# Annapolis, London Town & South County Heritage Area, Inc. (ALTSCHA)

DBA Chesapeake Crossroads Heritage Area



Request for Proposals

Website Update and Redesign

Release Date: August 29, 2023

Proposal due: September 25, 2023

QUESTIONS CONCERNING THIS REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO:

Carol Benson, Ph.D., Executive Director

Chesapeake Crossroads Heritage Area

Phone: 410-627-6018 – E-mail: PZBENS00@acounty.org

## Background: About ALTSCHA, Inc.

Annapolis London Town & South County Heritage Area, Inc. (ALTSCHA, DBA Chesapeake Crossroads Heritage Area) is one of 13 certified heritage areas in the State of Maryland. Maryland Heritage Areas are locally designated, locally managed regions where public and private partners make commitments to preserving historical, cultural and natural resources for sustainable economic development through heritage tourism. We are a partnership among the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, Anne Arundel County, The City of Annapolis, the Town of Highland Beach, and heritage-related nonprofit organizations and businesses that encourages economic development through resource enhancement and heritage tourism. Certified by the State of Maryland in 2001, the Heritage Area incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 2003.

*The mission of the Chesapeake Crossroads Heritage Area is to advance, support and promote the natural, historic and cultural resources of the region.*

Our locally-planned and state-designated area was originally geographically smaller than it is now; it followed the Bay’s coastline between Sandy Point State Park and the southern County line, and the heritage area operated with the marketing name of “Four Rivers Heritage Area.” The maritime heritage of the area along the coast was emphasized, along with the colonial-era heritage and cultural amenities of the small, well-preserved city of Annapolis. The themes of the original area were focused on this smaller area and are now a bit dated, while our enlarged area features additional outdoor spaces with parks and trails; the varied heritage of North County; agricultural and railroad heritage; Native American heritage; and more. With our new marketing identity (Chesapeake Crossroads Heritage Area) we have established new interpretive themes around the topic of “Crossroads,” and while they are likely too involved for a website homepage, they are resonant with our collective vision for future projects. There are four new themes:

* Crossroads of Place
* Crossroads of Culture
* Crossroads of Struggle for Equality and Freedom
* Crossroads of Social Change

Heritage tourism is a dynamic force in the regional economy of Annapolis and Anne Arundel County, incorporating elements of destination marketing, hospitality, historical and cultural preservation, and open-space conservation essential to the sustainable viability of this diverse area. ALTSCHA works in close collaboration with our Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) partner, Visit Annapolis and Anne Arundel County, and our marketing efforts are closely allied; however, ALTSCHA’s mission is distinct, as our deep commitment and goal is to advance, support and promote all our nonprofit heritage partners no matter their size, their budget, or their resources, through our visitor products, our social media marketing, and our web-based activities, including our website.

## Project Objectives

ALTSCHA invites proposals from a firm or individual designer/website developer for a professional update and redesign of the organization’s current website, www.chesapeakecrossroads.org[,](http://www.chesapeakecrossroads.org/) to enhance its overall brand awareness and online presence. The website was professionally upgraded and redesigned in 2017 on a Wordpress platform using the “Hudson” theme. The homepage and navigation were designed for our original, more limited area and themes. Our SEO is supported by Yoast. The website is maintained in-house by ALTSCHA staff, and contains a homepage and 40 additional pages, several of which make use of “portfolio” entries that are similar in function to listings in a database, as well as a calendar supplied by an Events Calendar plug-in. The primary navigation is for the visitor who is not local:

* Visit
* Things to Do
* Attractions
* Events
* Map
* Educators

 We also have secondary navigation designed for the stakeholder audience:

* News
* Resources (there are 9 subpages)
* About Us

In redesigning its website, ALTSCHA’s goals include:

* Position the Chesapeake Crossroads Heritage Area as a leading heritage tourism destination.
* Present our cultural, historical, and natural resources (including heritage sites, museums, historic districts, and the Roots & Tides Scenic Byway), in a dynamic, consumer-friendly way that educates and informs about our unique area and results in multi-day visitation to the region.
* Implement a design architecture that allows for easy accommodation of in-house updates.
* Facilitate seamless promotional integration with Visit Annapolis and Anne Arundel County (ALTSCHA’s Destination Marketing Organization), the Maryland Office of Tourism Development, and the Maryland Heritage Areas Program.
* Integrate social media channels into the website to make the most up-to-date content easy to find.
* Improve the user experience of the site, particularly on mobile phones.

