Environmental Council of the States
Request for Proposals

SUPPORT TO REDESIGN THE WEBSITE FOR E-ENTERPRISE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Released: December 13, 2023
Responses due: January 17, 2024

1. Project Context

The Environmental Council of the States (ECOS) is seeking proposals to redesign and support the website for a national initiative called E-Enterprise for the Environment (https://e-enterprisefortheenvironment.net). ECOS and its partners want to redesign the website to give it a fresh and modern look, improve the organization and usability of the content, more effectively communicate the value of E-Enterprise, and motivate more partners to engage in our work. ECOS is also looking to build a partnership with a firm that can provide longer-term support for maintenance and occasional enhancement of the website after launch.

1.1. Project Timeline

Our goal is to award a contract and kick off the project by the end of February 2024. We hope to launch the redesigned website by August 2024.

1.2. What is E-Enterprise for the Environment?

E-Enterprise for the Environment is a dynamic partnership among the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), states, and tribes aimed at transforming and modernizing environmental protection programs. E-Enterprise partner agencies work collaboratively to streamline workflows, deliver access to trusted information, and enhance productivity across the environmental protection enterprise. Our projects improve the way agencies protect human health and the environment and they benefit the public, government agencies, and the regulated community.

The E-Enterprise website is the hub for sharing news and information about projects and resources that help environmental agencies increase productivity and improve the delivery of environmental protection in the U.S.

1.3. What is ECOS?

ECOS is the national nonprofit, nonpartisan association of state and territorial environmental agency leaders. The purpose of ECOS is to improve the capability of state environmental agencies and their leaders to protect and improve human health and the environment of the United States of America. Among our many activities, ECOS helps support state agency engagement in the E-Enterprise initiative. ECOS hosts and manages the content on the E-Enterprise website on behalf of the broader partnership. We receive guidance and input on website content from the E-Enterprise Communications Team, which includes staff from U.S. EPA, states and tribes, and supporting contractors.

2. Project Purpose

2.1. Why are we doing this?

The E-Enterprise website is one of our primary means of sharing information about the initiative and motivating

participation among partner agencies. ECOS and our partners believe that we can more effectively communicate the mission and impact of E-Enterprise by revamping the visual design and content, revisiting the site's information architecture, and implementing more current technologies and best practices. We want to redesign the website to give it a fresh and modern look, improve the organization and usability of the content, more effectively communicate the value of E-Enterprise, and motivate more partners to engage in our work.

2.2. Thoughts on our current website

The [existing website](#) launched in 2016. The site is not particularly large or complex and its main purpose is information delivery. While we have made incremental improvements over the years, the website is showing its age and we are limited by the constraints of the existing platform's themes and templates.

Pain points we are experiencing with the current website include:

- **Low Visual Appeal** - The design of the existing site feels dated. E-Enterprise is a champion for modernization and innovation and the site does not visually convey those values. The current color scheme is too muted. This was primarily driven by the color scheme of our logo, which appears in the upper left of each webpage.

- **Text-Heavy and Static Content** - The existing site relies heavily on lengthy blocks of text that are difficult to absorb. The text is presented and written in a style that is not as engaging as we would like. We also do not have a great strategy or framework for featuring news or content from our quarterly email newsletter and other sources. Therefore, the content can often feel stale and static.

- **Lack of Flexibility** - The site was not built to be very flexible, so we routinely fall into the trap of supplementing or duplicating content in PDF files that are not engaging and are hard to find. For example, we have created an "[E-Enterprise by the Numbers](#)" infographic that attempts to show the impact of our work. It would be helpful to have that kind of information featured more prominently rather than buried as one of many links to "Resources" at the end of the [About](#) page.

2.3. What are our goals for this website redesign project?

<u>Goal 1</u> – Create a visually appealing and accessible space to share information on E-Enterprise projects.

