



# WEBSITE REDESIGN: Request for Proposals

(USE PDF BOOKMARKS FOR EASIER NAVIGATION)

## 1. Overview

### 1.1 About Us

The State Bar of Michigan (SBM) was established in 1935 by public act and is regulated by the Michigan Supreme Court. It is the licensing agency for all lawyers in Michigan and is a public body corporate, funded by licensing fees and revenue generated by bar activities. Its mission is to promote the professionalism of lawyers; advocate for an open, fair, and accessible justice system; and provide services to members that enable them to best serve their clients. There are more than 47,000 members of SBM, including about 42,000 licensed attorneys. SBM serves both Michigan attorneys and the public. Its work is guided by a [Strategic Plan](#), adopted by its elected Board of Commissioners.

### 1.2 Project Description

SBM wants to modernize its online presence by working with a strategic partner that will ensure alignment with current best practices for user experience, visual design, functionality, and performance while also developing innovative solutions to meet SBM's unique needs. This redesign will include new, intuitive navigation; differentiate between its two primary audiences (member attorneys and members of the public); incorporate modern, responsive design; and include top-notch search functionality. See also *Appendix D: Models for Development*.

Work is ongoing to consolidate information, reduce the overall number of webpages, and identify PDFs associated with the current site that will be carried over to the new site.

This redesign is focused on its public-facing michbar.org website. Currently, SBM's full online presence includes multiple separate portals that interact with the finance and central membership database. Understanding and experience with APIs and web services is preferred, but not a foreseen requirement for redesigning the michbar.org site. In addition, SBM works with multiple outside vendors that provide online services: [ReliaGuide](#), a member directory (SBM also offers its own member directory); [SBM Connect](#), a communication platform for SBM Sections and Committees; and [Career Center](#), a job posting and mentorship service.

SBM currently uses the DNN platform for its content management system, and DNN will continue to be used for non-michbar.org portions of the website. SBM is open to using a different content management system for the michbar.org site.

SBM's goals include:

- Improved access to information, tools, and resources that move to the new website
- Ease of use for website audience
- Ease of content management by SBM content publishers, especially in assigning related items algorithmically and in taxonomies
- Site longevity
- On-time and on-budget delivery of new site (unless changes are mutually agreed upon)

Completion of this project is not tied to any specific milestone, but SBM plans for the project to take 12-18 months. Note that launch may not be feasible in July, August, or September, as these months coincide with annual license renewal.

The projected total budget, including contingency, for this bid should be \$200,000 to \$500,000. See *Appendix A: Proposal Summary* for more information.

### 1.3 Project Guiding Principles

As SBM's primary storefront, the website should:

- Strengthen the SBM brand by educating attorneys on the depth and breadth of SBM services.
- Provide up-to-date, relevant information that is easy to find with streamlined site navigation and an effective search tool.
- Prioritize the user experience while serving the needs of both Michigan attorneys and the public.

### 1.4 Working with SBM

SBM will be an active partner in this project, and proposals should provide adequate time for client review. Marjory Raymer, director of communications, will serve as project lead for SBM and the first point of contact for all project questions, and will consolidate and prioritize SBM feedback for the selected firm. Various SBM stakeholders will participate in the project including Karen Korr, content consultant; Kim Panter, application development manager; Tim Maler, senior UX/UI designer; and Sarah Lawrence, brand manager.

## 2. SCOPE OF WORK

SBM recognizes that each element within the scope of work adds cost. SBM may prioritize certain aspects of this project, including dividing the total project into potential subsequent phases. Elements of the scope of work that are not required or could be outside of vendors' area of expertise are marked as "Optional." Proposals should include a set of services necessary to deliver a full website.

If a bidding vendor needs additional information or details beyond that provided in this RFP, please raise those questions in the bidders' Q&A. See 5: *Project Timeline*.

If bidders are uncertain about any requirements, they should explicitly state assumptions made for time, cost, and process and offer options if needed. Bidders should describe the discovery and strategy process needed to undertake this work and include any additional work they foresee as necessary to complete the project within the allotted budget.

If budget is an obstacle to effective work, bidders should outline additional recommended scope and cost on an a-la-carte basis.

