AppalachianVoices

March 31, 2023

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS:
AppVoices.org Website Revamp

Primary Contact: Jamie Goodman, Director of Digital Innovation and Technology | jamie@appvoices.org | 828-278-9424

The following Request for Proposals (RFP) includes a background of Appalachian Voices and describes the purpose of the website's redesign, its desired functionality, and specific requests relating to the proposal. We understand that details may be subject to change upon vendor recommendation and/ or research of more optimal solutions. In your proposal, please feel free to suggest alternatives where appropriate.

Overview

Appalachian Voices seeks proposals from qualified website development agencies for a set of template designs for our primary website, appvoices.org, and our accompanying publication website, appvoices.org/thevoice.

Proposals are due by **6:00 pm EDT on Thursday, May 4** and should be directed to Jamie Goodman at jamie@appvoices.org.

Questions prior to the due date regarding this proposal are welcome. AppVoices will decide upon a vendor no later than June 15, 2023. In conjunction with AppVoices staff, a complete launch of the website should be completed on or about December 1, 2023. All proposals should include a project timeline and expected date of completion.
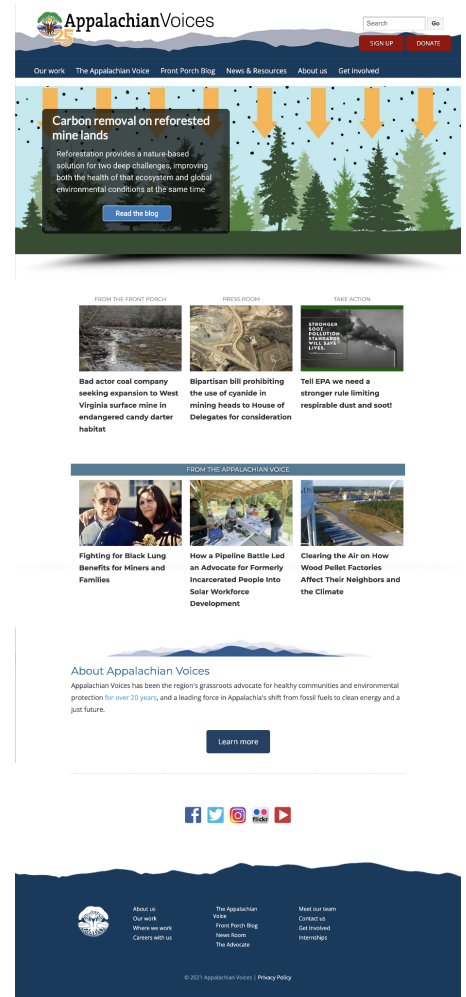
Organizational Background

Founded in 1997, nonprofit advocacy organization Appalachian Voices brings people together to protect the land, air, water and communities of Central and Southern Appalachia and advance a just transition to a generative and equitable clean energy economy. We work to end harmful fossil fuel practices such as mountaintop removal coal mining and construction of unnecessary fracked-gas pipelines. We also strive to shift our region to clean, 21st-century energy sources including solar and wind power and energy efficiency, and we stand up to monopoly utility practices that put profits over people. Our ultimate goal is to establish economic solutions that create community wealth and sustain Appalachia's mountains, forests and waters.

To accomplish this, we leverage grassroots organizing, community engagement, policy advocacy and technical expertise to hold decision makers accountable in courtrooms, in state capitals and in Washington, D.C. Our flagship publication, The Appalachian Voice, celebrates the region and shares stories of the people who are working to protect it.

Appalachian Voices has 34 staff members with offices located in Boone, N.C., Charlottesville, Va., Norton, Va., and Knoxville, Tenn. The organization's staff includes communications and IT professionals with backgrounds in content generation, web design, programming and server maintenance. These team members will collaborate with and provide assistance to the firm throughout the project.

