

Rally's Tips for a Great RFP

Find the best website provider for your school district!

Introduction

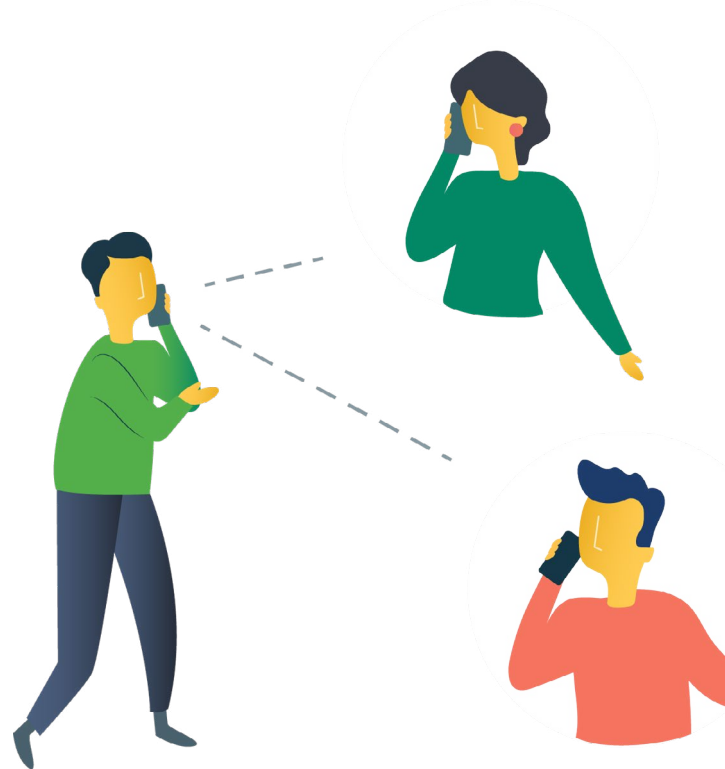
Putting together a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a new website provider for your school district can be a lot of work. At Rally, we see a lot of RFPs from school districts for website projects. We've put together a list of tips & tricks to help you solicit the best responses from vendors.

1. Planning

Starting an RFP can be an intimidating process. There's a lot of information to pull together. If you're not sure where to start, try looking at another school district's RFP. Sometimes you can find them online, but ask colleagues or reach out to organizations such as CACE or NSPRA.

Use these other RFPs as a source of inspiration: your district will have unique needs. Don't just copy the RFP without making any changes - otherwise you might not get the results you want!

Determine the scope of the project from outset. We see a lot of RFPs that include not only websites, but also an app, mass communications platform, and intranet. What's more important to your district: finding one vendor that can bundle lots of technology products together or choosing the vendor that can provide the very best websites and service?



Some vendors prioritize breadth of products - checking lots of different product "boxes" - but don't always provide the best quality work and support. Others are more specialized and focus on delivering the very best websites, but may not provide additional products.

Likewise, leave space in the RFP for vendors to show you what other value, features, or services they can provide. Some RFPs don't allow vendors to reply to anything except your list of requirements (especially those using online bid software). You might be missing something really great that will put a vendor over the top.

2. Design

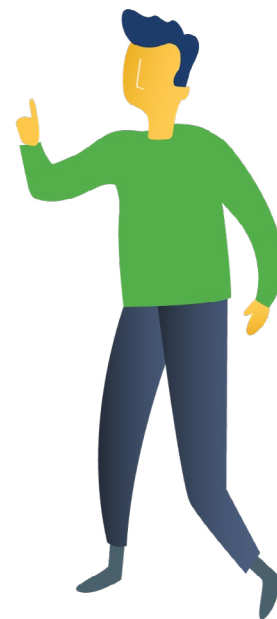
Many vendors will offer both custom and template website options. Be specific about which is the best fit for your district or ask for pricing for both. While it's great to ask for samples of custom design, don't expect a vendor to do a mock-up of your website for your RFP! That's asking for a lot of professional work to be done for free, and most vendors won't consider it. If you're worried about the custom design process, ask the vendor's references what the process was like.

3. Features

You can find a lot of specialized website features for school districts, but not every vendor will offer them all. Ensure you're including all the features you need, from basic functionality such as calendars and news, to more specialized features like attendance area maps or parent-teacher conference bookings.

Not sure what features you want? Use our [Choosing a Web Provide Checklist](#) to get started!

Don't be too prescriptive about the specific ways they need to work - let vendors share best practices and explain how they meet your needs. Just because a feature works one way on your current website doesn't mean that's the best way. Be open to change, and let the vendors show how their systems work.



4. Integrations

When requiring integrations with external systems, be specific about the functionality you need. Describe the task(s) you are trying to accomplish by integrating another system with your websites.

"Integrates with Google" could mean many different things, so be specific - do you want Google Calendar events to automatically display on the website or single-sign on for website administrators with a Google Account? The more details you can include about the specific goals you'd like to achieve with the integration, the better.

5. Support

Be clear about your support expectations. Who is the vendor required to support? Just your central technology team, or CMS users across your district? How do users access support? What response times are acceptable to you?

If there is a bug, how do you report it - and how long can you expect to wait before it's fixed? Different bugs can have different impacts on your website - from something impacting major functionality to a visual bug, ask how a provider will prioritize different bugs and how long you can expect to wait for a resolution.

6. Security

There's a difference between a cloud-hosted Software as a Service (SaaS) provider and a local hosting service. Increasingly, school district websites are delivered by SaaS providers, which offer the best website security, performance, and uptime. What SaaS providers typically can't do is allow you to fully audit their internal policies or request changes to their infrastructure. Decide which is most important to you and structure your RFP accordingly.



7. Scoring & Timeline

Don't box yourself in with a scoring formula that only rewards yes or no replies to the features you want. Let your team use their judgment and reward the quality of the vendor responses. Grading responses on a scale is better than a simple yes/no grade. This flexibility will also give you a sense of what it might be like to work with the vendor, and allow for more details about the potential project.

Most vendors have a human being reviewing your RFP and responding thoughtfully to every requirement. Allow at least one month for vendors to respond, including two full weeks after you release the final addenda.