## 2.1 Process and Planning

The selected vendor will act as a strategic partner, conducting thorough discovery and independent research to understand SBM's needs, including specific program needs. Vendor will identify unique challenges to SBM's website and provide recommended solutions. Using current SBM website analytics and general current best practices, the vendor should ensure recommendations are data informed.

Bidders should recommend a process that aligns with their own workstyle, but possible activities and deliverables in this phase could include: kickoff and discovery sessions with senior SBM leadership so that the vendor understands website goals, key audiences and critical tasks; content review to determine page types/patterns needed for a successful website design/wireframe system; and a final report/presentation with recommendations for implementation. This planning work should include a final content management system recommendation, matching tools and features with SBM's needs. It also should include a refined budget based on the final technical needs of the website and provide more detail about the firm's content migration plan.

## 2.2 Project Management

The proposal should include budget and deliverables for project management, including a project schedule updated regularly, weekly check-ins on project status with updates on progress and blockers, documentation of major decisions via email or project extranet such as Asana or Teams, maintenance of issue/bug tracking tools, and regular tracking of expenditures and billable hours against the initial proposal. The project management plan should include a running high-level review of project risks and mitigation strategies and should include budget reviews at every major milestone.

## 2.3 Information Architecture (Sitemap, Wireframes, Taxonomy)

The vendor will develop a new information architecture and site structure that prioritizes intuitive navigation, logical content organization, and enhanced user experience. The structure must reflect SBM's mission and strategic priorities, the needs of website users, specialty functionality, and future scalability.

- **SITE MAP DEVELOPMENT AND NAVIGATION DESIGN:** Propose a comprehensive site map that streamlines content hierarchy and ensures that critical information, identified as part of discovery, is no more than three clicks from the SBM homepage. Design global, secondary, and contextual navigation systems that are responsive across devices and are accessible. The site map should serve both public and member audiences distinctly,

providing tailored pathways and clear differentiation of content. The budget should allow every deliverable in sitemap development to be revised at least twice.

- **WIREFRAMES FOR PAGES AND FUNCTIONS WITH FLEXIBILITY FOR FUTURE NEEDS:** The proposal should include development of wireframes and/or patterns to create all major content types, and the system needs to ensure the page templates and/or patterns are simple to navigate, easy to update, and can grow with future needs. Wireframing (and design) should include a clean header and footer sitewide, specialty homepage design as well as custom specialty pages for microsites (See 2.5 *Program/Microsite Content and Functionality*) and interior page templates. Modular design options should include an optional module for “recent news” based on a content tagging system.
- **CONTENT TAXONOMY AND TAGGING FOR SEARCH AND RELATED CONTENT:** Recommend strategies for categorizing and tagging content to improve findability, incorporating SEO best practices such as friendly URLs, metadata optimization, schema markup and other SEO-friendly content and coding practices. Site must be set up for Google Analytics. The structure should facilitate easy updates and expansions, such as adding new sections for emerging programs without disrupting the overall architecture. Also: create a nonhierarchical tagging system for blog-type content (news, Michigan Bar Journal, etc.) as well as a mechanism delivering tagged and/or taxonomy content automatically to applicable pages. For example, all items tagged LJAP could appear in “recent news” on the Lawyers & Judges Assistance main program page. “See more” would allow users to view a page with all the posts associated with a specific tag.
- **CONTENT STRATEGY AND MIGRATION PLANNING:** Based on the content model developed during the information architecture phase and the content weeding process currently underway by SBM, work collaboratively to make decisions about what content needs to be migrated, and develop a workplan for applying any added format data (such as a new metadata or heads/subheads) and updating and revising taxonomy and tagging as content is being migrated to the new website. This taxonomy application must be accurate and consistent.

## 2.4 Technology Needs

### 2.4(A) CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

SBM requires a content management system (CMS) with a clear interface and straightforward tools that support efficient content management by SBM’s non-technical communications staff, which will be responsible for updating content, webpages, and site structure, as needed.

The proposal should make a top-level recommendation for a content management system that can implement the requirements in this RFP and is well supported by US-based vendors. It should support a version history so that inadvertent major errors can be reverted quickly and should also incorporate a basic digital asset manager.

**CURRENT SPECS:** SBM currently uses the DNN platform as its content management system. Continued use is neither required nor discouraged for the new website.

