Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area, Inc.

Request for Proposal

"Crossroads of War" Website Redesign and Expansion

Release Date: January 9, 2023

Proposals Due: January 30, 2023 at 5 PM

Questions concerning this request for proposals should be directed to:

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Contents

Background

The "Crossroads of War: Maryland and the Border in the Civil War" website (hereafter "Crossroads") is hosted by the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area. "Crossroads" was originally launched in 2012 by the Catoctin Center for Regional Studies at Frederick Community College, Frederick, MD. The Catoctin Center for Regional Studies was a regional history research program sponsored collaboratively by the National Park Service and Frederick Community College, 2000-2013. One of the projects of the Catoctin Center was the "Crossroads" website. The Catoctin Center closed in 2013, and the "Crossroads" website was hosted by Frederick Community College for several years, then the National Park Service, and now the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area, in Frederick, MD.

The creation of the website was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Park Service, the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area, the Maryland Historical Trust, the Tourism Council of Frederick County, and several other funders. Content for the website was created by the Catoctin Center through historical research conducted by Catoctin Center historians and student interns from Frederick Community College, Hood College, University of Maryland, and several other colleges.

A website developer was contracted to design the website. The Catoctin Center contracted with a separate digital map company to create dynamic maps depicting three local battles of the Civil War, and the website developer worked with this company to incorporate the maps into the website. The videos in the website were created by the Digital Media program of Frederick Community College. The most valuable element of the website, in terms of original contribution to local Civil War-era history and research, is the searchable research databases in the website. These include a historic newspaper database with over 7,000 articles from ten different newspapers in the region spanning the years primarily from 1859 to 1866; a database listing over 4,200 local Civil War soldiers with a concentration on local African American soldiers; and a database featuring extracts from letters, diaries, and memoirs from both soldiers and civilians that pertain to the geographic area of the website. The website developer created a user-friendly interface for the databases, and these databases continue to be very helpful to researchers.

RFP and High-Level Project Timeline

- RFP Posted: January 9, 2023
- Responses Due: January 30, 2023 at 5 PM

- o Please send proposal and any questions about the RFP to: Emily Huebner, emily@heartofthecivilwar.org
- Finalist candidates selected: February 6, 2023
- Chosen contractor selected: February 15, 2023
- Contractor start date: February 27, 2023
- Target launch date: October 31, 2024
- One year of maintenance and hosting concludes October 31, 2025

Goals

- The technological upgrading of the "Crossroads" website, including addressing accessibility for all users (meeting Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1) and compatibility for mobile users. The website was originally created in 2012, and needs to be upgraded to remain a resource into the future.
- The "Crossroads" website is an archival and research resource. The project seeks to maintain, expand, and enhance documentation and interpretation of the Civil War in the mid-Maryland region. Resources include narrative essays, maps, photographs, illustrations, drawings, videos, historic documents, and more, including searchable databases that include over 7,000 period newspaper articles from the region and data on over 4,200 local Civil War soldiers, including extracts from letters, diaries, and memoirs.
  - o Updating and revising information currently on the "Crossroads" website and in the research tools: including the addition of images, text, and more in searchable databases. All content will be provided to the web designer.
- Maintenance and expansion of current user-friendly research and archival databases.
- The creation of a new section on the website "Crossroads" dedicated to African American history.
  - o This new section on the website will highlight new research being undertaken during the initial phase of this project. It will also pull together all of the existing pieces of African American Civil War history that are currently located in various sections of the website.
- Several obsolete sections of the website will be deleted, including the "In the Classroom" and "See the Sites" sections.

Current Technical Capabilities

The "Crossroads" website is a WordPress site. It includes custom, searchable databases. Several links on the website are now obsolete and broken, we expect to remove rather than replace most of these broken links. Videos on the site are no longer viewable because of the site's age. In the future we plan to use the capability to embed YouTube videos on the site.

Site Architecture

The "Crossroads" website will include most, but not all, the sections currently included in crossroadsofwar.org. The following is an estimate of the work required on the current website.

