REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS: VLCT WEBSITE SERVICE PROVIDER
Issued by:
Vermont League of Cities and Towns
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Issue Date: March 3, 2026
Question Due: March 17, 2026
Proposal Due: April 3, 2026, 4:00 PM

1.0 Introduction and Background

VLCT is issuing this Request for Proposals (RFP) for website hosting, monitoring, security, maintenance, design, and support services. VLCT is a small to mid-sized non-profit with approximately 50 employees. VLCT seeks a cost-effective, sustainable website support partnership and encourages proposals that balance technical excellence with affordability appropriate to nonprofit organizations.

1.1 About VLCT

The Vermont League of Cities and Towns (VLCT) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that was founded in 1967 with the mission of serving and strengthening Vermont local government.

VLCT Provides:
- Educational workshops and consulting advice for municipal officials so that they can deliver excellent service to their residents
- Support for legislation that strengthens local government
- Comprehensive insurance coverage for municipalities
- A Municipal Assistance Center for consultation on a wide range of municipal issues

VLCT Believes In:
- The critical role that local government plays in the lives of Vermonters
- Municipal authority over municipal issues
- Representative and participatory local government
- The value of public service and excellence in municipal leadership
- A commitment to honesty, integrity, and the highest ethical standards among public officials
- The value of collaboration as a means of strengthening cities and towns

- The individuality of each local government

VLCT is owned by its member municipal governments. A thirteen-member Board of Directors is elected to represent the general membership and govern the organization. Board members must serve as a selectperson, mayor, manager, or clerk in a member municipality. All VLCT member officials are welcome to attend board meetings. An executive director, appointed by the board, manages the league's day-to-day operations in assisting members through the five major areas of service described at the bottom of this page. VLCT also offers a variety of employee benefits at group rates and issues an Annual Report in late winter or early spring following the completion of the annual financial audit.

1.2 Current Website Technical Environment

The VLCT website is built on Drupal 10.6.2 and is currently hosted in Microsoft Azure within VC3's web environment.

VLCT does not have full administrative access to the existing code repository or database, as certain portions of the implementation rely on proprietary components maintained by the current vendor. The current vendor has stated they will assist in providing data and information required to support a transition to a new provider, should VLCT select a different vendor.

The website receives regular maintenance. The most recent major update (from Drupal 10.5 to Drupal 10.6) occurred on January 25, 2026, and the site is reviewed weekly for applicable updates.

A number of custom modules are present in the current Drupal installation, including:

- VLCT Member Login (Primary Euclid/CV Integration) – handles user login synchronization and integration with Euclid/CV systems (www.vlct.org/login)
- VLCT Careers – functionality supporting the secondary Careers theme (www.VermontTownCareers.org)
- VLCT Content – entity controller enabling mirroring of Euclid/CV content (Classifieds, Organizations, Staff, Events Calendar)
- VLCT Municipal Calendar – functionality for generating and rendering the Municipal Calendar (www.vlct.org/MuniCalendar)
- VLCT Toolkit – functionality supporting handbook (formerly "toolkit") rendering and generation (example: www.vlct.org/handbook/TownClerks)

2.0 Project Timeline

2.1 Launch Phase

RFP Release: March 3, 2026
Q&A: March 3 – March 17, 2026
Proposals Due: April 3, 2026, 4:00 PM
Review & Scoring: April 6 – April 8, 2026
Vendor Interviews: April 6 – April 10, 2026

Contract Awarded: April 15, 2026
Discovery Phase: April 15 – May 4, 2026
Development & Migration: May 4 – July 10, 2026
UAT & Staging Review: July 10 – July 31, 2026
Final QA & Content Freeze: August 1 – August 10, 2026
Go Live: August 11, 2026

2.2 Phase Two

- Kickoff: October 12, 2026
- Discovery: October 19, 2026
- Technical Platform Assessment: October 19 – November 6, 2026
- Development: November 9 – December 23, 2026
- Testing: December 23, 2026 – January 15, 2027
- Go Live: January 18, 2027

3.0 Scope of Services

VLCT expects Phase 1 to launch on the existing Drupal platform for timing reasons. However, VLCT is open to alternative CMS or platform recommendations for Phase 2, including but not limited to Drupal upgrades, Drupal distributions, WordPress, or other CMS platforms. Vendors may propose long-term architecture changes as part of the Phase 2 approach.

