Connecticut APEX Accelerator

Request for Proposal

Website Design

February 26, 2024

Introduction

The Connecticut APEX Accelerator (CT APEX), formerly Procurement Technical Assistance Center (CT PTAC) was established to increase the number of businesses capable of participating in government contracts. The program is administered by the Department of Defense (DoD); Office of Small Business Program (OSBP) in cooperation with the State of Connecticut, Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). CT APEX is hosted by Southeastern CT Enterprise Region (seCTer), an economic development non-profit organization. The mission of CT APEX is to provide marketing and procurement assistance to Connecticut businesses interested in selling their products and services to federal, state and local governments. We provide education and training that all businesses need to become capable of participating in DoD and other government contracts. CT APEX is a statewide program. Our services are free of cost. CT APEX services include assistance with registration in systems such as the System for Award Management (SAM), identification of contract opportunities, help in understanding contract requirements, bid preparation and post award functions [Counseling Services - CT APEX (ctptac.org)](ctptac.org)

For many, the CT APEX website is the first experience and interaction with our program, so it is a vital component for awareness, engagement and recruitment. Effective February 2024, we have a new logo, therefore, re-branding plays a major part of launching our new website, however our mission, remains the same.

We are seeking estimates for the re-design, re-development, and launching our website: https://ctptac.org/. We also have Facebook & LinkedIn platforms, which drive visitors to our website. We seek a marketing partner who is able to understand our work in the government contracting space and grasp our brand and mission. This redesign will deliver a new online presence that elevates our brand and mission. We are seeking an experienced agency who has demonstrated experience with website redesign and incorporating rebranding into the project.

Summary

The CT APEX needs a new website in order to bring the most relevant government contracting information to all our stakeholders, which include business, resource partners, elected officials and government. The goal is to provide a user-friendly website that offers all the tools needed to succeed in government contracting on the local, state and federal levels.

Our Audience are our stakeholders.
- Connecticut for profit businesses
- Resource partners such as the CT Small Business Administration, Department of Administrative Services, Supplier Diversity Program, Small Business Development Center who refer clients to us
- Elected officials who refer clients
- Government buyers (federal, state, local, prime contractors) who award contracts to our clients

CT APEX welcomes all recommendations for innovative design techniques and modern technologies that will provide the best experience for all visitors to our website. We welcome suggestions that will better communicate what we do. We are the only organization of its kind that works exclusively with government contracting.

Integrations.
- Neoserra, which is our Customer relationship management system (CRM)
- Google analytics
- Zoom
- Outlook
- Etc.

Website hosting.
Miranda Creative currently hosts the website. The selected vendor for the redesign project will provide recommendations.

Search Engine Optimization.
Findability is important and the site must be built with SEO best practices in place.

Initial website project stage.
A review of the current CT APEX website: https://ctptac.org/ and discussions with the CT APEX, State Director, Marisol Herrera, will help with better understanding our goal with the website redesign. Refer to the following three examples of websites that meet our expectations for functionality and appearance:

- http://gtpac.org/
- http://ptac-sandiego.org/
- http://washingtonptac.org/

Design
The current CT APEX is outdated. Features such as: search box, blog, social media, videos and newsletter need to be addressed. Some preferred features are as follows:

- New graphics for use in print and online.

- Style guide: a comprehensive website style guide that can be easily edited by CT APEX on an ongoing basis
- Email Newsletter and Invitation templates in agreed 3rd party email-marketing provider (e.g. Constant Contact)
- Social media platforms (Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, and Instagram)
- All website graphics needed to fulfill the project with any stock photography incorporated from a licensed source or custom photography included in the budget. For custom photography., if proposed, copyright must be granted to CT APEX form the copyright holder for use in all other print and online collaterals
- Please provide an hourly rate for any additional graphic design work that may be necessary outside the scope of the RFP

Build Phase
- Create a user friendly experience that is exciting and is flexible to our visitors' device context, be it desktop/laptop, tablet, or other mobile device
- Compatible with MAC and PC platforms with cross browser testing to include the latest two versions of Internet Explorer, Safari, Chrome and Mozilla Firefox
- No use of Flash

