| # | Questions | Answer |
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| 1 | Please confirm whether View Source is eligible to respond, including whether any incorporation, registration, or vendor status requirements apply? | Vendor Eligibility: Proper Insurance Requirements & not on Federal Debarment List. Need a Sams.gov registration to submit. Yes offerers outside the US can participate. Foreign offerers can register with Sam.gov |
| 2 | Which stakeholders will participate in reviews, and who will have final approval authority for strategy, design, technology, and launch decisions? | There is a U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) National Solar Observatory (NSO) website committee representing NSO's departments and programs that will participate in reviews throughout the process. The Heads of IT and EPO/C chair this committee, and will be responsible for final approvals—while the NSO Director will always be kept in the loop. Additionally, an additional member will be coordinating our content—i.e., copy and images. |
| 3 | Is there an established budget range for the core project, and will optional ongoing support be funded separately? | We have an established initial budget range for the core project, which will be disclosed during the proposal process. Optional ongoing support and scope expansions will be funded and contracted separately as needed. |
| 4 | What brand guidelines, design assets, or visual standards are currently available, and are any updates anticipated during the project? | There is an NSO brand manual that will be shared with the chosen partner. This is the result of a recent rebranding that is not yet fully launched. There is also an NSF brand manual that needs to be followed. |
| 5 | Has NSO conducted recent audience research, usability testing, analytics analysis, or stakeholder interviews that can inform discovery? | The NSO has conducted preliminary audience research, and relevant findings will be shared with the selected partner during discovery. We are open to discussing whether additional user research or testing is warranted within the project scope. |
| 6 | Which scientific data tools, repositories, identity systems, APIs, forms, and third party platforms must the redesigned site integrate with or direct users toward? | Google Workspace tools could/should be integrated as needed. JIRA tools could/should be integrated as needed and NSO-specific data repositories, such as the NSO Data Center and facility-specific archives (e.g., DKIST, GONG). There are external data repositories we will need to discuss how to best integrate—i.e., from a functionality standpoint, these may need to remain under the control of the specific parties responsible for the repositories, with minimal intervention, but there should be an easy way to make them look like they belong to NSO. Google Workspace and/or Ping Federate authentication could/should be considered for user access. |
| 7 | Could NSO share the current CMS, approximate content volume, number of editors, and any known publishing workflow limitations? | We currently use Wordpress. The core public site consists of over 250+ active static pages (covering Observatory governance, facilities like DKIST and GONG, visitor info, education/outreach, and scientist documentation) alongside hundreds of news items, press releases, and blog posts dating back several years. It also houses a large, highly visual media library containing high-resolution solar photography, scientific diagrams, and press kits.<br><br>Publishing: Content is managed by a core team of approximately 10 to 20 key content editors distributed across NSO departments, including Education & Public Outreach / Communications (EPO/C), IT, and scientific facility staff.<br><br>Workflow Limitations: Current publishing limitations include an aging page-builder framework, limited flexibility in custom layout templates, inefficient media asset management for large scientific image files, and the need for better role-based workflow permissions prior to publishing. Resolving these bottlenecks to allow for flexible, modular page building is a key goal for the redesign. |

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| 8 | Which outcomes would NSO consider the strongest evidence of success one year after launch, and are baseline measurements currently available? | We want a website our staff is proud of, our visitors keep coming back to to learn the latest about the Sun, and the community of solar physicists can easily navigate when looking for assets for their own research. |
| 9 | When scientist and public audience needs compete, how does NSO expect priorities to be balanced across navigation, content, and homepage visibility? | We are open to exploring options. An approach that has been heavily considered is that of NSF NOIRLab which “asks” their visitors if they are “scientists” in their homepage so the user experience can be tailored appropriately. |
