

RESPONSE TO REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL: SCOPE B

Prepared For:

Whitefish Bay School District
1200 E. Fairmount Avenue
Whitefish Bay, WI 53217

Donovan Group
1345 N. Jefferson Street, #120
Milwaukee, WI 53202
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DONOVAN GROUP
SCHOOL COMMUNICATIONS



LETTER OF INTEREST

May 20, 2026

Dr. Jamie J. Foeckler
Whitefish Bay School District
1200 E. Fairmount Avenue
Whitefish Bay, WI 53217

Dear Dr. Foeckler:

I am pleased to submit this proposal to the Whitefish Bay School District on behalf of our firm, the Donovan Group, in response to Scope B only of the RFP for Marketing/Communications Services.

Now in our 21st year, our team has worked with hundreds of school districts on their survey research, communications, community engagement, and referendum efforts. Our work is fueled by the belief that engaging the entire district community, making information available to all, and transparency are critical components of building trust. We believe in expanding avenues for two-way communication with community members.

Working with the Donovan Group, the Whitefish Bay School District would gain access to a full team of communications professionals, with each member possessing specific skills to accomplish the district's objectives. The Donovan Group team includes experts in survey and data analysis, communications planning, media relations, content writing and editing, public policy, graphic design, and video production. We believe that well-planned and executed referendum communications bring together a community in support of its public schools. This leads to greater trust for the school district and its leaders.

In submitting this document, I certify that all information contained in this proposal is true and correct. As a partner, I have the authority to submit this proposal on behalf of the firm. The proposed fees have not been knowingly disclosed to other potential respondents and no attempt has been made to restrict competition among respondents. The Donovan Group does maintain professional association with the other firms listed in the RFP and the district administration, but does not have any financial agreements with those firms or individuals.

Lastly, in response to the request for a potential in-person interview on Friday, May 22, 2026, I would be available to attend at 10:30 a.m. or anytime thereafter that day. I welcome any questions you may have about our proposal. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 920-217-8022 or brian.nicol@donovan-group.com.

I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Brian Nicol, Partner
Donovan Group
1345 North Jefferson St. #120
Milwaukee, WI 53202



ABOUT THE DONOVAN GROUP

The Donovan Group is a communications, community engagement and survey research firm focused solely on serving the needs of public schools, school districts, and educational organizations across the United States. Since 2005, our team has worked with hundreds of school districts and numerous educational organizations on their data gathering and analysis, proactive communication, crisis communication, marketing, public relations, referendum, and community engagement efforts.

Our work is fueled by a commitment to public education and the belief that accessible information and transparency are key components to building trust. We believe in expanding avenues for two-way communication with district staff, families, and community members.

Working with the Donovan Group, the Whitefish Bay School District will gain access to a full team of research and communication professionals, with each member possessing specific skills to benefit the district and its communications needs.

The Donovan Group typically works on a fixed-fee arrangement. This means we charge the same fee every month, with no overages. We believe this is important because we cannot always predict what level of services school districts will need during the school year. Our fixed-fee model means your district is covered.

In 2019, the Donovan Group was recognized with a [Gold Medallion](#), the top award from the National School Public Relations Association, for a referendum campaign on behalf of the Howard-Suamico School District in Wisconsin.

In 2025, NSPRA again recognized the work of our team with 11 [Publications and Digital Media Excellence Awards](#).

Our firm has also become a trusted partner to state school board associations and superintendents' associations across the nation. We provide crisis communication assistance to association members in several states, including [Arizona](#), [Delaware](#), [Florida](#), [Indiana](#), [Minnesota](#), [Pennsylvania](#), [Virginia](#), and [Wisconsin](#).

Please note that additional information about our services is available on our website, at <https://donovan-group.com/services>.

OUR PRINCIPLES

- 1 **We believe a high-quality public education is a human right** and that all American children—regardless of race, color, religion, creed, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin or ancestry, as well as that of their family—are entitled to a great public education.
- 2 **We believe public education is one of the fundamental elements of our democracy.** It is one of the best ways for all of us to make use of the talents provided to us by our maker.
- 3 **We believe public education is changing and improving,** and we believe that we can play a supporting role in fostering this change. We believe the best days of public education are yet to come.
- 4 **We believe that those who are part of this educational change understand the responsibility to ensure all students are served,** including our most vulnerable students. In public education, when we say we serve “all” students, we truly mean all.
- 5 **We believe in honesty, transparency and forthrightness,** and we understand the responsibility we have in providing taxpayers who invest in their public schools with outstanding value.
- 6 **We believe in respecting the unique talents, skills and gifts of every team member** and working together to achieve goals on behalf of our clients and the students and families they serve.



