

# Soil and Water Conservation Society

## Request for Proposals

### Comprehensive Communications Plan/New Website

#### July 15, 2015

### Introduction

The Soil and Water Conservation Society (SWCS) seeks proposals from vendors to develop and implement a comprehensive communications plan, including evaluation of current communications and creation of a strategic plan for new content and marketing initiatives supported by a new website. This Request for Proposals (RFP) is to solicit a consultant with skills, experience, and vision to support this effort.

### About SWCS

**Mission:** To foster the science and art of soil, water, and related natural resource management to achieve sustainability, and promote and practice an ethic recognizing the interdependence of people and the environment.

**Vision:** SWCS is recognized internationally as an effective advocate for the conservation of soil, water, and related natural resources.

**Background:** SWCS is the world's leading conservationist society that provides a centralized place for members from a variety of sectors to share perspectives and discover, develop, and implement methods and practices to sustain the productive capacity of our working lands. Because the strength of our Society lies in the strength of our members, we provide front-line access to scientific research through our industry-leading *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* and cutting-edge scientific reports and workshops. We also offer networking and professional development opportunities through events such as our SWCS Annual Conferences. Passionate about the future, SWCS serves as an advocate for conservation public policy and outreach that will shape the next generation's ability to sustain and improve the quality of life we all enjoy.

### Project Description

An active organization since 1943, SWCS's 4,000 members participate both in local chapters and at the national level. Membership has shifted over the past 20 years to become more diverse, both in member professions and nationalities. In order to anticipate the future needs of Society members and encourage continued membership growth, the Board of Directors has recommended that we create a communications plan to reflect and serve the organization and our changing constituency. Our goals are to evaluate the effectiveness of the current communication products offered by SWCS, make recommendations for future products that would draw and benefit a larger membership, release a new website, and create a plan to position the Society to serve as the best resource for soil and water conservation information for an expanded market in the next 25 years and beyond.

### Evaluate Membership and Target Audience Needs

SWCS has a diverse membership with a range of conservation interests and experiences. To gain an informed perspective on the audiences reached and the products utilized or desired, we would like to

undertake a membership survey, detailed member/focus group interviews, and nonmember stakeholder interviews. This data will be compiled to identify trends, communications successes and gaps, and needs for future efforts.

Current target audiences may include:

- SWCS Membership
  - Researchers
  - USDA NRCS, USDA ARS, and USGS employees
  - Extension agents
  - Technical advisors
  - Planners
  - Policymakers
  - Post-secondary teachers and students
- Board of Directors
- Staff
- Corporate members
- Farmers, ranchers, and other producers
- Landowners (including absentee landowners)
- Like-minded environmental and agricultural organizations
- Agriculture-related industries
- The media
- The public

### **Evaluate Effectiveness of Current Content**

Using results of member surveys and interviews, in combination with website usage statistics, Society mass email statistics, social media usage statistics, and *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* subscriber statistics, we would like to evaluate the accessibility and use of our current informational content. See “Notes” section for a list of current products.

### **Identify Opportunities for New Content**

After completing a review of the current offerings of SWCS, we would like recommendations for expanding our resource base to reach our multiple target audiences. We would like to identify ways that we can better utilize our current member knowledgebase and products as well as new initiatives that will fill resource gaps for our membership. The organization of content should facilitate ongoing addition of new materials and should take into account the increasing importance of easy information access and interactive content for an online audience.

### **Release New Website and Branded Communications**

In order to present SWCS resources in an organized and accessible format, we would like to release a new website. Navigation and content organization should be prioritized and simplified. We would like to emphasize our role in conservation education and professionalism to both members and prospective members. The new website will serve as the communication cornerstone—the primary point of contact for current members, new members, and the public—and should make the benefits of membership and the Society’s work clear. The design should take into account the functions of the current site as well as any anticipated or recommended functions for a nonprofit, member-based organization.

## **Create Marketing Strategy**

As part of this shift, we would like to introduce our website and coordinating communications pieces with a marketing strategy that will reach target audiences. We would like to use our own platforms as well as advertise through related outlets with wide reach.

## **Splitting the Project**

SWCS recognizes that the conceptual and organizational components of a strategic communications plan and the implementation skills necessary for a website redesign may be strengths of multiple companies. Therefore, SWCS reserves the right to a multi-vendor solution to meet its needs.

## **Proposal Contents**

We are seeking proposals from firms to create a strategic communications plan for SWCS. We seek an agency with

- experience working with nonprofit organizations, in particular member-based organizations
- experience working with and knowledge of issues relevant to environmental, agricultural, and/or professional scientific organizations
- knowledge of membership surveys and evaluation
- experience coordinating staff and a volunteer board to ensure smooth adoption of new strategic communications and initiatives
- experience overseeing the development, design, and release of branded communication elements, including a website

Proposals should include the following information:

1. How you will support each of the specific deliverables; include any additional functions that could benefit the comprehensive communications plan
2. An outline and timeline for project implementation
3. Your expectations of SWCS:
  - a. Staffing
  - b. Training
  - c. Technology
4. A detailed budget including breakdowns for project phases
5. Summary of communications plan and website development experience, including samples of related work the agency has completed
6. List of existing client references
7. List of other individuals who will be involved in the project, including relevant experience and credentials

## **Evaluation Criteria**

Proposals will be evaluated based on the following standards:

- How does the proposal meet the project's requirements?
- What is the experience of the agency's staff?
- What will be the best value for the client, including most creative use of dollars and how will the agency leverage other products or services to maximize these dollars?
- How is the proposal addressing the need to situate the client to stay relevant in a climate of rapidly changing media?

## Timeline

RFP released July 15, 2015

Questions submitted by July 24, 2015

Questions will be answered by August 3, 2015

Full proposals should be submitted to SWCS August 14, 2015

SWCS will choose vendors for presentations August 21, 2015

SWCS will notify chosen candidate by September 16, 2015

## Reponses

Reponses to this RFP must be returned no later than August 14, 2015. All proposals should be sent to the address below:

Soil and Water Conservation Society

Attn: Annie Binder

945 SW Ankeny Road

Ankeny, IA 50023

Questions may be addressed to Annie Binder at [annie.binder@swcs.org](mailto:annie.binder@swcs.org).

## Notes

### Current Products

- *Journal of Soil and Water Conservation* (print and online; hosted by HighWire Press)
- Conservogram Newsletter (online and emailed monthly as a PDF)
- Conservation NewsBriefs (online and emailed weekly through Multiview)
- 20+ book publications, some open access (print with some PDFs available online)
- Event calendar (online)
- Social networking pages (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter)
- Conference presentation archive (online: videos, slides, photos)
- Library of resources for leaders to build local chapters (online)
- Job Board (online; paid postings only--minimally used)

### Current Website Host and Developer

The SWCS website, membership database, and online store are developed and hosted by Global Reach Internet Productions.