



THE ASSOCIATES of the BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

REQUEST for PROPOSALS

**Increasing Cultural and Educational Institutional Awareness throughout the U.S. of
the Boston Public Library's Anti-Slavery Collection**

March 8, 2021

Link to [the BPL's Anti-Slavery Collection](#)

Summary:

The Associates of the Boston Public Library is seeking a firm to design and implement a campaign targeted to museums, libraries, and selected institutions of higher education across the country to increase their awareness of the remarkable and extensive Anti-Slavery Collection held by the BPL and specifically the more than 14,000 items that are freely available to access digitally. We are focusing our campaign on civic, cultural, and educational institutions that already have some expertise in areas related to the abolitionist movement, African American history, and the Civil War because they are able to provide context regarding specific parts of the collection to their patrons. In this way, we hope to increase both use of the Anti-Slavery Collection by scholars, researchers, students and others, and—as they conduct research within it—to allow the BPL themselves to learn more about the meaning and context of the Collection.

Background:

The Boston Public Library (BPL) is home to an extensive collection of materials relating to the abolitionist movement in America. The nucleus of this collection was presented to the Library in the late 1890s by the family of William Lloyd Garrison and other individuals engaged in the anti-slavery movement. The Collection features artifacts, books, documents, letters, and pamphlets from Boston reformer Wendell Phillips and the letters and papers of orator and abolitionist leader William Lloyd Garrison dating from the 1830s through to the 1870s.

The Collection also contains daguerreotypes of noted abolitionists; the papers of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society; and the papers of Maria Weston Chapman and Deborah Weston, Amos Augustus Phelps, Lydia Maria Child, Samuel Joseph May, and John Bishop Estlin. Other items include the full run and the account books of the abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*; records of the American, New England, and Massachusetts Anti-Slavery societies; scrapbooks concerning Anthony Burns and John Brown; and the files of Ziba B. Oakes, a broker of the enslaved from Charlestown, South Carolina. In total the Collection contains about 40,000 items spanning a 35-year period.

Additional descriptive work and digitization projects are anticipated for the collection in the coming years.

This Collection represents a remarkable resource for scholars and historians, as well as students and lay people interested in exploring a difficult chapter in our nation's history through the words and writings of those who lived them. Over 14,000 manuscripts and printed materials in the collection have been digitized and are available on the Digital Commonwealth platform (which can be viewed [here](#) or via the link on the title page of this RFP), yet this resource remains unknown to many. The BPL is in the process of integrating crowd-sourced transcriptions of many of the Collection's letters into the platform. Early conversations with a number of museums around the nation have shown that they have a real interest in making their audiences aware of the collection and, in some cases, linking to it directly through their own websites. The interest, we believe, would be substantial if a larger set of museums, libraries, and educational institutions understood what is contained in the BPL's collection. [It should be noted that the physical documents that make up the full Anti-Slavery Collection are off-site and inaccessible while a new Rare Books and Manuscripts Reading Room is being renovated in the BPL. The new facility is expected to be ready to reopen late in 2021 or early 2022 with the Anti-Slavery Collection back on-site.]

The Campaign:

The Associates of the Boston Public Library is an independent non-profit dedicated to raising funds for the conservation, cataloging, digitization, and promotion of the treasures—including a wealth of primary source material—that reside in the Library's Special Collections. With this RFP, the Associates is seeking a public relations partner to design a targeted campaign with the goal of raising awareness among professionals in museums focusing on African American history, women's history, the Civil War era, and civil rights movements in the United States, as well as U.S. history more generally. In addition, we hope that public libraries and college libraries and museums, including those of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, can be made aware of the BPL's Anti-Slavery Collection and the open access afforded by Digital Commonwealth. The campaign will be designed and conducted collaboratively with management of the Boston Public Library and the Associates of the BPL.

Through a six-month engagement beginning in late May or early June 2021, we are seeking to have an institutional awareness campaign designed and its initial stages executed. The campaign is expected to take place in two phases: first, the design of materials to raise awareness, including stories of the Collection and, second, dissemination of the materials, including the creation of mechanisms to receive feedback from the target audience (a call to action). Such a campaign might include components such as:

- Creation of engaging email outreach materials directed to museums, public libraries, and colleges;
- Placement of stories in specialized media regarding the Anti-Slavery Collection (including interviews with appropriate BPL leadership and staff);
- Identification and creation of appealing postings for listservs reaching the target audience of museum and library professionals, as well as scholars and historians at those institutions;

- Creation of the specifics for a Google Ad words campaign that can be executed in order to draw attention to the Collection among the target audience;
- Identification of public speaking/presentation opportunities for BPL leadership or staff to raise awareness of the Collection among the target audience; and/or
- Design of symposia to highlight the importance of the Collection and generate coverage in appropriate vehicles.

These are meant to be illustrative examples and not required elements or limitations.

The overarching goal of the campaign is to increase awareness and knowledge of how to gain access to the Boston Public Library’s remarkable Anti-Slavery Collection among civic, cultural, and educational institutions across the country.

Submission Requirements:

Responses to this RFP are due no later than **April 11, 2021 at 5:00 p.m.**

All responses must include:

- An outline of the proposed components of the campaign and how they would work together to achieve the overarching goal;
- A timeline for execution and deliverables for each component of the proposed campaign;
- Proposed metrics for success of each component, as well as for the campaign overall;
- Delineation of staffing roles, including the qualifications of senior team members;
- Anticipated budget for the six-month contract period and breakdown of costs (the proposed budget should fall within the range of \$60,000 to \$90,000);
- Two client references; and
- Examples of past work that are relevant to this engagement (not to exceed five pages).

Proposals should be sent electronically as a single PDF to kpendleton@AssociatesBPL.org with “Response to Awareness Campaign RFP” in the subject line. (For questions, please see below.)

Award Process:

The award will be made after a review of all proposals by a committee consisting of Board members of the Associates of the BPL, senior staff from the Boston Public Library, as well as several outside advisors from local cultural institutions who are among the campaign’s intended audience.

The successful applicant will be notified no later than **May 14, 2021**.

Awarding Agency:

Please note this contract is being awarded by the **Associates of the Boston Public Library**, an independent non-profit organization which—while raising funds to support work in the BPL’s Special Collections—is not a department of the Library or the City of Boston.

Questions with regard to this RFP may be directed to Wendy Ballinger at wballinger@AssociatesBPL.org (preferred) or 617-653-8971.