

Making life better on the Esplanade for all.

**REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL  
Website Design & Development**



The screenshot shows the website header with the Esplanade Association logo and the tagline "Making life better on the Esplanade for all". Navigation links include "VISIT US", "THINGS TO DO", "ABOUT US", "SUPPORT", "CONNECT", and "CHARLESBANK". Below the header is a large image of the Charles River Esplanade with trees and buildings in the background. The main content area contains text about the organization's mission: "Founded in 2001, the Esplanade Association is the non-profit that works to **revitalize** and **enhance** the Charles River Esplanade, **sustain** its natural green space, and **build community** in the park by providing educational, cultural, and recreational programs for everyone."

**RFP Issued:** May 5, 2026  
**Responses Due:** June 1, 2026

**Contact Information**

Please direct questions and your proposal to:  
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**Table of Contents:**

**Organization Background.....2**  
**Current Website.....3**  
**Goals.....4**  
**Interests.....5**  
**Project Specifications.....5**  
**Budget, Partnership & Recognition Benefits .....6**  
**Milestones and Deadlines.....7**  
**Proposal Requirements.....7**  
**Evaluation Criteria for Proposals.....8**  
**Submission Details/Deadlines.....8**  
**References.....8**

## **Organization Background:**

Ask anyone what they picture when you say the word “Boston,” chances are that they mention the iconic Charles River Esplanade. They may not realize it, but this landmarked park is one of the most recognizable features of the city, the B-roll of almost every film that takes place here, the site of the yearly Fourth of July Fireworks display attended by 100,000 people, the daily running route for many, and a destination for tourists to experience the beloved greenspace and bluespace along the Charles River.

The Esplanade Association (EA), founded in 2001, is the only community-supported nonprofit dedicated to the care of Massachusetts' most-frequented 64 acres within the state park system: the Charles River Esplanade. Working in partnership with the state's Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), EA's mission is geographically specific yet intentionally inclusive: to improve the experience of Boston's landmarked historic riverfront as a vital destination for environmental, physical, and social connection and wellness for visitors of all ages, abilities and backgrounds—“Making life better on the Esplanade for all.” EA's departments revitalize the park's natural green space through native plantings, deliver capital amenity and safety improvements, and build community through award winning volunteer service programming and over 100 free educational, cultural, and recreational programs serving more than 10,000 people each year. The park currently welcomes over 4 million annually including residents from every county in the Commonwealth and tourists from across the world.

Our longstanding partnership with DCR enables us to activate the park in unique ways: we are one of the few organizations that holds performances on the DCR Hatch Memorial Shell, and our yearly Moondance gala, held IN the park, is one of the few Boston galas that brings in \$1M+ in revenue and sells out each year.

EA is building upon a 25-year successful track record to transform our role and the Esplanade experience: after a decade of planning, EA hired a new Executive Director in 2023, completed a strategic plan for operations in 2024, signed a lease agreement with the Commonwealth and commenced construction in 2025, and are building toward the opening of the Smith Family Pavilion and Charlesbank Campus on the Esplanade in late fall 2026. Beyond park care, capital projects, and free programs, EA's operations of the Pavilion and Campus will soon add visitor services to further our mission: to expand access, enjoyment and stewardship of the riverfront, with new year-round, universally designed, indoor-and-outdoor amenities and workspace. EA will operate spaces that are programable by EA, reservable by public groups and rentable by private parties. EA will also now have backups for outdoor activities in the case of weather advisories. EA seeks to communicate our readiness to welcome and serve visitors with a website that echoes our vision for a positively memorable park encounter: fully ADA accessible to enjoy the available benefits, intuitive and simple levels to access “skim, swim or dive” in information about both EA and the Esplanade, ease of orientation to engagement options and opportunities, clarity for transactions to reserve, participate or partner on site activations, and interfaces with content that inspires and revitalizes across any season or time of day.