### 2.4(B) CUSTOMIZATION

Describe the scope and process for any customized tools or code you expect to develop to account for specialty functionality. Please describe process for developing the specifications for these customized features, how SBM will review both the scope and the actual delivered functions, and

the time and scope window for providing feedback or suggesting modifications. Please outline your development methodology and if you use an agile method, explain how SBM would be involved in the sprints/development cycles and the time needed for review.

#### **2.4(C) ONGOING MAINTENANCE**

This proposal should include 60 days of post-launch support. Proposals should outline recommendations and/or options as well as project costs for ongoing maintenance after the initial 60-day launch window, including service, security, and software updates as well as projected support needed from SBM staff and internal developers. SBM recognizes future maintenance costs are not a part of the budget set for the Website Redesign.

CURRENT SPECS: Internal developers provide all maintenance and are an option for continued maintenance if DNN is used as the content management system. External maintenance support would likely be needed unless DNN is used.

#### **2.4(D) VANITY URLS AND REDIRECTS**

The website also must support the creation and management of vanity URLs, allowing for short, user-friendly, and easily memorable links that redirect to specific pages or content. The project plan should also establish a seamless user experience by properly managing 301 redirects for the site's pages and maintaining SEO integrity.

#### **2.4(E) HOSTING**

The vendor should outline recommendations and/or options as well as project costs for site hosting. Vendors have the option of continuing to utilize SBM's current site hosting. Security protocols should also be specifically outlined. See *Appendix F: Security Guidelines* for examples of potential security needs. Vendors may suggest alternate security options as needed.

CURRENT SPECS: The current site is hosted by SBM/RackSpace on Microsoft .NET Framework 4.8 with ASP.NET Web Forms and C# backend, hosted on IIS 10 running on Windows Server 2019, and using SQL Server 2019 for the database. The core platform is fully supported by Microsoft, ensuring seamless compatibility with SBM's existing dedicated Windows Server 2019 infrastructure. It leverages standard front-end web technologies, including HTML5, CSS3, JavaScript (jQuery), and Bootstrap (etc.) for responsive UI components. Traffic for FY 2024–2025, excluding directory which is being moved to a different portal, was 2.7 million pageviews.

## **2.5 Program/Microsite Content and Functionality**

The michbar.org website includes multiple program areas that act as microsites, including specialty functionality and built-in admin tools. A description of each microsite and basic needs for each follows.

#### **2.5(A) NEWS**

*Redesign. Add social compatibility. Create tagging system.* SBM regularly shares news items with its members and the public and wants the capability of streaming relevant news items to internal program pages using a tagging system. News posts also must be optimized for sharing on social media. <https://www.michbar.org/news/archive>

## **2.5(B) ETHICS**

*Redesign and restructure to create a better user experience, easier search.* This includes issued ethics opinions for attorneys and judges. These are currently posted as PDFs. These should be searchable by topic area and opinion number. This is a key location where we want to integrate generative AI to allow attorneys to ask questions and receive summaries of opinions as well as links to the full opinions. <https://www.michbar.org/opinions/ethicsopinions>

## **2.5(C) E JOURNAL**

*Create a main landing page and single-issue pages. Maintain advertising options with the ability to expand advertising.* Summaries of recent court decisions are typically published five days a week. Readers need the ability to see new summaries released each day and also be able to search for individual summaries. The summaries should also link to the full court opinion or a PDF of the court opinion. Pages must also be able to host advertising that is updated weekly by internal staff. Manually placed advertising appears on all summary pages and the main eJournal page. <https://www.michbar.org/ejournal/home>

## **2.5(D) MICHIGAN BAR JOURNAL**

*Redesign. Maintain social compatibility and advertising options with the ability to expand advertising. Incorporate SBM news feed.* A magazine produced by SBM, the Michigan Bar Journal currently publishes 11 times a year. The new site needs to host news articles, including photos, from the Michigan Bar Journal that can be easily shared to social media sites. The [michbar.org/journal](https://www.michbar.org/journal) URL should always have the current month's issue with the ability to toggle to previous issues. Pages also must be able to host manually placed advertising that is updated monthly by SBM staff. Advertising appears on all news articles and the main Journal page. Like the news feature, Michigan Bar Journal content needs to be incorporated into the tagging system, so that these posts can be automatically fed to program pages as recent updates. Also interested in adding a "Recent SBM News" area to the main page to share SBM News items. <https://www.michbar.org/journal>

