Request for Proposals (RFP)

Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area Website Redesign and Update

Release date: February 13, 2024

Proposals due: March 4, 2024

Questions should be directed to:

Emily Huebner, Director of Operations and Programs: emily@heartofthecivilwar.org

1. **Summary and Background**
   The Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area (HCWHA) is a nonprofit organization and certified heritage area, covering parts of Carroll, Frederick, and Washington Counties. The HCWHA mission—with its partners—is to preserve and promote the historic sites, towns, cultural landscapes, and diverse stories in Carroll, Frederick, and Washington County, Maryland.

   HCWHA is one of 13 heritage areas in Maryland. Maryland Heritage Areas are locally designated, locally managed regions where public and private partners make commitments to preserving historical, cultural and natural resources for sustainable economic development through heritage tourism. HCWHA became certified as part of the Maryland Heritage Areas Program in July 2006. It is an independent nonprofit organization guided by a Board of Directors and an Advisory Council comprised of representatives of local government units, state and national parks, private organizations and businesses, and individuals from all three counties in the Heritage Area.

   Our partners include the tourism entities in Carroll, Frederick, and Washington Counties, municipal and county governments, the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, nonprofit organizations including museums and historic sites, and government entities including National and State parks within our boundaries. We work with our partners to encourage economic impact through heritage tourism to our region.

2. **Proposal Guidelines**
   This RFP represents the requirements for an open and competitive process. Proposals will be accepted until **March 4, 2024**. All proposals must be signed by an official agent or representative of the entity submitting the proposal. If the entity submitting a proposal must outsource or contract any work to meet the requirements contained herein, this must be clearly stated in the proposal. Additionally, costs included in proposals must be all-inclusive to incorporate any outsourced or contracted work. Any proposals which call for outsourcing or contracting work must include a name and description of the organizations being contracted. All costs must be itemized to include an explanation of all fees and costs. Contract terms and conditions will be negotiated upon selection of the winning bidder for this RFP. All contractual terms and conditions will be subject to review by HCWHA and will include scope, budget, schedule, and other necessary items pertaining to the project.

3. **Project Summary and Objectives**
   HCWHA invites proposals from a firm or individual designer/website developer for a professional update and redesign of the organization's current website, https://www.heartofthecivilwar.org/, to enhance online presence and overall public awareness of HCWHA's resources as well as HCWHA as an organization.

   Objectives:
   - Position HCWHA as a leading heritage tourism destination.

- Present HCWHA's historical, cultural, environmental, and recreational resources in a dynamic way that educates and informs about the area and encourages visitation to the region.
- Implement a design architecture that allows for simple implementation of in-house updates.
- Facilitate seamless promotional integration with HCWHA's three county destination marketing organizations: Carroll County Tourism (in the Carroll County Office of Economic Development), Tourism Council of Frederick Couty (Visit Frederick), and the Hagerstown-Washington County Covention & Visitors Bureau (Visit Hagerstown).
- Integrate social media channels into the website to encourage engagement and make up-to-date content accessible.
- Collaborate with HCWHA to create an online map for the website- map content and functionality TBD
- Accept and display heritage tourism-related event listings on an event calendar. Possibly design to automatically populate calendar with partner listings from their online event calendars.
- Improve user experience of the site, especially on mobile phones.
- Increase traffic to the website.
- Integrate Neon CRM tools into site (donations, forms, newsletter sign-up, and other tools).
- Collaborate with HCWHA's SEO strategist to faciliate updated website SEO.

4. **Project Scope**
   HCHWA's marketing and communications strategy targets two distinct audiences:

   - HCWHA Visitors and Potential Visitors: Through a dynamic, responsive, image-rich, easy-to-navigate updated website, HCWHA will appeal to prospective visitors of diverse backgrounds, ages, and interests, including our target audience of heritage tourists. Heritage tourism is "travel to experience the places, artifacts, and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past." The events calendar includes entries promoting one-time events and ongoing events such as weekly tours and ongoing exhibitions. Each month can include up to 50 or more event listings. HCWHA promotes events and attractions in the Heritage Area using social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube), and online and radio advertising. HCWHA also hosts a blog that includes heritage tourism content (seasonal activity round ups, highlighted stories from the region's history, itinerary inspiration, etc.). This target audience seeks information for visitors, quickly and directly.