| 10 | How does this redesign relate to NSO’s broader digital roadmap, particularly the future roles of the public website, intranet, scientific tools, and external platforms? | The website redesign is part of NSO’s ongoing rebrand to better fit what is expected today from a center of scientific excellence that builds and operates the most advanced ground-based solar research facilities in the world. Under the motto “One with the Sun” NSO’s online presence needs to convey that everyone is welcome in knowing and contributing to our understanding of our home star. The intranet, for our staff, needs to provide an efficient, effective, and frustration-free experience that builds . |
| 11 | Page 19 requests at least three comparable project references. Page 25 separately requests five customers currently receiving similar services. Are both requirements cumulative, and must all five be current engagements? | Minimum of 3 references is adequate - may submit up to 5 for consideration. |
| 12 | For this remote website engagement, does Article 11 of the linked draft contract apply as written, including $5 million general liability, $1 million per claim/$3 million aggregate professional liability, and three-year continuing coverage? | Yes this applies as written - insurance requirements uploaded as attachment to RFP |
| 13 | The cover lists September 28 for questions and rhubbard@aura-astronomy.org, while Article 4 directs questions to you. Please confirm the controlling question deadline and contact, and the October 13 submission cutoff of 3:00 p.m. Mountain Standard Time. | Question Deadline is 9/28 - Contracts Contact is Rachel Hubbard rhubbard@aura-astronomy.org |
| 14 | Can development and system administration be performed from Portugal, including CMS access? | the answer to question 1 will address pre-req for eligibility. |
| 15 | Which UEI, SAM or foreign tax registrations must be complete at proposal stage rather than before award? | see question 1 - Sam.gov must be registered at submission. |
| 16 | Is there a budget range for the redesign, and should that include hosting and support after launch? | see question 3 |
| 17 | The technical proposal asks for three comparable references, while the qualifications form asks for five current customers. Which requirement controls? | see question 11 |
| 18 | CMS preference. The SOW asks the contractor to recommend and implement a CMS/hosting solution. Does NSO have a preferred platform family (e.g., WordPress, Drupal, or another), existing hosting/identity constraints, or a hard requirement for a specific CMS? Or should offerors recommend a platform within NSO/AURA security and maintainability constraints? | There is no preference. We currently use Wordpress but are willing to switch to a software that would fit better our updated needs. |
| 19 | Scope boundaries — public site vs. scientist portal vs. intranet. How should offerors treat the staff-only intranet and the scientist portal relative to the primary public site for base pricing? Are these (a) fully in-scope builds for the base award, (b) IA/UX and template work with light implementation, or (c) optional / later-phase items? What authentication or identity system (if any) must the intranet use? | While we are open to options, ideally (i) the intranet look and feel is exactly the same as the public site, so no additional work here other than what would be expected (i.e., password protected, nso.edu accounts only, and intranet specific menus); and (ii) the scientist portal landing page (and some additional pages) look and feel is exactly the same as the public site BUT some integration may be needed with data repositories that will remain in their own environments (e.g., JIRA, ftp server, etc.). |

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| 20 | Content inventory / page count. Can NSO share an approximate page count, content volume, or current sitemap for https://www.google.com/url?q=http://nso.edu&source=gmail&ust=1790688743010000&sa=E (and any related properties in scope)? Who owns the content audit deliverable timing relative to contract start? | The core public site consists of over 250+ active static pages (covering Observatory governance, facilities like DKIST and GONG, visitor info, education/outreach, and scientist documentation) alongside hundreds of news items, press releases, and blog posts dating back several years. It also houses a large, highly visual media library containing high-resolution solar photography, scientific diagrams, and press kits. |
| 21 | Scientific data & tool integrations. Please list the high-priority data access tools, external systems, or APIs that must be integrated or deep-linked at launch versus those that may remain linked-out or deferred. Are custom application builds expected, or primarily hub pages and curated access pathways? | Primarily hub oages and curated access pathways unless during our review process we deem custom application builds truly necessary. Google Workspace tools could/should be integrated as needed. JIRA tools could/should be integrated as needed and NSO-specific data repositories, such as the NSO Data Center and facility-specific archives (e.g., DKIST, GONG). There are external data repositories we will need to discuss how to best integrate—i.e., from a functionality standpoint, these may need to remain under the control of the specific parties responsible for the repositories, with minimal intervention, but there should be an easy way to make them look like they belong to NSO. Google Workspace and/or Ping Federate authentication could/should be considered for user access. |
