



# RFP for Strategic Enrollment Marketing and Student Search Partner

Carlow University

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## **1. About Carlow University**

### **1.1 Mission**

Carlow University, rooted in its Catholic identity and embodying the heritage and values of the Sisters of Mercy, offers transformational educational opportunities for a diverse community of learners and empowers them to excel in their chosen work as compassionate, responsible leaders in the creation of a just and merciful world.

### **1.2 Overview of the University**

Carlow University is a small, private, Catholic coeducational university. Founded by the Sisters of Mercy, the University has a strong commitment to social justice, academic excellence, and student success. It has more than 40 undergraduate, 35 graduate, and certificate programs. Within six months of graduation, 97 percent of its graduates are employed or enrolled in an advanced degree program. Located in the heart of Pittsburgh's innovation district, it boasts a 12:1 undergraduate student-to-faculty ratio and experiential learning opportunities and internships through regional partnerships. Popular degrees include nursing, education, art, social work, and psychology. Carlow provides transformational learning experiences that empower graduates to become forward-thinking, ethical leaders who give back and make a difference in the world.

### **1.3 Address**

3333 Fifth Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213

### **1.4 Website**

[www.carlow.edu](http://www.carlow.edu)

### **1.5 Phone**

412-578-6000

## **2. Partnership Overview**

Carlow University seeks a strategic enrollment marketing and student search partner to enhance our recruitment funnels with qualified leads for Traditional, Adult (Post-Traditional), and Graduate students. Our objective is to collaborate with a well-established partner in higher education that can provide marketing and engagement services to boost awareness of our academic programs and drive increased inquiries and applications that ultimately lead to enrollment.

## **3. Background**

Carlow University is devoted to fostering growth among our adult and graduate students while also stabilizing our traditional student enrollment. Since 2020, the university has experienced significant expansion, with over 18% growth in headcount, driven by the introduction of in-demand programs that address both regional and national workforce needs. Carlow has stayed true to its core strengths in helping, healing, expression, leadership, and service professions. We are focused on enhancing our long-standing programs and recognize that achieving this goal will require a comprehensive enrollment and marketing strategy to accelerate growth further.

Our student body is distinct from other institutions, currently at approximately 2,500 and projected to reach 3,000. Of this headcount, 32% are traditional-age students (FTIC and transfer), 23% are adult learners, 39% are pursuing master's degrees, and 6% are enrolled in doctoral programs. Approximately one-third of students are currently enrolled in fully online programs. Carlow is supported by an online program manager for 75% of its fully online programs. Our current student population is comprised of students from across the United States but most of the students enrolled come from southwestern Pennsylvania.

Carlow has been a leader in serving adult learners for over 50 years and has recently introduced career-focused associate degrees and certificates designed to meet regional workforce needs in healthcare, such as surgical technology and practical nursing.

Carlow University is in the midst of a rebranding. Within the last two years, we have introduced a new brand, tagline ("Devoted to the Future of You"), website, style guide, podcast, and social media strategy. This strategy developed under the leadership of a new VP has elevated Carlow's brand presence in the region while staying true to Carlow's mission.

## **4. Strategic Marketing Partnership Expectations**

Carlow University is seeking a partner that meets the following expectations:

## 4.1 Brand

- Understand Carlow's background, mission, vision, values, brand, and programs.
- Support Carlow's current branding, positioning strategy, narrative, and tagline while adhering to current visual brand identities.

## 4.2 Marketing

- Understand student demand and the competitive enrollment landscape.
- Define our different audiences and develop a targeted approach to engage them. Our audiences include FTIC, transfer students, adult degree completers, and graduate students, as well as parents and other key influencers.
- Recommend and implement solutions to support the university in achieving enrollment goals and increasing the geographical footprint of our students beyond the Southwest PA region.
- Design and execute initiatives that result in an increase in inquiries and applications. We are not looking to drive applications to reduce an admit rate; rather, we are looking for qualified leads that will ultimately matriculate.
- Develop strategic multi-channel campaigns to elevate priority programs and/or program suites while understanding the seasonality of the programs and the target audience to ensure campaign effectiveness. We expect digital strategies, such as retargeting, geofencing, display ads, social media, etc., to play a prominent part in these campaigns.
- Use AI or other effective strategies/technologies to create a personalized approach.
- As new programs are introduced, be prepared to support new program launches within the strategy.
- When certain academic programs and/or student populations are not performing as needed to reach desired enrollment targets, the partner may be asked to adjust strategies to support ad hoc or short-term campaigns.

