

THE JOHN CARTER BROWN LIBRARY

Request for Proposals (RFP) The John Carter Brown Library's Website

The purpose of the RFP is to solicit proposals from qualified web design firms and creative studios to create a new institutional website for the John Carter Brown Library.

Submission Deadline: April 15, 2025

Decision announcement: May 15, 2025

For questions and clarifications, please contact:

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I. Introduction

The [John Carter Brown Library](#) (JCB) is the preeminent collection of rare books, maps, and prints related to the history of the Americas during the long early-modern period (c. late 15th to early 19th centuries). The collection contains around 65,000 items, in over 200 languages. Our digital assets are downloaded over 1 million times per year.

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II. Project Scope

The John Carter Brown Library aims to redefine its digital presence with a website that embodies its mission, leverages new and emerging technologies and web tools, and supports its diverse audiences. This project seeks to develop a platform that achieves the following core objectives:

1. A Better Communication Tool

The new website will serve as the central hub for JCB's activities, enhancing transparency and streamlining user engagement. It will provide a clear, user-friendly interface for accessing library services, updates, and resources. The website should offer a direct feed from at least one social media platform (Instagram, Bluesky) and should offer a direct link to the virtual version of JCB hybrid events.

Success metric: increased user engagement; enhanced cross-over between social media and website.

2. Show Pathways into the Collection

The website will simplify access to JCB's rich collections. By improving navigation and showcasing the connections between physical and digital resources, users will be empowered to discover and engage with the breadth and depth of the library's holdings. The incumbent should be prepared to contribute to efforts to reduce barriers such as the current cumbersome Aeon integration by providing an intuitive, efficient system for item requests.

Success metric: reduced steps to access resources.

3. A Community of Knowledge

The website will foster a vibrant community of scholars, educators, and enthusiasts by opening doors to physical and hybrid opportunities for collaboration and engagement. The platform will serve as a nexus for shared knowledge and intellectual exchange, reinforcing the JCB's position as a library and global research institute.

Success metric: more engagement with social media posts; increase in applications for research opportunities.

Key Features and Requirements

- **CMS & Hosting:** The JCB website has to be developed in Wagtail (a Django-based CMS). For the time being, the website will be hosted on DigitalOcean.
- **Integration:** Seamless API-driven links with Americana and Aeon, with a roadmap for transitioning away from legacy systems.

- **User Experience:** Fully responsive design and SEO best practices for accessibility and discoverability.
- **Web Accessibility:** Fully compliant with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 AA standard.
- **Content Migration:** Ensuring a smooth transition of existing materials from Drupal to Wagtail.
- **Analytics & Reporting:** we envision the possibility of using the website to generate timely reports that include the number of events, fellowships, book requests/downloads/access, etc. for internal, institutional purposes.
- **Interactive Tools:** Event calendar, access to JCB social media including YouTube, live feed for hybrid events or "Watch now!" header with direct link.
- **SEO:** Optimize the website for search engines, focusing on Google best practices.
- **Security:** Backup and disaster recovery solutions

Content Expectations

- Home page
- About: The Library, The Mission, The Collection, Leadership, Staff Directory
- Events: calendar, upcoming, future and past events;
- News page
 - RSS Feed
 - Social media integration
- Patron onboarding: instructions on how to use the library, how to make requests, etc.
- Fellowship: Information / Onboarding / Potentially online application portal
- Brand-free page for inter-institutional projects
- Reading Room appointment page
- Librarian page (staff-access only):
 - In/out dashboard
 - Show where items are in the library (with filters to different operations/activities: scanning, cataloging, conservation, reading room, etc.)
- User accounts and editable profile pages;
- Compliance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 AA standard
- Full page menu / sitemap

III. Proposal Format and Submission Checklist

Please use this checklist to ensure that your proposal includes all of the required elements:

1. Executive Summary

- Overview of the proposed solution.
- Key highlights addressing project objectives.

2. Company Background

- Company name, address, and contact information.

- Brief company history and relevant experience.
- Examples of past work in the library, museum, or public sector.
- Awards or recognitions (if applicable).

3. Team Information

- Names and roles of key personnel assigned to the project.
- Brief bios highlighting relevant expertise.
- Organizational chart of the project team.
- Confirmation of team members' availability for the project timeline.

4. Approach to the Project

- Detailed explanation of the design and development process.
- Description of tools and methodologies for project management.
- Innovative or alternative approaches to meet project objectives.

