

Request for Proposals

Website Redesign, The Graduate Center, CUNY

Version 2 - Revised February 1, 2019

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Introduction

Project Overview

The Graduate Center of the City University of New York (CUNY) seeks to modernize and optimize its website to further the strategic goals of the institution as detailed in *Building for the Future: The Graduate Center Strategic Plan 2017-2022*:

1. Fostering and integrating communities of learning and research
2. Building the theoretical and experimental sciences
3. Advancing our public mission by increasing our impact
4. Diversifying our resources and building institutional resilience

To ensure the success of these initiatives, The Graduate Center seeks a partner to guide and support an overhaul of its web presence. The GC seeks a firm with extensive experience in the higher education industry to position the institution as a leader in advanced learning in groundbreaking disciplines within the public higher education landscape.

The ideal partner for this project will have a strong foundation in web and digital communications strategy development, will have proven success in evaluating the vast and varied needs of a large, full-service public institution of higher learning, and will have the creative and technical expertise to design and build a mobile-first, user-centric, engaging and exciting website.

RFP Timeline - Revised Feb, 1, 2019

RFP Sent: Week of December 17, 2018

***Deadline for Vendor Questions:** December 28, 2018

Final Question Responses Sent By: January 7, 2019

Revised RFP Sent: Week of February 4, 2019

****Deadline for Follow-Up Vendor Questions:** February 13, 2019

Follow-Up Responses Sent By: February 15, 2019

Proposals Due: February 22, 2019

Semi-Finalists Selected and Contacted: Week of March 4, 2019

Semi-Finalist On-Site Presentations: March 11-15, 2019

Finalist(s) Selected and Contacted: Week of March 18, 2019

Finalist On-Site Presentations w/GC President: March 21-27, 2019

Winner Selected and Contacted: Week of April 1, 2019

**See "Contacts" on page 10 for more information*

Project Timeline and Budget - Revised Feb. 1, 2019

Timeline: April 2019-April 2021
(with possible homepage/minisite launch in Spring 2020)

Budget: \$500,000 all-inclusive
(must cover all project costs including travel, technology/software licensing, other fees and expenses, etc.)

Background

About CUNY

The mission of The City University of New York, embodied in state education law, Article 125, Section 6201, as the finding and intent of the New York State Legislature, states in part:

“The Legislature intends that The City University of New York should be maintained as an independent system of higher education governed by its own Board of Trustees responsible for the governance, maintenance and development of both senior and community college units of The City University.

“The University must remain responsive to the needs of its urban setting and maintain its close articulation between senior and community college units. Where possible, governance and operation of senior and community colleges should be jointly conducted or conducted by similar procedures to maintain the University as an integrated system and to facilitate articulation between units.

“The Legislature’s intent is that The City University be supported as an independent and integrated system of higher education on the assumption that the University will continue to maintain and expand its commitment to academic excellence and to the provision of equal access and opportunity for students, faculty and staff from all ethnic and racial groups and from both sexes. The City University is of vital importance as a vehicle for the upward mobility of the disadvantaged in the City of New York.

About the Graduate Center

The Graduate Center of The City University of New York (CUNY) is a leader in public graduate education devoted to enhancing the public good through pioneering research, serious learning, and reasoned debate. The Graduate Center offers ambitious students more than 40 doctoral and master's programs of the highest caliber, taught by top faculty from throughout CUNY - the nation's largest public urban university. Through its nearly 40 centers, institutes, and initiatives, including its Advanced Science Research Center (ASRC), The Graduate Center influences public

policy and discourse and shapes innovation. The Graduate Center's extensive public programs make it a home for culture and conversation.

The Graduate Center benefits from highly ambitious and diverse students and alumni—who in turn teach hundreds of thousands of undergraduates every year. Through its public programs, The Graduate Center enhances New York City's intellectual and cultural life.

Current Website

The Graduate Center website was last redesigned in 2009 and launched in 2011. The current site uses Kentico as its CMS and has more than 28,000 pages.

The mobile site (m.gc.cuny.edu) was launched in April 2015 and has a limited number of pages, as well as the ability to view mobile versions of news and event items, and the directory.

There are numerous challenges with the current websites:

Mobile Accessibility. The main GC site is not responsive. Having launched in 2011 before mobile become a priority, the site is difficult to view on a mobile device. The mobile site was created as a temporary fix to satisfy the urgent need for a site viewable on mobile, but it only addresses a few pages, with links to the non-responsive pages.