## Scope of Work I -- General Requirements

ALTSCHA utilizes a Marketing and Communications strategy designed for reaching two audiences:

1. Visitor Experience Information: The current website provides visitor listings for sixty-six (66) non-profit heritage attractions; these are not adequately “front and center” on the home page and are lost in the difficulty of site navigation, resulting in fewer than optimal page visits. Through a dynamic, responsive, image-rich, easy-to-navigate redesigned website, ALTSCHA aims to appeal to visitors and potential visitors of all ages, including young students and families planning vacations to central Maryland and/or the D.C./Baltimore area, as well as our target audience of heritage tourists, who “travel to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past.” An active Events Calendar includes at least 50 monthly event listings during the tourist season of May to October. For local awareness, ALTSCHA utilizes the social media outlets Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, to optimize local awareness of our heritage partners and events. The target audience for this entire section of the website wants to find what they are looking for quickly and directly, without wading through “Who We Are” information.
2. “Corporate” or Stakeholder Information: ALTSCHA partners and stakeholders use the website to access information related to the heritage area’s grant programs, educational programs, research resources, and publications, and to learn more about historic preservation initiatives and programs. Staff make announcements which are frequently updated, accommodated through a “Blog” format on the homepage. The target audience for the stakeholder subsection of the website will seek out what they want and return frequently for updated information.

Due to the organization’s two distinct audiences, the project requires a balance that allows both audiences to find the information they are looking for.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  **Objective:** | **Outcome:** |
| Mobile-oriented website | Improved usage by younger visitors, betterSEO, more visits to site |
| Homepage emphasis on the Visitor Experience | Functioning mobile-friendly presentation of listings for each partner site, creating referrals to partner websites |
| Advertising and marketing specifically aimed athighlighting “heritage” in the destination (Phase Two of this two-year project – not included in this RFP) | Increase in visitors to the destination and to heritage attractions |

## Scope of Work II -- Additional requirements/expectations:

1. Mobile optimization (responsive design): Create a responsive site that is well-designed, fully functional, and easily viewable on mobile phones and tablets.
2. Secure site certification: Continue the site’s “https” level of security.
3. Accessibility Standards: The site must also be compliant with the American Disabilities Act Section 508, passing validation tests to ensure accessible compatibility.
4. Navigation: An optimized navigational layout for the entire website (team will sign off on this before the vendor proceeds).
5. Site Search: Google Site Search incorporated into to website.
6. Social Media: Integrate social media used by the heritage area (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube) into homepage.
7. Events: Refreshed look and feel for Events Calendar, and integrate Event Spotlight onto the homepage. Separate ongoing events from one-time events.
8. Partner Listings: Pages or listings for each of 66 heritage attraction partners.
9. Photography: Showcase the striking scenes found within the heritage area by integrating images into the entire site, making the photographs focal points rather than afterthoughts. Users should have the option to enlarge photos if they click or hover over images. Store photographs in a media gallery. Note: new photography has been made available through partners some of whom require a credit line.
10. Blog: Continue the current placement of a Blog format on the front page.
11. Sign-Up Forms: Continue to offer the opportunity for users to register for the E-newsletter through the site.
12. Search Engine Optimization: Register website at both free and paid sites (when feasible), and ensure that key search terms appear in title tags, headings, page text, and images throughout the site.
13. Analytics: Ensure that GA4 and other marketing tools are fully integrated.
14. Display: Correct display in all major browsers (including Firefox, Chrome, Safari, DuckDuckgo)
15. Content Conversion: Conversion of all content and documents from the existing website into the CMS-based website/templates.
16. Training: Adequate back-end or CMS training for ALTSCHA team.

**Scope of Work III** -- Website Additional Features:

1. Homepage with numerous images.
2. Map: Develop an interactive map of heritage attractions based on content from the visitor brochure, indicating heritage area boundaries, trails, the North County African American Trail, and the route of the “Roots & Tides” Scenic Byway.
3. Donor tools (via Paypal or another vendor) for “Support Us” functionality.
4. Online Educational Resources listings for teachers, home-school parents, and lifelong learners (see existing, under “Educators”).