5. Technical Solution

- Description of proposed technology stack (e.g., Wagtail CMS, API integrations).
- Strategy for achieving accessibility and compliance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 AA standard.
- Approach to ensuring mobile responsiveness and cross-browser compatibility.

6. Project Timeline

- Detailed schedule from kickoff to completion.
- Key milestones, including:
 - Discovery and wireframing.
 - Design iterations.
 - Development phases.
 - Testing and bug fixes.
 - Launch and post-launch support.
- Estimated delivery date for each milestone.

7. Pricing and Budget

- Detailed cost breakdown (design, development, content migration, testing, post-launch support).
- Payment schedule tied to deliverables and milestones.
- Contingency budget for unforeseen requirements.

8. Deliverables

- Wireframes and prototypes.
- Design mockups.
- Front-end and back-end code.
- Content migration strategy.
- Analytics and reporting tools.
- Post-launch training and documentation.

9. Portfolio

- Examples of similar projects for libraries, museums, or educational institutions.
- Description of challenges faced and solutions provided.
- Links to live websites or screenshots of past work.

10. References

- At least three client references, including:
 - Client name and contact information.
 - Description of the project and timeline.
 - Outcomes and measurable results.

11. Legal and Security

- Statement confirming adherence to data security standards (e.g., SSL, GDPR).
- Confirmation that JCB will own all work, code, and intellectual property.
- Confidentiality agreement for proprietary information.

12. Additional Information

- Innovative ideas or suggestions to enhance the website's functionality or user experience.
- Description of additional services offered (e.g., maintenance, user training).
- Assumptions or dependencies critical to the proposal's success.

IV. Selection Timeline

2025/1/15 **Publication of the Request for Proposals**

[Consultation period]

2025/2/1 **Deadline for proposal submission**

[Review period]

V. Evaluation Criteria

We will use the following criteria to evaluate the proposals in order to ensure that they align with project goals and objectives:

1. Proposal Quality

- **Clarity:** Demonstrates a clear understanding of the project requirements and objectives.
- **Organization:** Proposal is well-structured, concise, and easy to navigate.
- **Professionalism:** Presents a polished and comprehensive submission, free of errors or inconsistencies.

2. Relevant Experience

- Proven track record of developing websites for libraries, museums, or similar cultural or academic institutions.
- Experience with integrating complex digital systems, such as library catalogs, digital collections, or content management systems.
- Case studies or portfolios showcasing successful projects of similar scale and complexity.

3. Design and Development Expertise

- Demonstrated ability to create modern, user-friendly, and responsive website designs.
- Strong technical capabilities in CMS implementation (e.g., Wagtail/Django) and API integrations.
- Proficiency in accessibility standards (e.g., compliance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 AA standard).
- Creative and innovative solutions to address navigation, content discovery, and user engagement.

4. Budget Feasibility

- Alignment of the proposed budget with the scope of the project.
- Detailed cost breakdown to ensure transparency and value for investment.
- Feasibility of delivering all required features and services within the specified budget range.

5. Timeline and Project Management

- Detailed timeline with realistic milestones and deliverables.
- Evidence of the ability to meet deadlines and deliver high-quality work within the specified timeframe.

- Clear project management approach, including communication strategies and tools to ensure timely updates and collaboration.

6. Additional Value

- Suggestions for innovative or alternative approaches to enhance the website's functionality or user experience.
- Ability to provide scalable solutions that accommodate future growth and integrations.
- Post-launch support, maintenance, and training offerings.

VI. Terms and Conditions

1. Ownership of Work

- The John Carter Brown Library (JCB) will retain full ownership of all deliverables produced under this project, including but not limited to:
 - Website design and code.
 - Content created or migrated.
 - Documentation and training materials.
 - Custom integrations and APIs.
- Vendors must transfer all intellectual property rights of the completed work to the JCB upon final payment, ensuring unrestricted use, modification, and distribution by the Library.
- Vendors may not reuse or redistribute any part of the deliverables, including code or designs, without express written permission from the JCB.

2. Right to Reject Proposals

- The JCB reserves the right to reject any or all proposals at its sole discretion without obligation to provide reasons for the decision.
- Submission of a proposal does not guarantee selection, contract award, or compensation for time or resources expended in the preparation of the proposal.
- The JCB may waive informalities, negotiate with any or all vendors, or take other actions in the best interest of the library.

