

Request for Proposals (RFP): Rewriting the Narrative: New Jersey's Harm Reduction Story

The New Jersey Narrative Project is a multimedia storytelling initiative that highlights the impact of harm reduction and good governance in reducing overdose deaths by showcasing the work of frontline organizations, government agencies, and advocacy leaders across New Jersey.

Issued by: Vital Strategies

Release Date: June 6th 2025

Proposal Due Date: August 15th, 2025

Total Budget: \$350,000

Background

The overdose crisis remains a pressing public health emergency across the United States. In 2022, the country recorded more than 100,000 drug overdose deaths, with opioids contributing to approximately 76% of fatalities. While this crisis continues to devastate communities, evidence-based harm reduction strategies and public health investments have demonstrated their ability to save lives and reduce harm. Every overdose death is preventable, and addressing this crisis requires a shift away from punitive responses toward comprehensive, health-centered solutions.

Vital Strategies' Overdose Prevention Program is a national initiative that works with governments, healthcare providers, and communities to implement policies and programs that prevent overdose deaths. Supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies, the program collaborates with leading organizations such as the Pew Charitable Trusts, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, and the CDC Foundation to advance strategies that can be scaled nationwide. The program focuses on expanding access to lifesaving medications like naloxone, increasing harm reduction services, improving care coordination, and addressing the systemic barriers—such as stigma and criminalization—that hinder access to effective treatment.

New Jersey has emerged as a leader in implementing harm reduction and public health strategies to combat the overdose epidemic. In 2023, the state recorded a **4.6% decline in overdose deaths**, decreasing from 3,046 fatalities in 2022 to 2,905 in 2023. This reduction is can be attributed to New Jersey's **targeted investments in harm reduction and treatment expansion**, including a historic \$24 million commitment from opioid settlement funds over a two-year period and an additional \$4.5 million allocated in the FY2025 budget. The state's **Naloxone Distribution Program** has significantly increased access to opioid overdose reversal medication, and its commitment to community crisis response has contributed to increase trust between people reliant on harm reduction services and healthcare institutions.

Research consistently demonstrates the effectiveness of harm reduction services, which not only reduce the risk of fatal overdoses but also serve as a crucial entry point for individuals seeking treatment and social support. Studies indicate that new users of harm reduction services are five times more likely to enter treatment and three times more likely to stop using drugs compared to those who do not engage with these services.

Despite this progress, stigma and misinformation remain significant barriers to scaling harm reduction initiatives. Public perception and policy responses continue to be shaped by outdated

narratives that criminalize drug use rather than treat it as a public health issue. **This Request for Proposals (RFP) aims to build upon New Jersey’s progress by enhancing public awareness, reducing stigma, and expanding the reach of harm reduction efforts.** By leveraging evidence-based messaging and strategic communications, this initiative seeks to foster greater public and policymaker support for harm reduction approaches—ultimately contributing to a sustained reduction in overdose deaths and improved health outcomes across the state.

Project Overview

Rewriting the Narrative: New Jersey’s Harm Reduction Story seeks to document and elevate the impact of overdose reduction initiatives, harm reduction strategies, and community-based interventions in New Jersey. Through a combination of **photography, videography, and storytelling**, this project will illustrate the efforts of government agencies, harm reduction workers, and advocacy leaders in addressing substance use challenges in the state.

The selected creative firm will collaborate with a photojournalist and documentarian to produce compelling multimedia assets that showcase key organizations, government leadership, and project partners. The initiative will culminate in a **community event launched in Late Winter or Early Spring 2026.**

Scope of Work

The selected firm will be responsible for the following tasks:

1. Photo & Video Documentation

- Capture **at least 5-10 key organizations** involved in overdose reduction, harm reduction, and social services, including healthcare providers, harm reduction workers, mobile health services, social workers, educators, and community organizers.
- Produce high-quality **portraits, documentary-style photography, and short video segments** to highlight frontline staff and their work.

2. Government & Advocacy Leadership Spotlight

- Develop **photo and video content** featuring key figures in government and advocacy leading harm reduction initiatives.

3. Project & Evaluative Partner Features

- Showcase the roles of **Vital Strategies, Johns Hopkins University, and Bloomberg Philanthropies** in supporting and evaluating the project.

4. Content Production & Final Deliverables

- Develop a multimedia package including:
 - A curated **photo gallery** with captions
 - **Short documentary-style videos** (5-10 minutes each)
 - **Social media content** (30-60 second video clips, photo carousels, etc.)
 - A **project website or digital archive** to host content
 - Hi-Res image that can be used for the development of other assets

5. Event Planning & Execution

- Lead and execute on the in-person **community event launch and celebration** to present media assets and visual storytelling
- Develop **event branding, signage, and promotional materials.**
- **Partner** with VS communication team to generate earned media

Project Timeline (Subject to Change based on project needs)

Phase	Milestone	Timeline
Contracting and Kickoff	Contract Execution and kickoff meeting with stakeholders	September 2025
Planning	Project scope finalization, outreach to partners, and data collection	September – October 2025
Implementation	Photo/video documentation, narrative development	October – March 2026
Community Event	Showcase project findings and media assets	April 2026

Budget & Compensation

The total available budget for this project is **\$350,000**, which must cover all phases of production, management, and event execution. This includes:

Creative Development & Production

- **Creative fees:** Compensation for photographers, videographers, editors, graphic designers, and web developers.
- **Photography and videography:** Includes on-site shooting, editing, and preparation of media assets.
- **Graphic design:** Development of visual materials for digital and print use.
- **Web development:** Design and buildout of a dedicated project microsite.
- **Web hosting:** Domain registration, hosting services, and maintenance.