## **2.5(E) CALENDAR**

*Open to suggestions for design/presentation/best practices.* Calendar must provide seamless experience on all platforms and allow for linking to other pages for additional information or registration. <https://www.michbar.org/news/calendar>

## **2.5(F) PUBLIC POLICY RESOURCE CENTER**

*Redesign and restructure to create a more simplified user experience.* Area includes a searchable database to find public policy positions adopted by SBM, its sections, and committees. <https://www.michbar.org/publicpolicy/Home>

## **2.5(G) ADDITIONAL SPECIALTY PAGES**

The website design should be flexible enough to accommodate a variety of current and potential future content needs as SBM regularly develops new programs to meet the needs of its membership and its strategic priorities.

## 2.6 Design

**USER-FOCUSED, BRANDED DESIGN:** Create a user-friendly design that matches SBM’s current brand identity and feels approachable to SBM’s audience. The design should be adaptable to meet SBM’s needs now and in the future, while keeping a consistent look and feel. It needs to be flexible enough for microsites/specialty pages to have customized functionality but also well integrated into the overall website. The site should be able to easily incorporate the use of online forms to gather information, solicit signups, and other potential non-financial transactions by embedding surveys created in Wufoo (current practice) or a similar tool, as recommended by the vendor.

**RESPONSIVENESS:** Provide a responsive design that works well on all devices, including desktops, tablets, and smartphones. The solution should focus on easy navigation and consistent user experience. Currently desktop users outpace mobile users 3:1 in part due to the site’s poor mobile performance and member demographics. However, the site should be fully mobile responsive to meeting the evolving needs of users.

**MODULAR PAGE DESIGN:** Ensure a modern design with flexibility for seamless content updates or removal. Optimize layout and user experience with responsive grid structures, modular content sections, and adaptive design elements scaled appropriately based on content volume. Design should include a clean header and footer sitewide, specialty homepage design as well as between 15 to 20 custom specialty pages (See 2.5 Program/Microsite Content and Functionality) and interior page templates. Modular design options should include an optional module for “recent news” based on content tagging system.

**PORTAL SKINS:** To create cohesion throughout the SBM online experience, the selected vendor would also design skins for some of SBM’s independently operating portals. These portals tie directly into SBM’s finance and membership databases. Recreating these portals is not included in the RFP. However, the design (not actual implementation of the design) for the following portal landing pages and other high-profile portal pages should be included. Most of these sites require a username and password to access. See *Appendix E: Portal Pages* for images of these pages.

- Member Directory (publicly available at [dir.michbar.org](http://dir.michbar.org))
- Login Pages (2)
- Member Area
- License Renewal
- Store
- New Member Area (publicly available at [e.michbar.org/Member-Type](http://e.michbar.org/Member-Type))
- Interim Administrator Program
- Events
- Volunteer Application

Note: The public facing portions of the LRS portal ([lrs.michbar.org](http://lrs.michbar.org)) will be brought into the main [michbar.org](http://michbar.org) site as part of this process. The sign in area for attorneys will remain in a separate portal but will not be included in this redesign.

## 2.7 Search Functionality

The website must include a robust, user-friendly, and accurate search tool that enhances the discoverability of content for both attorneys and the public. It must offer full-text searching across all site content, including static pages, ethics opinions, publications, calendars, resource libraries, and PDFs. The search should provide results that are relevant and prioritized for attorneys and public users.

- Integrate with SEO best practices to improve external search engine visibility (e.g., Google indexing) while prioritizing internal site search performance.
- Include analytics tracking to monitor search queries, usage patterns, and abandoned searches that will help SBM staff to continue to refine content and navigation based on user behavior.
- Offer both basic search and advanced search capabilities with filtering options (e.g., topic, date, author) including a faceted search based on content type.

### 2.7(A) GENERATIVE AI SEARCH (OPTIONAL)

In addition to the requirements listed above, SBM wants to provide the best search capabilities possible by incorporating advanced AI-powered capabilities to provide more intelligent and relevant results.

