Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board
Request for Offers (RFO)

HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN AND WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT FOR
"MY TEXAS FUTURE" PORTAL
RFO NO. 781-2-25867

Questions and Answers #1
December 3, 2021

1. Whether companies from Outside Canada can apply for this? (like,from India or USA)

   Response: Provided the contractors are based in the United States, the company may be international.

2. Whether we need to come over there for meetings?

   Response: No, you will not need to be in person for meetings. We will be able to hold meetings virtually.

3. Can we perform the tasks (related to RFP) outside Canada? (like, from India or USA)

   Response: The contractors will need to be based in the United States and all work will need to be performed in the United States.

4. Can we submit the proposals via email?

   Response: Yes, please see section 10.2 of the RFO.

5. Please let us know the budget of this proposal to submit it before the mentioned deadline of December 15, 2021.

   Response: This is a competitive solicitation, and we are unable to provide budget information.

6. Could you share any answers to questions posed by other vendors?

   Response: Yes, all answers will be posted on THECB's website and on the Electronic State Business Daily (ESBD).

7. Can you share any budgetary information about this project with us, is there any assigned budget for this project? Please specify the budget

   Response: Please see the response to question number 5.

8. In your view what are some of the shortcomings/weaknesses of the current site? (These can be functional, branding and/or messaging things)

   Response: We are seeking a vendor to design and build a completely new website. We have conducted user testing and feedback, which will be shared with the selected vendor. We also anticipate structuring internal meetings to provide the vendor the opportunity to garner feedback.

9. What are some of the specific things you will be measuring to determine if the project is a success?

   Response: As an example, we will be measuring website traffic, clickthrough rates, enrollment conversion, and interaction with ADVi.

10. What are some untapped opportunities you wish to take advantage of with the redesign?

    Response: We are looking for a vendor to design and build a completely new independent website.

11. Do you have any CMS preference, like open source (Drupal, WordPress) or proprietary CMS?

    Response: WordPress is the CMS selected by the agency. Some of the agency's existing websites were built using a different CMS. The plan is to consolidate and migrate all web content into WordPress.

12. Do you have up-to-date brand guidelines or style guide that the vendor will be able to leverage to create a consistent user and visual website experience?

    Response: Yes, our Marketing Team will be able to share the agency brand guidelines with the selected vendor.

13. Will you be migrating hosts? Please let us know your present hosting provider

    Response: No, this will be a new website.

14. What specific third-party APIs and integrations are in scope?

    Response: Please see section 3.3 of the RFO.

15. Can you please provide examples of sites that are good models for what you want?

    Response: Based on our landscape analysis (which we will share with the selected vendor) we have not identified a particular website that meets all our needs. However, we recommend review of the Washington College and Career Compass website and cyberseek.

16. Can you go into detail regarding the CRM requirement – do you use a CRM presently, and if so, which is it?

    Response: We are in the process of identifying a CRM and will update the selected vendor as the process progresses.

17. Have you considered a Salesforce Experience cloud solution for the Portal, integrating to a Salesforce CRM?

    Response: Yes, we have considered Salesforce, but we are also open to recommendations from the vendor.

18. Who are the current incumbents?

    Response: We do not have an incumbent, who will be submitting a response to this RFO.

19.   What is the budget?

Response: Please see the response to question number 5.

20.   Can we perform the tasks (related to RFP) outside the USA? (like, from India or Canada)

Response: The contractors will need to be based in the United States and all work will need to be performed in the United States.

21.   What is the total HUB goals %?

Response: The THECB follows the statewide HUB goals.
- **11.2% for heavy construction other than building contracts;**
- **21.1% for all building construction, including general contractors and operative builders' contracts;**
- **32.9% for all special trade construction contracts;**
- **23.7% for professional services contracts;**
- **26.0% for all other services contracts; and**
- **21.1% for commodities contracts.**

22.   Could you please confirm what budget range you expect this work could be delivered within?

Response: Please see the response to question number 5.

23.   Is the THECB currently working with any other suppliers for the provision of services associated with those being procured in this RFO?

Response: THECB is currently working with two vendors conducting human-centered design research. One vendor is researching key student transition points, including reentry to higher education, to inform the development of a college and career advising strategy for the state of Texas. This project is occurring simultaneously with the one described in the RFO. The other vendor is researching students who have stopped out of higher education; this project will conclude December 15, 2021. THECB will share all available non-confidential research outputs with the selected vendor.

24.   With regard to the requirement for respondents to provide least 3 references for whom they have 'performed similar work, including other state agencies' - could

you please confirm what you would consider to be 'similar' work, and whether there is a preference for references for work undertaken in an education-specific context and/or for state agencies?

Response: Similar work refers to the strategy, design, and website development described in the RFO. We are open to any work that meets this requirement; however, if you do have state, nonprofit, or education-specific examples, please include as well.

25. For the avoidance of doubt, could you please confirm that respondents can partner with other suppliers to deliver the work?

Response: Subcontracting is allowed to the extent that all subcontractors agree to comply with all applicable terms and conditions of the RFO and ensuing contract, as well as all other state and federal requirements.