OUR TEAM

While Brian Nicol, a Partner with the Donovan Group, will be the district's main point of contact throughout the effort, the following members of [the Donovan Group team](#) will assist the Whitefish Bay School District with its communications efforts.



Brian Nicol, Partner and Project Lead

Brian brings 17 years of PK-12 public education experience in the state of Wisconsin, having previously served as director of communications for the Howard-Suamico School District. Nicol and HSSD won the WSPRA top honor, the Lighthouse Award, in 2015 and 2020. The district was also recognized with a Gold Medallion award from NSPRA for its successful 2018 operational referendum campaign in partnership with the Donovan Group.



Joe Donovan, Founding Partner

Joe Donovan is president and founder of the Donovan Group. In addition to working with dozens of school districts on their communications efforts, Joe regularly consults with districts and educational organizations across the country. He has also provided consulting services to state superintendents, state legislators, mayors, and members of Congress.



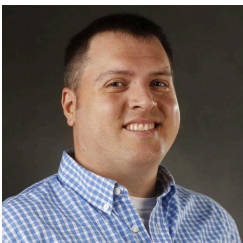
Tracy Jentz, Director of Survey Research

Before joining the Donovan Group, Tracy spent more than 10 years as communications coordinator for one of the largest school systems in North Dakota, where she provided a strategic communications and research focus through her award-winning work. Tracy holds a master's degree in sociology and a bachelor's degree in communication, both from the University of North Dakota. She has also obtained Accreditation in Public Relations (APR).



Steve Bailey, Partner

Steve is the Donovan Group's lead communication strategist and content director. He was also campaign manager for a U.S. Congressional campaign and has worked with nonprofit organizations in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Illinois, and New York. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh with a bachelor's degree in journalism and has experience as both a print and broadcast news reporter.



Jake Kurtz, Communication Strategist

Jake Kurtz serves as a communication strategist who specializes in bond, referendum, and ballot measure projects for public schools and districts nationwide. Before joining the Donovan Group in 2023, Jake spent 16 years as a newspaper editor and reporter in the Midwest, including tenures at the Des Moines Register, Pulitzer Prize-winning Storm Lake Times, and the DeForest Times-Tribune.



Derrick Docket, Director of Branding & Design

Derrick Docket helps public schools and districts tell their stories through marketing, content creation, graphic design, branding, communication planning, and video production. Before joining the Donovan Group, Derrick served as director of marketing for The Magic House, St. Louis Children’s Museum. Prior to that, he was the chief communications officer and director of marketing for the Wentzville School District in Missouri.



Katie Drida, Director of Social Media

Katie brings a passion for sharing the stories, celebrations, and community connections of each school district through their social media. Before joining the Donovan Group, Katie taught middle and high school English Language Arts for seven years, while also serving in various communication roles on several educational support and extracurricular teams.