- Brighten the color scheme of the existing E-Enterprise logo to improve its visual appeal and increase contrast for accessibility. We are not looking for a logo redesign or rebranding, but we would like to brighten the colors in our existing logo since it is a foundational branding element that will impact the look of the redesigned website.
- Refresh the look and feel of the website and adopt a more visually impactful design that conveys a sense of innovation and modernization.
- Include usability features or functions that accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities, including those who use assistive technology.

<u>Goal 2</u> – Improve the user experience so our partners can intuitively find information and engage in our active projects.

- Present more site content up front giving users the ability to access information with fewer clicks.

- Improve site navigation and information architecture so users can find content that is most relevant for them.
- Help partners understand how they can participate in our active projects and connect with project leaders.
- Eliminate redundant information and reduce our reliance on PDFs that duplicate or supplement site content.
- Incorporate responsive design to support users across devices and platforms.

Goal 3 – Engage and inspire users with more dynamic website content and email marketing templates.

- Incorporate more photos and graphical design elements to complement and enhance the text.
- Use more plain language and lighten the tone of the content to make it more accessible/colloquial.
- Design and deploy email templates that match the new website design for use in Mailchimp.
- More strategically integrate content from our quarterly newsletter into the site.

Goal 4 – Modernize the website's backend to improve its flexibility and security profile.

- The current site is built on the WordPress platform. We are happy with the platform, but many of the existing themes, templates, and plug-ins are aging and limit our flexibility to incorporate new design elements or functionality.
- As the WordPress core continually updates, we also run the risk of introducing breaking changes to our existing site or leaving the site exposed to unpatched security risks. ECOS wants to modernize our website components in the interest of shoring up its security and minimizing our risk profile.

2.4.   Who are our key audiences?

The core audience for this website generally includes staff from U.S. EPA and state, tribal, and territorial environmental agencies. They will most typically visit the website to learn about:

- the E-Enterprise mission and why it matters;
- the objectives, status, and work products of E-Enterprise project teams;
- tools, services, or informational resources that may help agencies improve their programs and operations; and
- opportunities to get involved in E-Enterprise project teams or leadership.

3.   Key Technical Requirements and Functionality

This list of high-level technical requirements will be supplemented by more detailed requirements gathered during discovery work.

- The current website is built on the WordPress platform. We are most comfortable sticking with WordPress for the new site, but open to proposals for other content management systems. We do not have coders or developers on staff, so we do need a platform that does not require deep technical knowledge for managing content.

- The website must be compatible with all major web browsers and incorporate responsive design principles to allow for use on mobile and desktop devices.
- The site must be designed so that ECOS can perform basic content administration without contractor support.
- Hosting requirements - Our existing website is hosted at Liquid Web along with a number of other websites that we manage. Our preference is to continue using that same hosting environment for the new website.
- We use Mailchimp to deliver quarterly newsletters and occasional emails to our contacts. We will need updated templates for the newsletters and emails that match the new site's design and can be deployed in Mailchimp. We are also interested in ideas for how we may integrate the website with the Mailchimp platform to deliver a better user experience or encourage more frequent engagement.
- Include usability features or functions that accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities, including those who use assistive technology.
- The site should integrate with Google Analytics so ECOS can monitor trends in web traffic.

4. Project Scope of Work and Key Deliverables

The successful bidder (contractor) will work in collaboration with the project team to provide the following services:

Project Management
The contractor will provide expertise to manage the project and keep it on schedule and within the proposed budget. The contractor will:
- Develop and manage the project work plan and schedule.
- Facilitate project team calls and meetings, capture action items, and provide support for online meeting software.

   Key Deliverables
   ○ Project work plan

Discovery and User Research
The contractor will design and conduct a Discovery process to gather input from the project team and up to 10 user representatives. The process may include electronic surveys and/or virtual interviews requiring no more than 1-2 hours of time for users. The contractor will capture the input in a Discovery Document.

