

# ACES Website Redesign and Development

## 1. Overview/Summary

### Executive Summary

The Area Cooperative Educational Services (ACES) agency seeks proposals to re-design, develop, and host a new external website with e-commerce solutions and a content management system. This will be a concept-to-completion production. The purpose of this RFP is to provide a fair evaluation for all candidates and to provide the candidates with the evaluation criteria against which they will be judged.

The current website at <http://www.aces.org> was designed and produced in 2012. It has been modified one time.

### Contact Information

Steven Manley, Director, Technology Services, ACES, 350 State Street, North Haven, CT 06473,  
Email: [smanley@aces.org](mailto:smanley@aces.org)

### Timeline

RFP Sent: July 29, 2016

Responses Due: August 31, 2016

Goal for new website launch: March 2017

### Budget

The budget for the website is \$20,000, including post-launch assistance.

## 2. Background

### 2.1. Purpose and Project Overview

The Area Cooperative Educational Services agency seeks proposals to re-design, develop, and host a new intranet site and external website with e-commerce solutions and a content management system. This will be a concept-to-completion production. The purpose of this RFP is to provide a fair evaluation for all candidates and to provide the candidates with the evaluation criteria against which they will be judged.

The current website at <http://www.aces.org> was designed and produced in 2012. It has been modified one time. The content management system has been enhanced over time to incorporate feature such as form builder and flip books. In 2015 an e-commerce solution was incorporated.

A successful candidate to this RFP will have demonstrated proficiency, experience, and creativity as a website designer, developer, and programmer; a thoughtful plan and strategy for developing and then transitioning to the new site; a plan for site enhancements as budget

allows; a content management and administration implementation that makes it easy for non-technical ACES staff to update the site; understanding of information technology (IT) needs and solutions related to the website; an understanding of cost-efficient solutions; and a working style and approach that is compatible with ACES needs for a web development and hosting partner.

## 2.2. Background and Company Overview

ACES is a regional educational service centers for the 25 communities in greater New Haven County. We are one of six regional educational service centers located in Connecticut. ACES has eight schools: three magnet schools and five special education schools. Our current total enrollment is 2,400 with students in grades ranging from Pre-K – high school. In addition to our schools, ACES offers an expansive range of programs and services that include professional development for educators and administrators, collaborative educational programs with partner districts, technology services, behavior services and autism programs, occupational and physical therapy services, assistive technology, international programs, vocational programs, early childhood programs, and blended learning opportunities for high school students. ACES employs 950 individuals and has fourteen physical locations.

### Audiences

We have multiple audiences for the website. The audiences may be divided into two groups of (1) users who are our current staff and customers and (2) users who are our future staff and customers. Categories of users of the site include: staff, teachers, administrators; parents; school districts; international partners; local government agencies; vendors; other educational service agencies; people looking for employment; and potential funders. We are aware that these different audiences have varying needs. We want these audiences to have incentives to follow us regularly on social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube). (3) Intranet: ACES employees.

| Audience  | Where They Are  | What They Want   | What We Want to Convey  |
|---|---|--|---|
| School district practitioners staff, teachers, administrators | A major area of concentration is the New Haven Region statewide and international | Help in finding evidence-based solutions to support their educational needs beyond what they can do on their own | ACES is here to partner and help them through collaboration to meet individual needs and consortia solutions for economies of scale |
| Current and potential students and families                   | A major area of concentration is the New Haven Region statewide and international | Looking for school information and parent choice options   | ACES offers a variety of educational options to meet families' needs  |
| Local government and nonprofit agencies e.g.,                 | Statewide   | Information and partnerships   | ACES is here to partner and help them through collaboration and   |

| Audience  | Where They Are         | What They Want   | What We Want to Convey   |
|---|------------------------|--|--|
| CABE, CASBO, CAPSS, CSDE, DDS                       |                        |  | consortia solutions for economies of scale   |
| Future employees                                    | Statewide and beyond   | Information and opportunities  | ACES is a welcoming equal opportunity employer   |
| Current and potential funders                       | Statewide and beyond   | Information and opportunities  | ACES is a nonprofit educational service agency meeting the needs of a diverse community                    |
| Current and potential business partners and vendors | Statewide and beyond   | Information and opportunities  | ACES is here to partner and help them through collaboration and consortia solutions for economies of scale |
| ACES staff and employees                            | Greater New Haven area | Looking for information and contributing to the content of the public and private web site | ACES has a content rich user friendly system   |

