

UnitedWaySEM.org website request for proposals

United Way for Southeastern Michigan seeks a web design company to redesign and refresh our website (UnitedWaySEM.org) and to conduct ongoing site maintenance and improvement. A large part of this redesign will be a reimagining of what a nonprofit website can be, with interactive elements woven into the fabric of the site that will keep donors, advocates, volunteers, partners, service seekers and more engaged and informed about the impact their efforts make possible.

The vendor will remain under contract long term for maintenance, development, upkeep, troubleshooting, etc., at an agreed-upon number of hours and budget per month.

Website/audience background

UnitedWaySEM.org provides information about:

1. Programs that help people meet their basic needs, help children learn, help make communities more equitable, help families reach stability and much more. These programs take place in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb and Washtenaw counties. It's important to note that we recently announced a merger with United Way of Washtenaw County, set to take effect Oct. 1. Washtenaw is a new service area for us with ample opportunities for growth.
2. Our giving societies and affinity groups, which bring certain eligible donors together and offer volunteer and networking opportunities and other exclusive benefits.
3. Advocacy opportunities, in which advocates contact their legislators about issues that United Way believes will improve life in our region. Currently, we use Phone2Action, an external platform, to create advocacy forms and embed them on our site.
4. Volunteer opportunities, including a link to our volunteer portal on Galaxy Digital, which does not live on our site, but is still critical to our website's search optimization.
5. Storytelling (short and long form), press releases, financial information, partner agencies, our leadership team, board and campaign cabinet, and more.
6. Grant opportunities and partner resources.
7. All other information that anyone might need to know about United Way. We want to ensure that anyone visiting our site will be able to get the answer they need or contact the person who will get them that answer.

Our site is unique in that there are multiple, quite different main audiences we serve:

- Those who want to help by donating, advocating and/or volunteering.
- Those who are seeking help.
- Corporate and community partners and funders who are currently collaborating with us, or would like to become partners.

We rely on several third-party web tools for various aspects of our work, including our:

- Volunteer portal, which we link to directly.
- Advocacy platform, which we embed on our site.
- Donation pages, which can be embedded or linked to depending on what's needed (some simply accept payments, others are for event sign ups while others accept donations for a specific purpose, like technology or books).

- Microsites like GetTheTaxFacts.org, FEASTprogram.org and Connect4CareKids.org that live on our site but are built and/or maintained by third parties.

United Way for Southeastern Michigan's website, though functioning, can be confusing to navigate and overwhelming to website users, including our own staff. There is a vast amount of information, as well as microsites and multiple, overlapping audiences, making it difficult to clearly highlight calls to action, which are numerous: donating, volunteering, advocating, finding services, applying for grants, and learning about impact/programs. Much of our content is high quality and useful, but it may not be organized in a way that meets the needs of our visitors. We want to be more focused and make it easy for all audiences to find what they're looking for by providing a more curated experience based on the visitor's primary interests and the audience they belong to. We would like to explore setting up a front door to funnel these audiences directly to the information that appeals to them, and to structure the site so the amount of information presented is not overwhelming. We also want to ensure that the website's design and functionality are as good, if not better, on mobile devices.

Our site was last rebuilt in 2019-2020 and launched in summer 2020. Content is outdated, the design is old and lacks a modern look, and we are behind on the latest website trends. This creates a negative browsing experience, making it more difficult to find information and decipher new from outdated information. We've also struggled with search functionality and would like to ensure that a new site has a proper search function that will help users find the exact information they're looking for.

The site is built on WordPress and hosted on WP Engine. We are comfortable with both and would prefer to stick with them. We are open to exploring other platforms, but we are unlikely to want to switch unless there are actual cost savings, ease of use improvements or other compelling reasons. Regardless of the platform, the United Way team must be able to build pages and publish content as needed.

We handle most content updates to our site in house through the WordPress WYSIWYG editor and very light HTML coding but will rely on the firm for more in-depth work like coding and building templates that we can populate. At times, we will present a design or provide an example of a page we'd like built. At other times, we'll look to you to provide any expertise on what will help us achieve the results we want. We know that many of the interactive elements mentioned throughout this document will be a new space in which we will lean heavily on your team. In all instances, the selected vendor will work with United Way for Southeastern Michigan brand guidelines.