   Key Deliverables
   ○ A Discovery Document that captures user input on desired site content, functionality, and design

Design
Based on the goals in this RFP and the information in the Discovery Document, the contractor will:
- Design a new information architecture
- Create a new visual design for the website and refresh the E-Enterprise logo

- Produce/acquire graphics, illustrations, or photos to supplement the text-based site content

  Key Deliverables
  - Sitemap and wireframes
  - Source files for refreshed E-Enterprise logo
  - Source files for new page designs, photos, and illustrations that will be used in the new site
  - Source files and images for new newsletter and email templates

Refine and migrate content

The contractor will advise the project team on strategies for improving the site's content to drive more user engagement. This will include assistance with improving, replacing, or eliminating existing site content or identifying opportunities to supplement or replace text with graphical elements. The contractor will provide assistance with:

- Content strategy

- Copywriting and editing

- Content migration

  Key Deliverables
  - Refined website content for migration to the new website

Web Development

- Front-end coding to implement the new site design
- Back-end coding to implement the Content Management System and site functionality
- Implement cross-platform and cross-browser compatibility
- Perform search engine optimization
- Implement site analytics in Google Analytics

  Key Deliverables
  - All code, themes, plug-ins, etc. necessary to support the new website
  - Functional Google Analytics project

Implementation

- Work with ECOS and our web host to prepare and deploy the necessary elements and software to host the new website. This will include provisions for a staging site to test future modifications and a solution for ensuring that the site is regularly backed up.
- Fully deploy the new site and refine as needed during testing.
- Conduct User Acceptance Testing with a small number of pilot users to be identified by ECOS (6-8).
- Test for browser/device compatibility.
- Develop technical documentation and user guides.
- Provide training to ECOS content administrators.

  Key Deliverables
  - Operational hosting environment and site backup solution
  - Fully tested and reasonably error-free website that meets the requirements in the Discovery Document

- Technical documentation and admin user guides

Long-term Website Maintenance

The contractor should propose terms for a 2-year maintenance agreement for the site. The contractor will monitor the site and provide ongoing routine maintenance to troubleshoot and correct issues, install updates to the content management system and associated plug-ins, ensure site backups are working properly, optimize site performance, and provide small-scale enhancements to site features and functionality.

ECOS and the contractor will agree in writing to the scope and budget of any substantial new development work beyond regular maintenance.

5. Required Proposal Content

The proposal should be as streamlined and concise as possible. Please limit your responses to no more than **12 pages**. Submission of additional materials not specifically requested in this Request for Proposals will not be reviewed. Complete responses will include the following information:

1. A concise description of the proposed approach for meeting our goals and requested scope of work. Please be sure to include recommendations for technology platforms and hosting arrangements and tell the project team why you would make those recommendations.

2. A high-level draft project work plan that describes the design and project management approach and includes an estimated schedule with key milestones, tasks, and deliverables.

3. Proposed project budget that includes an itemized breakdown of the estimated costs for time and materials to conduct the activities in the scope of work. Bidders should submit hourly rates of all key staff proposed for the project.
   a. For the 2 years of maintenance and operations support, bidders may propose an all-inclusive flat rate for regular monitoring and maintenance, an hourly rate to be billed as needed, or some combination of the two. If proposing a flat rate, the contractor should specify exactly what will and will not be included for the fee. If proposing an hourly rate, the contractor should provide a realistic estimate of the anticipated monthly hours that will be required to provide the support.

4. Information on corporate and staff experience and qualifications for the work described in this RFP. Please include brief bios for proposed staff that demonstrate their relevant experience.

5. Three client references (name, address, phone number, email address) for whom similar work was performed. Please also include links to examples of your work.

6. Submittal Instructions

Responses to this Request for Proposals are **due to ECOS by 5:00 PM ET on January 17, 2024**. Responses must be e-mailed as one (1) PDF file to rfp@ecos.org. ECOS will not accept hard copy submittals.

In the Subject Line of the e-mail, enter "RFP 01-EEWEB-2024." Do not include any additional information in the Subject Line.

