WESTAF: RFQ for External Development 2024

SECTION ONE

Introduction

The Western States Arts Federation (WESTAF) requests vendor qualifications to partner with us on our vision to become the place for creative opportunities to advance careers, fund projects, and achieve missions in the arts. Our existing software helps arts organizations manage opportunities online and facilitate the adjudication and post-application processes. This project helps artists build awareness of opportunities tailored to their interests and expands upon the types of opportunities and disciplines we support in our services. The project vision includes multiple components and phases:

1) We will optimize how our users find opportunities today. This includes recommending opportunities that align with their interests, enhancing search results with related results and categories, and expanding our notifications beyond email for targeted, multi-channel notifications.
2) Develop a mobile and desktop application that allows users to search all of our existing opportunities. This will become the central hub for users to manage their profiles and preferences, follow new opportunities, and receive notifications.
3) Lower the barrier to posting opportunities, events, projects, resources, and jobs. Posted opportunities will become leads for our existing products for users who want additional application management features.
4) Develop a single sign-on experience for users to jump between WESTAF accounts and products (ZAPP, CaFÉ, GO Smart, ArtOpps)
5) Collect usage data and user feedback to learn how to improve our services.

Organizational Overview

WESTAF (Western States Arts Federation) is a regional nonprofit arts service organization dedicated to strengthening the arts' financial, organizational, and policy infrastructure in the West. WESTAF assists state arts agencies, arts organizations, and artists in their quest to serve diverse audiences, enrich the lives of local communities, and provide access to the arts and arts education for all. Through innovative programming, advocacy, research, technology, and grantmaking, WESTAF encourages the creative advancement and preservation of the arts regionally and through a national network of customers and alliances.

Founded in 1974, WESTAF is located in Denver, Colorado, and governed by a 22-member board of trustees composed of arts leaders in the West. WESTAF serves the largest constituent territory of the six U.S. Regional Arts Organizations (RAOs) and includes Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Hawai'i, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming. Alongside the other six RAOs (a national collective of place-based
nonprofit arts service organizations committed to strengthening America’s infrastructure by increasing access to creativity for all Americans), WESTAF works across the United States to activate and operate national arts initiatives, encourage and support collaboration across regions, states, and communities, and maximize the coordination of public and private resources invested in arts programs.

About Our Existing Products

ZAPPlication® (zapplication.org)
ZAPP provides in-person art fair and festival administrators with tools to digitally collect and jury applications, manage booth payments, and communicate with applicants all in one easy-to-use digital platform.

CaFÉ™ (callforentry.org)
Call for Entry (CaFÉ) is an online application submission system designed for the arts sector to help organizations manage their call for entry processes.

GO Smart (gosmart.org)
GO Smart is an affordable, cloud-based grant application system that offers pre- and post-application forms, panel reviewing, and data reporting that streamlines the collection and management of application data in a singular format.

Public Art Archive™ (publicartarchive.org)
Public Art Archive (PAA) is a free, continually growing online and mobile database of completed public artworks that offers a suite of resources and tools for managing public art collections.

Creative Vitality Suite™ (cvsuite.org)
CVSuite provides centralized access to cleaned and vetted for-profit and nonprofit labor market data to help arts advocates, economic developers, and revitalizers analyze and demonstrate the creative economy’s impact.

WESTAF’s Technology Vision

For over 20 years, WESTAF has been dedicated to nurturing creativity and building the capacity of artists and arts organizations in the West and beyond. Through our equitable and accessible technology, we have provided digital solutions that have empowered thousands of arts organizations to streamline their application and adjudication processes, making it easier for artists to access opportunities and grant funding to advance their careers and missions. Our platforms, such as ZAPP and CaFÉ, revolutionized how artists connect with art festivals and arts organizations, providing a seamless and efficient way to apply to fairs, exhibitions, residencies, and public art calls. GO Smart supports applying for direct grant funding across the U.S., empowering individuals and arts organizations to pursue their creative endeavors.
Navigating the ever-evolving creative sector can be daunting for artists and arts organizations. In a recent survey, 80% of respondents sought opportunities outside our services. Location, thematic relevance, and cost are the driving factors that cause artists to apply for opportunities. We want to personalize the artist’s experience by using modern technologies to help them better discover and connect with opportunities that align with their interests, historical behavior, eligibility, and practice. As we create more value in our services, we will attract more active users and posted opportunities. Festivals, exhibitions, and grants will receive more qualified applications because we accurately match and guide eligible users to their opportunities.