Key members of the team working on this project include:

Name	Title	Contact
Jamie Goodman	Director of Digital Innovation and Technology	jamie@appvoices.org
Jimmy Davidson	Graphics and Digital Communications Coordinator	jimmy@appvoices.org
Jen Lawhorne	Communications Coordinator	jen@appvoices.org
Matt Wasson	Director of Programs	matt@appvoices.org
Clover Forbes	IT Specialist	clover@appvoices.org

Project Goal

AppVoices.org is the central nervous system for the network of communications tools we use to inform the public, cultivate supporters and provide opportunities for them to advocate for clean air, clean water, healthy ecosystems and strong local economies for communities moving past coal.
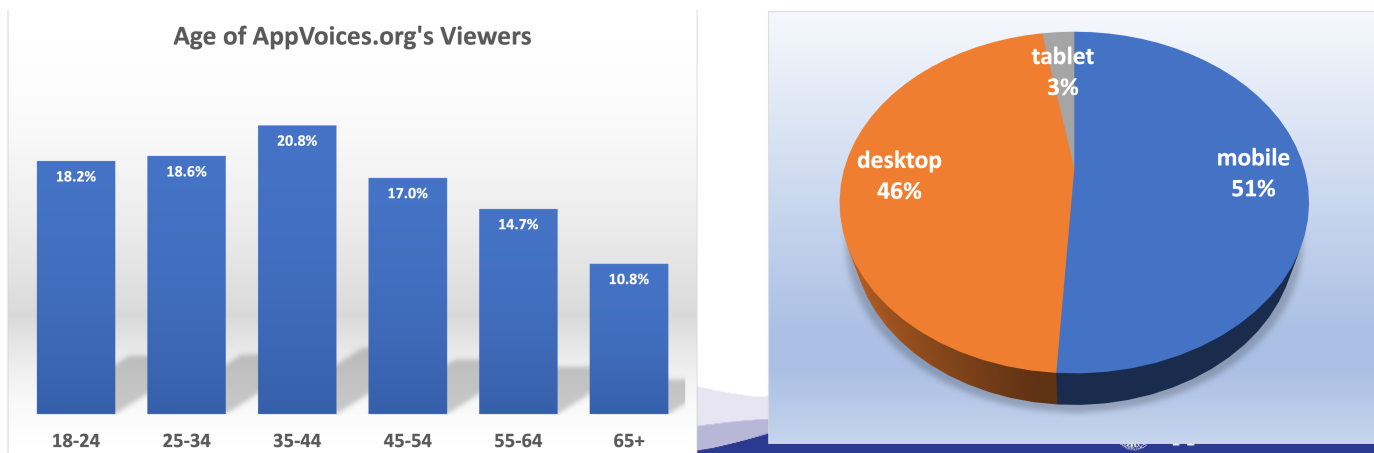
We are seeking to revamp our WordPress website in the following ways:

1. Refresh the look and feel of the main website
2. Replace heavily customized and code-heavy Wordpress templates with cleaner coded templates
3. Employ the use of a nimble visual editor (like Divi, Elementor, etc.) to improve updating options for staff
4. Improve our site's accessibility across a spectrum of devices and end-user accommodations
5. Optimize SEO and load times
6. Refresh the header and footer for The Appalachian Voice publication's web pages (possibly a separate project depending on proposals)

Our current web presence

AppVoices.org is housed on a WordPress backend that contains over 670 published pages, 6,300 published posts and nearly 8,800 images. The current site was built in-house using the Responsive theme as a base to create a customized set of templates to control the pages and posts. Javascript and php written by our former in-house IT Specialist controls a web of automated features on the back end.

In 2022, 288,170 visitors came to the site for a total of 689,116 pageviews. Average session duration was 5.02 minutes, and the average bounce rate was 51.5%. Our age range is fairly varied, though there is some steady dropoff after the age of 55, but some of this may be attributed to our use as a resource for high school and college student projects during the school year. While mobile users have recently taken over as the majority, desktop viewers still provide a significant portion of our traffic.

Age of AppVoices.org's Viewers

18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
18.2%	18.6%	20.8%	17.0%	14.7%	10.8%

tablet 3%
desktop 46%
mobile 51%

The Appalachian Voices website serves multiple purposes for our organization.