| 22 | Are there any licensing, hosting, procurement, or technology constraints vendors should consider when recommending a CMS? Hosting ownership. After launch, who owns and pays for hosting (NSO/AURA account vs. contractor-managed)? Any required U.S.-only hosting, FedRAMP-adjacent, or AURA IT security review gates? Are there mandatory hosting locations, IT/security standards, or identity/SSO assumptions for the public website and the staff intranet? | seeking clarification - will post updated Q&A with answer |
| 23 | Comparable experience. For the “similar size, complexity and nature” references (Technical Proposal ≥3; Qualifications Section C asks for five current similar customers): will multi-audience public websites for education, nonprofit, or hospitality organizations be accepted as comparable, or does AURA expect prior NSF, federal research, or observatory/science-institution website references specifically? | Multi-audience public websites for education, nonprofit, or hospitality organizations will be accepted as comparable—additional provided context on how those would qualify as comparable will be welcome. |
| 24 | Submission packaging. Please confirm that a compliant submission is exactly two PDFs (Technical Proposal and Price Proposal), and whether the completed Qualifications Package (Section 4) and Offeror’s Proposal for Contract (Section 3) should be bound inside the Technical PDF, Price PDF, or split across both. | Please combine with technical proposal PDF |
| 25 | First, is there a funding ceiling or anticipated budget range for this engagement, so that our pricing attachment is aligned with the Observatory's expectations? | see question 3 |
| 26 | Is the contract intended to be firm fixed price per phase or time and materials? | FFP |
| 27 | the instructions limit offerors to two documents, a Price Proposal and a Technical Proposal, and note a preference for PDF with a separate pricing attachment. Can the qualifications package required in Section 4 be included within the Technical Proposal, or is it expected as a third document? | same as Question 24 - combine with tech PDF |
| 28 | Do you have current baseline measurements for any of the stated KPIs in the Success Matrix, and are there specific quantitative targets NSO expects the selected vendor to meet? | We will discuss during kick-off with chosen partner |

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| 29 | What CMS platforms are currently used, if any? Is the preference to remain on the current CMS? | duplicate |
| 30 | What are your top pain points with your current CMS?? | Some examples include: the site lacks professional UX/UI design and performs poorly; visual inconsistency (fonts, layouts, image sizes); cluttered layouts; poor mobile experience (missing functionality, rendering issues); slow load times, especially for images; updates are slow and sometimes altered during deployment; staff lack ability (or permission) to easily edit content directly. These challenges may be due either to the currnet CMS not being a good fit or the current CMS not being used appropriately. |
| 31 | Are there any licensing, hosting, procurement, or technology constraints vendors should consider when recommending a CMS? | duplicate |
| 32 | If you had to rank in the order of importance, what order would you rank the following? Licensing cost, ease of use for content editors. Ability to easily create your own layouts, performance, SEP Capabilities | Performance would be number one. Ease of use for content editors is really important. We coud do with a few set templates, so being able to create new ones after those are set as part of this effort, is not that important. SEP capabilities should follow from a well-thought strategy. Licensign cost is importand and will be evaluated in terms of what comes with it. |
| 33 | Please provide an overview of the current NSO website technology stack, including CMS and version, hosting environment, front-end/back-end technologies, database(s), search technology, authentication/identity systems, analytics/tag management, and any other material infrastructure component | We currently use Wordpress.  Hosted on Bluehost, no cms, Linux server, sql, Wordpress built-in search, Google Analytics, Google Workspace SAML user auth. |
| 34 | Are vendors expected to assume access to the existing source code, CMS/database<br>exports, configuration files, analytics accounts, and hosting environment during discovery and migration? | Yes, vendors are expected to assume that the selected vendor will receive full administrative access to the existing source code, CMS/database exports, configuration files, analytics accounts, and hosting environment during the discovery and migration phases. Full system access is granted exclusively to the chosen agency once a contract and non-disclosure agreements are signed, enabling them to audit the legacy setup, plan the new architecture, and execute a seamless data migration. |