**Process and Deliverables:** The vendor must deliver to ALTSCHA a fully operational, updated website (or a paired website and “microsite” for stakeholders), utilizing the following steps:

1. Research/Site Structure: Work with ALTSCHA team to determine goals, customization needs, style preferences and outline a new site structure/number of pages.

2. Design: Present ALTSCHA with 3 new creative options for review, revision, and final selection.

3. Development (front-end and back-end): Using either WordPress or a custom content management system, the front-end and back-end programming will be completed based on the approved design and site structure layout.

4. Beta Review Stage/Final Changes: Test the site in the various Windows and Mac browsers as well as mobile phone browsers, validate HTML/CSS coding, check all links, and test functionality of the site. ALTSCHA will also review the site and clarify any necessary changes before the launch.

5. Server Transfer and Launch: Upon final approval, transfer all of the website and database files to the organization's hosting server (currently WP Engine).

## Schedule (Phase One of the Project):

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Activity | Anticipated Completion Date |
| Consultant selected | Target Date: October 6, 2023 |
| Begin work with Consultant | October 2023 |
| Project Completion and Website launch | By June 30, 2024 |

Work on the website will begin immediately upon finalization of contract arrangements between the selected bidder and ALTSCHA management. A fully functioning, updated website is expected to be developed, implemented and posted online no later than June 30, 2024. Phase Two of this two-year project will include advertising and marketing specifically aimed at highlighting “heritage” in the destination, and driving visitors to and across our nonprofit heritage attractions’ sites.

## Proposal Submission

Candidates should submit their information listed below by 5 PM, September 25, 2023, via E-mail to heritage\_area@aacounty.org, with any supplementary materials mailed to the heritage area office, Chesapeake Crossroads Heritage Area, Arundel Center, 44 Calvert Street, Annapolis, MD 21401. Alternatively, candidates can utilize Dropbox or its equivalent to share submitted information.

## Submission Guidelines and Requirements

1. Name of company, a point of contact, email address, address, and telephone number.
2. An overview of the company and its history (one page). If applicable, note minority or women business enterprise (MBE/WBE) designation.
3. A brief (no more than one page) description of the relevant experience of the principal(s) who will perform the work. A copy of their resume(s) and any appropriate product examples may be included.
4. A concise (no more than four pages) description of the approach to the work, including the tasks defined in “Scope of Work II: Process” and a definition of deliverables for each, a schedule and any suggested modifications to elements of the scope of work if deemed appropriate.
5. Relevant samples of similar web design work that illustrate the contractor’s ability to meet the technical and aesthetic qualities required. Provide URLs for previous works demonstrating the design and technical capabilities outlined in this request for proposals.
6. Cost estimate: totaled and subtotaled for each task and proposed deliverables.
7. The quoted price should be inclusive. If your price excludes certain fees or charges, you must provide a detailed list of excluded fees with a complete explanation of the nature of those fees. Also, please describe any ongoing fees or charges associated with the proposal (i.e., web hosting fees). Note that ALTSCHA will not pay for any travel costs incurred by the contractor.
8. If the execution of work requires the hiring of sub-contractors, please state this in your bid. ALTSCHA will not refuse a proposal based on the use of sub-contractors; however, the organization retains the right to refuse the sub-contractors you have selected. If applicable, note minority or women business enterprise (MBE/WBE) designation for any subcontractors.

BUDGET

We would like each firm to respond to this Request for Proposals with how you would allocate a **budget of approximately $35,000** to complete the project by June 30, 2024. Your proposal should include the preferred payment method and payment schedule, including payment requirements, available discounts, and/or other invoicing details the firm deems significant.

## SELECTION CRITERIA AND CONTRACT TERMS

A contractor will be selected based on response to the scope of work statements. Creativity, vision, technical approach, professional experience, sensitivity to our mission, and price/value relative to the scope of work will be considerations. Additional consideration will be given to firms based in Anne Arundel County.

ALTSCHA will negotiate terms upon selection. All contracts are subject to review by legal counsel and will be considered awarded only upon signing of an agreement or contract, which outlines terms, scope, budget, and other necessary items. This RFP does not obligate ALTSCHA or the selected contractor until a contract is signed and approved by both parties. ALTSCHA will not be responsible for work done, even in good faith, prior to the final approval of the proposed contract.