## **New Hub of Org Operations and Esplanade Welcome:**

The Smith Family Pavilion and Charlesbank Campus will establish Boston's newest waterfront destination on the Esplanade to welcome neighboring residents and workers, all of greater Boston and the Commonwealth, and international tourists to the oldest part of the Esplanade designed and named “Charlesbank” by Frederick Law Olmsted, Sr. in the 1880s. What was nearly 150 years ago North America's first free gymnasium in a public park, Charlesbank subsequently supported many forms of recreation—children's plays, concerts,

movie nights, and then with the construction of Storrow Drive, became public pools amid ballfields, until closed to the public from the 1990s until now. Building on the site history, the Pavilion and Campus that replace the close pool complex will provide long-missing resources, promote visitorship, and enable more equitable access to the park than ever before. The culmination of dozens of open meetings to envision public needs, the completed project will redefine the Esplanade experience and reinvigorate the connections along the Charles River

The new 1.9-acre campus will return to the Esplanade basketball and tennis courts and introduce the first pickleball courts for recreation that complements the nearby Teddy Ebersol's Red Sox Fields for baseball and soccer, the Alford Memorial Spray Deck and universally ADA-accessible Gronk Playground. It will also introduce a flexible plaza for pop up fairs, a 1000-squarefoot at-grad stage for free performances, a mural wall, and more public art. Sheltered from Storrow Drive by the Pavilion structure, the flexible plaza, court lawns and art lawns can host passive gatherings and actively programmed pop-up fairs, events, and more.

The new 9,000 square foot Pavilion will house a visitor center with interpretive and orientation services, the park's first year-round public restrooms, a welcome lobby with a café, information desk and educational displays, public meeting rooms, and programmable open-air spaces including a sheltered patio and upper deck. The Pavilion will also house EA staff workspace and an operations yard to provide visitor services and lead year-round maintenance, volunteer engagement, free programs and capital improvement planning from within the park. The entire campus will offer free public wifi and the information desk will have iPad access for web access and online services.

This Pavilion and Campus will be a new "gateway" to the Esplanade, footsteps from MBTA stations on the Red Line (Charles), Green Line (Science Park) and Orange Line and Commuter Rail (North Station), and is adjacent to the Esplanade's only ADA parking and safe pull off/drop off area from Storrow Drive. This will be EA's new address and site for year-round educational, service, and social gatherings to complement free seasonal programming that will continue across other parts of the Esplanade, from the Museum of Science to the Boston University Bridge with iconic venues like the Hatch memorial Shell and Community Boating Inc. in between. EA seeks a website that parallels the Pavilion and Campus' universal accessibility, signaling a next generation experience at a park site and broader riverfront with an exceptional but underknown history.

### **Current Website:**

1) EA will maintain the URL [esplanade.org](http://esplanade.org) (We also own [esplanadeassociation.org](http://esplanadeassociation.org))

2) EA's current website was originally developed in 2006 on WordPress and is built on legacy code that limits compatibility with modern plugins, tools, and design standards. As a result, routine content updates and visual edits are difficult to implement without risking site instability or layout issues:

Key challenges include:

- Limited ability to visually edit content without breaking page layouts
- Difficulty updating global elements such as the header and footer
- Inconsistent page templates and layouts throughout the site
- Inconsistent formatting across pages
- Difficulty searching for and making "umbrella" updates on out-of-date content.

EA currently uses several third-party platforms that are not fully integrated, including:

- Google Calendar for programs and events
- Humanitix for event registrations (open to alternative free event registration platforms)
- DonorPerfect, Double the Donation, OneCause, and GivenGain for online donations
- Constant Contact for newsletter sign-ups
- Google Maps for park features orientation
- Canva and Heyzine for annual reports and other publications
- Social media platforms (Instagram and Facebook)
- QR codes

3) Site navigation and information architecture are also areas of concern. The main menu includes many submenu items, resulting in a cluttered navigation experience. There are opportunities to consolidate pages and simplify site structure. Additionally, internal search results do not consistently prioritize core informational pages over less relevant content.