- It provides an initial point of contact for many individuals, brought to AppVoices.org either because they've heard about a particular issue and are drawn to our site via a search engine or links from outside sources, or because they have heard of Appalachian Voices and want to learn more about what we do.
- It makes available to the general public a wealth of information about the issues we work on, content that describes not only the problems, but also presents solutions and our work toward that end. This content is utilized by students, concerned citizens, elected officials, partner organizations, media outlets and others.
- It houses opportunities for advocates and supporters to become involved in protecting the region, whether by signing petitions, sending letters to elected officials, registering for events or signing up for webinars.
- It broadens our base by providing opportunities for volunteering, interning and careers
- It serves as a repository for press, news, stories and updates disseminated throughout our various other channels, especially social media outlets (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) and our media database (Meltwater). These articles serve various purposes for our organization: providing updates to our funders and followers on current programs; housing detailed information for media outlets; and disseminating articles that celebrate the natural heritage, culture and beauty of our region (please see separate section below on *The Appalachian Voice*)

The Appalachian Voice (appvoices.org/thevoice/)

A separate but connected section of our website is [The Appalachian Voice publication](). Story content ranges from general environmental, nature and cultural features from the Appalachian region to more robust exposés tied to the organization's programmatic work. The Voice is a key entry point to Appalachian Voices, serving as a gateway to introduce people to our issues and ultimately our organization.

Until the pandemic, this news source was published both in print and online 6 times a year since 1996. The Voice boasts its own navigation and robust set of templates, complete with custom-built automations to aid supporting staff in posting stories, creating issue landing pages, and populating the issue page with links to the feature stories and columns from that issue. Out of our 689,116 total page views in 2022, 199,505 were from The Appalachian Voice.

Pros, Cons and Challenges

What we like and don't like about our website and challenges that we have faced / may face in the upcoming website revamp.

- ❖ **Pro:** The wealth of information we provide! We want to maintain our substance rather than switching to being a "brochure" site

- ❖ **Con:** But ironically we don't have good intro points for people who aren't ready to be immersed deep in the substance at first

- ❖ **Pro:** The clean and open feel of the current site

- ❖ **Pro:** The customized automation features that allow specific categories to be populated in various areas

- ❖ **Con:** The inability to set up new automation features on our own right now due to a lack of a PHP expert on staff

- ❖ **Con:** Some outdated design elements

- ❖ **Con:** The inability to update the base template for security patches, etc. (it was not set up as a child theme)

- ❖ **Con:** The inability to easily update or add plugins (this access was turned off by our former IT Specialist and must be completed on the backend now)

- ❖ **Challenge:** Our current WordPress theme is heavily customized, and some legacy functionality may have to be imported over / maintained in stasis for the foreseeable future

- ❖ **Challenge:** The standard visual editor on our site has been turned off for years, to prevent interference with some customized PHP, so staff have been required to use the HTML editor with help from a Google Doc with pre-written code for various needs

- ❖ **Challenge:** Currently the organization has limited staff able to handle moderately complex to advanced page designs or make edits / updates to the back end of the site

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Design Requirements

The AppVoices communications team will play an integrated role in the project, working with the chosen agency to develop a website that is consistent with Appalachian Voices' overall mission and identity. To that end, after the contract is signed we will request at a minimum three distinct design directions in the initial phase, with two rounds of revisions for the chosen design direction. Successful proposals will include markers within the project timeline that allow for the revision process.

What we have . . .

- A complex system of hand-coded automation that can be mined or duplicated
- A fairly robust set of CSS class names that could be used for ease of design transfer
- A fully-scaled navigation / content structure that, while open to some suggested revisions, should require little in the way of discovery during this project

What we need . . .

- **Critical Site architecture**
    - Updated Wordpress and PHP versions
    - A primary page template as well as post templates for our Front Porch Blog, careers page, press room and action center
    - Mobile friendly / fully responsive with <u>equal emphasis</u> on desktop design and functionality
    - ADA and end-user accessibility
    - Improved loading speeds
    - Built-in functionality for improved SEO

- **Necessary Functionality**
    - Implementation of a visual editor like Divi or Elementor
    - Options to set mobile vs. desktop views on images or sections
    - Better image plugin to maintain good resolution quality but avoid overly large file sizes

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- ○ Functional automation on key sections (this already exists but some items may need to be recoded)
- ○ Possibly: A way to integrate Spanish translation on some pages or provide on-the-fly translation for common languages (not a primary requirement at this time)

