

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

The Washington State Higher Education Coordinating Board, hereafter called "AGENCY," is initiating this Request for Proposals (RFP) to solicit proposals from firms interested in developing a College & Career Ready website for Washingtonians. The project will be managed by the Washington State GEAR UP and Washington College Access Challenge Grant programs¹.

Washington State lacks an online destination where students, families, and teachers can browse comprehensive college planning, application, and financial aid information. The new College & Career Ready Website will be a clearinghouse for useful, vetted online resources made accessible through a portal-like interface. Additionally, the website should include features and functionality to promote user engagement and interaction.

Educators, families, and students will use the website as a resource to support the following broadly defined college planning and preparation activities:

- Taking the courses in middle and high school that are rigorous, sequentially progressive, and aligned with college readiness benchmarks and the Common Core State Standards.
- Exploring career opportunities and the multiple options to realize such opportunities.
- Signing up for and taking the right tests including the EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT.
- Applying to post secondary institutions and programs.
- Applying for financial aid and finding scholarships.
- Meeting all the deadlines in the college application process.

During the spring of 2011, Washington State GEAR UP contracted with two strategic communications firms to conduct research and evaluate current outreach materials, the gearup.wa.gov website, and other program activities. The results of that process will inform the development of the College & Career Ready Website. The reports detailing the project are attached here for reference as Exhibits C and D.

The overarching goals of this project are to conceive an identity and develop a new online destination that includes information and applicable tools for college planning and preparation that address academic preparation, social connection and support, and financial aid. This new website will replace the current GEAR UP site (www.gearup.wa.gov).

¹ Washington State GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) is a college access program administered by the AGENCY. Washington was awarded its third consecutive state GEAR UP grant by the US Department of Education in 2011. The six-year award will be used to provide direct services to 6,000 students in 28 high-poverty school districts statewide. In addition to the state GEAR UP program, Washington is home to ten GEAR UP partnership programs that serve a combined 26,000 additional students.

The purpose of the federally funded College Access Challenge Grant (CACG) program is to provide services and support to low-income, first-generation college students and their families to help them prepare for college and careers. The AGENCY has administered the CACG since 2008.

The AGENCY may award one or more contract(s) to provide the services described in this RFP.

1.2. OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE OF WORK

GEAR UP is seeking a qualified firm to provide website development and design to expand and enhance the resources that Washington State provides to students, families, and educators to support college and career readiness. This new website will build on the existing work of Washington State GEAR UP, but will target a broader audience to ensure that accurate, relevant, and timely information is available to assist them in planning for and succeeding in postsecondary education and beyond.

The website must be built in Drupal and provide rich and engaging user experiences within this CMS framework. The website will provide a vibrant and authentic user experience and provide clear, compelling pathways for audiences to access information.

This new online entity will offer the best of what GEAR UP provides on the ground (support, inspiration, information, and guidance), plus new features that address identified needs from key audiences: educators, students, and families collected in a needs assessment conducted in Spring 2011.

Specifically, the following objectives must be addressed:

- Create new brand (logo, styles, identity) for statewide college and career information website.
- Develop an interactive website that serves the needs of the target audiences: students/families/teachers in Washington State, including those who may not have access to the GEAR UP program, but may be part of other college access and success programs such as the Washington College Bound Scholarship, Talent Search and Upward Bound.
- Provide user friendly access (for example, increasing browsing interactivity) to existing and new resources
- Create a timeline management tool for students and parents.
- Create a forum of “real” stories and advice from GEAR UP alumni.
- Develop a social networking space to enable participation and social validation through sharing and peer-to-peer interactions.
- Develop content delivery through multi-touch points.
- Provide user training to AGENCY staff upon delivery.

Scope of Work:

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Deliverable</i>
Phase I – Research and Discovery May – June, 2012	

Initial meeting between AGENCY and consultant.	Summary of Meeting notes.
Research and review current website, collaterals and other communications materials; Research audience demographics.	Recommendations report.
Conduct focus groups to assess ease of use of content and features	Findings report.
Define application features and functionality.	Technical specifications.
Phase II Identity and Design Development May – June, 2012	
Create attitude boards for new identity.	At least 4 options for identity logo/styles.
Develop creative brief for new brand.	Creative brief.
Develop initial website design concepts.	3 brief concepts.
Develop high-level information architecture & detailed content outline.	Content map.
Assess usability.	Findings report.
Draft high-level narrative content.	Subject area content.
Develop content and social media strategy.	Communications plan.
Phase III – Technical Development July – September 2012	
Refine chosen website design concept.	Website shell pages.
Implement core functionality of the website.	Functional pre-production site.
Integration of content into application framework.	Functional pre-production site.
Assess Usability	Findings Report
Phase IV – User Testing & Website Launch October – December 2012	
Refine key messages, narrative content, & functionality.	Refined website.
Provide site management training to HECB staff.	Training documentation.
Launch website.	Project completion.

1.3 MINIMUM QUALIFICATIONS

Minimum qualifications include:

- Licensed to do business in the State of Washington or provide a commitment that it will become licensed in Washington within thirty (30) calendar days of being selected as the Apparently Successful Contractor.
- 2 years experience creating identities and branding strategies for the public sector.
- 2 years experience delivering complex, content-heavy Drupal websites for multiple audiences.
- 2 years experience creating successful social media strategies in the education sector.
- 2 years experience integrating third party services and technologies with Drupal.

Bidders who do not meet these minimum qualifications will be rejected as non-responsive and will not receive further consideration. Any proposal that is rejected as non-responsive will not be evaluated or scored.

1.4 FUNDING

The AGENCY has budgeted an amount not to exceed **two hundred thousand** dollars (**\$200,000**) for this project. Proposals in excess of **\$200,000** will be considered non-responsive and will not be evaluated. In the event additional funding becomes available, any contract awarded may be renegotiated to provide for additional related services.

Any contract awarded as a result of this procurement is contingent upon the availability of funding. **This project will be entirely funded with federal funding from the GEAR UP (CFDA #84.334) and College Access Challenge Grant (CFDA #84.378) programs.**

Any contract awarded as a result of this procurement is contingent upon the availability of funding.

1.5 PERIOD OF PERFORMANCE

The period of performance of any contract resulting from this RFP is tentatively scheduled to begin on or about May 22, 2012 and to end on December 31, 2012. The AGENCY reserves the right to extend the contract for up to two one-year periods. Amendments extending the period of performance, if any, shall be at the sole discretion of the AGENCY.

1.6 CONTRACTING WITH CURRENT OR FORMER STATE EMPLOYEES

Specific restrictions apply to contracting with current or former state employees pursuant to chapter 42.52 of the Revised Code of Washington. Proposers should familiarize themselves with the requirements prior to submitting a proposal that includes current or former state employees.

1.7 DEFINITIONS

Definitions for the purposes of this RFP include: