

MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

RFP # 26-11 Web Development & 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's mission is to prepare artists, designers, and educators from diverse backgrounds to shape communities, economies, and cultures for the common good.

Overview

Massachusetts College of Art and Design ("MassArt") is seeking proposals from qualified vendors to provide ongoing web development, technical support, accessibility maintenance and remediation, and strategic enhancement services for [MassArt.edu](https://massart.edu).

MassArt.edu is a critical institutional platform supporting student recruitment, academic program visibility, public engagement, and external communications. Maintaining and evolving the website requires a combination of full-stack WordPress development, UX/UI expertise, accessibility best practices, systems integration, performance optimization, and strategic digital consultation.

The selected vendor will collaborate closely with MassArt's Marketing & Communications Web Team to address maintenance and development requests and to support institutional priorities. The vendor will also serve as a strategic thought partner, providing recommendations that help MassArt.edu remain secure, accessible, high-performing, sustainable, visually compelling, and aligned with the College's recruitment, communications, and digital-experience goals.

Consultation or coordination with MassArt Technology staff and other campus stakeholders may also be required. At the discretion of the Marketing & Communications team, the vendor may provide technical guidance, development support or accessibility remediation for additional College-managed websites and digital platforms, including those built on Drupal, Modern Campus, Slate, and other systems.

Current Technical Environment

MassArt.edu currently operates within an environment that includes:

- WordPress with a custom theme and reusable content components
- Hosting and deployment through Pantheon
- Responsive layouts supporting desktop, tablet, and mobile experiences
- Redis object caching and Pantheon platform caching
- Custom and third-party WordPress plugins
- Embedded Slate and Mailchimp forms
- A custom API integration with Localist, MassArt's event calendar platform
- Accessibility monitoring and reporting tools

- Analytics and tag-management configurations
- Separate production, test, and development environments
- Git-based code management and deployment workflows

During onboarding, the selected vendor will be expected to review and validate the website architecture, codebase, plugin inventory, integrations, development workflow, hosting configuration, and available documentation. The vendor should identify risks, dependencies, documentation gaps, and opportunities to improve security, accessibility, performance, maintainability, and long-term platform sustainability.

Web Support Goals

The primary goals of this engagement are to:

- Maintain the security, stability, accessibility, performance, and reliability of MassArt.edu
- Provide responsive technical support and sufficient development capacity to address an ongoing, prioritized backlog of maintenance and enhancement requests
- Serve as a collaborative partner and strategic resource to MassArt's Web Team
- Support recruitment and strategic institutional initiatives through ongoing digital enhancements
- Develop and maintain custom WordPress components, templates, functionality, and integrations
- Provide proactive guidance that supports platform modernization and alignment with evolving SEO practices for AI-powered search and discovery
- Provide technical, development, and accessibility support that strengthens consistency across MassArt's broader web ecosystem as needed

Scope of Work

MassArt seeks a flexible ongoing support model that balances required maintenance, accessibility, consultation, and development services with capacity for strategic enhancements. Responding vendors should recommend an appropriate staffing, pricing, and capacity model based on the Scope of Work and clearly describe the level of service included in their proposed fee.

The service categories and estimated effort below are planning assumptions rather than fixed, guaranteed, or cumulative allocations. MassArt will direct the use of contracted capacity based on institutional priorities.

Essential Maintenance & Technical Support

Anticipated baseline effort: 12–20 hours per month

The selected vendor will provide routine maintenance, monitoring, troubleshooting, and technical support necessary to keep MassArt.edu secure, functional, stable, and high-performing. Actual monthly effort may vary based on incidents, security needs, integration issues, platform updates, and institutional priorities.

Services include:

- WordPress core, theme, and plugin updates, including compatibility testing with MassArt.edu's custom theme and components and correction of resulting layout or styling issues
- Security patching, vulnerability review, and malware scanning
- Uptime monitoring and incident response

- Backup verification and system recovery support
- Troubleshooting and resolution of WordPress, front-end, performance, integration, and hosting-related issues
- Responsive, cross-browser, and cross-device testing and corrective maintenance
- Maintenance of custom code, templates, components, and functionality
- Ongoing maintenance, troubleshooting, and optimization of the Localist events calendar integration, including API connections, scheduled synchronization, event displays, and caching behavior
- Maintenance and troubleshooting of integrations with admissions, email marketing, analytics, and other institutional platforms
- Plugin evaluation, configuration, replacement, or removal when appropriate

The vendor should identify any routine monitoring, security, hosting, backup, or maintenance services that are excluded from its proposed fee or require additional third-party costs.

Accessibility Maintenance & Remediation

Anticipated baseline effort: 10–20 hours per month

The selected vendor will provide ongoing accessibility monitoring, testing, consultation, and remediation for MassArt.edu following the College's completion of a comprehensive accessibility audit, remediation roadmap, and priority remediation work to bring MassArt.edu into conformance with applicable WCAG standards.