ADA Accessibility. In 2017, The Graduate Center received a complaint from the Office of Civil Rights regarding website accessibility. Issues were content-related and tag-related. The GC brought the site up-to-date, but needs additional requirements and processes in place to ensure the continued accessibility of new and/or edited content.

Navigation and Content Strategy. The main GC site serves dozens of academic programs, centers, and administrative offices with thousands of pages aimed at a wide array of audiences, all built more-or-less independently of one another without a clear overarching navigation and content strategy. As a result, the site is overly complex, confusing, and difficult to navigate. The information architecture and menu should be evaluated for ease of use.

Internal vs. External Users. Content for all users of the GC site is treated equally, without clear separation or direction for content that is primarily for existing students, faculty and staff vs. that directed to prospective students and other outside visitors. We require an audit of our current web content to evaluate internal vs. external content and inform the development of a GC Intranet.

Governance. The main GC site has more than 500 content editors with varying levels of access and edit permissions. This causes inconsistency in style, tone, and quality. Editors also vary in degrees of proficiency in Kentico. Updates are pushed straight to production (the staging site was eliminated in 2013).

Disconnected. All GC academic programs have pages on the GC site, but several programs and the majority of the GC's centers have additional self-managed websites outside of Kentico.

Most of these sites are built on one of two GC-owned WordPress networks (Website Services & the Academic Commons), but several are hosted entirely outside of the GC ecosystem with custom domains and unique CMSs, and nearly all fall outside the purview of GC Communications and Marketing. This includes the website for the Advanced Science Research Center, which exists as its own contained WordPress multisite network and is comprised of nearly 600 pages and posts, managed by more than 30 users.

This splintered model, while enabling structural flexibility and independent content oversight for individual units, causes a visible disconnect between the GC and the programs, centers and initiatives that fall under its managerial umbrella.

Page Design Flexibility. Content editors feel constrained by our templates, widgets and styles. Editors would like more flexibility, but pages should have elements of consistency tying them to the larger website.

CMS Usability. GC content managers find the Kentico CMS difficult to use and often require additional training and support beyond the standard offerings. The structure for managing shared/global content (such as news, events, profiles) is confusing and sometimes leads to duplication of content/multiple versions. There is perceived difficulty in uploading and posting images, videos and other rich media. Development of new features/functions (and revising existing ones) is slow, which limits our ability to be nimble and responsive to the changing needs of the institution. This has created a perception that Kentico is “broken”, which means end users are hesitant to use the system and often turn to secondary/outside systems as an alternative, leading the disconnection described above.

Our Audiences

Although we recognize the vast array of audiences our site must serve, we struggle to properly prioritize them and are thus unable to truly strategize our content structure to fit.

These audiences include:

- prospective students
- current students and faculty
- prospective faculty
- staff and administration
- donors and influencers
- press/media
- alumni
- external partners (local, national, global)
- prospective space rental clients
- elected officials
- state/federal government staff
- foundations

We hope to identify our primary, secondary and tertiary audiences through the redesign process.

Project Requirements

Project Scope - New Feb. 1, 2019

This redesign will address the Kentico-hosted gc.cuny.edu website **only** (as described on page 3) and is not intended to include web sites/content hosted by secondary/external services (as described on pages 3 under the heading “Disconnected”).

All programs, centers and initiatives must be represented in some way on the redesigned website, but should clearly and cleanly link to any associated external sites.

Brand Strategy

From The Graduate Center Strategic Plan:

“Focused on graduate education and advanced research, The Graduate Center is unique in the experience it can offer students and faculty, distinctive in its commitment to scholarship and learning for the public good, and distinguished—across the breadth of the arts and sciences—in quality and creativity.

By strengthening our communities of teaching and scholarship, we aspire to provide New York City with the public flagship of research and advanced learning that it deserves; to enrich public understanding; and to serve as a national leader in graduate education.

There is nothing like The Graduate Center—self-standing and yet thoroughly networked into the ‘connected university’ that is CUNY; a degree-granting institution organized in the service of doctoral education; an assembly of academic centers, institutes and initiatives designed to foster scholarship and research; a loose community of scholar-teachers and student-teachers; and a stage and forum for outreach and public programming.”