The sections to be retained and updated or enhanced include:

1. Homepage: the homepage will need to be redesigned
2. Discover the Story: the following thematic sections will likely need content and format updates
    a. The Coming Storm
    b. Fighting on the Border
    c. Communities at War
    d. African Americans: The Struggle for Freedom
    e. Civil Liberties in Crises
    f. Women and Children on the Border
    g. Reconstructing the Region
    h. Remembrance and Reconciliation
3. Research:
    a. Civil War Soldiers
    b. Historic Newspapers
    c. Diaries, Letters, and Memoirs
    d. African American Records
        i. Freedmen's Bureau Schools (several content pages share this heading, will need to be consolidated)
4. Videos, maps, and images: This section currently has lots of broken links and consists of Videos, Special Collections, and Animations.

Sections to be added:

1. About (1 content page)
2. New African American history research to be added to research databases and new content page

Sections to be deleted

1. Links
2. Credits
3. See the Sites
4. In the Classroom

Deliverables

The current website needs updating of design and code to current Web standards to make it viable for users to utilize on all current platforms. All sections of the website must be made responsive (tablet and mobile).

The following specifications are written with the current website host, Wordpress, in mind but candidates are welcome to present a comparable content management system.

- Front end development will include HTML and CSS Development including:
  - Design and Development narrative, wireframes, finalization of site map
  - Custom Homepage Theme Design
  - Landing Page, Database Listing, and Detail, Subpage Templates
- Custom WordPress Theme Development and Resource Database set up (or comparable)
  - Design multi-use template to display specific content (Historic Newspaper Database; Civil War Soldier Databas; Letters, Diaries and Memoirs Database, Freedmen's Bureau Databases, and others to be determined, as well as videos, maps and images listings and detail pages.
  - Adapt current research databases or develop new databases with user-friendly interfaces and include all functionality currently present on the website.
- Content Placement, WordPress Training, Site Launch (including post-launch error correction).
- One year of hosting and WordPress Maintenance including:
  - WordPress and Plug-in updates and minimum one hour per month allocated for Client Support
  - Hosting – Cloudways (or comparable) server

Functionality Features

- Site administrators will have the ability to make all content updates, including the functionality to create new secondary level pages as needed to allow for future data/content expansion.

- Advanced Custom Fields – Use ACF to develop custom post types throughout the site, to give the Heart of the Civil War the ability to update all areas of the website using a simple form in the dashboard. The content must be SEO and user friendly.

Research Database Upgrade

- Current research databases will be maintained and expanded, preserving current functionality (ability to quickly and easily search by keyword, subject, location, date, source, and more). Create new section and upgrade the existing database to include the

following. (Content/data field details will be reviewed once all content has been reviewed and approved.)

- Historic Newspapers

- Civil War Soldiers

- Letters, Diaries, and Memoirs

- African American Civil War History (must be reviewed to determine if this information will fit into other database categories, but additional database categories may be required)

Content: Add "Crossroads" content and format accordingly.

Testing and Support: Develop the site on a dev server. Conduct thorough QA testing before posting for client review. Provide soft launch support and post launch support on a time and materials basis.

Training: Train Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area staff how to add site content and how to change WordPress settings. This includes how to load images and files such as PDF, XML, and Doc files. Consult on how to use content to boost search rankings.

Records/Data

All data and materials produced through this contract belong to the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area.

Overall project timeline (including non-website related work for context)

- January, 2023 RFP released for web design contractor (Jan. 9), responses received by January 30.
- February-March 2023 Web Contractor selected, preliminary familiarization with "Crossroads" website and current condition of technology.
- March to May 2023 Recruitment of Principal Investigator, appointment of advisory/review board, and meetings with principal stakeholders and partners to inform them of the project and to get feedback. Onboarding of website design contractor and familiarization with current technological specifications.
- June 2023 Organizational meeting to bring key personnel together, including PI and website designer, for more detailed project planning.
- June 2023 – December 2023 PI reviews recent historical literature and conducts new research on topics pertinent to the themes of the "Crossroads" website, especially on African American history in the region relevant to the Civil War era. PI consults with partner organizations and with advisory/review board for relevant information and guidance. During this phase, PI works with HCWHA and web designer to start preliminary discussions of how new material will be added to the "Crossroads" website. Throughout this period, web designer will explore how to redesign the

homepage, add functionality, and stabilize current content on the website, with particular attention to the existing custom research databases.