4) Now that EA has a 25-year history and potential to educate on park history, we will need site functionality to explore organizational or park archives, histories of notable activity, or collections. We will also need the capacity to supplement interpretive content and rotating displays at the Pavilion and Campus with a repository of further information online across languages and with search and suggestion capability.

5) Importantly, the current website has been flagged as not fully compliant with accessibility standards.

### **Goals:**

The relaunch of EA’s website is a major priority for the organization in 2026, and would have the full attention of the Marketing & Communications staff as well as input on a high level from EA’s Executive Director, with the vendor have access to the ED as needed and on at least a weekly basis.

1. Create a new discovery space for EA and the Esplanade that centers our new visitor services operations from the Pavilion and Charlesbank:
  - a. Introduction of campus resources and options
  - b. Ease for an individual, public group, private party, or programming partner to explore or initiate booking or activating reservable spaces
  - c. Archive and search functions for repositories of organizational and park history or curricula
  - d. More integrated mapping, registration, donation and CRM tracking
  - e. Possibly: “sign-in” interfaces (for vendors/attendees/volunteers) that feel like part of the EA public interface.
2. Accessibility:
  - a. The new website should be designed to be accessible to people with disabilities by adopting the [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.1 Level AA](#).
  - b. Candidates must have extensive experience creating websites that are engaging and WCAG compliant
  - c. Screen reader accessibility must be a factor in design
3. Enhanced UX:
  - a. Develop stronger, more intuitive and more clearly organized site navigation that reflects EA’s work, mission, and goal to parallel a joyful park experience
  - b. Integration across home screens, hand-helds, and watch interfaces

4. Easy to maintain, difficult to break:
  - a. For EA staff to easily update content within clean templates going forward
  - b. Clear processes of how to properly update and maintain
  - c. Robust logic and systems that guide future site content growth or back-filling on our own time

### **Interests:**

1. Bold, non-traditional UX/UI approaches that will inspire search and discovery (even for users with much knowledge of the organization and park) For example:
  - Visitor → “What’s happening today”
  - Donor → “Give / recurring portal”
  - Event organizer → “Book a space”
  - Volunteer → “Sign up”
  - Tourist → “Plan a visit”
2. Features that “grow” over time or reveal more “around the bend” across seasons and inspire people to come back to check in... What is a nonprofit version of Google’s daily search logo or doodles?
3. Design formats/templates that ease integration with app interfaces

### **Project Specifications:**

1. **Content Management System:** Website must be built on WordPress.org, or an equivalent platform with widely supported themes and plugins, avoiding programs that could hinder future maintenance. EA’s site administrators must be able to manage pages, content, images, and basic layout elements without requiring developer assistance.
2. **Platform Integrations:** Website must support current third-party platforms (see “*Current Website*”). Must also support integrations with new platforms such as *FareHarbor*, EA’s preferred public booking platform to reserve spaces at the Pavilion and Campus.
3. **Accessibility Compliance:** Website must comply with applicable accessibility laws, standards and guidelines.
4. **Design & Branding:** Website must adhere to [EA’s style standards and brand guidelines](#): modern and cohesive to enhance usability, clarity, and visual appeal. The design should ensure brand consistency across all pages, while allowing for appropriate flexibility for departments and partners to express distinct visual identities (i.e. annual GroundBeat Concert Series, annual Boston Marathon Charity Team, etc.). The vendor shall provide design templates for the homepage and multiple tiers of subpages, and the site should support dynamic features that enable engaging content presentation.
5. **Information Architecture:** Website must uphold a clear, intuitive, and flexible information architecture that enables access and discover key content. Site navigation, including menus, should be easy to use, consistent, and support dynamic, frequently updated content.
6. **Website Search Capabilities:** Website must include an internal search function that allows users across language and ability to locate relevant content. Search results should be accurate and prioritized by relevance, ensuring high-value pages appear prominently over less relevant or outdated content. Search results for “archived content” on “past exhibitions, past performances, past programs,” is clearly identified as such via the search. The vendor may propose a new search solution, provided it integrates with WordPress, supports accessibility standards, and presents clear, easy-to-navigate results and links.
7. **Search Engine Optimization:** Website must meet latest standards for search engine optimization

(SEO) best practices and allow for integration with analytics tools (e.g., Google Analytics).