### 3. Scope of Work

#### 3.1. New Website Goals and Objectives

**Goal 1: To continue to strengthen our brand identity, awareness, and interest with a website that is accessible, engaging and informative.** ACES websites needs to provide for discovery of ACES events, happenings, and news, as well as allow our visitors to easily share the information they find with their social networks. We seek to create a flexible, informative, user-friendly website that is easy to maintain. We must develop a friendly site that can deliver large amounts of constantly changing information to our key audiences. The website should represent a portfolio of our activities and publications.

**Goal 2: The new layout should intelligently guides users to where they need to be.** It needs to provide an interface that allows users from very different audiences (with very different perspectives, interests, needs, and abilities) to experience or navigate the website in different, tailored ways, which enable users with different profiles to readily access the types of information that interest them most. Our audiences are primarily but not exclusively domestic (US-based), however as we develop our international programming, we seek to broaden our appeal to users in other countries. We want our audiences to have incentives to follow up regularly on social media (e.g., Twitter, Facebook). The site should be accessible to individuals with visual impairments and include the ability to adjust font size. It should also have the ability to translate into a different languages (the current ACES website uses Google translator).

**Goal 3: Design should be clean, lighter, more visually pleasing and stimulating, and more inviting to navigate.** Using intuitive navigation, users should be able to navigate with as few clicks as possible. The design should eliminate redundant sub-menus and include concise messaging and compelling visuals. The homepage should generate more traffic, better reaching our audiences and encouraging them to stay there, browse, and share what they found with others. The website must comply with accessibility standards and best practices to ensure that people with disabilities can use it.

**Goal 4: User interfaces should present comprehensive information in a readily accessible search format.** It should have a good content management system to consolidate all published documents in one center with an advanced and intuitive search function and site-wide advanced search functions. It should showcase new publications while also having a user-friendly archive of older publication. Information uploaded on one part of the website should be available and cross-referenced in multiple locations. Events should be more visible (not just a list view) with search functions that allows searches by date and topic. The content management should facilitate frequent updates of events and cross-postings.

**Goal 5: The website must be safe and secure including HTTPS.** The website should be platform agnostic, working well on mobile devices and tables using best practices of responsive design.

**Goal 6: User-friendly intranet system.** Leveraging existing credentials for single sign-on capabilities, the intranet system should be a user-friendly mechanism that enables inter-agency communication, sharing of information and storing of documents, photos, videos and presentations. It should be easy to navigate, update and maintain.

**Goal 7: Interactive Data Dashboard.** Ability to present dashboards to a variety of audiences with differing permission levels.

### 3.2. Website Examples

Included below are examples of regional educational service centers' websites that provide a good feel for the type of site and functionality we desire.

Hamilton County Educational Service Center (ESC) in Ohio: <http://hcesc.org>

Educational Service District (ESD) 112 in Washington: <http://esd112.org>

Region 4 Education Service Center in Texas: <http://esc4.net>

Capitol Region Education Council: <http://www.crec.org/>

Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13 (IU13): <http://www.iu13.org/>

Patagonia: <http://www.patagonia.com/home>

### 3.3. Current Website Analysis of Challenges

ACES current website at <http://www.aces.org> is about four years old. It needs to redone to reflect the depth and breadth of ACES robust activities, services and schools. Given the richness of data, ACES challenge has been to feature many areas with limited design space. The result has become a structure is not intuitive, with too many sub-menus and important pages

buried under layers of hierarchy. Cross referencing features are not always clear. The search engine does not always result in links for the desired documents. Overall, the site lacks clear ways for visitors to find what they want and engage with our agency. Staff comment that they have a hard time finding things on the website. We need a website that is easier to navigate for users and easier to manage for contributors. The site includes our school sub-sites. While the school sites follow the form and function of the website, the sub-sites do not have a vibe that relates to the schools' themes or energy. Therefore, our website does not reflect the needs and stylistic preferences of our audiences.