At the discretion of the Marketing & Communications team, a portion of the contracted capacity may be directed toward accessibility work for other College-managed websites and digital platforms, as needed.

Services include:

- Ongoing accessibility monitoring, including review, validation, and prioritization of findings from automated reports for MassArt.edu and other assigned College websites
- Accessibility testing and code-level remediation across themes, templates, components, plugins, integrations, and user workflows, including validation following website updates and correction of regressions
- Technical guidance and remediation support for accessibility issues involving third-party platforms, tools, embeds, and other College-managed digital properties
- Consultation and technical guidance on video and multimedia accessibility, including captions, transcripts, audio descriptions, accessible media players, and related implementation practices
- Accessibility guidance, documentation, and training for content editors and other campus stakeholders

Work involving extensive component redevelopment, large-scale multimedia or document remediation, or significant intervention within third-party platforms may require separate scoping and authorization.

Consultation, Planning & Backlog Management

Anticipated effort: 4–6 hours per month

The selected vendor will manage and track assigned development work while providing regular check-ins, progress updates, and clear communication about timelines, risks, dependencies, and next steps. The vendor will also serve as a strategic thought partner to the MassArt Web Team, providing consultation on technical

approaches, design implementation, accessibility, performance, platform sustainability, and specific content or functionality issues.

Services include:

- Weekly and as-needed check-ins, including preparation, follow-up, and documentation of key decisions and next steps
- Review, estimation, and prioritization of development requests
- Backlog management, capacity, and roadmap planning
- Identification of dependencies, risks, and recommended technical or strategic approaches
- Coordination with MassArt Technology staff and other internal stakeholders as needed

Vendors should indicate whether meetings, project management, quality assurance, reporting, and account administration are included in the proposed fee and whether those activities are deducted from available development capacity.

Front-End Development & Strategic Enhancements

Anticipated estimated monthly effort: 12–25 hours per month

Front-end development and strategic enhancement projects may arise from institutional and marketing initiatives or be identified collaboratively by the MassArt Web Team and the vendor. Work will be selected from an ongoing backlog and prioritized by MassArt based on institutional needs, urgency, impact, technical dependencies, available funding, and vendor capacity.

Projects may be phased over multiple monthly service periods when necessary. The vendor should proactively identify and recommend opportunities to evolve MassArt.edu in response to higher education web practices, emerging technologies, audience needs, and changing digital expectations. MassArt will determine which recommendations to pursue based on institutional priorities, available funding, and anticipated impact.

Services may include:

- UX/UI design and front-end development that align with MassArt's visual identity, accessibility requirements, and digital standards
- Developing or modifying WordPress templates, reusable components, content modules, page layouts, forms, and custom functionality using PHP, HTML, CSS, and JavaScript
- Creation or optimization of landing pages, high-priority website sections, and prospective student journeys
- Development or enhancement of interactive features, including program finders, filters, directories, comparison tools, search functionality, 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, reporting enhancements, and data-informed improvements
- Integration or enhancement of third-party systems, APIs, forms, and content feeds within the existing website architecture
- Research, evaluation, and piloting of relevant higher education web practices, tools, and emerging technologies that improve functionality, usability, engagement, or digital storytelling

- Front-end development or technical consultation on other College-managed websites and platforms when assigned and authorized by Marketing & Communications

This list is illustrative rather than exhaustive. Vendors are encouraged to recommend additional approaches or enhancements that would advance MassArt's recruitment, communications, institutional, and digital-experience goals.

Initiatives involving substantial redevelopment, entirely new platforms, large-scale content migration, or significant new systems architecture will require separate scoping and authorization.

Work Prioritization & Service Expectations

MassArt will maintain an ongoing backlog of maintenance, accessibility, development, and strategic enhancement requests. Priorities may change in response to urgent issues or time-sensitive updates, institutional deadlines, emerging needs, or available resources.

The vendor will support this process by providing estimates, identifying risks and dependencies, and recommending appropriate sequencing. Once work is assigned, the vendor will manage and track progress updates, providing access and transparency, and communicate promptly about capacity constraints, delays, or changes that may affect scope, cost, or delivery.

Responding vendors should provide their standard service-level policies for routine, urgent, and critical requests, including response targets, escalation procedures, business hours, emergency support options, and associated fees.