We'd love for our website to be extremely customizable, allowing us to be flexible as we build pages on our end and avoiding having to ask the vendor to build entirely fresh designs on a regular basis. The selected vendor will be proactive in solving problems and presenting new and unique ideas to continuously drive our website to be the best it can be; fresh, effective, and up to the latest standards.

Interactivity

In addition to improving current function, we want new interactive elements that will increase engagement and inspire visitors to make a difference in the community. Possibilities include but are not limited to:

- Personalized leaderboards that show volunteer, donation and advocacy statistics and the impact those efforts make in the community.
- Gamification like milestone badges and the ability to challenge a friend or coworker to “compete” over a certain time frame.
- Increased opportunities for users to share information about their efforts on social media.
- Embedded videos that cover a wide range of topics from programs to “how-tos”, to virtual tours of our office and our partner locations to updates from our staff and much more.
- The use of AI chatbots to provide instant information as users request it; augmented reality experiences that bring users into our office, our events and more.
- Visitor portal capabilities to allow for personalized information and customized experiences to be directed to individual users. For example, a current donor would see a donation-focused call to action, whereas a volunteer would see more information about volunteering, etc.

It’s worth noting that, at present, we list 11 different programs and 10 separate ways to get involved in our mega menu, and that doesn’t even cover all the work we do as an organization. With the front door solution mentioned above, we can help direct visitors to the proper program. These functions must work well whether they are on desktop, tablet or mobile browsers.

Vendor services

In the short term, the vendor will:

- Audit current site and provide recommendations on and building a new site.
- Work with our team to outline the process of building a new website, paying special attention to the unique variety of needs we have.
- Work with our team and utilize our recent Brand Health report to understand who our audiences are and how best to structure our site content.
- Use those learnings to build a new website, working alongside our team to provide needed content and assets. It should have an updated, modern look, feature interactive elements woven into the fabric of the site throughout and be optimized for mobile and search.
- Manage hosting and Wordpress plugin billing and monitor for any issues like site downtime.

Longer term, the vendor will:

- Work alongside our team to provide ongoing service, including making recommendations on improvements, helping us build new page templates and troubleshooting issues.
- Provide ongoing site maintenance from a backend perspective (United Way performs the day-to-day content management work).
- Meet with the United Way team once a week to discuss ongoing projects.
- Manage and update plugins and interactive elements as needed.
- Help set SEO objectives and strategize around ways to reach those goals.
- Provide tools and develop content/page structure recommendations that will help our rankings and increase usability.
- Help us with accessibility and ensuring our site is Section 508 and WCAG (2.2) compliant.
- Work on additional website projects as they arise.
- Provide immediate crisis support in collaboration with our IT team in the event of an event like a site crash or a hacking situation.

The selected vendor will be forward-thinking, stay on top of the latest trends and pitch innovative ideas that would be nice to try.

Selection criteria

United Way for Southeastern Michigan is not bound to accept the lowest fee proposal or the highest projected performance. The following list of criteria will be used to evaluate all submitted proposals. The order in which the selection criteria are listed is not necessarily indicative of their relative importance.

A successful applicant will have:

- A history of quality web design and development, with references and links.
- A background in interactivity and history of implementation of interactive elements.
- Creative problem-solving skills.
- A solid process for managing projects and meeting deadlines.
- The ability to keep up to date with the latest trends and find ways to implement those trends within our site.
- Long-term thinking that sets us up to be ahead of the curve now and in the future, and the ability to see what's happening in the industry and implement it on our site.
- The capacity to take on a large-scale project like this without outsourcing any portion of a contract.
- Effective communication skills.
- The ability to explain technical matters clearly.
- Knowledge and expertise with websites that are accessible to all.
- A team that aligns with our organization's values, including Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, that actively maintains a diverse workforce. Businesses that are locally-owned, minority-owned and/or female-owned are preferred.
- A location in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb or Washtenaw county, and/or experience working with companies in Southeastern Michigan.