3.1 Initial Launch Phase

- Managed hosting with uptime guarantees, compliant data centers, automated backups, and full disaster recovery
- Ensure dependable site availability for time-sensitive claim form submissions using the hosting provider's standard uptime SLAs. VLCT is not requesting enterprise-grade high-availability infrastructure.
- Active monitoring: uptime, page speed, page errors, security events, Drupal patches and updates
- DDoS mitigation and cybersecurity protections.
- Accessibility compliance (WCAG 2.2 AA)
- Technical support with a ticketing system
- Ensure full continuity of the existing member login integration
- Ensure full continuity of VLCT's form integrations (currently Cognito forms) and the ability to transition to Origami Forms (ongoing project).
- Ensure all website pages (including handbook content) can be printed and downloaded in a clean, high-quality, VLCT branded, timestamped format that is easy to print and legible.

VLCT does not require a visual redesign prior to launch. Phase 2 updates, including improved search and handbook functions should be proposed but are not required before launch.

VLCT anticipates routine support needs and does not require dedicated full-time staffing. Vendors may propose support models appropriate for small-to-mid-sized nonprofit organizations.

3.1.1 Analytics and Reporting

VLCT currently uses Google Analytics 4 (GA4). The vendor must ensure continuity of analytics tracking post-migration (including tag verification in Dev/Stage/Prod), preserve historical tracking where possible, and validate key events prior to go-live.

Where printable/downloadable views are implemented, vendor will validate GA4 tagging behavior to ensure event fidelity is maintained.

Post-launch, the vendor will provide periodic operational reporting appropriate to the support model proposed.

3.2 Phase 2 Key User Enhancements

- An evaluation and redesign of the site's search capabilities, including indexing, relevance tuning, metadata, filters, and backend search technology.
- A rebuild or significant improvement of the online handbooks, including information architecture, presentation, navigation, print/download, and searchability.
- Review of long term platform suitability for VLCT's needs, including evaluation of Drupal vs. alternative CMS platforms. Term- platform suitability for VLCT's needs, including evaluation of Drupal vs. alternative CMS platforms.
- Evaluation and recommendation for optional Single Sign-On (SSO) for VLCT members.

3.2.1 Search Requirements

Proposals must include enhanced document search capabilities, including:
- Indexing of HTML pages and PDF documents (including embedded text extraction; OCR only if necessary and identified during discovery).
- Support for metadata (title, author, publish date, taxonomy) and faceted filtering.
- Relevance tuning (boosting by content type/recency/popularity as proposed).
- A clear plan for reindexing cadence and handling large files.
- Vendors must state the proposed search backend and any ongoing usage or licensing fees and include these in Total Cost of Ownership.
- *Optional: Vendors may propose additional features such as synonym dictionaries, typo tolerance, stemming, or semantic/NLP search as add-ons with separate pricing.*

3.3 Periodic Visual Refresh

As part of ongoing website maintenance and lifecycle management, the vendor must provide a visual look-and-feel refresh every 3–5 years. This refresh should update the site's theme, styling, and user interface patterns to maintain alignment with modern design, usability, and accessibility standards.

This periodic refresh does not require changes to the site's underlying information architecture unless otherwise recommended in future project phases.

Vendors must provide pricing for this visual refresh either as part of ongoing service or as a separately priced fixed-fee service.

