

RFP for Website Design and Hosting
Vendor Questions and MaineHousing Answers
December 2023

Q: What is your budget for the project?

A: We do not have a specified budget for this project. We ask that vendors include the required itemized pricing for all costs as described in the RFP with their submission.

Q: How many vendors did you actively reach out to (not including anyone who may just stumble upon it?)

A: Thirteen

Q: Do you expect to have photography or other imagery used in the design? Do you have any photos to share, or how do you feel about stock photos?

A: We would like imagery used in the design to make it a visually appealing site. We may have some photos to share that have been utilized in the past in some of our other content, and have a subscription to Adobe Stock that could provide photos and videos for this site.

Q: Will all current content (pages, posts and files) be ported over?

A: All current existing information on the site should be brought over to the new site. This includes pages, post information and files. There is a potential that some should be archived if feasible.

Q: What tool are you currently using to send out the emails that people can subscribe to?

A: We are currently using the built-in subscribers feature of Wordpress.

Q: Does your contact form need to integrate with anything (CRM for example)?

A: Not that we are currently aware of.

Q: What are your expectations for an affirmative action policy from the selected vendor?

A. Vendors shall not discriminate in any manner against any person because of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, national origin, ancestry, age, physical or mental disability, or familial or marital status. Such prohibition against discrimination shall include, without limitation, all actions relating to employment, upgrading, demotion, transfer, recruitment or recruitment advertising, layoffs or termination, rates of pay or other forms of compensation and selection for training. The affirmative action policy should address this.

Q: For the references and example websites, do they need to be for companies within the United States? We do have examples of websites developed and maintained by us but some of them are for clients outside of US.

A: There is no restriction that they must be websites from within the US as long as they are accessible and readable by the team at MaineHousing.

Q: Additionally, does our own company website qualify as an example/reference?

A: Yes, if you feel that it is a good example of your craftsmanship and would help us understand your vision.

Q: We are registered in the State of Kentucky. Do we need any registration to do business in the State of Maine for responding to the RFP?

A: You do not need to register to do business in Maine for responding to the RFP.

Q: We are currently reviewing the requirements outlined in your RFP for the website redesign project. We have noted that the current website comprises over 50 pages visible on the front end, with additional pages and posts linked internally.

A: We are not asking for a redesign of the MaineHousing website, which this implies. The website at www.mainehomelessplanning.org does not have the number of pages or amount of content listed here.

Q: Given the scope of the redesign as specified in the RFP, which includes a maximum of 20 pages, we are interested in understanding if there is an existing plan for managing and redirecting the content from the existing pages that will not be included in the redesign.

A: Due to the description, this question seems to reference our agency's main website, which is not included in this RFP.

Q: Proper redirection is crucial to maintain user experience and search engine rankings. Therefore, we seek clarification on whether MaineHousing has a specific strategy or expectations regarding the handling of these additional pages.

A: This question seems to reference our agency's main website, which is not included in this RFP.

Q: There is no logo on the website as of now and no color theme. Will this be provided by the Maine team?

A: We have logos for some of the individual pages, but no overarching logo for the site. We would be looking to the vendor chosen through the RFP process to assist us in visioning around color scheme and logo.

Q: There are 10-20 content pages to be created by the vendor responsible for the content building. I am assuming the Maine Team will provide the Vendor with content help on this.

A: Yes, the MaineHousing team will assist in the content for building out each page.

Q: How many landing pages will be there? We are assuming only 1 homepage, if there are more, please clarify.

A: There would be 1 homepage and between 10 and 20 landing pages.

Q: There is an iCal link with each calendar event. What is its purpose?

A: We are currently using the built-in subscribers feature of Wordpress.

Q: Categories - "General" on the calendar page. We are assuming that there will be multiple categories dynamically created from back end in the new portal and each event on calendar would be categorized into a particular category so that any user can filter calendar events accordingly.

A: Yes, this would be our preference.

Q: Subscription: I am assuming any event or post added to the calendar and on the blog will be communicated to subscribers via an email.