A successful application will provide answers to the following questions:

- What web development services does the organization provide?
- What is your project management approach?
- How often do you complete projects at or under budget? What happens if you go over budget?
- What is your review and testing process?
- How does the organization stay up to date with the latest trends in web design/development?
- What websites has the organization built/does the organization maintain? Please provide links for review. Can we reach out to any references and/or view case studies about these projects?
- What interactive elements have you used on these sites? What would the process of implementing an AI chatbot, augmented reality, personalized impact leaderboard, etc., look like?
- Does your organization have experience rebuilding a legacy website with large amounts of content? Give examples.
- There may be urgent projects that require work during nights or weekends. Is it possible to have emergency assistance in these cases?
- What would the organization's process be for rebuilding a website?
- What is the organization's approach to analytics? How can you help us improve our website analytics and search engine optimization? How do we ensure that we make changes as needed to improve our numbers?

- Is your organization equity driven? Does your organization have experience working with diverse groups of people? Is your organization local? Is your leadership/ownership team diverse? Please describe your company's commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and share how you will ensure that every aspect of our website is accessible based on ADA and WCAG guidelines.
- What is your approach to multilingual support? We often translate items in Spanish and Arabic.
- How will you ensure that this project and ongoing relationship will be a success? How will we measure the effectiveness of this new site and the changes we make from our current site?
- What experience does your firm have with integrating other third-party platforms onto a website?
- What is your approach to SEO-driven content and design?

A successful applicant will include the following items in the application:

- Cover letter
- Design examples/ideas
- A breakdown of the team that will be assigned to this project, including:
 - Resumes
 - Description of roles
 - How many other projects this team has to work on
 - What capacity will be like.
 - Whether team members on this project are full time employees, contractors or a mixture of both. If a mixture, what percentage of this work would you handle in house, and what percentage would you outsource?
- Statement of qualifications
 - Years of experience in web development
 - Top clients and how long you've worked with them
 - Client references (three to six)
 - Experience working in Southeastern Michigan (preference will be given to a firm based in Southeastern Michigan, a firm based in Michigan and a firm with experience working in Michigan, in that order)
 - Experience working with nonprofits
 - Experience working on large-scale websites with more than 100 pages of content
 - Experience with website interactivity and engagement
 - Details on a few of the major projects your team has worked on, with links to examples
 - Experience with accessibility, universal design and section 508 compliance.
 - Description of performance history
 1. Examples of website builds/rebuilds, including links
 2. Examples of website maintenance projects/programs, ideally with a similar scope of work
- Budget & budget narrative*
 - Proposed total budget
 - Breakdown of costs, including design, ongoing maintenance, etc.
 - How will we be charged for completed services? By milestones, based on hours, etc.
 - Are there projected price increases over time? Yearly, occasionally or otherwise? How are those handled?
 - Budget narrative

- References (minimum of three)
- Copy of W-9

Submission Requirements

Interested firms should submit their intent to respond within 10 business days of the launch of the RFP (by Monday, July 31) at UnitedWaySEM.org/IntentToRespond. This is not required but highly encouraged. Questions can be submitted at UnitedWaySEM.org/WebsiteRFPQuestions before 11:59 p.m. on Monday, July 31, and will be answered at UnitedWaySEM.org/WebsiteRFP by Friday, Aug. 4. Complete proposals are due via email to LiveUnited@LiveUnitedSEM.org by 11:59 p.m. on Tuesday, Aug. 15. If you encounter any issues with your submission, email Dave.Phillips@LiveUnitedSEM.org.

Terms and Funding

Anticipated start date for this contract is Oct. 1, 2023. The contract will be year to year with mutually agreeable renewals and opt outs. Applicants should propose fee structure. This will be managed between United Way for Southeastern Michigan and the chosen vendor. Dave Phillips (Dave.Phillips@LiveUnitedSEM.org) will be the main point of contact.

Reserved Rights

United Way for Southeastern Michigan has the right to:

- Reject any or all proposals
- Cancel the entire RFP process
- Remedy the technical errors in the RFP
- Negotiate with any, all, or none of the respondents to the RFP
- Solicit the best and final offers from all or some of the prospective Firms
- Accept the written proposals as an “offer” without negotiations and issue a notice to proceed
- Contract with any respondent based solely on the qualifications and capabilities of the Firm and its consultants
- Choose not to have formal presentations
- Solicit follow up information as deemed necessary

United Way will not share any information about any submitted proposal with any other entity. All submissions will remain confidential.

Timeline

Application Opens	July 18
Application Closes	Aug. 15
Interviews With Top Candidates	Begin on or around Aug. 29
Awardee Notified	On or around Sept. 12

Agreements Finalized	On or around Sept. 29
Contract begins	Oct. 1