See appendix: GC Branding Brief

Website Objectives - Revised Feb. 1, 2019

Key objectives:

Enhance The Graduate Center’s reputation through a sophisticated, visually-engaging website that showcases our serious academic programs and pioneering research, is accessible to all

(mobile-responsive and ADA-compliant) and supports the goals of The Graduate Center strategic plan:

- Fostering and integrating communities of learning and research
- Building the theoretical and experimental sciences
- Advancing our public mission by increasing our impact
- Diversifying our resources and building institutional resources

Provide functionality and transparency for internal processes and operations for the GC community, including current existing website functionality and desired functionality.

Additional objectives:

Attract prospective students; facilitate fact-finding and increase inquiries/applications through market-driven, approachable, engaging gateways to our academic offerings, and provide supportive and informative pathways for incoming students after acceptance.

Strategically incorporate and elevate the CUNY BA program, the only undergraduate level offering that falls under the supervision of the GC.

NEW: Attract programs/centers to utilize the new GC site in place of existing sites hosted by secondary/external services by offering flexibility for programs/centers to have their own identity within the GC brand and for some level of autonomy while still ensuring compliance with best practices and quality standards.

Increase public and community engagement with the GC by:

- Highlighting GC news: student/faculty accomplishments, advancement of GC projects, initiatives and partnerships
- Promoting GC events and event spaces

Appeal to alumni and prospective donors; inspire financial support of the GC, its students and its initiatives through donations, grants and sponsorships

Provide relevant information to media looking for faculty experts or research information.

Exemplify the dynamic research and lively public discourse taking place at the GC, and reflect the relationship and dependencies between these two entities.

Support departmental goals and business practices to foster a functional community at the GC, with designated space for, and clear pathways to, information, tools and resources for existing students, faculty and staff.

Design & Functionality Goals

The GC website must:

Reflect and promote GC brand identity while affiliating with the overall brand identity of the CUNY system

Provide opportunities to integrate GC entities—such as the Advanced Science Research Center (<http://www.asrc.cuny.edu>), Ralph Bunche Institute (<http://ralphbuncheinstitute.org/>), Center for the Humanities (<https://www.centerforthehumanities.org/>) and others—as organic elements within the GC while continuing to highlight their own unique identities, offerings, initiatives, and accomplishments.

Be easy to navigate on desktop and mobile for external and internal audiences without inundating each audience with information for the other, and provide clear, user-centric pathways to a GC community intranet.

Be flexible enough to enable individuality across academic programs, departments, centers and initiatives, while maintaining a consistent level of quality and adherence to brand standards.

Use imagery, rich media and social media to engage site visitors with our content, with focused, directed and approachable copy to communicate information.

Allow for easy capture of information about prospective students, public interested in programming, and prospective donors.

Clearly connect to, or integrate with, online application tools (currently hosted using ApplyYourself)

Utilize external/cloud-based hosting which provides ongoing upgrades/patching/maintenance, as well as back ups and security.

Utilize a user friendly CMS with easily managed permissions levels to support good governance and oversight of web content and design standards. CMS **must** be an “out of the box” solution (ie. not a custom-built platform) with ready support available for successful long term management and development.

Utilize SEO best practices to drive organic traffic, optimize for PPC ads, and enable accurate conversion tracking.

Integrate with GC systems (eg. Active Directory, Sharepoint) and align with applicable CUNY systems and standards.

Be ADA-compliant—WCAG 2.0 AA standards at minimum.

Comply with all current privacy and disclosure standards (eg. GDPR).

Anticipated Functionality Needs

- Active Directory authentication
- Calendar display (*academic calendar; events*)
- Carousels & Galleries
- Chat
- Custom Forms (*eg. Housing Application, Contact/Inquiry Forms, etc.*)
- Custom Data Tables
- Directory (*Staff & Departmental - ideally connected to Active Directory records*)
- Global/shared content (*entered centrally using tags/categories to organize, filter, display & browse*):
 - Contact Information includes (*Individual & Departmental - ideally connected to Active Directory records*)
 - Events (*include registration functionality*)
 - FAQs
 - News
 - Policies & Procedures
 - Profiles/Bios (*Students, Faculty, Alumni, Staff*)
- Microsites
- Modular Page Templates
- Password protection for pages and files
- Roles and Permissions (*for groups & individual users*)
- RSS display
- Search

Reference Websites

University of Chicago <https://www.uchicago.edu/>

John Hopkins <https://www.jhu.edu/>

Dartmouth <https://home.dartmouth.edu/>

Proposal Requirements - Revised Feb. 1, 2019

Please include the following in your proposal response:

- Overview of your company, including relevant experience/expertise and any key differentiators that we should consider.
- Outline of your website design and development strategy
- Explanation of how you will meet our stated goals and objectives, including proposed timelines from kickoff to completion, addressing the following project phases and deliverables:
 - **Discovery**
 - Content Audit - **inventory and audit of content contained within the current Graduate Center website at gc.cuny.edu.**
 - Research and Analysis – prepare and implement a plan for community engagement and usability testing to provide insight about The Graduate Center Website users' needs and expectations, which will guide our decisions throughout the redesign process. The plan must include user research tasks, the contractor's assistance with execution, and a report on the findings.
 - **Strategy**
 - CMS Evaluation & Recommendation – based on the results of the research and analysis phase, recommend a content management system on which build the new Graduate Center website. The CMS must be a pre-built/out of the box solution (such as WordPress, Drupal, etc) rather than a custom built/homegrown solution. Anticipated customizations to the CMS should be described.
 - Content, Design & Architecture Strategy - document outlining detailed information architecture; planning, development, and management of content; and recommendations for site look and feel.
 - Governance Guidelines - document outlining recommended policies and procedures addressing content management, user management, and access permissions.
 - **Design**
 - Creative Design and User Experience Planning - prepare the creative design and user experience plans for the home, landing, sub-site and content-level page templates and any other templates or tools required to support recommended content & design strategy. Provide wireframes and both flat and interactive prototypes of all templates and tools for review and approval.
 - **Content**

- Content Production: Identify areas of content to be developed by you vs. areas to be developed by Graduate Center staff; develop search engine optimized content described in the content strategy recommendations.
 - Content Migration: Identify areas of content to be migrated by you vs. areas to be migrated by Graduate Center staff.
 - **Development/Programming**
 - Development and coding of templates and tools - develop and perform all coding of templates in the chosen CMS.
 - User Testing – create and implement a plan for user testing of each prototype.
 - **Implementation & Post-Launch**
 - Code Delivery - deliver template/site files and be required to be available during the implementation to assist with launch to chosen hosting platform.
 - Training & Documentation - prepare a style guide for ongoing maintenance of the redesigned website and provide training to content managers on style guide and maintenance best practices.
 - Post-launch consulting - outline arrangement for on-going advisement for a period for up to one year from the expiration of the Contract at no additional cost to the University. This provision shall survive the expiration of the Contract.
- Completed cost and timeline estimate, addressing the following requirements:
 - Itemized pricing for each of the stages of development detailed above
 - Budget timeline aligned to our request for a phased approach to launch
 - Include any optional/additional elements not directly provided by your company (fees for purchased tools and services, outsourced consulting costs, etc.) as individual line items
 - Include any considerations for reducing cost by adjusting the balance of responsibility between your project team and the GC's internal team
- Description of your project team and expected roles and responsibilities, including anticipated expectations for involvement from the GC's internal team. (Our internal team includes creative and technical staff who stand ready to assist with the hands-on work of the project, in addition to providing ongoing guidance and feedback.) Please also detail any services you do not offer in-house, and any partnerships or sub-contracting arrangements you would employ to provide those services, particular in service of meeting the NYS goal of a minimum 20% fulfillment of services by NYS-certified MWBEs.
- At least three (3) case studies of similar, recent projects, conducted for similar clients, with contact information for references.
- Terms and conditions, including explanation of your change order process.

Following a review of all proposals received, selected finalists will be **required** to give an on-site presentation to the internal project team, which will include institutional communications, design and IT staff as well as representatives from student, academic and business affairs.

Contacts

All inquiries on this revised RFP must be submitted via email by **Wednesday, February 13, 2019**.

Please submit all inquiries to:

Rob Paynter

Director of Purchasing & Contracts

Office of Business Affairs

The Graduate Center, CUNY

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All potential respondents will receive an addendum detailing all questions and responses by **Friday, February 15, 2019**.

If required, follow-up questions will be answered in a second addendum following this response date.