26. If at all possible, would you be able to confirm when we can expect to receive a response to our questions?

Response: Please see section 9.2 of the RFO for THECB's calendar of events.

27. Create an interactive tool that integrates data provided by THECB which allows for program, institution, and training search, along with the ability to compare metrics across the product (education provider/institution or specific program). Data may include but are not limited to program and jobs data. (Back End Coding and Custom Software Development) - Section 3.3 item 6 "Could you please provide some clarity on data provided by THECB and the functional expectation and scope of the backend coding and custom software development here"?

Response: We are seeking a vendor to design and build a completely new website which meets the needs presented in the RFO. THECB will provide the necessary data to feed content, but we expect the selected vendor to build the website including backend coding. THECB teams will work collaboratively with the vendor to provide feedback and ensure the correct data is provided. The new technology solution should be able to receive data by calling API services. The data model supporting the new website should conform to the agency's data architecture design principle.

28. We understand that preliminary UX research for My Texas Future has been done in house. How will the in house UX team be engaged throughout the project, directly or indirectly?

     Response: THECB has conducted both in-house and external user testing. We intend to share all the non-confidential research with the selected vendor and structure ongoing meetings with our internal team to solicit feedback.

29. Can you provide more details on the "career exploration/pathway tool" that is in the discovery phase? Is this a web application? Who is developing this solution, and in what format?

     Response: THECB is working collaboratively with another Texas agency on the career exploration/pathway tool to determine the specific needs of all Texans. We expect it to be both a website and application. A vendor has yet to be identified as we are still in the discovery phase.

30. Are there examples of similar portals in use by other states or counties that provide a template for the My Texas Future portal?

     Response: Several states have student-facing portals; however, none provide an exact model what we would like to see in My Texas Future. We conducted a landscape analysis at the start of the project which will be shared with the selected vendor.

31. Will the vendor be able to access current website analytics data from Google or another source on the current site or partner sites?

     Response: We are seeking a vendor to design and build a completely new website. The prototype site was developed for the purpose of user testing, so there are no web analytics to share currently.

32. Is THECB interested in content strategy recommendations for the new site?

     Response: Yes.

33. Will there be content migration expected by the vendor or will it be done in house by THECB?

     Response: We expect this to be done by the selected vendor.

34. Is THECB open to a cloud-hosted or SaaS based solution to the requirements?

    Response: The agency is open to a SaaS solution if the solution meets the integration, security, and other compliance-related requirements. If a solution cannot be hosted in the state data centers, however, THECB will be required to obtain a DCS exemption.

35. What platform is the THECB CRM running on?

    Response: Please see the response to question number 16.

36. What technology does the ADVi virtual advising chatbot leverage (e.g. IBM Watson, Lex etc.)?

    Response: THECB currently partners with Mainstay and relies on their proprietary technology to manage ADVi.

37. Is there an incumbent technical vendor for front and back-end development or is the technical work currently being done in house?

    Response: No, we are seeking a vendor to both design and build the website inclusive of the front and back-end development.

38. Cludo is referenced specifically for search. Is THECB open to alternative, less costly solutions for search optimization?

    Response: While we have familiarity with Cludo, we are open to recommendations from the selected vendor.

39. When the RFP asks that the solution "Account for application integrations" (p.7 #12), does that mean that the solution should just be capable of integration, or that the vendor should account for the cost of integrating each of the platforms referenced and include that in their cost proposal?

    Response: Both. In the immediate, we expect the selected vendor to account for the cost of integrating each of the referenced platforms, but we will also need the website to be capable of integration for the purpose of sustainability and any future integrations.

40. Is the THECB open to alternative content management systems (other than WordPress)? We have developed a highly relevant platform using Drupal. Would that be rejected?

    Response: WordPress is the selected system for the agency moving forward.

41. Understanding the need to communicate with a diverse population, will translation tools be desired?

    Response: Yes.

42. Would there be interest in using some AI driven tools to provide base translations that can be adjusted as needed?

    Response: We are open to recommendations from the vendors.

43. Are there specific capabilities THECB is looking to achieve with the virtual advising chatbot?

    Response: ADVi has proven successful in directly supporting high school students through the college application process. We are interested in the selected vendor's recommendation on how we may utilize this technology to provide scalable support to the target audience for My Texas Future.

44. Is a HUB subcontracting agreement required for award of the project? If so, what targets for HUB participation are you seeking?

    Response: Vendors must submit a HUB subcontracting plan with their proposal in order to be considered responsive. No other HUB related documents are required. And please see the response to question number 21.

45. Regarding the potential for variables in the deliverables, is there a not-to-exceed budget for the entire project?

    Response: Please see the response to question number 5.

46.   Please can we request that the due date for the proposal be extended to 10 business days from release of the answers to questions? This will provide us with adequate time to factor the responses in to our approach.

Response: All proposals must be submitted by December 15, 2021, by 5:00 p.m. CT.

47.   Is THECB set on building on Wordpress, or using PHP, or is the tech stack open for recommendation?

Response: THECB currently uses WordPress across all our websites.