

RFP #27-01 Web Development and Support Services for MassArt.edu

Project Specifications and Description of Services

Relevant Background

Founded in 1873, Massachusetts College of Art and Design (MassArt) is the only independent public college of art and design in the United States. Located in Boston, MassArt prepares artists, designers, and educators from diverse backgrounds to shape communities, economies, and cultures for the common good.

Overview

MassArt is seeking proposals from well-established and qualified vendors to provide ongoing web development, technical support, accessibility maintenance and remediation, and strategic enhancement services for MassArt.edu.

The website is a critical institutional platform supporting student recruitment, academic program visibility, public engagement, and external communications. As the digital front door for an art and design college, MassArt.edu must remain visually rich, expressive, accessible, and reflective of the creativity, energy, and diversity of the MassArt community. The selected vendor will collaborate closely with MassArt's Marketing and Communications Web Team to maintain the site and make strategic improvements that support institutional priorities.

MassArt.edu is the primary focus of this engagement, though targeted support for related College-managed digital properties may be requested when assigned and authorized.

Current Technical Environment and Content Model

MassArt.edu is built on WordPress and uses the Gutenberg block editor with a custom theme and reusable content components. The current environment includes Pantheon hosting and deployment, responsive layouts, Redis object caching, Pantheon platform caching, custom and third-party WordPress plugins, embedded Slate and Mailchimp forms, a custom Localist API integration, Accessible Web monitoring, analytics and tag-management tools, separate production/test/development environments, and Git-based code management.

MassArt.edu includes approximately 3,655 total pages and records, including 274 basic pages, 176 program pages, 864 news posts, 72 stories, 575 featured artworks, 770 user profiles, and more than 5,000 media items. The site includes text, media, featured content, people, event, story/quote, and navigation-related blocks.

Access to the WordPress backend, codebase, plugin inventory, hosting configuration, version information, and other detailed technical environment information will not be provided during procurement. The selected vendor will receive available technical documentation, appropriate access,

and relevant system information during onboarding. The College owns and pays for hosting services and institutional third-party platforms and licenses.

Web Support Goals

The selected vendor will help MassArt:

- Maintain the security, stability, accessibility, performance, and reliability of MassArt.edu.
- Provide responsive technical support and sufficient development capacity for a prioritized backlog of maintenance and enhancement requests.
- Support recruitment and institutional priorities through ongoing digital enhancements.
- Maintain and improve custom WordPress components, templates, functionality, and integrations.
- Provide strategic guidance on platform sustainability, accessibility, performance, analytics, technical SEO, structured content, metadata, and discoverability across traditional search engines and emerging AI-powered search experiences.

Scope of Work

MassArt seeks a flexible ongoing support model that balances maintenance, accessibility, consultation, and development services with capacity for strategic enhancements.

The effort ranges below are planning assumptions only and are meant to provide insight into the balance of types of work required. They are not guaranteed minimums, independently funded allocations, firm monthly commitments, fixed monthly caps, or cumulative allocations. Actual utilization may vary based on institutional priorities, project needs, available funding, and the agreed-upon contracting structure.

Essential Maintenance and Technical Support

Anticipated baseline effort: 12-20 hours per month.

Provide routine maintenance, monitoring, troubleshooting, and support to keep MassArt.edu secure, functional, stable, and high-performing. Services may include:

- WordPress core, theme, and plugin updates, including compatibility testing and correction of resulting layout or styling issues.
- Security patching, vulnerability review, malware scanning, uptime monitoring, incident response, backup verification, and recovery support.
- Troubleshooting and resolution of WordPress, front-end, performance, integration, and hosting-related issues.
- Maintenance of custom code, templates, components, plugins, and functionality.
- Maintenance and optimization of the Localist events integration, Slate and Mailchimp forms, analytics tools, and other assigned institutional integrations.

There are no known issues with the Localist API at this time. Any recommendation to replace or significantly change an institutional platform would be separately evaluated.

Accessibility Maintenance and Remediation

Anticipated baseline effort: 10-20 hours per month, depending on institutional priorities

MassArt has completed a comprehensive assessment, planning process, and prioritized accessibility remediation of the MassArt.edu codebase. Relevant findings and remaining priorities will be shared during onboarding. MassArt's current accessibility conformance standard is WCAG 2.1 AA. Services may include:

- Review, validation, and prioritization of findings from Accessible Web and other accessibility testing.
- Code-level accessibility remediation across themes, templates, components, plugins, integrations, and user workflows, as needed.
- Regression testing following website updates.
- Technical guidance for third-party platforms, embeds, multimedia accessibility, content-editor practices, and accessibility remediation support for other College-managed digital properties when assigned.

Consultation & Planning

Anticipated effort: 4-6 hours per month.

Provide regular check-ins, estimation, tracking, documentation, and strategic consultation. MassArt currently uses Asana, Airtable, and Google Workspace for web project coordination. Respondents should be prepared to work within MassArt's existing systems and workflows while recommending practical process improvements where helpful.