- January 2024-July. 2024 In close consultation with HCWHA and the PI, web designer upgrades the technical components of the "Crossroads" website, adds additional material to the website, and reconfigures website to more prominently highlight the regional African American history in the Civil War era.
- August 2024 – October 2024 Soft launch; New "Crossroads" website demonstrated to select partners and groups, and to the advisory/review board; formal evaluation of website conducted. Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area team will receive training on how to add site content and how to change WordPress settings (including loading images and files such as PDF, XML, and Doc files, and how to use content to boost search engines).
- October 2024 New "Crossroads" website officially launches.

Budget and Funding

Please submit with your bid with a separate document noting the itemized budget that will enable you and your team to effectively execute the entirety of this update within the project timeline. We anticipate that this project will be accomplished in part, or in full, with federal funding and it will be subject to federal grant requirements. At the conclusion of this project, we do not anticipate additional investment in design and development to follow so all project goals and deliverables must be met within the budget you propose. This will be reflected in our final agreement with a contractor. Funds for sustaining and maintaining the website will be available annually, beyond the year of maintenance and hosting to be covered by this project.

The contract type will be a firm fixed price.

Proposal Requirements

Please include the following in your proposal response:
- Overview of your company
- Overview of how you will meet our objectives and scope of work, including description of your project management approach and website design/development process (research/initial meetings/brainstorming, design and development process, post-launch errors correction, etc.)
- Explanation of any alternative suggestions to the Wordpress CMS and other functionality features specified here.
- Examples of 3-5 most relevant recent projects. **Review will pay special attention to projects that include database development.**
- Within the overall project timeline described here, provide timeline detail specific to website design and development.
- Proposed budget/pricing.
- Details about your team.

• If the execution of your proposal includes the hiring of sub-contractors, this must be clearly stated in your proposal and included in your budget. Sub-contractors must be identified and the work they will perform must be defined.
• Any key differentiators about your firm.
• Terms & conditions

Proposal Criteria

HCWHA Criteria for Crossroads of War Project

1. Adherence to RFP Instructions	Score Range	BASIS FOR SCORE
Timeliness	1-5	Arrived by deadline receives all points
Completeness	1-5	All proposal requirements as specified in RFP are completed
Overall Quality & Level of Professionalism	1-5	Technically compliant and attractive receives all points
Total Value of Section	**15**	
2. Company Information	**Score Range**	**BASIS FOR SCORE**
Overview of Company	1-5	Provided overview of company with sufficient detail, companies based in the United States, including their staff, are given special consideration
Organizational Structure	1-5	Provided details about team, all team members are described
Project Management Approach	1-5	Fully explains project management approach
Total Value of Section	**15**	
3. Project Understanding	**Score Range**	**BASIS FOR SCORE**
Overall Comprehension of Project Objectives	1-5	Written section shows comprehension
Proposed functionality meets project scope and goals	1-10	Written section shows comprehension
Explanation of website design/development process	1-5	Written section shows comprehension
Proposed timeline meets requirements	1-5	Written section conforms to overall project timeline and provides relevant detail
Total Value of Section	**25**	
4. Budget	**Score Range**	**BASIS FOR SCORE**
Budget completeness	1-5	Budget fully addresses all requirements
Budget detail	1-10	Relationship between services and expense is made clear in proposal
Cost effectiveness	1-10	Total expense is reasonable, comprehensive, and cost efficient
Total Value of Section	**25**	
5. Applicant Experience	**Score Range**	**BASIS FOR SCORE**
Demonstrated experience with custom databases	1-10	Provide high quality examples of previous work with custom databases
Experience with educational and/or archival websites	1-5	Cite examples of work on educational and/or archival website projects
Provides examples of 3-5 most relevant recent projects	1-5	Provide specific examples of recent relevant projects
Total Value of Section	**20**	
Total points possible	**100**	

Proposal Submission

All proposals should be submitted electronically by January 30, 2023 at 5 PM to Emily Huebner at emily@heartofthecivilwar.org