3.4 Content Responsibilities

VLCT will author all website content. Vendors are not expected to substantially rewrite anything during any phase. Vendors are expected to configure content types, templates, and navigation, and to support content migration. During Phase 2, vendors should assume information architecture restructuring, template adjustments, and implementation of improved navigation/search, but no copywriting.

4.0 Pricing Requirements

Vendors must provide a clear, itemized pricing proposal that distinguishes between one-time costs and ongoing monthly or annual costs. Pricing must be transparent, sustainable, and structured to support predictable long-term budgeting.

4.1 Required Pricing Breakdown

Vendors must present pricing in the following categories:

A. **One-time/Initial Costs**
   a. Platform setup and onboarding

Codebase migration, environment configuration, DNS cut over

   b. Security hardening, performance tuning
   c. Any required discovery or assessment work

B. **Ongoing Monthly or Annual Costs**
   a. Hosting / Platform Services
   b. Maintenance & Operations
   c. Support Retainer

C. **Phase 2 Pricing** – *each item (a-d) must be priced as a separate, fixed not-to-exceed amount*
   a. Enhanced search functionality (engine configuration, indexing, metadata, relevance tuning)
   b. Improvements to the online handbooks, including structure, navigation, and usability
   c. Optional CMS/platform recommendations or evaluations
   d. Optional evaluation and recommendations for SSO ability

D. **Periodic Visual Refresh Pricing**
   Vendors must provide pricing for the periodic visual refresh (every 3–5 years) within a proposed contract term, including whether the refresh is included in the annual service fee or provided as a separately priced fixed service. Vendors may propose multi-year pricing options or renewal structures that support this requirement.

    E. **Optional Add-On Pricing (If Applicable)**
        a. Advanced search functionality (AI/semantic search, NLP)
        b. Additional UX improvements or component updates
        c. CMS migration or future redesign options
        d. Any other enhancements the vendor recommends

4.2 Total Cost of Ownership

Vendors must provide:

- First-year total cost
- Annual recurring cost after Year 1
- Any usage-based fees (e.g., API, search volume, storage)
- Licensing or SaaS subscriptions
- Visual Refresh Cost
- Clarification of multi-year discount options

Vendors must disclose any proposed annual increases for hosting, maintenance, support, or platform fees. Increases must be stated as a specific percentage, flat amount, or pricing tier change. If no increases are proposed, vendors must explicitly state that pricing remains flat for the contract term.

4.3 Pricing Worksheet

Vendors must complete and submit the VLCT RFP Pricing Workbook (Excel) provided with this RFP. Do not alter formulas or protected cells. Enter pricing only in the yellow input cells.

The workbook auto-calculates Year 1 and Year 2 totals and distinguishes:

- One-time costs
- Ongoing Monthly/Annual costs
- Phase 2 (fixed not-to-exceed)
- Optional Add-ons
- Rate Card

5.0 Evaluation Criteria

VLCT will evaluate proposals based on technical merit, security and service model strength, relevant experience, accessibility/performance approach, and overall value. VLCT may consider qualitative factors not fully captured by scoring and reserves the right to deviate from the scoring rubric. It is at VLCT's sole discretion to accept or reject any proposal.

5.1 Scoring Rubric

- Technical Approach & Security (30%)
- Relevant Experience & Team (25%)
- Service Model & SLAs (20%)

- Accessibility/Performance/SEO (10%)
- Cost & Value (15%)

VLCT may conduct finalist interviews/demos and request clarifications or best‑and‑final pricing prior to award.

6.0 Security Requirements

Vendors must describe their security practices and approach to protecting VLCT's website and data. Formal enterprise certifications are preferred but not required.