External User Functionality
The following is an inclusive but not necessarily exhaustive list of the requirements, desired features, and deliverable for the Design Phase:

- Robust news feed/blog easily manageable by CT APEX staff and with audience/subscriber "following" options
- Integrated feeds to social media with set-up of new streams where required: Twitter, Linked-In, Instagram, YouTube, Facebook
- Integrated email-marketing sign-up
- Contact forms with capcha directed to the key member of the CT APEX for the inquiry
- Events calendar and online event management compatible with Timely
- A "client only" section of the site accessible by registration and password (preferably with the ability to link to the PTAC data gathering and case management tool, NEOSERRA)

Internal User Functionality
- A standard, not bespoke, Content Management System incorporating graded user capabilities and one user with full administrative access to theme and plugin updates. Full C-panel/FTP access at the host. While CT APEX anticipates an ongoing relationship with the preferred vendor, we wish to ensure standalone access to the full functionality of the site and the ability to back up or migrate the site to an alternative host should that be required.
- Front-end staff login

- Effective spam filters
- Search Engine Optimization: the site should include the ability to alter title tags, meta descriptions, alt tags and headers. The site must be built to be easily crawled by search engines
- Integrated analytics tool (such as google analytics or similar)

Data Migration

Vendors should make an assumption that the data and media (such as events calendar, cyber security, and government links) incorporate in our current website will be migrated to the new platform and that this activity lies within the scope of the RFP. We expect to work with the successful vendor to rewrite copy and reformat navigation to better serve our audience.

Implementation Phase

We will require a minimum of 3 x 2 hour training sessions to be provided on site in Groton with up to 2 hours additional virtual or email support provided. Vendors should include an hourly rate for additional training beyond this scope.

Ongoing Cost Analysis

- Hosting proposal with ongoing annual costs
- Annual license fees for any 3rd party software integration
- Any scheduled Cyber Security assessments
- Event Management
- SPAM management
- Email marketing platform
- You Tube Video streaming
- CRM platform
- Hubspot, Hootsuite or similar
- Calendar

Important Improvement Requirements:

1. ***Incorporate effective targeted use of SEO:*** Vendor should also include keywords and tags on pages so that our search functionality should be exceptional, and should allow our site visitors to complete their goals.
2. ***Lead Conversions:*** Better effective "Calls To Actions" to convert leads.
3. ***Improved Navigation interface:*** Vendor should simplify Navigation Path and create a very attractive, easy-to-navigate website that should allow visitors to fulfill their goals quickly and easily.

Project Priorities:

Our Primary priorities are:

1. Strengthen our online presence
2. Client conversions

3. Repeat visitors
4. Etc.

Our Secondary priorities are:
1. Educating businesses regarding government contracting
2. Building brand awareness
3. Etc.

Important Technical & other Requirements:
1. Website Security: Installation of SSL Certificates
2. Robust Hosting Platform (with 24 hours support, software updates etc.)
3. Continuous Website Backup
4. Vendor will train how to use website's Administrative sections.
5. Website's Platform will be compatible with other External 3rd party applications currently in use.
6. Analytics Integrations such as Website Visitor Statistics *(Google analytics etc.)*
7. Responsive Web Design – compatible with laptop, desktop, smartphones, tablets, etc.
8. Effective website content Search Functionality *(already mentioned above).*
9. Easy to change website's Global Elements such as – Logo, Color Themes, Navigations etc.
10. Language conversion functionality (English, Spanish) should be done by the website visitors on Real-time.
11. If any stock photos being used, should be licensed or royalty free.

Acceptance of Submission and Criteria for Selection
Proposals must be emailed directly to Marisol Herrera, State Director of CT APEX Accelerator at mherrera@secter.org by 5:00 pm Eastern Standard Time March 20, 2024. CT APEX is seeking qualified, creative, responsible and responsive vendors for this project with an anticipation (but not a guarantee) of an ongoing support contract/relationship.

Vendor must guarantee a fully functional and complete website by August 1, 2024

Contact Details
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Reservation of Rights
CT APEX reserves the right to accept or reject any and all proposals.

Proposal Due Date
March 20, 2024 by 5:00 pm Eastern Standard Time