A: Yes, this would be our preference and would be based on content areas a user subscribed to.

Q: In the new website, will users be able to subscribe by blog category? In this case, there should be an option to select multiple categories. Also, the user should be able to opt out of a category if they desire. Please Confirm!

A: Yes, there should be the ability to subscribe to multiple categories and opt out of categories they do not wish to subscribe to.

Q: What is a permission group? Is an item posted in a permission group available on the front-end website for the general public?

A: A permission group is a group that has specific permissions around posting/ editing/ deleting content. The permission groups would be related to who can post what and the blog subscriptions would be related to who can see what.

Q: Would you be able to provide us with a demo login to the current website or create a user for us to check the currently functionality for logged in users?

A: We would provide this to the chosen vendor as part of the discovery and planning process.

Q: Who will comprise the stakeholder team for your organization on this project?

A: The team will be made up of employees from MaineHousing that work with the statewide groups served by this website as well as employees from our Planning and Research and Information Technologies departments. We also plan to bring in subject matter experts from our partner agencies, as appropriate, for different content areas.

Q: What is a reasonable amount of time (in business days) for the team to turn around feedback and/or approvals on designs and finished web pages?

A: This will be very dependent on the size and scope of the content that needs to be reviewed.

Q: Do you have a specific list of environments (browsers, mobile platforms, etc.) that need support, or should we adhere to current industry standards?

A: The site should support should at a minimum support the latest three major versions of Chrome, Safari, Internet Explorer and Opera regardless of the operating system or device environment (i.e. mobile or desktop.)

Q: Do you have any existing materials related to user research or audience segmentation? (e.g., user personas)

A: No we do not have any research or audience segmentation documentation for this site.

Q: Is the team open to user/usability testing as part of this engagement? If yes, would we have access to existing users, potential users, and different employee groups?

A: Yes we would be open to that and could provide information on different potential testing groups.

Q: Are there any identified pain points mentioned by users of the current site (internal or external)?

A: Users find it difficult to search for previous posts; there is no real categorizing on the current page, so it is challenging to hone in on what applies to one person versus another; the calendar feature is not dynamic enough; the site is one page with many blog posts instead of multiple pages where important content and applicable blog posts can be located.

Q: Does the site (currently or anticipated in the future iteration) integrate into any outside systems?

A: Not currently

Q: Is the current site built using WordPress?

A: Yes

Q: Would you prefer to remain on WordPress or are you open to other CMS options?

A: We are open to other CMS options.

Q: Are there any additional technologies in use on the current site that will need to be transferred over?

A: No

Q: Could you elaborate on the SEO and ADA requirements for the new site redesign?

A: As a quasi-governmental agency, we try to adhere to the Section 508 Accessibility Requirements. You can read more about these requirements here: <https://www.section508.gov/content/guide-accessible-web-design-development/>

Q: What level of content migration and updating is expected from the vendor as part of this project?

A: The vendor will need to pull all existing content on the website site over for migration. Updates to content will be given to the vendor by the project team at MaineHousing. Once the site is complete the vendor will not be part of content updating process.

Q: Can you elaborate on the post-launch training and support required by the vendor?

A: This would be discussed in more detail with the chosen vendor as part of the rollout timeline, but we would like the vendor to provide training to key staff that can then be utilized by MaineHousing to train others on use of the site. It would be helpful for the vendor to provide quick reference guidance materials on how to use the built in features of the website, which would likely cut down on the additional support needed after the site is launched.

Q: Are there any specific KPIs used to measure the existing site's performance that you wish to improve upon with the redesign?

A: We have no existing KPIs for this site.

Q: Is there an incumbent vendor currently providing development and/or maintenance services for the existing website? Are they participating in this RFP?

A: There no incumbent vendor.

Q: Can we assume that branding (logo, colors, etc.) will utilize the existing site, or should re-branding be part of the design phase of this project?

A: We would like rebranding to be a part of the design phase of the project.

Q: What specific dynamic features or functionalities are desired for the new website that are not currently present in the existing one?