7. Evaluation Process and Selection Criteria

ECOS plans to use the following process to evaluate proposals:

- Initial screening
  - Verify that the proposal is received before the deadline published in the RFP.
  - Confirm that the proposal is complete and includes the items requested in section 5 of this RFP.

- Evaluate proposals based on the following criteria:
  - Overall proposal suitability: Proposed solution must meet the scope, requirements and goals included in this RFP and be presented in a clear and organized manner.
  - Quality of the draft work plan and project management approach.
  - Organizational/Staff Experience: Bidders will be evaluated on their experience and previous work as it pertains to the scope of this project.
  - Technical expertise and qualifications: Bidders must provide descriptions and documentation of staff technical expertise and experience.
  - Value and cost: Bidders will be evaluated on the cost and value of their solution for the scope of this project.
  - Minority- or woman-owned business: ECOS strongly encourages bids from minority- or woman-owned businesses. Qualified bidders should share any relevant certifications.

- Conduct interviews if deemed necessary (see below)

- Check References

- Request Best and Final Offers (BAFO)

- Final evaluation of proposals

- Negotiate contract with winning bidder

Interviews
ECOS may invite bidders to present their proposals and/or sit for virtual interviews conducted via Zoom. The purpose of the interviews is to allow ECOS to ask for clarifying information or get a deeper understanding of information provided in the written proposals. Vendors may not alter the basic substance of their proposals during the interviews. ECOS will use a structured agenda for any interviews to ensure consistency. Any costs associated with interviews shall be borne entirely by the bidder. Bidders may be asked to provide examples of past work as part of the interview.

8. Questions and Answers

All questions regarding this Request for Proposals must be submitted by email to rfp@ecos.org by 5:00 PM ET on January 10, 2024. Questions and corresponding answers will be posted periodically to: https://www.ecos.org/documents/rfp-ee-website.

Hard copy questions and phone inquiries will not be accepted or acknowledged.

9. Waiver and Acknowledgments

By submitting a response to this Request for Proposals, "Responder" expressly waives any and all claims against ECOS, its officers, directors, employees, subcontractors, and agents, and assumes full responsibility for any and all damages, claims, losses, costs, and expenses that the Responder may incur arising from or relating to this Request for Proposals or its response to this Request for Proposals. This waiver does not apply to damage or loss resulting from the sole negligence, gross negligence, or willful misconduct of ECOS, its directors, officers, employees, or agents.

Responder expressly acknowledges that its response to this Request for Proposals does not create a contract between Responder and ECOS.

Responder expressly acknowledges that ECOS is under no obligation to provide one-on-one feedback to any Responder concerning its response, ECOS' methodology and deliberations for evaluating responses, or ECOS' selection of a contractor.

ECOS reserves the right to contact individual bidders for any reason and at any point in its decision-making process. ECOS is under no obligation to disclose any contact with any bidder(s).

Responder expressly acknowledges that the decision to select or not select a contractor in response to this Request for Proposals is:
- made at ECOS' sole discretion;
- may be based on any factors ECOS chooses to consider; and
- may or may not be based solely on cost considerations.

10.   Confidentiality and Disclosure

By submitting a response to this Request for Proposals, the bidder agrees to keep confidential and not use or disclose any information acquired during the review process concerning ECOS, its business, finances, or operations. The provisions of this Section shall not prevent the Responder from disclosing information to the extent required by a judicial order or other legal obligation, provided that, in such event, the bidder shall promptly notify ECOS in writing, and shall cooperate with ECOS to contest or minimize the scope of the disclosure (including application for a protective order).

Bidder expressly acknowledges that ECOS may distribute some or all responses, via e-mail, to members of the project team, whose agencies may be bound by Federal or State requirements to disclose information sent to their e-mail system. ECOS will take reasonable steps to keep the content of responses confidential, but the bidder expressly acknowledges that ECOS or project team members may be required, under certain circumstances, to disclose the contents of any response received. Consequently, neither ECOS nor members of the project team are obliged to keep responses confidential.