NOTE · 016

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Writing the RFP for a rebrand or a new website

Twelve sections for an RFP that brings back proposals you can compare, drawn from public requests by museums, libraries and arts organizations.

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This fall we read public requests for proposals for a rebrand or a new website. We read ten from museums, libraries and arts organizations in full, and more from festivals, tourism offices and downtown districts. This is the template we would hand an organization writing one now. Your purchasing office has the final word on every section, and where public rules usually apply we say so.

01 What the useful ones had in common.

A clear RFP gets fewer responses, from firms that already know they fit, and a vague one gets a stack that cannot be compared. The clearest documents we read did three things: they described what had gone wrong with the

current site or brand, they named the systems the work had to connect to, and they said who on staff would run the result after launch.

02 The template.

Copy what helps. Each section has a note on what goes in it. Download the template as a PDF to work from on paper or share with your committee.

1. Issuing contact and dates

Name one person as the only contact for bidders, and say that no one else at the organization will discuss the RFP until the award. List the dates: issued, questions due, answers posted, proposals due, interviews if any, decision, start. Public bodies usually set a minimum posting period, so check it before you pick the due date. Where the rules leave it to you, in our experience four weeks from issue to due date gives firms time to write something considered.

2. Questions

Questions go in writing to the named contact by a stated date, and the answers go to every bidder at once, usually posted where the RFP is posted. A private conversation with one firm can put the whole process at risk.

3. Who you are

A paragraph on your mission and audiences, how many people work in marketing and communications, and who will run the website and the brand day to day once the project ends. That last line tells a firm more about the job than any list of pages.

4. What is not working

Write it the way you would say it to a colleague, since firms write to the problem you describe. “Launched over ten years ago.” “Feels too much like a printed catalog.” “Our content management system has passed end of life.” “We have been buying design project to project from different people for two years.”

5. What you are buying

Name the pieces, and mark each one required or optional.

- Research and brand strategy
- Identity: logo system, typography, color, guidelines
- Templates your staff will use, and in which tools (Canva, PowerPoint, InDesign)
- Website: design, build, content migration, integrations
- Launch and rollout
- Hosting, maintenance and support after launch, and for how long

If you are unsure whether you need a rebrand or only a website, say so in the document.

6. The systems it has to work with

List them by name: the content management system, ticketing, the library catalog, the donor database, the email platform, the digital asset library. Say which are staying. Named systems can be priced; “our existing systems” cannot.

7. What you own

Seven of the ten museum, library and arts RFPs we read asked for a site staff could manage themselves, and six asked for training. Ask for all of it in writing:

- The domain and hosting account registered to the organization from the first day
- Every source file, font license and design template
- The code, and administrator access to the site
- Assignment of intellectual property on final payment
- Training for the staff who will update the site, recorded so new hires can watch it
- Documentation for the brand and for the site

8. Accessibility

State the standard. WCAG 2.1 AA appeared in most of the RFPs that named one, and some asked for a path to 2.2. A public body may also need Section 508 or a state standard. Ask how the firm tests and what it hands over as evidence.

9. Budget

If your procurement rules allow it, publish the budget or a range. Six of the ten museum, library and arts RFPs we read gave no figure. A published figure lets firms shape what they propose to the money. If you have a hard ceiling, say so. If you would take a phased proposal, ask for one.

For a sense of scale, single public postings we read asked for about $10,000 to $15,000 for a small district identity, $50,000 for a regional cultural

alliance rebrand, and $80,000 for a mid-size arts nonprofit website with integrations.

10. What to send, and how

- How to submit: portal, email or sealed copy, file format, page limit
- Approach, in plain language
- The people who will do the work, by name, and whether each is staff or a subcontractor
- Three relevant projects, with links
- Three references
- An itemized fee, a payment schedule, and how changes to the work are priced
- Required forms (tax, non-collusion, small, minority or women-owned business certification, if your rules ask for them)

In our experience, fifteen to twenty-five pages is enough for a firm to show how it thinks.

11. Terms

Attach your standard contract, or summarize it: insurance amounts, indemnity, intellectual property, termination, payment terms. Say that proposals may be released under public records law if that applies to you. Firms price risk they can see.

12. How you will decide

Publish the criteria and their weights, and say whether you will interview a shortlist. Only two of the ten museum, library and arts RFPs we read gave weights. A sample that adds to 100:

Criterion	Weight
Relevant experience and references	30
Understanding of our organization and audiences	20
Approach and team	20
Fee and value	20
Accessibility, training and handover plan	10

A sample weighting written for this template.

03 Questions worth adding.

Ask these at the interview, or add them to section 10.

- Who from your firm will run our weekly meeting, and will that person be at the interview?
- How are overruns in time or cost handled?
- What will our staff be able to change on their own the day after launch?
- What do we receive if the contract ends early?
- Which people in your proposal are employees, and which are subcontractors?

04 Getting it seen.

Post it wherever your purchasing rules require, usually your own procurement page and any portal your government uses. Sector job boards and association newsletters reach firms that do not watch procurement portals.