Currently ACES maintains two web sites for public and private use. This results in duplication of postings and multiple accounts. A common site would streamline our efforts and message.

ACES would like to continue efforts to manage its web presence through the communications' and technology departments. Other departments within ACES will manage their individual landing pages and associated sub-pages.

### 3.4. Approaches, Vision, Strategies, and Functionality

#### **Vision:**

The new ACES website will be the one-stop resource and portal for anyone who needs and wants to know anything about ACES programs, schools and services, whether you are a school district, teacher, administrator, parent, student, vendor, or funder.

#### **Approaches, strategies, and functionality:**

- **E-commerce:** ACES has a custom-designed e-commerce site, [registration.aces.org](http://registration.aces.org) that was initially developed to accommodate program registrations for a new blended-learning summer school. Since the initial launch, the e-commerce system has been updated to include dashboard management features; specifically the ability to add, edit, delete, and drag and drop sort banner images, as well as giving the ability to manage content of three sub-blocks. The system was also upgraded to include a form builder feature enabling users to customize their registration item as well as email receipt and reminders, partial payment options, archive view for old registrations/ completed programs, homepage banner to enable customization to promote specific programs.
- **Existing technologies and software:** Integrated content management system (CMS) components and website tools.
- **Partner:** The selected candidate will work in tandem with the ACES Communications' and Technology teams to establish brand, look, feel, and consistency of the website. Our new web development partner will assume full responsibility for the designing, programming, developing, and hosting this site. Upon completion, ACES will be responsible – using nontechnical tools – for the website content, maintenance, and administration. Content management and administration will have levels of control and access (i.e., author, reviewer, and publisher). Upon completion of the development, the content, coding, and graphics will become the sole property of ACES.

- **Appearance:** The new site will have a unified appearance, but it will allow for school sites and ACES services and programs to capture their essence and themes.
- **Focus on end-users and audiences:** The new site will be flexible, fun, and informative while being easy to use. Anyone coming to the site will be able to find what they need. It will employ the latest web technologies such as multimedia, RSS feeds, and social networking. The developed site will be mobile capable and platform agnostic, meaning it will work smoothly across all operating systems and web browsers. Users need the ability to email using an integrated email system within the site. Users need the ability to set alerts and subscribe to various publications, programs, and news updates.
- **Password Protected Sections:** The site should have the ability to create password protected sections. Using HTTPS encrypted traffic and existing credentials for single sign-on capabilities.
- **Content Management:** The site needs a streamlined and simplified content creation and display system. Users should be able to add events via a form and use checkboxes or tags to associate it with the site's taxonomy. We need the ability to implement an integrated blogging tool or pull in posts via RSS. It should include a video widget that allows ACES to pull in YouTube or Vimeo videos instead of trying to embed them into the site. The system should provide a secure solution for coauthoring and coediting of content.
- **Calendar:** The site needs an integrated calendar, where we can list and browse all of our events and happenings using the site's taxonomy. We would like program departments to submit their own events, which would be approved by a key contact person for publication. This approval process should be automated, seamless, and integrated.
- **Forms:** The site should include tools for web form creation that allow visitors to submit information. Submitted information should be easily assessable and assembled for analysis and reporting.
- **Search engine optimization (SEO) and analytics:** We need to pull quarterly reports to demonstrate return on investment (ROI) and utilize SEO to increase site visibility.
- **Interactive Data Dashboard capability:** The site should have the ability to display multiple custom interactive dashboards based on permissions and audiences.

## 4. Budget Details

As listed in the summary, our budget for this project is \$20,000, including post-launch assistance. While we prefer the most cost-effective solution, all proposals that fall within this range will be considered and weighed based on their merits. Please provide several cost proposals to accomplish the scope outlined above. The budget must encompass all design, production, and software acquisitions necessary for development and maintenance of the website.

Candidates should list pricing for each of the phases listed in 7.2 Proposal Outline.

All costs associated with the delivery of the project should be presented in a flat rate, fee for service format.