MassArt does not have a required preference for whether meetings, project management, QA, reporting, and account administration are absorbed into a retainer, deducted from available capacity, or billed separately. Respondents should clearly explain their proposed approach and reporting method.

Front-End Development and Strategic Enhancements

Anticipated effort: 12-25 hours per month.

Support prioritized enhancement work that advances institutional, recruitment, accessibility, performance, and digital-experience goals. Services may include:

- UX/UI design and front-end development aligned with MassArt's visual identity, accessibility requirements, and digital standards.
- Development or modification of WordPress templates, reusable components, content modules, page layouts, forms, and custom functionality.
- Optimization of landing pages, high-priority website sections, prospective student journeys, search tools, directories, filters, and admissions-related experiences.
- Performance optimization, Core Web Vitals improvements, image optimization, code refactoring, and technical debt reduction.
- Analytics implementation, conversion tracking, technical SEO, structured data, metadata frameworks, and reporting enhancements.
- Evaluation of relevant tools or emerging technologies. AI-powered search tools or third-party search platforms may be recommended as separately scoped, priced, and evaluated options.

Scope Boundaries and Separate Authorization

The baseline engagement does not include full website redesigns or rebuilds, major platform migrations or technology migrations, large-scale content migrations or data imports, development of entirely new platforms or separate websites, major integration projects requiring significant new architecture, paid-media strategy or buying, or large-scale document, multimedia, or third-party platform remediation.

MassArt.edu is the primary focus of this engagement. Other College-managed websites, subdomains, and platforms may receive targeted support when assigned and authorized, but full ongoing maintenance responsibility for those platforms is not included in the baseline scope unless separately scoped. Any major modernization effort, platform replacement, substantial new system architecture, or significant accessibility remediation beyond baseline support will require separate review, scoping, authorization, and funding.

MassArt is the issuing institution for this RFP, and proposals should be structured around MassArt.edu and MassArt's anticipated web development and support needs. Respondents may also describe how their rates, service tiers, staffing model, or support approach could scale to additional Massachusetts public higher education institutions if those institutions elect to use the resulting contract.

Work Prioritization and Service Expectations

MassArt will maintain an evolving backlog of maintenance, accessibility, development, and strategic enhancement requests. Priorities may change based on urgent issues, institutional deadlines, emerging needs, available funding, and vendor capacity.

The selected vendor will work primarily with MassArt's Marketing and Communications team, with the Director of Web and Digital Strategy serving as the primary point of contact for day-to-day coordination, priorities, and approvals. Depending on the work, the vendor may also coordinate with MassArt Marketing and Communications, Technology staff, content managers, MassArt-affiliated site administrators, accessibility stakeholders, or other campus offices.

MassArt's standard business hours are Monday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Eastern Time. Routine support is expected to occur during standard business hours. For urgent requests, MassArt expects acknowledgement within approximately one hour during normal business hours, with prompt attention and regular status updates until resolved. Critical issues, including website outages, security incidents, or problems that significantly affect access to the site, should receive immediate escalation and active response through the vendor's proposed emergency support process.

Historically, urgent or critical support requests have been infrequent. Respondents should describe their availability for after-hours or emergency coverage, including response windows, escalation procedures, resolution targets, communication practices, and whether after-hours or emergency support is included in the proposed pricing or billed separately.

Year-One Priorities

Year-one priorities are expected to include ongoing website maintenance, accessibility remediation and maintenance, performance optimization, analytics and SEO improvements, and strategic enhancements that support recruitment and institutional priorities.

Typical backlog items include bug fixes, component updates, accessibility remediation, performance and caching improvements, plugin support, content-management enhancements, front-end theme refinements, integration support, and new features or functionality.

One known technical debt area involves occasional front-end theme regressions following WordPress core updates, including minor changes to spacing, padding, and component presentation. The selected vendor may be asked to investigate underlying causes, strengthen update and QA processes, and implement fixes that preserve visual consistency across future releases.

Vendor Qualifications

Responding vendors must demonstrate relevant experience supporting complex websites for a **minimum of five** American higher education institutions, public-sector organizations, nonprofits, or similarly complex institutional environments. Vendors must be well-established, being in business for a **minimum of four** years.

Required qualifications include:

- Demonstrated experience supporting complex, content-rich WordPress websites with custom themes, reusable components, plugins, integrations, and Git-based deployment workflows.
- Experience supporting higher education websites or similarly complex institutional websites with decentralized stakeholders, accessibility requirements, and public-facing marketing or recruitment goals.
- Direct experience with Pantheon-hosted WordPress environments or comparable managed WordPress hosting environments.
- Full-stack development capabilities, including WordPress, PHP, HTML, CSS, JavaScript, databases, APIs, testing, deployment, and rollback.
- WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility testing, remediation, regression prevention, and accessibility governance.
- Website security, performance optimization, uptime monitoring, backups, incident response, and disaster recovery.
- Strong project management, QA, documentation, communication, staffing continuity, and remote collaboration practices.
- Live support during the hours of 8AM to 6PM EST.