3. Confidentiality

- Vendors must treat all information shared during the proposal and project phases as confidential.
- Any proprietary or sensitive information disclosed by JCB during this process may not be shared, reproduced, or used for any purpose outside the scope of this project.

4. Compliance with Standards

- Vendors must ensure all deliverables comply with relevant legal, security, and accessibility standards, including:
 - Data protection and privacy laws (e.g., GDPR compliance).
 - Accessibility standards (e.g., WCAG 2.1 AA).
 - Security protocols for data storage and transfer (e.g., SSL encryption).

5. Dispute Resolution

- Any disputes arising from this agreement shall be resolved through mutual negotiation or arbitration before resorting to legal proceedings.
- The governing law for this agreement will be the laws of the state of Rhode Island, United States.

6. Amendments to the Scope

- Any changes to the scope, deliverables, or timeline must be documented and mutually agreed upon by both parties.
- Additional work resulting from changes to the scope may require renegotiation of project costs and timelines.

7. Liability and Indemnification

- Vendors are responsible for ensuring that their work does not infringe on any third-party intellectual property rights.
- Vendors agree to indemnify and hold the JCB harmless from any claims, liabilities, or damages arising from the project.

8. Timeline Adherence

- Vendors must adhere to the agreed-upon project timeline. Delays caused by the vendor may result in penalties or project termination.
- JCB reserves the right to terminate the agreement if milestones are consistently missed or deliverables do not meet agreed standards.

VII: Vision Statement

Principles

- **Welcome and Access:** Prioritize inclusivity and ease of use, ensuring the website is a welcoming gateway to JCB's rich resources for diverse audiences.
- **Transparency and Integrity:** Build trust by offering clear, accurate, and consistent information about the library's mission, operations, and collections.

Design

- **JCB Architecture + Americana:** Reflect the physical presence of the Library and its digital counterpart, creating a cohesive experience that bridges these realms.
- **Materiality (Books as Objects) + People:** Highlight the tangible heritage of the collection alongside the human connections it fosters, emphasizing both its scholarly and community-centered roles.
- **Brand Colors:** Integrate the provided color guide to maintain consistency with JCB's identity and enhance visual appeal.



Challenges and Opportunities

Design and Integration with Americana

- **Challenge:** Distinguishing and transitioning between the institutional website and Americana, JCB's digital collection platform.
- **Opportunity:** Leverage design to clarify the hierarchical relationship between JCB and Americana, while emphasizing their complementary purposes.
- **Vision:**
 - Americana represents a bi-dimensional digital experience focused on scanned images and collections.
 - The website can adopt a more **architectural and tridimensional approach** inspired by the library building's structure using interactive visuals, video elements, and a people-oriented focus.
 - Seamless navigation between the two platforms will create a unified yet distinct user experience.

Content Granularity and Frequency

- **Challenge:** Balancing diverse types and volumes of content, ranging from frequent updates (e.g., news and events) to detailed, sporadic information (e.g., fellowship applications or book requests).
- **Opportunity:** Enhance the relationship between content and navigation to deliver an improved user experience.
- **Vision:**
 - Implement flexible content architecture to handle varying levels of granularity.
 - Design intuitive navigation paths, such as **scrolling for recent posts** and **streamlined processes for specific actions** like book requests.
 - Simplify and consolidate user pathways to reduce clicks and improve efficiency.

Book Circulation

- **Challenge:** The existing Aeon system is cumbersome, requiring multiple accounts and excessive clicks, while relying on outdated technology.
- **Opportunity:** Modernize the book request process, improving usability and efficiency while preserving traceability of items.
- **Vision:**
 1. **Integration Option:** Link Americana with Aeon via a “push-button” request system using Americana credentials, allowing phased discontinuation of Aeon.
 2. **Custom Application Option:** Develop a new request platform integrated with the website, enriched with existing Aeon data, providing a future-proof solution.

Analytics and Reporting

- **Challenge:** Managing complex, manual reporting processes for activities such as item consultations, events, and digital access metrics.
- **Opportunity:** Automate analytics and reporting to save time and provide actionable insights.
- **Vision:**
 - Integrate robust analytic tools into the website to generate **real-time reports** on user engagement, access statistics, and operational metrics.
 - Offer customizable dashboards for internal and institutional reporting needs.