   - HCWHA Partners and Stakeholders: HCWHA partners and stakeholders use the website to access information related to the Heritage Area's grant programs, educational resources in our education portal, minutes and other information for Board members, and dedicated pages that offer technical assistance to stakeholders addressing specific public history topics such as preparing to commemorate the 250th anniversary of the United States.

The website must include content for both audiences and clearly differentiate between the two "zones" of content.

5. **Process**
   The vendor must deliver to HCWHA a fully operational, updated website, utilizing the following steps:
   - Research/Site Structure: Work with HCWHA staff to determine goals, customization needs, style preferences, and outline a new site structure.
   - Design: Present HCWHA with 3 new options for review, revision, and selection.
   - Programming (front-end and back-end): Using WordPress or a comparable management system, the front-end and back-end programming will be completed based on the approved design and site structure. Neon CRM donation tools and other related CRM tie-ins will be included in the new site.
   - Search Engine Optimization: Work with HCWHA and HCWHA SEO contractor to ensure updated website will facilitate SEO strategy.
   - Beta Review Stage/Final Changes: Test the site in the various Windows and Mac browsers, as well as mobile phone browsers. Validate coding, check all links, test functionality of the site. HCWHA will also review the site and clarify any necessary changes before the launch.
   - Server transfer and launch: Upon final approval, transfer all website and database files to the organization's hosting server or vendor to maintain hosted site with annual hosting and maintenance fee.

6. **Detailed Deliverables/Expectations**
   - Mobile optimization (responsive design): Create a responsive site that is well-designed, fully functional, and easily viewable on mobile phones and tablets.
   - Secure site certification: Build site with "https" security; at minimum using SSL certificate that we currently have.
   - Accessibility: Site must be compliant with American Disabilities Act Section 508, passing validation tests to ensure accessible compatibility.
   - Navigation: An optimized navigational layout for the entire website (HCWHA will sign off on this before vendor proceeds).
   - Site Search: Users must be able to search within the website using a clearly labeled search tool.
   - Social Media: Integrate HCWHA social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube) into website.
   - Events: New event calendar with ability to provide event spotlight on homepage. Separate ongoing events from one-time events.
   - Travel Information Request: Users can request travel information using a form on the website, HCWHA staff should be able to create multiple forms for the purpose of collecting this information.
   - Grant Submissions: HCWHA administers a regional grant program. Stakeholders must be able to use the website to submit grant applications, including informational fields and the ability to upload and submit materials to HCWHA.

- Map: Establish infrastructure for an interactive map of the Heritage Area (including Carroll, Frederick, Washington Counties), that can orient users to layers of information. This may include routes, attractions, historic events, and more. Map must be functional on mobile and desktop platforms. The exact map specifications will be developed in collaboration with HCWHA. HCWHA staff should be able to edit map layer content from the back-end.
- Analytics: Install Google Analytics.
- Display: Correct display in all major browsers, to include Internet Explorer, Firefox, Chrome, and Safari.
- Content conversion: Conversion of all content and documents from the existing website into the new website.
- Training: Back-end training for HCWHA team.

SEO-Related Requirements
- SEO friendly design utilizing best SEO practices.
- Search engine friendly URLs, canonical URLs, page title, description H-tags, semantic markup and the like are required.
- Access to website meta data fields (either through theme, plugin or addon) - the CMS backend needs to make SEO easy for content editors by requiring fields important to SEO are completed.
- Ability to manage and create 301 & 302 redirects
- Supply and implement a 301-redirect strategy (for existing redirects) so that we do not lose any of our current search engine rankings.
- Inclusion of Yoast SEO plugin (if WordPress) – this has built in ability to accomplish meta data & redirect through paid version.
- Ability to add header footer codes for Google, Facebook and other platforms either through access to these areas or via plugin/addon.
- Provide ability to include a robots.txt file for limiting search engines to some content.
- Have the ability to add alt texts and titles.
- Mobile friendly design optimized for fast loading of pages.