## 4.3 Partner Services

- Provide all services in-house, resulting in effective communication, consistent service, and accurate pricing.
- Coordinate with the University's marketing department and existing marketing partners, such as the online program manager, to maximize performance and not duplicate efforts.
- Perform name acquisition/list purchasing services in conjunction with Carlow's existing subscriptions to College Board, Encoura, and PTK Connect. Model, recommend, and execute search purchases on Carlow's behalf.
- Manage College Board Connections on Carlow's behalf.
- Manage all digital advertising expenses on Carlow's behalf.
- Understand the inclusion and utilization of Carlow's website and other assets while working with the marketing and enrollment teams.
- Drive strategy with key KPIs and ROI measurement using a reliable tracking tool. Partner will provide a dashboard with real-time data and analysis and conduct monthly reporting calls.
- All deliverables are subject to WCAG 2.1 AA standards; meet and/or exceed those standards.

- Understand and integrate with Technolutions Slate (Carlow’s CRM) as applicable.
- Overall strategy should be developed in collaboration with Carlow Enrollment and Marketing leadership teams with the expectation that regular engagement will occur with the teams.

## 5. RFP Requirements

Please provide the following information to illustrate your relationship and services provided to your existing clients:

### 5.1 Case Studies

Provide at least two case studies that show the performance of your clients. Case studies of small, regional institutions similar to Carlow are highly preferred. For each, provide detailed information that may include: History of the relationship (length to date; per contract), Audiences served – Traditional, Adult (non-traditional), and Graduate with different modalities; Enrollment & revenue growth (by year, by program); Key marketing elements – market analysis, marketing approach, name acquisition, lead generation, and conversion data; and other qualitative outcomes/benefits that the university has received because of the partnership.

Across all clients, what are the average campaign response rates, increase in applicants, and increase in enrollment during the first year of partnership?

### 5.2 Client References

Provide contact information for three to five institutions of higher education your organization currently works with, and a summary of the scope of work. (References from small, regional institutions like Carlow are preferred.)

## 6. Timeline

Selection of Vendor

<b>Milestones</b>	<b>Dates</b>
Release of RFP	3/2/2026
Notice of Intent to Respond due	3/20/2026 (by 5:00 p.m. EDT)
RFP Responses due	3/27/2026 (by 5:00 p.m. EDT)
Notification of 3 finalists	4/6/2026-4/10/2026
Presentation/Finalist Interviews	4/20/2026-4/30/2026
Selection and Notification	5/15/2026

Partnership begins June 2026 with an expectation of launching in eight to twelve weeks. Please note that the first invoice cannot be issued until the start of FY27 in July 2026.

## 7. Key Carlow University Personnel

Name	Position
Mollie Cecere	Vice President for Enrollment Management and Corporate Partnerships
Wendy Phillips	Director of Adult and Graduate Enrollment
Joel Mullner	Director of Undergraduate Enrollment and Operations
Crystal Gonzalez	Enrollment Marketing & Operations Specialist
Carlow Faculty	TBD
Eric Pugliesi	Procurement & Payables Specialist

## 8. Budget

- \$350,000–\$450,000 per year (including advertising spend and any additional name acquisition strategies beyond Carlow’s existing College Board, Encoura, and PTK Connect subscriptions)
- Willingness to adopt Carlow’s payment terms and offer a mutually agreeable payment structure (e.g., quarterly installments).
- Anticipated 3-year engagement

## 9. Notification of Intent to Submit Proposal

Respondents who plan to submit a proposal must submit the [Notice of Intent to Respond to Enrollment Marketing/Student Search RFP](https://forms.office.com/r/ypZEN5N8Fj) (https://forms.office.com/r/ypZEN5N8Fj) no later than **Friday, March 20, 5:00 p.m. EDT.**

## 10. RFP Clarification

Respondents may request an explanation of the intent or content of this RFP and clarification of procedures used for this procurement. No interpretations made to any respondent as to the

meaning of the RFP shall be binding on the University unless repeated in writing or distributed as an addendum by the University's Procurement Office.

Email questions must be directed to Crystal Gonzalez, [csgonzalez@carlow.edu](mailto:csgonzalez@carlow.edu). Such requests must be received no later than March 20, 2026, at 5:00 pm EDT.

Failure of the respondent to make appropriate inquiries, evaluate any special conditions, or verify requirements of this RFP shall not relieve the vendor of responsibility for fulfilling the contract in accordance with this RFP.

Oral communication with any University employee, unit, department, or organization concerning this RFP is not binding on the University. It shall in no way modify the RFP or the obligation of the University or vendor.

## **11. Addenda to the RFP**

In the event that it becomes necessary to revise any part of this RFP, Carlow's Procurement Office will provide addenda in writing to all respondents who submitted a Notification of Intent to Submit Proposal form.

## **12. Proposal Submittal Guidelines**

Respondents are asked to submit their proposal no later than **5:00 p.m. EDT on Friday, March 27, 2026**, via email to [csgonzalez@carlow.edu](mailto:csgonzalez@carlow.edu) with the subject line: Enrollment Marketing Partnership for Carlow University.

## **13. Acceptance of Proposals**

The University reserves the right to consider the competency, responsibility, and suitability of the respondent, as well as the services to be provided, in awarding the contract. The University further reserves the right to accept or reject any or all proposals, to waive any irregularities or informalities, and to award the contract in the best interest of the University. Neither the University nor any agent thereof on behalf of the University will be obligated in any way by any respondent's response to this RFP.

The University also reserves the right to allow a respondent to correct a defect in its Bid, provided that the correction of the defect does not alter the amount of the Bid or the scope of work required under the Bid.

Discussions may be held with respondents to clarify the RFP requirements and address questions about the oral presentations.

## **14. Proposal Submission**

Any term or condition stated in this RFP document shall be considered accepted by the respondent unless specifically objected to by the respondent. The University may accept or reject the respondent's alternative terms to this RFP. A proposal may be rejected if it is incomplete or conditional.

To receive consideration, proposals shall be made in agreement with the instructions as stated in this RFP.

## **15. Preparation**

Proposals should provide a straightforward, concise description of the respondent's capabilities to satisfy the requirements of the RFP. Emphasis should be on completeness and clarity of content.

## **16. Incurred Cost**

The University is not liable for any costs incurred by the respondent in preparing and presenting the proposals.

## **17. Proposal Format**

### **17.1 Requirements**

- Be clear and concise
- Use a table of contents for ease in finding necessary information
- PDF of a Word document
- Contain 17.2 through 17.8 below

### **17.2 Title page**

Include a title page with signatures of the person or persons required and authorized to legally bind the respondent to the proposal. Specifically state that the respondent shall complete all

services set forth in the proposal within the proposed time limits to the satisfaction of the University.

### **17.3 Cover letter**

- Name and working address of respondent
- Name and contact information of the primary company representative to be contacted in reference to the proposal
- Date of submission
- Brief introduction of the respondent
- Brief explanation of why the company is a good fit for Carlow University, acknowledging its mission and audience
- Any terms or conditions of this RFP to which the respondent objects and/or does not accept, along with any alternatives or further explanation

### **17.4 Vision for Carlow**

Provide a clear, unique vision for Carlow throughout the partnership with your organization. Your vision may include the following specific details:

- Why are you interested in working with Carlow?
- What are, or could be, Carlow's key competitive advantages and differentiators in the market?
- Initial thoughts on the Carlow brand today, and how it might evolve in this partnership.
- Describe the ROI this partnership will generate for Carlow.

### **17.5 Designated project personnel**

The proposal must contain a detailed list of designated project personnel:

- Clearly identified respondent liaison/team supervisor
- The entire team that will be completing the work identified in this proposal
- Each team member's name, title/position, and role as it correlates to this RFP

### **17.6 Itemized scope of work**

The proposal must contain an itemized scope of work containing:

- A detailed list of all services to be provided with succinct explanations
- Projected time to complete each service
- Projected cost of each service

### **17.7 Timeline**

The proposal must contain:

- Clearly defined and concise timeline
- Communication schedule

## **17.8 Campaign samples produced by the vendor**

Provide at least two campaign samples you have created to show your qualification in completing this RFP, as outlined in Section 5.1.

## **18. Proposal Evaluation**

### **18.1 Proposal Criteria**

If all criteria below are met, the proposal meets the minimum requirements for review and evaluation. Proposals must meet the following criteria to be considered:

- Submission by the deadline
- Total cost within the budget range
- Project personnel clearly designated
- Detailed, itemized scope of work
- Detailed timeline for completion of the project

### **18.2 Evaluation Criteria**

All qualifying proposals will be evaluated by the Strategic Marketing Selection Committee using a rubric, with additional consideration given to qualitative, subjective criteria. The committee will evaluate each proposal based on the factors outlined in this RFP.

- Minimum criteria as noted above
- Cost effectiveness and value
- Clear understanding of the project and partnership goals
- Innovative approach or methodology to successfully meet the project's goals
- Necessary qualifications, experience, and resources to undertake the project
- Sufficient training resources and personnel dedicated to the project
- Accessibility and compliance with knowledge and efficiency
- Organized and written clearly in layman's terms, free of technical jargon

## **19. Proposal Presentation**

The Marketing Partnership Selection Committee will select at least 3 finalists who will be asked to present their proposal on campus to the committee and a select group of internal stakeholders. Once selected, additional information will be provided.

## **20. Proposal Award**

The University reserves the right to cancel the selection process or negotiations at any time, including after a selection is made, before entering into a formal written agreement with the vendor.

The University intends to execute a contract with the vendor submitting the proposal that the University determines best meets the University's requirements. The University will be the sole judge of the acceptance of any and all proposals.

In awarding the contract, the University may consider the vendor's references, experience, responsibility, reputation, and ability to provide an advantageous service schedule. The inability of any respondent to meet the requirements may result in the proposal's rejection. The University reserves the right to entertain post-submittal feedback.

The award decision will be communicated in writing to all respondents and is final.

The University reserves the right to approach any respondent with a "best and final" offer. One or more respondents may be provided an opportunity to submit a "best and final" offer.