Out of Scope

The following services are not included unless separately scoped and explicitly authorized:

- Full website redesigns or rebuilds
- Large-scale content migrations or data imports
- Development of entirely new platforms or separate websites
- Major integration projects requiring significant new architecture
- Marketing strategy, brand strategy, or content creation beyond minor edits
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Vendor Qualifications & Minimum Requirements

Responding vendors must demonstrate:

- Significant experience supporting complex, content-rich WordPress websites and digital ecosystems
- Experience supporting higher education institutions, public-sector organizations, or similarly complex environments
- Strong full-stack development capabilities, including WordPress, PHP, HTML, CSS, JavaScript, databases, APIs, and third-party integrations
- Experience developing and maintaining custom WordPress themes, templates, reusable components, plugins, and integrations
- Experience working within Git-based development, testing, deployment, and rollback workflows

- Proven expertise in WCAG 2.2 AA accessibility testing, remediation, regression prevention, and accessibility governance
- Demonstrated capabilities in website security, performance optimization, uptime monitoring, backups, incident response, and disaster recovery
- Strong UX/UI design capabilities and experience creating visually compelling, user-centered digital experiences that support recruitment, engagement, and conversion goals
- Familiarity with analytics platforms, user behavior analysis, conversion tracking, technical SEO, and data-informed website optimization
- Experience integrating third-party institutional systems and services, including admissions platforms, CRMs, event calendars, marketing tools, forms, APIs, and external content feeds
- Ability to provide strategic consultation, roadmap planning, and proactive recommendations that support platform modernization and evolving digital practices
- Strong project management, quality assurance, documentation, and communication practices, including the ability to collaborate effectively with remote stakeholders
- Sufficient staffing and availability to provide responsive support and continuity of service throughout the engagement

Preferred Experience

Experience with the following is preferred:

- Pantheon-hosted WordPress environments
- Localist or comparable event calendar platforms
- Familiarity with Drupal, Modern Campus, Slate, or other institutional platforms
- Long-term support of small internal web teams through remotely managed environments
- Experience with visual standards and brand expectations of an art and design institution

Vendor Response and Evaluation Criteria

Proposals should be responsive to the Scope of Work, and describe the vendor's recommended approach, relevant experience, and the proposed service model.

Proposals must include the following:

1. Relevant Experience & Capabilities

Describe the vendor's experience supporting higher education institutions, complex WordPress websites, or comparable digital environments.

Include relevant examples of:

- Ongoing website development, maintenance, and support
- Accessibility testing, conformance maintenance, and remediation
- UX/UI design and strategic digital enhancements
- Third-party integrations
- Pantheon or comparable managed WordPress hosting environments
- Website security, performance, and incident-response support

2. Technical & Strategic Approach

Describe the vendor's recommended approach to supporting and evolving MassArt.edu, including:

- Website maintenance, development, testing, deployment, and technical documentation
- Maintaining and enhancement of custom themes, templates, components, plugins, and integrations
- Security, monitoring, vulnerability management, patching, malware response, backup verification, recovery, and incident response
- Performance optimization, platform stability, and technical debt management
- Accessibility maintenance, remediation, regression prevention, and support for third-party platforms
- Any assumptions, platform risks, dependencies, and opportunities for modernization MassArt should consider
- Strategic recommendations related to UX/UI, recruitment, content discovery, analytics, technical SEO, AI-powered search, and emerging digital practices

Include examples demonstrating the vendor's ability to provide proactive strategic guidance in addition to routine technical support.

3. Project Management, Communication & Service Levels

Describe how the vendor will:

- Receive, estimate, prioritize, track, and report on requests
- Manage an ongoing backlog, available capacity, and changing institutional priorities
- Communicate progress, capacity, risks, dependencies, schedule changes, and anticipated changes to scope, cost, or delivery
- Collaborate remotely with MassArt staff and other stakeholders
- Provide staff coverage, continuity, and escalation

Include the vendor's standard service-level policies for routine, urgent, and critical requests, including business hours, acknowledgment and response targets, emergency contact procedures, escalation paths, after-hours availability, and any associated fees.

4. Staffing Plan

Identify:

- Team structure, roles, responsibilities, and relevant experience
- Primary point of contact for day-to-day communication, project management, and meetings
- Personnel responsible for development, UX/UI design, accessibility, and quality assurance
- Expected continuity and availability of assigned personnel
- Any subcontractors and the services they would perform

5. Pricing

Proposals should recommend a flexible ongoing support model that addresses the service areas described in the Scope of Work. Pricing proposals should include:

- Estimated number of hours per month to accomplish the work in this request for proposal as well as the hourly rate for the contractor by role and service capacity (e.g., Project Manager, Developer, Accessibility Specialist, etc.)
- Treatment of meetings, project management, consultation, reporting, and quality assurance.
- Methods for tracking and reporting time or capacity
- Emergency or after-hours support costs
- Exclusions or third-party expenses

Please note, there is no guarantee of volume to the awarded bidder. Needs may vary from month to month, however it is anticipated that the college will utilize the selected vendor for all services described herein. The vendor will invoice the college monthly on a time and materials basis.

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 a monthly reports outlining hours worked attached to the invoice.

6. References (MassArt may contact references directly)

Provide three client references, preferably in higher education or similarly complex environments. For each reference, include:

- Client and organization name
- Project type and duration of the engagement
- Contact name, title, email, and phone number
- Brief description of services provided

Finalist Interviews

After a review of proposals, a select group of finalists will be invited for an interview with college representatives. The interviews will take place during the week of July 27, 2026 and will last for approximately one hour.