## 5. Contact Information

Steven Manley, Director, Technology Services, ACES 204 State Street, North Haven, CT 06473  
smanley@aces.org

## 6. RFP Schedule

RFP Sent: July 29, 2016

Intent to respond: August 5, 2016

Responses due: August 31, 2016

Finalists selected and contacted: September 14, 2016

Winner selected and contacted: September 19, 2016

Project kick-off: September 26, 2016

New website launch target date: March 29, 2017

## 7. Proposal Scope, Guidelines, Format, Outline, and Submittal Requirements

### 7.1. Guidelines

In the interests of the environment, ACES will only accept electronic submissions. An acceptable electronic submission will consist of one PDF. Within that PDF, we expect you to have URLs and links to your business website; relevant samples of your web development work; and other websites and online references as needed.

A required format and outline for your proposal is included in section 7.2 of this RFP.

Your PDF proposal must be delivered electronically to ACES by 2:00 p.m., August, 31, 2016, EST. Proposals received after that time will not be considered. The PDF must be delivered via email to [smanley@aces.org](mailto:smanley@aces.org) and must be less than 10MB in size. Formatting requirements include page size of 8.5" x 11", font no smaller than 10 point size, proposal length of 15 pages, and URLs as active links within the PDF.

ACES will send candidates an email confirming timely receipt of your proposal.

Questions concerning this proposal must be submitted in writing to [smanley@aces.org](mailto:smanley@aces.org) by email no later than August 22, 2016. Answers to questions and clarifications will be given by August 26, 2016 and shared with all candidates.

The pricing in your response must be inclusive. If your price excludes fees or charges – such as third-party licensing for software – you must provide a detailed list of fees with a complete explanation of those fees.

If the execution of work to be performed requires the hiring of sub-contractors, you must clearly state this in your proposal. Sub-contractors must be identified and the work they perform must be defined. Please include the name, address, EIN, and contact person of the sub-contractor. ACES retains the right to accept a proposal while refusing specific sub-contractors you have selected.

Website guidelines:

- An easy-to-use content management system (CMS);
- An integrated, user-friendly ecommerce component for processing activity (field trips), program and event registrations, charitable donations.
- A user-friendly online application for processing school admissions and facility rentals. It should provide ease and rapid feedback to families and allow schools and departments the ability to time stamp, document, and process students and customer information.
- Easily updated;
- Intuitive navigation: Information should be grouped and presented in a logical manner and require no more than three levels of 'drill down' for the user to find the desired information;
- Custom, Mobile- Optimization
- Clean and focused design with strategic use of images, common theme;
- Current color scheme is based on the ACES logo;
- All applicable content should be imported from the current site – loss of data would be a major problem, since the website is currently our live documentation center.
- Optimized with SEO best practices – Specific SEO for the document center that searches through PDFs (and that can single out results from others, so as to allow for a specific document search, as opposed to a more general search on the website);
- Social media integration (share buttons, follow buttons, etc.);
- Web site must not require plug-ins as a default;
- Fast loading pages – the web site must be designed with a balance of text and graphics such that each page loads in 4 seconds or less on the average computer.
- Email update sign-up form; ListServ capabilities;
- Scheduled posts features;

- Contact form;
- Analytics: Gather email, areas of interest and demographic information from visitors in a format that permits ACES to maintain a single database of users and email each according to their area of interest and profile. Provide training and all necessary support to permit easy use by selected ACES staff persons. Provide information on web traffic analysis, path analysis, visitor trends, page views, entry pages, top pages, exit pages, length of stay, browsers, and platforms.
- Provide necessary software and licenses to maintain the site – within the cost of the contract.
- Project management: An assigned project manager will be made available to present information and coordinate with ACES staff, including a reasonable number of meetings to present design and development solutions. The site should be tested on all platforms to ensure it works as promised. Explain your testing plan through the development process. Once the website has been completed and accepted by ACES, the website design and all of its contents, software, and architecture become property of ACES.

## 7.2. Proposal Outline

Please include the following outline in your proposal response. Candidates are to submit a written narrative corresponding to each item.

**Title Page/Cover Letter:** Include your company name, address, website, telephone number, fax number, and primary contact person with email, direct line, and cell phone numbers. The title page will be considered the cover letter and should be signed by an agent, owner, or authorized officer of your company. Include an overview of how you will meet our objectives.