| 35 | Are there any technologies, hosting environments, cloud providers, security standards,<br>or software products that AURA/NSO requires or prohibits? | Google Workspace Authentication. |
| 36 | Please identify the scientific data systems, tools, repositories, applications, APIs, databases, or external platforms that the new website is expected to integrate with or<br>provide access to at launch | Google Workspace tools could/should be integrated as needed. JIRA tools could/should be integrated as needed and NSO-specific data repositories, such as the NSO Data Center and facility-specific archives (e.g., DKIST, GONG). There are external data repositories we will need to discuss how to best integrate—i.e., from a functionality standpoint, these may need to remain under the control of the specific parties responsible for the repositories, with minimal intervention, but there should be an easy way to make them look like they belong to NSO. Google Workspace and/or Ping Federate authentication could/should be considered for user access. |
| 37 | For each anticipated integration, can NSO indicate whether the expected implementation is navigation/linking, embedded functionality, API/data integration, authentication/SSO integration, or custom application development? | We will discuss pros and cons of each approach. Some will be navigation but we would like to explore the option of integration as possible. |

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| 38 | Are technical documentation, APIs, development/test environments, and technical SMEs available for these systems? | No Dev enviroment, little documentation, there will be at least one technical contact to support this effort. |
| 39 | Does the scope include design and development of a new staff intranet, or only the strategy and separation/migration of staff-only content from the public website? | The staff intranet will be built on the same design, and will leave behind a password-protected wall for NSO.edu accounts only. |
| 40 | If implementation of an intranet is included, approximately how many users and pages/content items should vendors assume, and what authentication/identity platform should it use? | Google Workspace and/or Ping Federate authentication could/should be considered for user access. |
| 41 | How many users or content providers will the CMS have? | 15-25 |
| 42 | How many staff members are maintaining the website? Will training be needed? | Training of a small group of staff will be needed. |
| 43 | How many internal developers & resources do you have to support this project, and what is their anticipated role in the initial development of the solution, ongoing maintenance, and feature enhancements to the website? | 0 developers. Head of IT will be the technical support contact. |
| 44 | What content sources must the new site's search index—public website content only,<br>or also scientific data/tools, publications, documents/PDFs, external repositories, and<br>other NSO resources? | Mainly public website content only which will include access point to any other resource. |
| 45 | Should the scientist portal and data-access hub primarily organize and link existing NSO tools, or do you expect new authenticated application features inside the new site? | If we understand this question correctly, no new tools will be developed to support these two topics. |
| 46 | Are there requirements for faceted search, filtering, autocomplete, federated search,<br>or search across external scientific data sources? | Faceted search for publich facing content (news, publications, press releases, etc). No Federated Search/external scientific data source search. |
| 47 | How many public-facing forms or workflows that must be recreated or introduced, such as contact forms, proposal/application workflows, event registration, newsletter<br>signup, employment-related forms, or requests for scientific resources | TBD |
| 48 | Do any website workflows collect personally identifiable, sensitive, or regulated information? | No |
| 49 | Does AURA/NSO have an existing or preferred hosting/cloud environment, or should<br>vendors propose and price hosting as part of their solution | We use Bluehost, but we are open to options |
| 50 | Should hosting costs be included in the fixed project price, separately identified, or presented as an ongoing annual cost? | Identified |

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| 51 | Are there specific AURA, NSO, NSF, or federal cybersecurity requirements, security assessments, vulnerability scanning requirements, data residency requirements, or technology approval processes that apply to the website? | Yes, and will be discussed with the chosen vendor. |
| 52 | Will the selected platform need to undergo a security review or Authority to Operate/other formal approval before launch? If so, please describe the process and anticipated timeline. | No |
| 53 | Are there any existing website analytics, user feedback, surveys, or other data that will be made available to the selected vendor? | Yes, and will be discussed with the chosen vendor. |