- Documented security practices governing hosting infrastructure and application security
- Web application firewall (WAF) and DDoS mitigation appropriate to organizational risk
- Regular application of Drupal core and contributed module security updates
- Monitoring for uptime, performance degradation, and security events
- Encrypted backups with documented retention policies
- Clear incident response process, including notification procedures
- Description of vulnerability management and patching cadence
- Multi-factor authentication for administrative access
- Role-based access controls for website administrators

Preferred but not required:

- SOC 2, ISO 27001, or comparable third-party security validation
- Periodic penetration testing or vulnerability scanning

Vendors should explain how their security posture aligns with small-to-mid-sized nonprofit organizations.

7.0 Hosting SLAs

Vendors must provide managed hosting and maintenance services appropriate to VLCT's operational needs and budget.

- Managed hosting environment suitable for Drupal 10
- Separate Development, Staging, and Production environments (or equivalent workflow)
- Target uptime of 99.9% or greater
- Regular automated backups with documented restoration procedures
- Disaster recovery approach appropriate to organizational scale
- Ongoing Drupal core and module updates
- Proactive monitoring of uptime and major performance issues
- Access to a ticketing-based support system

- Clearly defined support response times appropriate to the proposed service tier
- Performance optimization consistent with current best practices for Drupal websites

Vendors should describe:

- Their recommended hosting architecture
- Backup frequency and retention policies
- Disaster recovery approach
- Support structure and escalation procedures
- Any assumptions regarding traffic levels or infrastructure scaling

VLCT does not require enterprise-grade high-availability clustering or custom infrastructure unless recommended as a cost-effective solution.

8.0 Vendor Qualifications

- At least five comparable clients
- Three named references
- Bios for key staff

9.0 Proposal Instructions

VLCT encourages concise, well-structured proposals (maximum 25 pages excluding appendices).

- **Submission Format:** Submit one PDF (≤ 25 pages excluding appendices) plus a separate pricing worksheet.
- **Due Date: April 3, 2026** at **4:00 PM ET**.
- **Contact:** Lisa Goodell, lgoodell@vlct.org and Emmanuel Ajanma, eajanma@vlct.org

9.1 Required Proposal Contents (in this order)

a) Executive Summary: one page summarizing the approach, timeline assurance for the August 11 launch, and key differentiators.
b) Technical Approach: architecture for hosting/monitoring, security model, DR plan, deployment workflow, and performance strategy. Describe your assumptions and responsibilities for content ownership/entry, your approach to PDF/document indexing in search, and your plan for analytics continuity (GA4).
c) Initial Scope and Phase 2 Deliverables: itemized deliverables for Phase 1 (launch) and Phase 2 (search + handbooks), noting any prerequisites or client dependencies.
d) Schedule: confirm the Phase 1 dates and provide a high-level Phase 2 schedule aligned to VLCT availability after October 10.

e) Team: key staff bios (at least two primary plus any specialists for security, accessibility, search).
f) Relevant Experience: at least five comparable clients; include three named references (name, title, org, email, phone).
g) Accessibility & Performance: WCAG 2.2 AA testing plan and Core Web Vitals targets; tools and remediation timelines.
h) Security and Compliance: WAF/DDoS, patch cadence, logging/monitoring, incident response (notification timeline), backup/restore testing, SOC 2/ISO 27001 assurances.
i) Pricing: itemize onetime transition/onboarding, ongoing monthly/annual costs, a separate fixed not-to-exceed price for Phase 2 (search + handbooks), and a periodic visual refresh. Include any OCR/document processing, search platform, or analytics addon fees under Total Cost of Ownership and list any optional addons separately. -time transition/onboarding, ongoing monthly/annual costs, a separate fixed not-to-exceed price for Phase 2 (search + handbooks)-processing, search platform, or analytics add-on fees under Total Cost of Ownership and list any optional add-ons separately.
j) Assumptions and Risks: explicit assumptions (especially regarding content entry/migration scope) and risk mitigations.
k) Exceptions: any proposed exceptions to terms or SLAs.

9.2 Administrative Requirements

- Submit in PDF format and excel worksheet
- Questions Due: March 17, 2026
- Proposals Due: April 3, 2026.