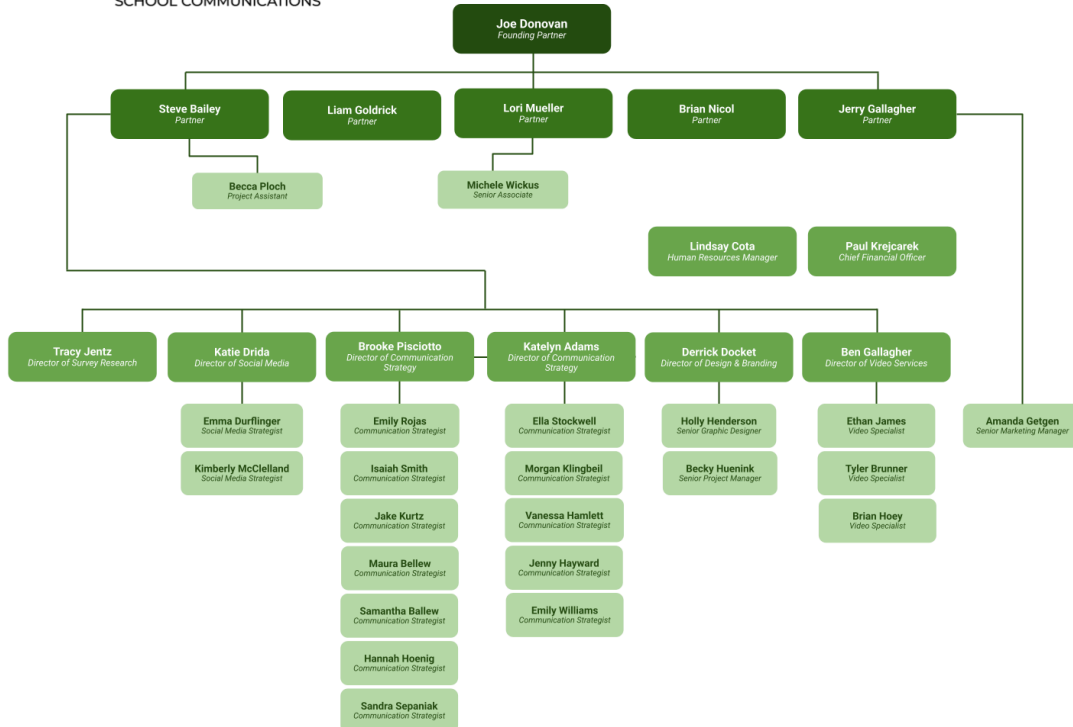


Ben Gallagher, Director of Video Services

Since joining Donovan Group in 2020, Ben has produced award-winning videos for a wide variety of school districts across the country. His work helps school districts tell their stories and provides information about unique programs, special events, student achievements, extracurricular activities, and more.



ORGANIZATIONAL CHART





PHILOSOPHY

As a rule, we believe that referendum success is about more than just the passage of a referendum.

We believe that a well-done referendum effort is one in which trust is built in the community and the level of dialogue about educational issues is raised.

We believe that defining success in this way is important because it dramatically changes the tactics and procedures used by the district in advance of the referendum. Over the years, we have seen some school boards engage in what we might best describe as scorched earth efforts that rely on generating fear and spin to pass a referendum. We find these tactics to be less than successful, and they also destroy, rather than build, trust.

Instead, we believe in telling the truth and seeking to engage every community member in the district's needs. We believe school and district leaders must communicate in such a way as to build integrity. Most of all, we do not know when the district may need to return to voters for another referendum. The way to pass a replacement referendum a few years later is to communicate with integrity now.

With all this in mind, we will describe a referendum process focused on authentic engagement, truth-telling, and building integrity in the rest of this section. Pushing further, we do not believe a referendum is won or lost. Instead, we see that a referendum solution that was presented to voters either passed or did not pass. We believe that not talking about wins and losses in a referendum effort is a subtle issue, but an important one.


We believe that every referendum includes three distinct stages. The first is to identify and communicate the needs of the district. For community members to vote for a referendum, they must understand how the referendum solution addresses specific needs. Engaging the community in the district's needs is essential for the referendum communications process. Thus, it continues throughout the timeline.

Whether the district is pursuing a capital referendum or an operational referendum, it is essential to communicate about needs. In short, you must seek to educate community members about why the referendum is needed. As noted, this can be facilities-related or, for an operational referendum, related to being locked into a low revenue limit.

This needs-based messaging is what we call a narrative. Creating this narrative is something you should work on early in the effort, as it takes some time to fine-tune and is the most critical piece of the communications effort.

In addition to communicating the narrative, you must proactively communicate answers to likely questions. Responses to key questions should be baked into your narrative, as you can assume they will be on the minds of many.

To that end, the first stage of the referendum project is when we will educate community members. This stage may include articles in the local newspaper, the creation of a dedicated web page, a fact sheet with some frequently asked questions and parent and staff email messages.



The second stage of the referendum is to engage community members through a formal process. Engagement is more than just providing information to community members. It is providing them with information, asking them to consider various solutions, and then providing feedback to the district and school board.

This part of the process can include a task force, a district-wide survey and focus groups, listening sessions with the school board, community presentations, and staff listening sessions. The idea is to engage in a two-way conversation about the needs so that community members have a strong sense of ownership over the solution placed on the ballot.

The final stage of the process begins the evening the board votes on the referendum resolution. This last stage—the communication of the solution—includes reminding community members how their voices were part of the process. It will consist of additional information on the district's website, parent letters, backpack stuffers, and community presentations.

Finally, we must always realize that communication in advance of a referendum is a great way to gain trust in the community. This happens by being as truthful as possible, answering questions as honestly as possible, and operating with a high level of integrity. As noted earlier, a successful referendum endeavor both results in the passage of a referendum and builds trust.

