Request for Proposals:
New Website Design for the Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment
October 17, 2023

About CCSI

A joint center of Columbia Law School and the Columbia Climate School, the Columbia Center on Sustainable Investment (CCSI) is an applied research center that develops and advances policies and practices that shape investment to contribute to, rather than undermine, sustainable development. Through research, advisory projects, multi-stakeholder dialogue, and educational programs, CCSI focuses on constructing and implementing a holistic investment framework that promotes sustainable development and the mutual trust needed for long-term investments that can be practically adopted by governments, companies, and civil society. Our focus areas intersect and evolve over time; significant ones at present include mining and energy; investment in land, agriculture, and food systems; international investment law and policy; and climate-aligned finance. We are a team of about 20 staff located primarily in New York City and mostly lawyers and economists. We also engage student interns for both our research and operational needs.

Backdrop to this RFP

CCSI's current website (https://ccsi.columbia.edu/) faces significant limitations, many (but not all) of which are due to design limitations of the website's platform. CCSI's website is one of the main means by which we share our research, resources, and tools with stakeholders around the world. Given it is such a key instrumentality for achieving our impact, we are eager to create a new website that makes it easier for our audiences to find content relevant to their interests and needs. In addition to finding an initial piece of content through hyperlink, web search, or other means, we want our audiences, once on our site, to be able to quickly and easily locate additional content relevant to them, whether in the form of an explanation of a relevant issue, a range of other publications on the same topic, or upcoming events related to a certain topic. We also want our audiences to have access to better search tools on our website.

Nature of our content: The resources we post on our website primarily take the form of reports, policy briefs, blog pieces, guidebooks, interactive tools, e-learning materials, and events. We also strive to contextualize these resources with webpages describing the relevant challenges and mapping out the range of angles our work covers. (For the next iteration of our website we would like to make these contextualizing webpages more clear, succinct, and navigable, relying on both tighter writing and better page formatting options.)

Nature of our stakeholders: Our stakeholders are diverse in interest, profession, and geography, and it is important that our website be accessible to them all. They come from academia, thinktanks, NGOs, community-based organizations, governmental and intergovernmental agencies, business, finance, and industry organizations, among others. They access our resources from locations ranging from New York to Geneva and Ecuador to Zambia.

How website viewers come to our site: While we have not conducted formal research on the matter, our understanding is that our stakeholders primarily access our website through:

- A web search based on our center's name or the name of our director or other researchers;
- A web search to find a specific cited article or other resource;
- A web search on a general topic or query, which connects the reader to a webpage or publication on our site;
- Accessing a hyperlinked resource from, for instance, our newsletter, Twitter, LinkedIn, or other public communications; and
- Accessing our site to learn more about a specific issue on which they know we work, or to locate a specific resource they already know exists.

Our Goals for this RFP

We seek a website that provides a means to both highlight and organize our work, increasing the ability of our range of stakeholders to identify and access content relevant to them. Our work is highly interconnected, which complicates the presentation of our work on our website, where we want several issue areas to connect readers to a given resource or theme.

There are many different means of organizing our content, and we would be grateful for a service provider that can help us understand the options for presenting such interconnected content, both organizing the material in the first instance to allow for effective presentation, and providing functional search capabilities. We are eager to increase the navigability of our site, and to increase the ability of audiences to easily see additional content relevant to their needs and interests. We also want diverse visual options so that we can present a large amount of content in one place. We do not require the sleekest visuals, but we do want a cleaner look with more intuitive flows and visuals on our new site. Select elements of our website might require unique treatment.

Additionally, the new website will need to account for accessibility needs and an ease of access on mobile phones and in low internet connectivity environments.

Following are some frustrations we have with our current website, which we would want to avoid in the new website:

- Ineffective search function
- Difficulty in finding relevant content
- Significant reliance on drop downs, burying content under many layers of 'clicks'
- Severely limited options for text-related visuals such as text size, color, and alignment
- Inconsistent page framing as far as width and general layout

We do not anticipate including all of the materials from our current website on our new website, though we would likely retain at least 80 percent of our materials. Some of the most dated materials, as well as redundant materials, will ideally be omitted in the next iteration.

Services We Seek

CCSI seeks to commission the design and development of a new website, including significant support in information architecture. The successful service provider will design a website to which CCSI staff, who lack website-related technical expertise, can quickly and easily add content on an ongoing basis. Ideally, the service provider will also provide a simple guide so that future staff will to be able to maintain and add to the website in a consistent and smooth manner. With respect to migrating content to the new website at the outset, we have the capacity to hire interns to conduct a lot of this work but would look to the service provider to oversee this process, cost permitting.

Our Budget: As a center that is entirely funded by sponsored projects, we do not have an easy source of funds to cover the cost of commissioning a new website. Yet we are committed to a website redesign because a more functional website is essential for achieving greater impact. As such, cost will be an important factor in our selection process, considered in light of the anticipated increase in impact the proposed services might offer. We anticipate a cost of $50,000 to $100,000, though we may have some flexibility for the right services.

Our Anticipated Engagement: CCSI has a relatively small team with little communications capacity and no technical website-related expertise. We anticipate designating a point person from CCSI's operational team to manage the relationship with the service provider and to be available on a weekly basis at minimum. For the information architecture stage as well as select other phases, we anticipate designating a small group of staff, including the CCSI point person as well as select directors and lead researchers, to provide input and engage with the service provider on an agreed-upon timeline.

Proposal Process

We ask that interested parties submit proposals by December 15, 2023. Proposals should be sent via email to lisa.sweat@law.columbia.edu with a subject line that includes "Website RFP".

Proposals should provide:

- An overview of the proposed services;
- An outline of the anticipated phases of the website redesign project and the approximate timeline of each;
- A budget and any variables that may affect it;
- The amount of time/engagement the service provider would require from CCSI, and an estimate of when within the process such engagement would be lighter or heavier; and
- Brief context on service provider's prior track record and record of success, especially with prior clients from academia, thinktanks, or other institutional thought leaders.

CCSI plans to review proposals and engage shortlisted candidates over the course of December and January, with the goal of kicking off the project in February or March 2024.