| 54 | Are there specific SEO goals or benchmarks you would like the new website to achieve (e.g., improved search rankings for services, structured data, local search optimization)? | Yes, and will be discussed with the chosen vendor. |
| 55 | Is a SEO audit and analysis desired? | No |
| 56 | Has keyword research already been performed, or should it be included? | We have Google Analytics |
| 57 | Are there specific AI platforms (ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, etc.) you want to optimize visibility for? | None specifically |
| 58 | Which analytics platforms are currently deployed (GA4, GTM, Search Console, Looker Studio, etc.)? | Google Tag Manager (GTM), Google Analytics 4 (GA4), Google Search Console |
| 59 | Are there existing dashboards that should be preserved? | Unknown |
| 60 | Are conversion events already defined? | N/A |
| 61 | Do you need documentation for governance of the website? | Yes |
| 62 | Approximately how many current pages, posts, documents, staff profiles, publications, media assets, and other content records are currently in scope for evaluation/migration? | Site is currently being internally audited and updated (copy and impages). |
| 63 | Can NSO provide an existing sitemap, URL inventory, CMS export, or representative content inventory to bidders? | Yes, public sitemap data can be accessed immediately by all bidders, but full URL inventories and database exports are restricted to the selected vendor. Publicly Available Right Now: Bidders can fetch the live XML sitemap at https://nso.edu/sitemap.xml |
| 64 | For pricing purposes, what level of contractor migration support should vendors assume—for example, migration tooling and QA only versus hands-on migration of a defined subset of content? | Different levels would be welcome. |
| 65 | Are PDFs, publications, historical news, scientific documentation, media libraries, and other downloadable assets included in the migration scope? | Some. |
| 66 | Will URLs need to be preserved, and is a redirect strategy expected as part of the project? | As much as possible, although with an expected new distribution of NSO's information and assets changes may be expected. A best-possible redirect strategy cn be explored. |

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| 67 | What accessibility standard and conformance level will constitute acceptance—for example, WCAG 2.1 AA or WCAG 2.2 AA? | Bidders should assume WCAG 2.2 Level AA conformance as the required technical benchmark |
| 68 | Is automated and manual accessibility testing by the contractor sufficient, or is an independent third-party accessibility audit required before acceptance? | TBD |
| 69 | Is an Accessibility Conformance Report (ACR/VPAT) or other formal accessibility documentation required at launch? | We need to be accesibility compliant. |
| 70 | Are there existing brand guidelines that should be followed? | Yes |
| 71 | Are photography, illustration, or other visual assets available, or should the agency source/create them? | They are available. If more are needed we can procure them. |
| 72 | Are there examples of websites whose design or user experience you would like vendors to emulate? | Emulate, no. Get inspiration from, sure. E.g., NOIRLab, Space Telescope Science Institute, etc. |
| 73 | What existing audience research, personas, surveys, analytics, or prior usability findings will be available? | At least Google Analytics |
| 74 | Will NSO be responsible for recruiting and scheduling representative scientists, members of the public, staff, and other stakeholders for interviews and usability testing? | Yes, we expect to be responsible for that. |
| 75 | Approximately how many stakeholder interviews/workshops and usability-testing participants should vendors assume for pricing purposes? | Initial workshops have been conducted, and findings will be available. Vendors will workd with a diverse and representative committee, and additional research can be incorporated. |
| 76 | Is there a scoring matrix/grid for RFP evaluation? If so, what is it? | There is not an established matrix. Review committee thoroughly considers technical expertise and ability to execute project needs. Price analysis is performed to determine fairness based on market value with any specialization taken into consideration for escalation of costs. |
| 77 | Is there an incumbent vendor? If so, is that vendor bidding on this contract | There is no incumbent vendor. |
| 78 | When do you anticipate the selection of a vendor to be made? | Before the end of the year if everything goes as planned. |
| 79 | What is the budget/range for the project? | see question 3 |
| 80 | What is the annual budget for the website after launch? | TBD |
| 81 | What are your expectations for post-launch support, including help desk availability (e.g., business hours vs. 24/7 support), response time SLAs, and support channels? | We expect our IT team to be able to address most of the issues we encounter. We would expect the vendor to be available for major issues or additional projects that may arise. |
| 82 | Do you have an anticipated level of post-launch support (e.g., expected monthly support hours, number of support requests, or preferred retainer model)? | Open to options |