Project Operations

- **Project management:** Oversight of timelines, deliverables, and partner coordination.
- **Staff time:** Includes both internal project management and a dedicated liaison to coordinate with government agencies and other stakeholders.
- **Logistics:** Scheduling, communications, and administrative support.

Community Launch Event

- **Event production:** Planning and execution for a launch event for approximately 50–75 attendees in New Brunswick, NJ.
- **Catering and beverages:** Food and drink for all attendees.
- **Staffing:** On-site support for setup, guest management, and event facilitation.
- **Space curation:** Design and installation of a temporary photo exhibition (event space will be provided in-kind).
- **Merchandise:** Branded materials, giveaways, and other event swag

Travel & On-Site Costs

- **Travel:** Transportation, lodging, and per diem for creative and production teams as needed.
- **On-site production expenses:** Equipment rentals, permits, and miscellaneous costs related to in-field documentation.

Payment will be structured based on key deliverables and milestones.

Proposal Submission Guidelines

Interested creative firms must submit a proposal including:

1. Firm Overview

- Background, expertise, and relevant experience
- Examples of similar past projects (links preferred)

2. Approach & Creative Vision

- Proposed methodology for photo and video storytelling
- Strategies for engaging key stakeholders
- Creative direction for the community event

3. Work Plan & Timeline

- Detailed production schedule aligned with project milestones

4. Budget Proposal

- Breakdown of costs within the \$350,000 budget

5. Team Members & Roles

- Key personnel involved in the project
- Experience and credentials

6. References

- Contact information for past clients or collaborators

Questions Period:

June 15–July 1st, 2025

Responses Posted By:

July 7, 2025

Submission Deadline:

August 15, 2025

Submission Email:

Overdose@vitalstrategies.org

Evaluation Criteria

Proposals will be evaluated based on:

- **Demonstrated expertise in documentary storytelling & advocacy-driven media (30%)**

- **Creative vision and alignment with project goals** (25%)
 - **Feasibility of work plan and timeline** (20%)
 - **Budget alignment and cost-effectiveness** (15%)
 - **Past performance and references** (10%)
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Contact Information

For questions or clarifications, please contact: Overdose@vitalstrategie.org

Vital Strategies | NJ Harm Reduction Campaign – Project Q&A

This document provides answers to common questions about the NJ Harm Reduction Campaign and Community Storytelling & Event Initiative. It is intended to guide creative partners, vendors, and collaborators.

1. What organizations are expected to be featured in the project?
We anticipate featuring 5–10 organizations with strong community ties and compelling harm reduction narratives.
 - a. Potential groups include:
 - Black Lives Matter Paterson (BLM Paterson)
 - Proceed, Inc.
 - NJ Harm Reduction Coalition (NJHRC)
 - Newark Community Street Team (NCST)
 - Imperfect Village

Final selections will prioritize diverse regional representation across North, Central, and South Jersey.
2. Who are the primary audiences for this project, and what actions are desired?
 - a. **Primary audiences:**
 - New Jersey state and local government officials
 - Philanthropic partners in New Jersey
 - Community-based organizations and harm reduction practitioners

- Media outlets covering public health, equity, and drug policy
- Program participants and the general public

b. **Desired actions:**

- Recognize and support community-led harm reduction efforts
- Encourage policy and funding support from state leadership
- Inspire cross-sector collaboration
- Raise visibility and legitimacy of grassroots work
- Promote replication of successful overdose prevention strategies

3. Can creative teams interview staff and community members directly?

- a. ☒ Yes. Interviews with staff and community members are encouraged to ensure authentic storytelling. All participants must provide informed

4. Are there required branding elements for events and web design?

- The Vital Strategies logo should be incorporated where appropriate.
- There is no strict requirement to adhere to Vital's color palette; creative teams are encouraged to bring their own perspective while maintaining professionalism.

5. Will Vital Strategies host the microsite?

No. The vendor should plan to host the microsite and include hosting and maintenance in their scope of work. The microsite will be live for at least one year, with the possibility of transitioning it to a partner organization in the future.

6. What is the vision for the culminating event?

A gallery-style event featuring:

- Image displays and video screens
- A bar with non-alcoholic options (and wine/beer, if permitted)
- Catering for guests

The event will be geared toward community partners, elected officials, government agency partners, and program participants, not the general public.

7. How will success be measured?

Key metrics include:

- Web traffic and video engagement analytics
- Attendance and feedback at the event
- Media coverage and recognition
- Stakeholder engagement and follow-up interest
- Continued use of content for education and advocacy

8. Will bilingual content be included?

✓ Yes. Bilingual content (English/Spanish) is a priority, especially for organizations like Proceed, which serve large Spanish-speaking communities.

9. What tone and style are preferred for storytelling?

We envision a fine art, documentary portraiture style that celebrates dignity and resilience. Personal stories of recovery and family perspectives are encouraged alongside organizational narratives.

10. What lessons learned from prior campaigns should guide this work?

✓ Do:

- Make the work beautiful, celebratory, and empowering
- Center dignity and strength in all visuals and messaging

✗ Don't:

- Avoid content that could be perceived as "torture porn" or "pity porn" (overly bleak or sensationalized depictions).

11. Are there any pre-selected partners/vendors for events?

Yes. The NJ Harm Reduction Coalition (NJHRC) in New Brunswick has offered to host the event.

12. Are there preferences for vendors (e.g., NJ-based, Black-owned)?

No. There is no specific preference for New Jersey-based or Black-owned/led partners.

13. Will Vital Strategies manage promotions and media engagement?

Vital Strategies is open to including these activities in scope. While some internal support exists, we welcome proposals with strategic outreach, media planning, and digital promotion—especially approaches targeting government and philanthropic stakeholders.

For further information or to discuss scope and collaboration details, please contact the Vital Strategies team: overdose@vitalstrategies.org