7. **Proposal Deadline, Evaluation, and Project Timeline**
   Formal proposals in response to this RFP are due no later than **March 4, 2024 at 5 PM.**
   Questions regarding the proposal and the RFP should be addressed to Emily Huebner, HCWHA Director of Operations and Programs at: emily@heartofthecivilwar.org. Questions will be publicly posted and answered at https://www.heartofthecivilwar.org/rfp-2024

   Evaluation of Proposals
   Evaluation of Proposals will be conducted from **March 5, 2024-March 18, 2024.** If additional information or discussions are needed with any bidders during this window, the bidder(s) will be notified. The selection decision for the winning bidder will be made no later than **March 18, 2024.** Upon notification, the contract negotiation with the winning bidder will begin immediately. Our goal is to complete contract negotiations by **March 22, 2024.** Notifications to bidders who were not selected will be made in a timely manner.

Project Timeline
The project is scheduled to begin no later than **March 25, 2024** and conclude by **September 30, 2024.**

8. **Budget**
Each bidder should respond to this RFP with a detailed budget, **not to exceed $40,000**, to complete the project by September 30, 2024. Annual hosting and maintenance should be quoted separately from the redesign price. Proposals should include preferred payment method and schedule, including payment requirements, available discounts, and/or other invoicing details the bidder deems significant.

9. **Submission Guidelines and Requirements**
Candidates should submit a digital proposal to Emily Huebner at emily@heartofthecivilwar.org or utilize Dropbox, Google Drive, or another file sharing service to deliver the proposal.

The proposal must include the following:

- Name of organization, a point of contact, email address, address, and telephone number.
- Overview of the organization and its history (one page). If applicable, note minority or women business enterprise (MBE/WBE) designation.
- A brief (no more than one page) description of the relevant experience of the principal(s) who will perform the work. A copy of their resume(s) and any appropriate product examples may be included.
- A concise (no more than four pages) description of the approach to the work, including the tasks defined in "Scope of Work: Process" and a definition of deliverables for each, a schedule and any suggested modifications to scope of work elements, if appropriate.
- Relevant samples of similar web design work that illustrate the contractor's ability to meet the technical and aesthetic qualities required. Provide URLs for previous works demonstrating the design and technical capabilities outlined in this request for proposals.
- Cost estimate: totaled and subtotaled for each task and proposed deliverables.
- Quoted price should be inclusive. If your price excludes certain fees or charges, you must provide a detailed list of excluded fees with a complete explanation of the nature of those fees. Also, please describe any ongoing fees or charges associated with the proposal. Note that annual hosting and maintenance fees should be quoted separately from the redesign price. HCWHA will not pay for any travel costs incurred by the contractor.
- If the execution of work requires the hiring of subcontractors, please state this in your bid. HCWHA will not refuse a proposal based on the use of sub-contractors; however, HCWHA retains the right to refuse the subcontractors you have selected. If applicable, note minority or women business enterprise (MBE/WBE) designation for any subcontractors.

10. **Selection Criteria and Contract Terms**

A contractor will be selected based on response to the scope of work statements. Creativity, vision, technical approach, professional experience, sensitivity to our mission, and price/value relative to the scope of work will be considerations. Additional consideration will be given to firms based in Maryland.

HCWHA will negotiate terms upon selection. All contracts are subject to review by legal counsel and will be considered awarded only upon signing of an agreement or contract, which outlines terms, scope, budget, and other necessary items. This RFP does not obligate HCWHA or the selected contractor until a contract is signed and approved by both parties. HCWHA will not be responsible for work done, even in good faith, prior to the final approval of the proposed contract.