- Support for natural language queries, allowing users to search using conversational phrases rather than exact keywords (e.g., "What are the ethics rules regarding social media?" instead of rigid terms).
- Semantic search powered by AI, which understands context, synonyms, and related concepts to deliver accurate results.
- AI-driven result summarization, generating concise overviews of matching content with direct references and links to source material on the SBM website, ensuring users can quickly grasp key information without navigating multiple pages.
- Results must also link to source material and include a disclaimer that results are AI generated.

## 2.8 Staff Sites Archive (Optional)

To improve website functionality and simplify the user experience, SBM plans to reduce the vast amounts of historic information now maintained on michbar.org. For instance, board agendas and minutes from the last 20-plus years are currently housed on the website. While these records are also stored in-house, SBM is interested in possible solutions to continue to make this type of historic information easily available to staff, who are accustomed to finding it on the website.

## 2.9 Accessibility

The vendor should ensure a high degree of accessibility using the latest Web Content Accessibility Guidelines as a resource and at a minimum must ensure WCAG 2.1 AA accessibility. This includes ensuring that all content and interactive elements (widgets, controls, forms, search, etc.) be fully operable using non-mouse/non-touchscreen input (i.e. keyboard) on both Windows and macOS. The vendor should specifically outline its proposed accessibility testing and verification process.

## 2.10 Content Migration, Platform Integration, and Launch

The vendor will oversee migration of content from the old site to the new site and, where possible, automate taxonomy application. However, taxonomy application must be accurate and consistent, and the selected vendor should be able to advise SBM as to the time and effort necessary to validate tagging and adding new content requirements to migrated pages. The vendor must identify the type and scope of support expected from internal IT developers.

Migration exports and imports should be scheduled in off-peak hours to minimize disruption. The content migration plan should include regular incremental refreshes of current content based on a discussion of the firm's development schedule and an assessment of SBM's content management tempo. The selected vendor must also validate migration of content as complete according to the migration plan drawn up at the beginning of the project. It may be necessary to migrate content to an intermediary holding platform so staff can modify content for import into the new CMS. If so, please detail the costs associated with this work in the proposal, as well as the timeline implications for this work.

The selected vendor will also conduct rigorous QA testing across multiple browsers, devices and breakpoints to verify responsiveness, accessibility, and performance, as well as user acceptance testing (UAT) with SBM staff and end-users.

## 2.11 Training and Documentation

The vendor will also provide training and documentation (ideally including video tutorials) to allow non-technical staff to confidently manage page and content updates, as well as hand-off plans as applicable to transition to an ongoing maintenance plan.

## 2.12 Exclusions

The selected vendor will not be responsible for:

- Writing or editing new content
- Revising the existing logo/brand identity
- Repurposing content (with the exception of what content needs to be repurposed to validate that the proposed design or development is acceptable to the project team)
- Direct coding/management of third-party systems (as opposed to manipulating the API)
- Procurement of stock photos, video or photography creation
- Development or management of a marketing or social media strategy for the project
- Development in multiple languages/localization

# 3. VENDOR REQUIREMENTS

Please submit the following:

- **COMPANY INFO:** Company overview including experience, qualifications, members of the project team who would work on this project including bios, past experience, and contact information. SBM operates on Eastern time and expects mission critical support as well as a functional working relationship during Eastern Time business hours.
- **CASE STUDIES WITH REFERENCES:** Overview of similar projects, links to those websites, and contact information for previous clients. Case studies should name the project team involved and the CMS used for implementation.