| 83 | Are there any planned enhancements, new functionality, or future phases that you anticipate following the initial website launch? | None planned currently |
| 84 | Do you anticipate the need for SEO analysis or analytics analysis regularly post-launch? | We will use Google Analytics |

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| 85 | Please confirm whether the 30-page limitation in Section J applies to the Technical Proposal, the Qualifications Package/additional information, or the entire proposal submission, and identify any forms, resumes, references, or required certifications excluded from that limit. | The 30 page limit applies to the technical proposal only. Any addiitonal required pdf's inclusive of the references requested are not included in the limit. |
| 86 | The Technical Proposal requirements request a minimum of three similar-project references, while Section 4, Section C requests five customers providing similar services. Should offerors provide five references in total, with the same references permitted to satisfy both requirements? | duplicate question 11 |
| 87 | We noted several apparent references to other solicitations/projects within the RFP,<br>including RFP Nos. N00060972C and N00051392C and references to the "11km/DM11km<br>Deformable Mirror Design Study." Please confirm these references are inadvertent and<br>that RFP N00061838C, NSO Website Redesign, governs this solicitation. Will AURA issue a corrected solicitation or amendment? | Corrected RFP posted - these were copy paste errors |
| 88 | Please confirm that Suzanne Baron Helming (sbaronhelming@aura-astronomy.org) is<br>the designated Contracts Officer and sole point of contact for submitting solicitation questions and the final proposal, notwithstanding the different Contracts Contact listed on the RFP cover page. | Contract rep has been updated to Rachel Hubbard rhubbard@aura-astronomy.org |
| 89 | For example, the technical proposal calls for a minimum of three references, while the<br>Qualifications Package asks for five customers providing similar services. How many<br>are required? | duplicate question 11 |
| 90 | Please confirm the required accessibility standard (for example WCAG 2.1 or 2.2 AA) and any formal acceptance tests NSO will apply. | Bidders should assume WCAG 2.2 Level AA conformance as the required technical benchmark |
| 91 | Please confirm that RFP version 3 and the linked Fixed Price Design Agreement draft are the controlling documents, and that proposals remain due by 3:00 p.m. Mountain Standard Time on 13 October 2026. | please see latest RFP posted - deadline will be extended |
| 92 | After the 13 October 2026 closing, what evaluation window and target kickoff / Phase 0 start should offerors assume? | TBD pending submission close date - evaluation period heavily dependent on number of submissions received. Submission deadline extended thru 10/30/26. Will update listing with estimated selection timeline - once a bidder is selected, the contract terms will need to be negotiated/signed. Then work can commence. |

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| 93 | Please confirm the preferred submission package and whether late clarifications are still accepted. | Received after Deadline - Late questions will not be considered/answered |
| 94 | Properties in scope: Is https://www.google.com/url?q=http://nso.edu&source=gmail&ust=1790697722616000&sa=E (WordPress, roughly 200 pages and 550+ posts) the only site in scope, or are any subdomains or program sites (DKIST, GONG, NISP, data portals) included? Is building the staff intranet in scope, or only the separation strategy? | Main site is in scope. Intranet is on scope but the expectation is that no new developments are needed for it to be implemented—other than a separate navigation and password protection. Programs are on scope as they are part of the main site. Integration of or navigation to data repositories may be needed, and will be evaluated on a per repository basis. |
| 95 | Data access hub: Which scientific data systems or tools must the hub connect to at launch? Is that linking or embedding existing tools, or API-level integration? Any SSO or identity requirements? | potential duplicate |
| 96 | Platform and hosting: Is NSO open to staying on WordPress as well as moving to a new CMS? Are there hosting requirements (NSO/AURA on-prem, a specific cloud, or a required security framework)? | potential duplicate |
| 97 | Accessibility: What is the target standard (WCAG 2.1 AA, 2.2 AA, or Section 508)? Is remediation of existing PDFs and documents in scope? | potential duplicate |
| 98 | Team location and travel: Is a fully remote team acceptable, or will kickoff, usability testing, or training need to be on site? If travel is required, should it be included in the fixed price? | TBD |
| 99 | Insurance: The draft AURA contract calls for $5M CGL per occurrence and aggregate. For a remote, off-premises software engagement, would AURA accept lower CGL limits with an umbrella policy, alongside $1M/$3M professional liability? | TBD - requires leadership clarification and approval. Will update Q&A posting with final answer. |