Our vision is to become the go-to place for artists seeking opportunities for financial sustainability, cultural enrichment, and community engagement. We will personalize this experience with recommendations, suggestive search, and multichannel notifications. We will lower the barrier for international markets and new artistic disciplines enabling them to post any event, project, or grant on our site. This platform will expand our support for new artistic practices in performing arts, music, film, fashion, virtual reality, AI-generated art, and emerging genres. Organizations will seek out our platform as the place to find the artists and designers to advance their missions.

SECTION TWO

Project Goals
The following major goals have been established for this project:

- Become the go-to place for artists seeking and art organizations posting opportunities online.

- Personalize the artist experience to connect artists with opportunities that match their interests. We will increase the rate of artists applying to opportunities, and therefore the number of users and opportunities on our platform.

- Lower the barrier to post creative opportunities, diversify the types of opportunities we support, and increase the number of international opportunities we publish.

- Increase sales leads to our existing products for application management and adjudication. Diversify revenue streams with new models.

- Develop a mobile experience, for seekers and posters, that provides up-to-date alerts on new activities and opportunities wherever they are.
• Develop shared microservices between our existing products and their APIs, and leverage these tools to optimize overhead and reduce technical debt. Shift towards agile development methods with automated tests, continuous integration, and infrastructure as code.

• Implement monitoring with our business intelligence practices so that we can learn from customer behavior and improve our products.

**Project Budget**
The budget for this project is $350,000 - $500,000.

**Audience and Users**
The audience and user base are broken down into the following general categories:

1. **Individual Seeker: Artists seeking creative opportunities**
   a. Artists span a multitude of disciplines. Our products are currently centered on the visual arts, but we seek to attract artists from all disciplines including music, film, literature, theater, and emerging art.

2. **Organizational Seeker: Art organizations seeking opportunities**
   a. Art organizations looking for funding through grant opportunities. Organizations are also interested in community engagement, educational opportunities, and providing resources.

3. **Poster: Existing WESTAF customers posting opportunities**
   a. Art organizations that host or offer creative opportunities ranging from festivals, exhibitions, grants, and more using ZAPP, CaFÉ, GO Smart to manage their applications, opportunity lifecycles, and adjudication.

4. **Poster: New users and potential leads who have opportunities for artists.**
   a. The personas here are varied, but they can be described in the types of opportunities they offer.
      i. Grants (funding, career development, crisis relief)
      ii. Events (festivals, fairs, exhibitions, shows)
      iii. Projects (public art, commissions)
      iv. Jobs (careers, part-time, freelance)
      v. Community engagement (meetups, workshops, arts-related clubs and associations, volunteer)
      vi. Educational opportunities (scholarships, internships, mentorships)
      vii. Resources (professional development, business services, shared spaces, tool renting)
      viii. Marketplaces (online, selling, marketing, showcasing)

**Technology and Technical Resources**
The three existing applications ZAPP, CaFÉ, and GO Smart are production workloads using AWS services. They are LAMP stack applications utilizing basic AWS architectures: Amazon EC2 instances, Amazon Relational Database MySQL servers (RDS), Amazon S3 for storage, and Amazon Web Application Firewall. This project will access data from these application APIs developed by others.

With this project, we envision a multi-phased approach. This plan is subject to change after discussing with the selected vendor.

- **Discovery Phase**: the selected vendor works with us to learn more about the project scope in more detail and the technologies behind our products.

- **Implementation**
  - **Phase A**: We intend to start with optimizing how users connect with opportunities by building core features shared between the three products (recommendation engine, suggestive searches, and notification service).
  - **Phase B**: Develop a mobile experience that allows existing users to connect their account(s) and receive up-to-date alerts on new activities and opportunities.
  - **Phase C**: Then we will create a central platform where our existing and new users can find opportunities across our existing products. This platform will become the central profile that ties a WESTAF user across all WESTAF products and leverages the core services built early on.
  - **Phase D**: We will allow users to post opportunities to broaden the types of opportunities we support. Art organizations that want to manage and adjudicate applications online will be directed to our sales pipelines of existing platforms, ZAPP, CaFÉ, and GO Smart.