Preferred qualifications include:

- Direct experience supporting higher education websites, particularly recruitment, admissions, academic program, advancement, event, and institutional communications content.
- Experience supporting the visual standards, brand expectations, storytelling needs, and digital audience journeys of an arts, design, museum, cultural, or creative institution.
- Understanding of the role a higher education website plays as both a recruitment platform and a public expression of an institution's identity, community, and creative work.
- Experience supporting recruitment journeys, program discovery, accessibility, analytics, technical SEO, decentralized content ownership, and cross-campus stakeholder coordination.
- Experience with Localist or comparable event platforms, Slate or comparable admissions CRMs, Mailchimp or comparable email platforms, Accessible Web or comparable accessibility tools, Drupal, Modern Campus, and Google Analytics/Tag Manager.

Staffing, Delivery Model, and Subcontractors

Respondents should identify where services will be performed and how the vendor will ensure compliance with applicable confidentiality, security, communication, and contract requirements. Any proposed staffing model will be subject to College review and approval.

Any proposed use of specialist subcontractors must be clearly disclosed in the proposal and is subject to College review and approval. The contractor must remain fully accountable for the work, communication, quality, security, confidentiality, and contract performance.

Vendor Response and Evaluation Criteria

Proposals should describe the vendor's recommended approach, relevant experience, and proposed service model. MassArt will evaluate the full proposal, including qualifications, approach, staffing, service levels, pricing, and ability to provide high-quality and cost-effective support.

MassArt will give strong consideration to vendors that can demonstrate the ability to provide continuity of support, quick understanding of an existing custom WordPress/Pantheon environment, and sustain responsive, collaborative support for a small internal web team.

Proposals Must Include:

1. Evidence of responsive long-term support for at least five American higher education institutions, public-sector organizations, nonprofits, or similarly complex institutional websites, including examples of maintenance engagements, support for small internal teams, issue triage, urgent response, QA, continuous improvement.
2. Relevant experience supporting WordPress websites, accessibility remediation, UX/UI enhancements, integrations, Pantheon or comparable hosting, security, performance, and incident response.
3. Technical and strategic approach to maintenance, development, testing, deployment, documentation, custom theme/component support, security, performance, accessibility, technical debt, analytics, SEO, content discovery, AI-powered search considerations, and modernization recommendations.
4. Project management and communication approach, including how the vendor will receive, estimate, prioritize, track, report, and communicate on work using MassArt's current tools and workflows.
5. Service-level policies for routine, urgent, and critical requests, including business hours, response targets, escalation paths, after-hours availability, and any associated fees.
6. Staffing plan, including team structure, primary point of contact, assigned personnel, continuity, availability, subcontractors, and where services will be performed. Please include resumes for key personnel.
7. Pricing model, including estimated monthly hours, hourly rates by role or clearly explained blended rate, billing method, treatment of meetings/PM/QA/reporting, time tracking, after-hours costs, exclusions, third-party expenses, and how additional authorized work would be billed.
8. Three United States-based client references, in higher education or similarly complex environments. Include:
 - a. Client and organization name
 - b. Project type and duration of the engagement
 - c. Contact name, title, email, and phone number

d. Brief description of services provided

There is no guarantee of volume to the awarded bidder. Needs may vary from month to month; however, MassArt anticipates using the selected vendor for services described herein as needs arise and funding allows. It is preferred that the vendor invoice monthly on a time-and-materials basis, with a monthly report outlining hours worked attached to the invoice.

Bidders should also be cognizant of the fact that MassArt is a public institution of art and design. Therefore, the College must have a high quality AND cost-effective service offering. The successful bidder will have to demonstrate the ability to achieve both objectives. MassArt will use the entirety of responses in the section of the RFP titled "Vendor Response and Evaluation Criteria" as the evaluation criteria. Rates are one factor, but the selection will also take into consideration the firm's ability to deliver on the other criteria. The awarded vendor will be required to submit invoices on a monthly basis with monthly reports outlining hours worked attached to the invoice.

Administrative Notes

Required contracting documents, including the Certificate of Non-Collusion, Commonwealth Standard Contract Form, tax-compliance documentation, and W-9 documentation, will only need to be completed by the awarded vendor.

Links to online portfolios, case studies, or accessibility samples are acceptable in place of embedded media within the proposal file. Respondents should apply by the indicated deadline. The College has not identified mandatory insurance requirements, required certifications, registrations, or Commonwealth vendor qualifications that must be completed prior to proposal submission.

The College has used a variety of contracting models for web development support. Respondents should demonstrate that they have the capacity, expertise, and resources necessary to fulfill the scope of work.

This engagement is not being funded through a grant.

After proposal review, selected finalists will be invited for an interview with College representatives during the week of July 27, 2026. Virtual interviews will last approximately one hour.