A: The desired new features are the ones listed on page 5 of the RFP. We currently either do not have these at all or what we have is not fully meeting the requirement as described.

Q: Can you provide examples of websites or design styles that align with your vision for the new site?

A: We would be looking to the chosen vendor to present us with ideas and work with us on exploring design styles that meet our needs.

Q: Is there a preferred hosting platform for the new website, or should we make recommendations based on industry standards and best practices?

A: We do not have a preferred hosting platform.

Q: Could you outline any specific security considerations or compliance standards that the new website must adhere to?

A: Web hosts that comply with SOC2 Type 2, SSAE16 or FedRAMP are preferred. Vendors will be asked to complete a brief security survey if they are selected as one of the finalists.

Q: Are there any specific design elements or visual aspects that need to be prioritized in the redesign?

A: We would like the site to be more visually appealing in general and in a manner that facilitates ease of use for those accessing the site. We do have a few different logos that would need to be built in to the specific pages but we are looking for our vendor to help us in the design and vision for the aesthetics.

Q: Will an incumbent agency be submitting?

A: No, there is no incumbent agency.

Q: What is the ideal launch date for the new website?

A: The ideal launch date would be Q3/Q4 of 2024.

Q: What events or conferences may restrict the availability of the Maine State Housing Authority (MaineHousing) team during website creation?

A: There are no specific events that will restrict availability, however there will be a requirement for schedule coordination with the team and the vendor.

Q: How does MaineHousing plan to develop content for the new website? Select one of the following:

A: Option B

- a. The agency should pull from the existing site and minimize involvement from MaineHousing.*
- b. MaineHousing is comfortable providing seed copy for the site, utilizing a guide provided by the agency. The agency will then refine this content.*
- c. MaineHousing will provide the final copy for the site, utilizing a content guide supplied by the agency.*
- d. Other:*

Q: If you were forced to pick only one type of relationship with a firm for this project, which would you select?

A: Option B

- a. Follow Orders - An agency that executes your ideas and acts as a helping hand to get things done.*
- b. Team Player - A collaborator who thinks and works with you to create assets.*

c. Thought Leader - A thought leader and subject matter expert who leads you, constructively challenges assumptions and offers fresh perspectives.

Q: Since a budget is not provided, we must determine if the financial opportunity is appropriate. Which budget range aligns with your expectations?

A: Option D - We do not have a specified budget for this project. We ask that vendors include the required itemized pricing for all costs as described in the RFP with their submission.

a. \$30,000-45,000

b. \$45,000-60,000

c. \$60,000-75,000

d. Other:

Q: Will a preference be given to a local agency? What level of influence will this have on the selection?

A: There is no specific preference given for a local vendor. We are looking for a vendor that understands our needs and the population of people who will visit and use the site.

Q: Will brand guidelines be available to the selected partner? Describe the elements included in your brand guidelines.

A: This website does not have specific brand guidelines. We do have some homegrown logos that we would like incorporated but other than that are not bound by any brand guidelines.

Q: How closely will the new site be tied to the existing brand/look and feel? Assuming the logo remains the same, are the other elements, such as colors and typography, open to expansion and evolution?

A: It is all open to expansion and evolution. We would prefer a new look and feel.

Q: Describe the photo library, if any, available to the selected vendor.

A: We have a subscription to Adobe Stock that could provide photos and videos for this site.

Q: List the third-party integrations for the new website. (Forms, real estate listings, etc.)

A: Based on the expertise of the vendor, if it would be most beneficial for ease of use, we may need integrations for the calendar, subscription option, and preference groups.

Q: Will MaineHousing accept WordPress as the content management system (CMS)

A: Yes, as long as the site is monitored for potential security issues affecting the platform or the plugins.

Q: Is there a plan (or desire, if it's easy to do so) to create more sites in the future?

A: We do not have current plans for future sites, but as the demands of homeless initiatives in the state are constantly evolving, there is always a potential for additional websites.

Q: Are there any sites (or web apps) that are not directly referenced in this RFP that the county would benefit from consolidating into this new platform? If so, approximately how many?