- **PROJECT PLAN:** A phased timeline for discovery, design, development, testing, data migration, and launch. The project plan should assume at least two rounds of review for major deliverables and at least one rounds of review for minor deliverables and define which is which. It should also outline validation processes to ensure content migration and fulfillment of requirements related to accessibility, mobile responsiveness, etc., as well as hand-off plans, as applicable.
- **PROPOSAL NARRATIVE:** Details addressing each requirement (see 2. *Scope of Work* and all subcategories).
- **CMS DETAILS:** Description of proposed CMS and reasoning, training and documentation for staff, and plans for ongoing maintenance and service including an estimated number of hours, costs, and internal IT support required. If providing an external hosting option, provide detailed information on maintaining site security.
- **PROPOSAL SUMMARY:** SBM recognizes that each element within the scope of work adds cost. SBM may prioritize certain aspects of this project, including dividing the total project into potential subsequent phases. Using *Appendix A: Proposal Summary* as a framework, please provide a breakdown of fees to help SBM make strategic choices for this project. You should include the hourly rate for each person attached to the project, the number of hours for each billable person, and the total cost per phase. You also should include line items for out-of-pocket costs (fonts, software, photography). Proposed budget, including contingency, should be \$200,000 to \$500,000. See *Appendix A: Proposal Summary*.
- **RISKS:** Prospective vendors should outline project risks that could generally arise from a website development project of this nature as well as ones unique to this RFP as understood by the prospective vendor. Proposals should include a summary of considerations with proposed solutions and regular check-ins on risks and mitigation as part of project management.
- **ASSUMPTIONS:** SBM will answer questions at the beginning of the bid period (see 5. *Project Timeline*). If your firm discovers an area that is unclear after the Q&A period ends, please use your proposal narrative to explain the assumptions you made to formulate your budget and schedule.

## 4. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Qualified proposals will be evaluated based on the criteria below and the ability of the respondents to satisfy the requirements of this request in a cost-effective manner. Some criteria include:

- Ability to meet the specific RFP requirements
- Quality and practicality of proposed methodology
- Cost in relation to proposed services
- Past success in providing similar services, experience of team members, and references from past clients
- Demonstrated experience with robust CMS platforms
- Proven ability to manage project timelines and budgets, deliver quality, and provide technical resources and services.

## 5. PROJECT TIMELINE

RFP released	December 1, 2025
Submission of questions due	8 p.m. (ET) December 12, 2025, Submit to <a href="mailto:SBMwebsite@michbar.org">SBMwebsite@michbar.org</a>  Subject line: <b>RFP Question</b>  Note: Questions and answers will be shared with all prospective vendors.
RSVP for Bidders' call (Optional)	Noon (ET) December 15, 2025 Submit to <a href="mailto:SBMwebsite@michbar.org">SBMwebsite@michbar.org</a>  Written responses to questions will be shared prior to the Bidders' Call with those who RSVP, if available.
Bidders' call (Optional)	3-4:30 p.m. (ET) December 17, 2025 <a href="#">Via Zoom</a>  Meeting ID: 856 7182 6545 Passcode: 672964
Intent to bid due	8 p.m. (ET) December 19, 2025 Submit to <a href="mailto:SBMwebsite@michbar.org">SBMwebsite@michbar.org</a>  Subject line: <b>&lt;FIRM NAME&gt; Intent to Bid</b>
Proposals due	8 p.m. (ET) January 9, 2026 Submit to <a href="mailto:SBMwebsite@michbar.org">SBMwebsite@michbar.org</a>  Subject line: <b>&lt;FIRM NAME&gt; SBM Proposal</b>
Finalists notified	January 23, 2026
Hold for virtual finalist presentation & interviews	10:30 a.m. (ET) January 27, 2026 3 p.m. (ET) January 27, 2026 Noon (ET) January 28, 2026 3 p.m. (ET) January 28, 2026
Selection criteria	Please see the full Evaluation Criteria section. Note: firms must have post-launch support for working hours in US Eastern time.
Final selection	No later than Monday, March 2, 2026.  Note: Vendor contract must be approved by the SBM Board of Commissioners, which meets April 24 with a potential March 6 meeting.
Project kickoff	No more than 30 days after contract approval.
Project relaunch	12 to 18 months after award. Note windows where project cannot launch (see <i>1.2 Project Description</i> ).

## 6. CONFIDENTIALITY

SBM seeks to openly share information needed by prospective vendors so that they can fully and accurately bid on this project. All information provided by SBM in connection with this RFP, including but not limited to business operations, data, technical specifications, content, financial information, or other proprietary materials, is considered confidential.

Any information provided by SBM shall be used solely for the purpose of preparing and submitting a proposal in response to this RFP. No information, confidential or otherwise, shall be shared with any third party without prior consent from SBM. The obligations of confidentiality shall survive the completion or termination of this RFP process, and any resulting contract.

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