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**Thinking about redesigning your organization's web site?  
Read this first.**

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Is your web site starting to show signs of aging? Is it becoming harder to manage and update? Are you having difficulty staying on top of traffic to your site, including number of visitors and what information they're getting? Do you find that it's lacking features and interactive tools you've seen on other sites that you wish yours had? Does your website no longer accurately reflect the work of your organization or how you want others to perceive it?

If you answered "yes" to any of those questions, it's probably time to redesign your organization's web site.

However, before simply sending out requests from web designers for a new site, you should spend some time thinking about the kinds of capabilities, features and tools you want for your redesigned site. It's important too to query others in your organization about what they want the new site to do that the current one can't.

You also need to take time to answer questions about who is going to manage your redesigned website, especially one that has more complex features. Will it be you, your department, or are you open hiring a webmaster? Knowing those things will help determine whether to request a content management system that requires little technical knowledge or one that offers more features and complexity but requires someone with programming skills.

Other questions to ask as you start the process include such things as: Do you need capability to collect information from visitors as well as allowing them to search databases linked to your site? Do you want to offer discussion forums for visitors to share information? What about streaming video, blogs or podcasts, or interactive versions of your publications? Even if you don't have these needs now, is it worth investing in the capacity to add them later? And, of course, how much can you afford to spend on the design and then the ongoing maintenance of your site?

As we learned at the Study Circles Resource Center, the better you can answer those kinds of questions – some from your own experience or from what you learn talking to

other staff members – the better the request for proposal (RFP) that will result. A thoughtful, detailed and well-articulated RFP also will make the process of selecting the right vendor a more efficient process and you'll likely increase the chances that your vendors will respond with equally thoughtful and well-crafted proposals that address your needs.

When creating an RFP, here are some suggestions you might find helpful:

### **Purpose of the Redesign**

- Since you're not creating a web site from scratch, instead trying to improve what you have, be clear about the purpose of your redesign project.
- Tell the designer why you need a new web site and what more you want it to be able to help you do.
- Indicate what you think you think are the strengths of your current site and what some of are some of its weaknesses or missing capabilities that you want your new site to offer. (If you've seen examples of such features on other sites, include links to them in your RFP.)

### **Background Information**

- Provide statistics about your current web site, such as average number of visitors, page views, and how many times publications and other documents are downloaded, as well as the number of types of publications and other material you keep on your server for downloading. It's important for your designers to know as much as possible about who visits your web site (as well as the kinds of people you want them to attract), the amount of time they spend on it, and what information seems most interesting to them (or what you want them to see and/or know about). That will help bidders on your project determine what elements of your site may already be working well and only require some modifications, and what other kinds of enhancements or improvements will be needed.
- Indicate how frequently you update content and describe the system you use to manage your current website. Let bidders know your in-house capability and how much time someone currently spends managing the site.
- Be specific, too, about what you like about the content management software and other tools you currently use as well as how they limit what you can do. That information can help designers determine whether its best to make modifications or enhancements to your current system or replace it with something new.

### **What Kind of a New Site You Want**

- Indicate what kind of impression you want to create when visitors come to your redesigned website—whether first-timers or past users.
- Articulate what you want visitors to your redesigned website to be able to do, what you want them to be able to find, and what you think would make it an extremely valuable resource to them--more so than now. (Include such things as how much more and different kinds of interactivity you want offer. Describe the range and kind of content you hope to have on the site. Determine whether you want to provide visitors opportunities to interact with your organization as well as other visitors—such as being able to ask questions or share stories or information about their work.

## Planning for a Website Redesign -- 3

- Similarly, you should decide if your website should help connect people with each other, such as grantees doing similar work.
- Articulate the indicators that you'll be using to measure the success of the redesign—things such as increase in visitor traffic, more time on site, more publications or information downloaded, more repeat visits—and make sure you have the tools for tracking them.

Once you've completed your RFP you have to determine where to send it. If you've seen other websites you like, contact those organizations to find the name of their designers. Get in touch with other members of the Communications Network for recommendations as well.

In addition to requesting answers specific to the design aspect of your site, use the RFP to get learn about the capabilities of the firms that will be bidding on your project and what makes them think they can do the best job for you. Here are some questions to ask:

- Describe your firm's experience with standard and modular software.
- Describe your firm's experience and understanding of interactive web content.
- Describe your understanding of the issues involved in building web sites that work well for all kinds of users, regardless of their browsers, operating systems, and connection speeds.
- Explain the programming languages your firm use and the strengths of each.
- Provide examples of end-user, business and system documentation that your firm has developed.
- Describe a project that was successful for both you and your client and one that did not go so well. In addition, describe what you learned from each experience. (We found that answers to this question tells a lot about an individual designer's ability to understand their clients' needs as well as their ability to learn from mistakes and adapt accordingly.)
- Describe why you think your firm is best suited for the assignment.

### **Proposal format**

Be explicit about what you want to see in proposals. We asked firms to break down costs according to project phases. We also asked for background information on the firm, references and a proposed project timeline. In addition, we asked each bidder to specify the terms and conditions of their warranties. You want to be certain that the firm will correct, free of charge, any defects in the web site within a certain time period.

### **Need more help?**

Contact me anytime. I'd be glad to talk more about our experiences and share our RFP.

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