A: Potentially one or two.

Q: Do different teams/departments manage their own sites? Or does one team own all web work?

A: In this particular case, the website is managed by a specific department in the agency who is closest to the work with partners accessing the site.

Q: Are there granular levels of permissions needed where certain people should only have access to certain sites? Or, even certain areas of sites?

A: We do not anticipate wanting to restrict access to view the site(s), but we do want to be able to have permission levels that impact who can post and to which areas they can post.

Q: What are some things you DO NOT like about your current CMS?

A: There are current security issues with some of the plug ins being used as well as an unfamiliarity with the CMS itself, making it challenging for us to manage the site in a way that would make it most effective.

Q: Where is the CMS/website currently hosted?

A: The site is currently hosted on Wordpress

Q: Are you open to evaluating an open source CMS?

A: Yes

Q: Are you open to a cloud-hosted CMS?

A: Yes

Q: What is your current annual spend on CMS, hosting, and related support?

A: We currently have a very small CMS and hosting budget of under \$1000 per year. We understand this is unlikely to continue.

Q: How are you defining success from a technical perspective for this project? (please use numbers where possible)

A: Success is a new website that provides information to our partners in the homeless/ housing realm in a dynamic way.

Q: Are there any security standards required for your CMS platform? i.e. HIPAA, PCI, SOCII, Fedramp, etc?

A: There certifications are not explicitly required, but they are preferred.

Q: Please provide the average monthly numbers for page views of the websites combined (to the nearest 100K is fine)

A: This is a very small site that reaches an extremely niche group of people. The hits total roughly 1.5k per month.

Q: Do you experience frequent surges of traffic that impact performance at critical times?

A: We have not seen an issue with this up to this point.

Q: Do you require 24/7 support access in the case of critical (site availability) issues?

A: We would like the website host to provide 24/7 uptime and support that is available at a bare minimum for 12/5.

Q: Do you require specific response time SLAs for critical issues? If so, please specify expectations

A: See support question above.

Q: Please describe the internal team who will be responsible for the website post-launch (developers, non-tech users, etc)

A: The team will be staff in MaineHousing's Homeless Initiatives Department with assistance as needed from our Webmaster and IT department. The staff have varying levels of technical knowledge, but would not be considered non-tech users.

Q: Are there defined customer journeys for different visitors/personas?

A: No

Q: Would you need any copywriting or content migration services?

A: Yes

Q: Would you need any original or stock videography or photography?

A: We have a subscription to Adobe Stock that could provide photos and videos for this site.

Q: Is there a CMS that you have a preference for over the other?

A: No

Q: How much content do you currently have on your website?

A: You can view our site and all of its content here: <https://www.mainehomelessplanning.org>

Q: Could we request an extension to the submission deadline?

A: We will post notice of any changes to the submission deadline.

Q: Could you let us know if you have a local preference or are you open to a Canadian agency that has done similar work with clients across the United States, with some currently being the States of California, Colorado and Wyoming?

A: Companies outside the U.S. are not prohibited from submitting a proposal to this RFP, however, MaineHousing will take into consideration the added complexities, exchange rates and fees associated with doing business with a company outside of the U.S. when evaluating the proposals and making a choice that is most advantageous to MaineHousing.

Q: Do you have an indexed or estimated amount of material that you would need migrated from the current site (including the webpages, but also documents or other files you would need to have brought over?)

A: You can view our site and all of its content here: <https://www.mainehomelessplanning.org>. Everything currently on this site will be able to come over.

Q: The RFP lists a 6-month contract term, with extension of another 6 months upon approval. The development and design of a customized website usually falls into the realm of about 5-6 months, so I assume this term in the contract is referring to the development stages with the website?

A: The majority of the work will be development and launch. Once the site is complete, the vendor will not be part of the content updating process. We will extend the contract as listed if additional time is needed to get to the launch and post-launch training support.

Q: Your RFP mentions the ability to have users subscribe to e-mail notifications, would you also like text notifications to be available?

A: This would be something new for us, but we would be willing to explore the idea.