

Need a Website Superhero?

Getting the Best Bids
for Your Next Website Project



Make sure the board and key staff are 100% on board with the project and it is a top priority. If it is NOT a top priority, hold off on the project. You don't want to end up with the never-ending project which will cost you more money in the long-run not to mention cause a serious strain on your relationship with your contractors. If you feel the project IS a top priority, get everyone on the same page before you start and once you start, stay committed to the project by meeting deadlines. From the nonprofit's perspective, there can be a lot of concern about deadlines met by contractors, but in reality, most projects are stalled when client's don't meet deadlines for supplying website content or from staff turnover when a key staff member leaves the nonprofit.

Form the website committee with a board member at the helm or a staff member other than the executive director. The executive director should absolutely be a key member but they are often wearing so many hats that it may be more challenging to keep the project in focus and keep it moving forward. The size of the committee can also have a direct correlation to the cost of the project and the length of time it takes to get it finished. A small committee with representatives from each of your constituencies would be ideal and it's important that the committee choose one point of contact to work with the contractors. The key point of

contact would be responsible for gathering feedback from the committee and presenting it as a unified response rather than bits and pieces of comments from each individual committee member. For larger projects you may want to create a separate focus group made up of your various constituents to provide feedback at specific intervals in the project.

Prepare a list of goals for your website.

Ideally, this would be done as part of an overall marketing/strategic plan and would include specific measurable goals that include the number of visitors coming to your site, the number of people signing up for your newsletter, donating, volunteering, and number of Facebook fans. If you don't have tools in place to measure and track these goals, include that as one of your needs in the RFP. You will also need to come up with a list of needs for the website in terms of design, content, usability and technology. Have your website committee and/or your focus group go through the site and evaluate it from their perspective as a donor, volunteer, board member and client. It can also help to investigate other sites and bookmark ones you find appealing or with elements that you would like to incorporate into your site. This will at least give you a starting point when discussing your needs for the site with potential contractors.

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Be open to new ideas and different approaches. Each IT/marketing firm will have its own approach to web design so you are better off listing your needs/problems and asking for solutions - rather than coming up with the solution yourself - unless you are sure that a specific solution is the one for you. Be realistic about what you know and don't know about websites and let the experts guide you. When selecting a contractor, one of the most important questions you can ask is about content management systems. Make sure the contractor is open to a variety of ways to create and update the website and that they are not selling just one kind of content management system. There are specific benefits and drawbacks to using content management systems and if you choose to use one there are many options out there; it's best to get advice from someone who can be truly objective when finding the right solution for you.

Get the help you need ahead of time. If you don't feel comfortable determining your goals, needs and project parameters without having more information at hand, hire a consultant to help you with just this portion of the process. This can be as involved as helping you develop the overall marketing plan for your organization, just an online marketing plan or coming in to help you evaluate your website specifically from a marketing and technology perspective. We absolutely recommend having some type of marketing plan in place before developing the website as it will direct the goals, design and content of the site; this is especially helpful if you will be hiring website/IT contractors with no marketing experience. It's important that website development be approached as primarily a marketing and development activity.

Show your organization in a positive light - When you are ready to find a consultant/contractor, you may or may not have procedures already in place to start the bidding process; either way there are steps to take to make sure you get a quality contractor at a reasonable price. This can be a serious challenge as many of you will have had

6 Factors that will Increase Your Budget and/or Attract Lower-Quality Talent

An in-depth proposal process - The moment you decide to use a more formal RFP process, your costs go up. The proposal writing, extra presentations, mockups, etc. will be covered time-wise in the final proposal budget so you need to determine if the extra costs are worth it.

Confusing Requirements - Be clear about what you want OR about what you need help with. If a contractor reads your requirements and they don't make sense, they know they will have to work harder to educate the client and better determine the needs.

Lots of Legalese - If you have legal language, keep it simple and cover potential issues from both sides of the equation. Protect yourself as best as you can, but going in on the defensive is not conducive to a good working relationship with your contractors.

Any combination of: very involved, specific requirements, multiple presentations, multiple steps to the proposal process, multiple proposal rewrites or any other indicators that it will be challenging to please the client especially when combined with the words "cost-effective, budget crisis, budget-conscious, or low-cost." Consultants know they will never be able to charge enough to recoup their actual time/costs spent.

Any indication that the project is not solid - no start date, a request for the bid to be open an extended period of time and, even bigger warning if the proposal asks for too much detail before the project agreement is signed indicating that the organization is seeking ideas and not legitimately seeking proposals.

Any indicator that the organization is disorganized and may not be responsive to the timeline or have a process in place that will kill any timeline. Good consultants are BUSY and need to schedule their projects to make sure they get the attention they deserve so timeline busters are not good!

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bad experiences with previous contractors and the real goal is to not let any previous problems or perceptions taint your current proposal process because it will likely COST you more. If you create a process that is strict and clearly unfavorable to the consultant or appear to be difficult to work with in any way, you will not attract the best consultants. Why? Because the consultants/contractors that are really good can be a little choosier AND even if they do decide to turn in a proposal, you WILL be charged extra - not as a punishment - but because difficult clients take more time and contractors have to cover their costs. So, it's really important to show your organization in a positive light to attract the best talent AND save money.

Website Evaluation Checklist

- A well-designed logo that blends well with the banner / slogan
- A Compelling Message on main page with accompanying photos
- News items on the main page to draw visitors in
- A navigation menu with no dropdowns, has 8 or less menu options and is on every page
- Fonts that are large and readable in short paragraphs that are easy to read
- An annual report OR statistics about consumers/finances
- A list of the board of directors and staff with contact info for staff
- A Get Involved section for volunteers and donors that showcases client stories
- Multiple donation levels and online /offline options for donating
- A prominent Donate Now button on the main page
- A list volunteer jobs available and a printable application
- A volunteer recognition page with photos
- Programs and services pages with client requirements and application / referral info
- An email collection form prominently displayed on the main page
- A utility bar and copyright at the bottom of the site that does NOT repeat the top menu
- A newsroom or media center with fact sheets, archived newsletters, press releases
- A list and/or logos of community partners and other affiliations
- Direct email access in the Contact Us section / NO form
- At least one social media site/page i.e. blog or Facebook fan page
- Use of professional photos to showcase clients and activities
- Link to latest Form 990 and IRS Determination letter



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