Developing this holistic experience increases the application rate for our existing products, centralizes all of our opportunities in one place for user discovery. Lowering the barrier to post opportunities will expand our opportunity types, attracts new artists looking for opportunities, and creates lead generation for our existing services.

We collaborate on our existing products with multiple outside vendors and an in-house software development team. Our team includes software developers, QA engineers, system administrators, DevOps admins, and project managers from both in-house and external development resources. We believe this project is self-contained and will have API dependencies with existing products to retrieve event and user information. We seek expertise and skill sets in the following areas:

- Expertise in creating recommendation engines, deploying them to production environments, and ongoing tuning and maintenance.
- API driven development.
- Leveraging Infrastructure as code and containerization.
- Mobile application or mobile responsive development.
- UI/UX leveraging user centered design principles.
- Architecting and developing a scalable web application using containerization technologies.
- Building accessible experiences following WACG 2.1 standards.
- Security is a forethought, not an afterthought.
- Experience with customer identity access management and authentication.
- Familiarity with message queues and building combined and integrated SMS, email and push notification systems.
- Integrating with data lakes and business intelligence tools for measuring success and ongoing learning.

We are looking for a partner who has the technical expertise to build our vision but also has the product expertise to guide our project and build delightful user experiences. We understand a project can have many approaches and look forward to discussing tradeoffs and building a project plan together. Post-project we anticipate a shared software development partnership where we can continue collaborating with you and allow our internal development team to contribute as well.

**SECTION THREE**

**RFQ Process and Evaluation Criteria**

This RFQ’s effective date is June 10, 2024 and will end on July 8, 2024. Submissions are accepted by form submission and email only. Respondents will be evaluated internally by members of WESTAF’s business, technology, and leadership teams. The evaluation committee will conduct independent reviews of materials and submit scores on a scale of 1-10, with the following weighted categories:

- *Alignment with WESTAF (34%)* - Alignment with WESTAF’s values, guiding principles, vision, and priority.
- *Relevant Experience (33%)* - Similarity to other projects or demonstrated capability to handle a project of similar scope and size.
- *Technical Knowledge (33%)* - Diversity in experience, platforms/languages used, and core technical competencies.

Following initial assessment and scoring, WESTAF will select up to three candidates to move on to the next phase. Top candidates will be invited to participate in a 60-90 minute interview with WESTAF to discuss qualifications and skills. After all interviews, a single vendor candidate will be identified and selected for the project.

**Timeline**
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Date/Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Release RFQ:</td>
<td>June 10, 2024</td>
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<tr>
<td>Response Deadline:</td>
<td>July 8, 2024 11:59pm MDT</td>
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<td>Finalists Notified by Email:</td>
<td>July 24, 2024</td>
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<td>Finalist Interviews:</td>
<td>July 29 - August 9, 2024</td>
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<td>Award of Contract:</td>
<td>August 14, 2024</td>
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<td>Tentative Commencement of Project:</td>
<td>September 2024</td>
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<td>Tentative Initial Launch of Project:</td>
<td>October 1 - Dec 30, 2025</td>
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<td>Tentative Future Releases</td>
<td>Year 2026</td>
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Please note the anticipated start and end dates for this project are tentative. We expect the technical work to begin in September 2024, with development to follow. Project end dates and phases are negotiable and subject to change.

**SECTION FOUR**

**Submission Requirements**
A completed form must be submitted to WESTAF by 11:59 p.m. MDT on Monday, July 8, 2024.

[Click here to access the RFQ form.](#)

Supplemental materials can be uploaded through the Google form or emailed in PDF format to artoppsrfq@westaf.org with the subject line: Response to WESTAF RFQ - [Org Name].

This information will be shared internally with WESTAF staff only for the purpose of evaluating and comparing respondents.

Thank you,

We appreciate your interest in partnering with us on our vision to become the place for creative opportunities. We understand that it's important for you to identify if this is the right fit for your company, and welcome any questions you may have during this process. Please contact us at artoppsrfq@westaf.org