8. **Mobile Optimization:** Website must be optimized for mobile devices, ensuring consistent and user-friendly experience across smartphones, wrist devices, and desktop browsers.

### **Support & Documentation:**

Along with the site, the vendor must provide basic documentation and guidelines to enable staff to manage and maintain site post-launch. Proposals should also indicate specifics on vendor availability for post-launch support and maintenance. We will need access to the back end/coding for future updates.

The vendor will serve as an on-call advisor for 45 days after the launch of the website for bug fixes and troubleshooting.

### **Content Development:**

All content will be provided by EA, included but not limited to copy, imagery, videos, maps, and other media assets. EA will be responsible for following the vendor timelines for providing content, and any delays from EA would not be held against the vendor.

Vendor responsibilities include incorporating EA-provided content into the website, formatting it appropriate for display, and ensuring compatibility with visual design, technical requirements, and accessibility standards. *The vendor is not responsible for creating, sourcing, or editing content, but we would embrace strategic editorial input from the vendor, especially around legacy content.*

### **Budget, Partnership & Recognition Benefits:**

The available funds Esplanade Association has for this work is approximately \$90,000 over a 4.5-5-month engagement. While the Esplanade Association has a relatively modest (non-profit) project budget, we have a significant audience reach—4 million park users annually, and that is before we double access to wellness amenities from 50% to 100% of the year. EA views this project not merely as a service contract, but as a high-profile creative partnership. Beyond budgeted project funds, EA is committed to leveraging its reach to elevate the selected firm's brand through the following avenues:

#### 1. Creative "Blue Sky" Autonomy

- We seek a Firm that would use this latitude to produce career-defining work.
- EA is specifically seeking a "progressive" and "bold" aesthetic. We commit to a streamlined approval process, providing the Selected Firm direct access to our Executive Director to minimize "design-by-committee" and preserve the integrity of the creative vision

#### 2. Physical Presence & In-Park Recognition as EA's "Digital Experience Architect" This includes:

- On-Campus Acknowledgment: For in-kind support valued at more than \$10,000, EA would include the firm's name/logo on the permanent "Partners and Contributors" Naming Wall within the Pavilion's lobby.
- "Experience Designed by [Firm Name]" credits on the site and any in-park touch-screen interfaces with the site.

#### 3. Marketing & Press Amplification

- Marketing the site as part of a multi-channel PR campaign surrounding the building's grand opening.
- Press Release Integration: The Selected Firm will be featured in a dedicated section of the official

press kit as "Digital Experience Architect"

- Social Media Spotlight: A "Behind the Design" series across our social platforms (Instagram/LinkedIn) highlighting the firm's creative process and philosophy to our nearly 25,000 followers.
- Case Study Rights: Full permission to submit this project for industry awards (Webbys, Awwwards, etc.), with EA providing any necessary data, testimonials, or video assets to support the entry.

#### 4. Access to EA's Networks

- Launch Event: An invitation for the Firm's principals to attend the VIP Ribbon Cutting Ceremony with an opportunity to be introduced to key stakeholders.
- Footer Signature: A "Designed by [Firm Name]" link will remain in the global footer of the website for the duration of the site's lifecycle.

### **Milestones and Deadlines**

The Charlesbank campus is currently scheduled to open late 2026, construction dependent. We seek to launch the website in November 2026. We expect the active engagement to run June 15 up to November 15, 4.5-5 months, with follow up testing and trouble shooting as needed. Milestones could include:

#### *Phase 1 – Core Website Launch*

*By launch date of website, the vendor will focus on delivering a refined fully-designed set of 20 high-priority pages:*

- *These pages will serve as the foundation of the new site, highlighting key information related to the organization, the park, and accessing the new building*
- *Implement approved site map, consolidating and restructuring content with prioritization of improved user experience*

#### *Phase 2 – Expanded Content Development*

*Following the initial launch date, remaining pages and secondary content will be developed and integrated into the site by*