### **Proposal - qualifications:**

- **Company profile:** Length of time in business, founders/owners, number of full-time employees, organizational capacity, technology, hosting and/or server capacity, equipment, partnerships, vendor or licensed arrangements, and other unique attributes.
- **Statement of experience and approach:** A brief description of your experience and approach to producing web sites for clients. What makes you different or better than the rest? Describe your in-house skills with design, programming and coding (e.g., HTML5, CSS3, JQuery).
- **Relevant work:** A selection of up to five best web sites that you have developed that are comparable or relevant to the work in this RFP. Briefly describe for each your role, budget, and time-frame for completion. Include URLs and screen shots if appropriate.
- **Project management:** Submit how you propose managing this project, i.e., who will be your main point of contact, who will be assigned from your team, and in what roles and

with percentage of time involved. Provide a flow chart that shows this project management, as well as the names and bios of those working on this project.

- **Client list:** Comprehensive list of current and past web site development clients.
- **References:** The names and contact information for three former or current clients.
- **Terms and conditions:** Describe the way you invoice your clients; include a sample invoice if appropriate. Describe any other terms or conditions of your proposed relationship.

**Proposal – Discovery Stage:**

Describe your process for working with the ACES team as well as other staff involved to review and confirm web site strategy and objectives; design look and feel; user navigation; assessing web site functions and capabilities; technology; hosting; content management; administration; audience engagement; site tracking and usage statistics; timeline for deliverables; and other issues discussed or touched upon in this RFP. ACES understands that during this Discovery part of the project, the selected candidate's scope of work may change. Any changes to your proposal that occur from this Discovery will be by mutual agreement of ACES and the selected candidate.

**Proposal – Design Stage:**

Describe your process for designing the look and feel of the web site, information architecture, user navigation, home page and main navigation templates. How do you work with the client? How many design approaches do you create? How many rounds of review? How are design comps presented – on boards, electronic, online?

**Proposal – Development Stage:**

Describe your process and standards for developing the new ACES web site. Your development discussion should address at least the following:

- **Content -** Process for porting or incorporating substantial content from the existing sites. Describe your process for getting new content as required from ACES.
- **Appeal and User Experience –** describe the user experience you will try to create such as the ease of the site, visual appeal, graphic and brand theme, tone.
- **Language and Content Management System –** recommend and select the programming language (and describe why) and the content management system for the new site that will permit non-technical ACES personnel to instantly update web site content on specific pages without accessing or knowing source code. The content management system should have levels of permission, and also allow the easy and intuitive incorporation of graphics and media.
- **Engagement and Interactivity –** describe the ways you will make the web site interactive and engaging for users.

- Navigation – describe how you will create a user-focused and simplified navigation architecture.

**Proposal – Hosting, ongoing support and training:**

Describe your process for working with the ACES team as well as other staff. Include details on hosting ongoing support and training.

**Proposal – Technology:**

Describe the technology specifications you will recommend and guarantee for the new web site. Your technology discussion should include:

- Security – describe how you will develop the site to prevent against security breaches such as spam, viruses, phishing, DOS attacks, site hijacking, unapproved posting and content, FTP access, personal information, or database thefts.
- Browser and Platform Compatibility - describe the browser compatibility guarantees you will design to such as MS IE 9, Chrome v28, Firefox 20, Safari 5.0 and operating system platform compatibility such as Windows, Mac, Linux, IOS5+. Android 4.0. Describe the minimum browser resolution (i.e, 1024 x 768) and whether pages will be designed for fixed width or stretched.
- Plugins – describe the level of plugin compatibility for Java, Flash, and others you will design to, as well as detection software for user compatibility and download and upgrade options for users.
- E-commerce – describe your solution.
- Speed – describe how you would ensure that the web site loads fast. Describe the specs you will design to.
- Search Capabilities – how will users be able to search within the site for content? Key words or phrasing? Describe search software for internal as well as external searches.
- Database Integration – describe how you will create and manage one common database of users for integration with existing ACES email, communication, and management tools.
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO) – describe how you will develop and program the site to maximize SEO.
- Site Usage and Stat Tracking – describe the site statistic and tracking software you will install and use for the web site. This software should provide access to site visits, unique visits, page popularity, entry/exit analysis, browser usage, IP location, engagement time, and other relevant information. Software should provide ACES with easy access to and presentation of this information.