- **Required design elements**
  - ○ An appealing and dynamic front page easily customizable with latest news, stories, and other important content
  - ○ A general, customizable page design to be used across the site
  - ○ Three-tiered design scheme for our programmatic pages:
    - ■ Top-level intro page to a program (low text, high graphics content)
    - ■ Informational page (higher amount of text)
    - ■ Internal/detailed pages
  - ○ Front Porch Blog
  - ○ A suite of customizable options for standard elements (buttons, full-width divs, bullets, blockquotes, special sections, etc.)
  - ○ Default elements for The Appalachian Voice publication (see section below for details)

- **Desired aesthetics**
  - ○ An updated design, modernized but not too modern
  - ○ Retains the flavor of AppVoices — action-oriented, but also community-oriented AND science-oriented while retaining an environmental/nature feel (all the things! 😃)
  - ○ Don't want it to look like Canva (not too clip-arty) or to look like the current popular cookie-cutter designs (especially big enviro orgs)
  - ○ Good color scheme, not too 🌈, and cohesive or complementary with the AppVoices logo and current color scheme (though not limited to the 5 AV logo colors)

- **The Appalachian Voice**
  - We would like a header / footer / primary elements design refresh for *The Appalachian Voice* publication (appvoices.org/thevoice). This design should be cohesive with the organization's main site while maintaining some individual identity, including the separate navigational structure, while still being connected in the WordPress backend.
  - The automation for this section of our website is fairly functional, so this aspect of the project would be primarily cosmetic (though some technical assistance could be helpful and should be factored in at an additional / separate cost).

What is <u>not</u> requested in this proposal . . .

- A rebranding of the organization as a whole (this includes logo design and base color palette, though complementary color palettes will be accepted)
- Any content updates or major changes to the overall navigation structure
- The implementation of the new templates across all pages and posts on the website.
  - Once the templates are in place and revisions applied to a few pages in the new template design, our current plan includes AppVoices staff working to revise pages to fit the new templates. ****Depending on your agency's proposal costs, an additional but separate section could be appended offering services for supporting this transition ****

Estimated RFP Time Table	
RFP Sent to Vendors	March 31, 2023
RFP Due Date	Thursday, May 4, 2023 at 6pm EDT
Interviews With Finalists Completed	June 2, 2023
Contract Execution – Work Begins	June 15, 2023
Final site launched	Dec. 1, 2023

Budget

We are budgeting $35,000 – $50,000 for this website project. Competitive submissions will include a detailed breakdown of costs. If your firm is unable to provide the requested scope of services within this budget range, we are willing to consider proposals outside of the range we have budgeted.

Evaluation criteria

The successful respondent will:

➔ Have been continuously operating as an agency for a minimum of 24 months

➔ Demonstrate the necessary experience, knowledge, and skills to accomplish the project

➔ Be competitive in their cost of services

➔ Demonstrate sensitivity to the racial, socioeconomic and gender diversity of our networks

➔ Understand climate, energy, and economic and racial justice issues generally

➔ Demonstrate compatible and appealing design aesthetics

➔ Have the ability to work within an engaged team dynamic

➔ Possess experience working with nonprofit organizations in general and more specifically share an understanding of environmental work

➔ Be located in North Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia or a neighboring state, or can demonstrate experience with and understanding of the culture of Appalachia and the South

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Submission Instructions

All proposals should include the following details on company background and project estimates:

- [ ] Description of the firm that includes a general overview, names, biographies and roles of the team, and demographic composition of employees

- [ ] 3-5 top relevant projects, who worked on each project, link to case study or website URL

- [ ] 3-5 client references

- [ ] A work plan that outlines critical tasks, milestones, and deadlines and any additional resources required for support (e.g., sub-contractors)

- [ ] Project management approach and description of what will be required from the Appalachian Voices' web project team.

- [ ] Itemized budget and list of deliverables

The RFP will be posted at appvoices.org/web-redesign and can be downloaded directly as of March 31.

Respondents to this RFP should submit their proposal in PDF form, and may include supplemental materials in any format including web-based, to jamie@appvoices.org no later than **6:00 pm EDT on Thursday, May 4, 2023**.

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