- *Developing remaining pages based on approved site map and content organization*
- *Continue content migration, consolidation, and optimization process*
- *Refine and expand content based on user and internal feedback gathered post-launch*

#### *Content Governance and Support*

*To support ongoing content creation and maintenance beyond vendor engagement, the vendor must:*

- *Develop flexible page templates that enable internal staff to create and manage content consistently*
- *Provide clear guidelines outlining content standards, formatting, and publishing processes*
- *Ensure templates are designed to maintain visual and structural integrity while allowing for flexibility*

### **Proposal Requirements**

#### *Company Overview*

1. Agency background, including history, staff size and capabilities, and case studies highlighting successful projects.
2. Team member bios and their roles.

### *Creative Services Capabilities*

3. A detailed overview of creative services capabilities, including an approach to creative strategy, concept development, and production.
4. Proposed project description, timeline, and long-term site maintenance plan.

### *Account Management*

5. An overview of how the agency handles project management, communication, and reporting.

### *Cost Breakdown*

6. Cost breakdown by agency service area/function.

## **Evaluation Criteria for Proposals:**

All responding proposals will be reviewed and graded by EA based on organizational capacity and experience, as well as proposed costs. Using the rating scale below, applications will be evaluated for:

1. Demonstrated expertise & organizational capacity via references and sample projects
2. Performance & outcome indicators
3. Proposed schedule to meet project timeline
4. Narrative on applicable value of work to budget
5. Clarity of proposed work description
6. Plan for long-term site maintenance

## **Submission Details/Deadlines**

- *Monday May 18:* Please submit any questions to [erainville@esplanade.org](mailto:erainville@esplanade.org)
- *Thursday May 21:* We will release answers to questions and post to our website [esplanade.org/rfp/](http://esplanade.org/rfp/)
- *Monday June 1:* Submit via email a proposal narrative, budget and any applicable supporting documents to [erainville@esplanade.org](mailto:erainville@esplanade.org). Please provide the name of the main contact person for the proposal in your email submission.

## **References:**

### **1. Site Map**

The selected vendor shall propose a site map that consolidates existing pages into a clear and simplified structure. Related content should be combined where appropriate to reduce redundancy, streamline navigation, and prevent lengthy and cluttered pages. The page menu should be organized to minimize excessive submenu items and improve usability, ensuring important information and updates are easy to navigate in a well-organized framework.

Existing pages are [linked here](#). As part of the proposed site map, the vendor should evaluate which existing pages would be more appropriately structured as posts to improve content organization and searchability. The vendor is encouraged to recommend improvements based on best practices in user experience and information architecture.

## 2. Websites of comparable organizations

Website	What We Like
<a href="https://www.rosekennedygreenway.org/">https://www.rosekennedygreenway.org/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dynamic homepage with eye-catching video feature</li> <li>• Clear topic organization with creative use of icons</li> <li>• Use of images for events page (not solely calendar grid)</li> <li>• Featured content slider for recent/important updates</li> </ul>
<a href="https://arboretum.harvard.edu/">https://arboretum.harvard.edu/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rotating/sliding elements for layered content</li> <li>• Intuitive imagery and features that align with mission and identity</li> </ul>
<a href="https://www.baa.org/">https://www.baa.org/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vibrant and engaging webpages</li> <li>• Prominent display of current updates</li> </ul>
<a href="https://www.gtnpf.org/">https://www.gtnpf.org/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subtle scroll motion elements</li> <li>• Clear and organized menu structure</li> </ul>
<a href="https://www.obama.org/">https://www.obama.org/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dynamic integration of text and imagery</li> <li>• Clear and organized drop down menu structure</li> </ul>
<a href="https://www.rutharts.org/">https://www.rutharts.org/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative and eye-catching visual elements without reliance on photography</li> </ul>
<a href="https://www.radiatinghope.org/">https://www.radiatinghope.org/</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear and organized homepage</li> <li>• Every page has unique dynamic elements</li> </ul>