Finally, in keeping with our fifth guiding principle, *we believe in honesty, transparency and forthrightness, and we understand the responsibility we have in providing taxpayers who invest in their public schools with outstanding value.*



REFERENDUM COMMUNICATIONS

The Donovan Group is a full-service communications firm. Not only is the Donovan Group one of the largest public-education-focused firms in the U.S., but it is also one of the largest communications firms in the state. Our team includes writers, editors, graphic designers, videographers, project managers, and social media experts, in addition to our survey team. The Donovan Group can provide:

- Communications and community engagement planning and road-mapping
- Survey services, including promotion, analysis, and reporting
- Assistance with the district's website (drafting copy, assisting with design, etc.)
- Assistance with social media (drafting, editing, posting, etc.)
- Video production and editing
- Writing and copy editing
- Graphic design assistance (layout of mail pieces, brochures, etc.)
- Administrator training or coaching
- Other services, as requested by the district (The Donovan Group will go to great lengths to provide all services needed to accomplish the goals of this project, including doing that which we cannot currently anticipate.)



PROPOSED TIMELINE

We work with each of our clients in the development of personalized referendum-related timelines. However, the following is a general communications calendar for a November 2026 referendum.

June/July

- Create and finalize the communication roadmap, including key messages and a communication calendar
- Align roadmap to outcomes from Board engagement sessions from RFP Scope A process
- Upon request from the district, advise on Scope A in collaboration with facilitator
- Create a referendum webpage with FAQs (this can be a page on the district's website or a standalone page created by the Donovan Group)
- Write and send an email to parents about the district's needs, the process that has been used to address those needs

August

- **Board votes to place the question on the ballot (per legal advice)**
- Create and distribute a news release announcing the referendum and the question that will appear on the ballot in November
- Create mailer #1 that details the district's needs, the process used to develop a solution, and the question on the ballot
- Begin social media campaign
- Create a one-page fact sheet on the tax impact of the referendum; share via email, social media and other channels

September

- Mailer #1 distributed to every residential address in the district
- Create mailer #2, a postcard-style piece that provides brief information and directs recipients to the referendum webpage
- Continue social media campaign
- Hold parent and community engagement sessions
- Continue to update the webpage/FAQs as needed
- Write a guest article from the board president; send to local media

October

- Mailer #2 distributed to every residential address in the district
- Continue social media campaign
- Write and send an email to all parents, providing information and reminding them about the upcoming referendum vote
- Hold parent and community engagement sessions
- Continue to update the webpage/FAQs as needed

November

- Continue social media campaign
- Write and send emails to parents and staff, reminding them of election day and where they can cast their ballots
- Election Day (November 3, 2026)
- Post-election activities:
 - Contact/thank other local officeholders
 - Place thank you message on the website
 - Send thank you message to families/staff
 - Publish thank you social media posts



REFERENCES

- **Howard-Suamico School District - April 2026 referendum**
 - Dr. Mark Smith, Superintendent
marksmit@hssdschools.org, 920-662-7709
- **Port Washington-Saukville School District - April 2025 referendum**
 - Dr. Michael McMahon, Superintendent
michael.mcmahon@pwssd.k12.wi.us, 262-268-6000
- **Mequon-Thiensville School District - November 2024 referendum**
 - Dr. Matthew Joynt, Superintendent
mjoynt@mtsd.k12.wi.us, 262-238-8502
- **Maple Dale-Indian Hill School District - November 2024 referendum**
 - Tim Joynt, District Administrator
timothy.joynt@mapledale.k12.wi.us, 414-351-7380

PROPOSED FEES

The Donovan Group typically works on a fixed-fee arrangement. This means we charge the same fee every month, with no overages. We believe this is important because we cannot always predict what level of services school districts will need throughout the course of a project. Our fixed-fee model means your district is covered.

Please note that the school district will provide its own printing services and postage for mailings. Any potential media or social media buys are also outside the scope of this agreement.

Scope B Only: Referendum Consulting, Planning, and Communication

Weekly referendum consulting meetings in addition to communication and community engagement planning and communication production services as noted in the draft timeline above. This proposal includes development of up to three mailers, one video production, and social media planning, copywriting, and design. This also includes all travel-related expenses incurred by the Donovan Group. Additional video services may be added at a discounted rate. This project may include consultation on the promotion and execution of RFP: Scope A items at the request of the district and in collaboration with the Scope A facilitator.

The total cost of this proposal for Scope B only is \$30,000.



Thank You!

We appreciate the opportunity to provide this proposal to the Whitefish Bay School District. We welcome your thoughts and feedback.

If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact:

Brian Nicol, Partner

Donovan Group

920-217-8022

brian.nicol@donovan-group.com

www.donovan-group.com