- ADA Requirements – describe how the site will meet all Federally-mandated access requirements adopted by the Federal Access Board under section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act as well as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0 provided by the W3C.
- Mobile – Can and how will you design the site so that it, or a version of it, will work on smart cell phones such as the iPhone, Android, Blackberry and Google phones?

**Proposal – Testing:**

Describe your process and criteria for testing the new web site on all browsers and platforms. How do you make a beta version of the site available for testing by ACES staff? How long do you plan for your sites to be in beta before they go live?

**Proposal – Training:**

Describe your process for training ACES staff on content management and site administration.

**Proposal – Technical Support and Maintenance:**

Describe how you will provide ongoing monthly technical support and maintenance. What is your response time to routine questions and requests? What is your after-hours policy? What is your disaster-recovery approach?

**Proposal – Budget and Fees:**

Provide a detailed budget for this project to include:

- Fees – for your development, design, and programming for the new site;
- Expenses – any subcontractors, licenses, software acquisition, vendors, or hosting costs;
- Maintenance & Support – your estimated fees for one- years -worth of routine maintenance and technical support. Is this a flat monthly fee? Hourly, and if so what are the rates? After-hours support? Do you have packages? What is included?
- Additional Work – your fees or hourly rate for any additional work or consulting that may be required above and beyond this scope.

**Proposal – Timeline:**

Provide a detailed timeline for the stages and deliverables of the project. Make sure that you give a date by which you believe the new site will go-live and the old site transferred over. While speed to market is important, we are looking for a reasonable go-live date with adequate time for discovery, design review, development, testing, and training.

**Proposal – Warranty:**

Describe the warranty you provide for site design and performance as detailed in your proposal including browser compatibility, speed, navigation, etc.

**Proposal – Attachments:**

Include any relevant attachments such as sub-contractor information, vendor information, software descriptions, and hosting environments.

### 7.3. Selection Process and Evaluation

ACES reserves the right to award the contact to the candidate that they deem to offer the best overall proposal. ACES is therefore not bound to accept a proposal on the basis of lowest price. ACES has the discretion and reserves the right to cancel this RFP, to reject any and all proposals, to waive any and all irregularities, or to re-advertise with either the identical or reviewed specifications if it is deemed to be in the best interest of ACES.

Proposals will be evaluated with the following criteria:

- Suitability of the proposal: The proposed solution meets the needs and criteria set forth in the RFP.
- Expertise in recommending and communicating appropriate technical and aesthetic solutions as evidenced by the proposal and references.
- Aesthetic capabilities: Prior work demonstrates artistic and innovative, user friendly interfaces that engage communities and viewers.
- Candidate experience: Candidate has successfully completed similar projects and has the qualifications necessary to undertake this project.
- Technology, programming, and development skills: Candidate has the in-house skill set and knowledge base for all aspects of web and Web 2.0 technology, development, and programming. Candidate is confident enough to warrant their deliverables for a certain period of time.
- Proposal Recommendations – Candidate has thoughtfully described the process for development and switching over to the new site; the recommendations for enhancements, IT recommendations; content management system; and the ease of ACES management and administration of the site after it is delivered.
- Value/pricing structure and price levels: The price is commensurate with the value offered by the proposer. The candidate has proposed a realistic budget for design and development, expenses and technical support and maintenance.
- Proposal presentation: The information is presented in a clear, logical manner and is well organized.
- Service, creativity, enthusiasm, and fit: Based on the proposal, interviews and/or site visits, the candidate will demonstrate a high level of personal service, creativity, and

enthusiasm for the project. There also should be a good chemistry between the candidate and ACES.

- Demonstrated commitment to high service level agreements (SLA).

#### 7.4. Determining Scores

| Criteria   | Weight Given |
|--|--------------|
| Responsiveness to purpose and scope of work  | 40%          |
| Ability and history of successfully completing contracts of this type, meeting projected deadlines, experience in similar work | 40%          |
| References, key personnel, and performance   | 10%          |
| Budget   | 10%          |
| <b>Total Criterial Weight</b>  | <b>100%</b>  |

Thank you for your interest in responding to this RFP with a proposal for our new website. We look forward to your response.