

LEATHER ^{AND} HIDE

COUNCIL OF AMERICA

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL

Leather & Hide Council of America

Real Leather. Stay Different. Campaign

The Leather and Hide Council of America (Council or LHCA) is using this request for proposal (RFP) to invite multiple proposals. This would use off the shelf tools for the development and management a competition platform, multiple websites, an integrated information system for a lifecycle assessment database, a digital asset management tool for brand management, a customer relations management tool, a digital communication (newsletter) tool, data and artificial intelligence integrations, and system analysis. The RFP will be used to identify one or more organizations to develop one or more of these cloud-based tools to support the L&HCA mission.

I. Organizational Background

The Leather and Hide Council of America is a national trade association established in 1917. The Association has approximately 75 member companies that collectively account for over 90 percent of U.S. hide, skin, wet blue and leather production and exports. Members of the Association include meat packers, hide processors, brokers, traders and dealers, tanneries, leather product manufacturers, trade media and other industry service providers.

II. Project Background and Objectives

Background. LHCA promotes leather fashion, design and craftsmanship, highlighting style, brands and the craftspeople that make it happen to build a presence and unlock access to fashion brands and the wider leather industry.

Underlying this effort is a technology framework. This includes four-plus domains, including chooserealleather.com, internationaldesigncomp.com, usleather.org and onlynaturaldesign.org. The network also includes Zoho a SAAS package used for contact relationship management software, surveys and campaign communications. Websites are also linked with opportunities to join our newsletters and tie into Zoho's CRM. LHCA also uses AxiosHQ for campaign communications. AxiosHQ does not have an integrated CRM. Two outstanding components which need to be included are a digital asset management software and a life cycle assessment data platform.

usleather.org/communications

The USLeather.org website is hosted in Drupal and has a minimal user content management interface. The communications and campaign software are minimally integrated into the usleather.org, chooserealleather.com and internationaldesigncomp.com infrastructure. As noted below this will be integrated.

[Chooserealleather.com](http://chooserealleather.com) and internationaldesigncomp.com

LHCA currently uses a tailored web-based solution built upon an off-the-shelf CMS which drives both the RLSD and Only Natural competition sites. Developed in late 2022 and launched in 2023, the platform has successfully run both national and international design competitions

over the past two years and has been consistently maintained and developed to optimize user experience and ensure security and reliability.

The current solution is capable of hosting many competition sub-sites with unique brand identities via a multi-tenancy architecture, whilst sharing a common user database for participants, voting guests, administrators and content moderators. RLSD and Only Natural are the two current sub-sites housed within this solution. Themes within the platform have been built to WCAG standards for Accessibility.

Within each competition sub-site, the CMS provides the ability to populate marketing content in the form of pages and posts in a popular WYSIWYG-style block editor. Data on competition locations/regions, colleges/universities, and the competition events is all manageable via the admin interface allowing the team to populate, adjust, and promote annual competitions with relative ease. The CMS is intuitive and user-friendly, allowing the competition teams and moderators to work efficiently.

From a user perspective, the platform offers the ability to register for a free account which can be used to like an unlimited number of projects, vote on one project per competition per year, and participate in open competitions by populating a detailed user profile and creating one or more projects (entries) within the system.

Users are provided with a self-serve interface which allows them full ability to create, edit, and remove their profiles and projects as they see fit, with a content moderation system that holds new and changed user data for manual review before being made public. This process ensures the quality and appropriateness of content, helping to maintain a high standard for public-facing competition entries and ensure that no inappropriate content is published.

In addition to moderation, user uploads are tightly controlled to manage allowed file types, sizes, formats/codecs, and resolutions/dimensions. All user-uploaded content is scanned for malware at the time of upload.

The platform currently works globally, with primary data storage in the US and regional servers in the UK and China. The global infrastructure supports fast performance across different regions and is designed for data compliance with local regulations, such as GDPR in Europe and the ICP requirements in China. The platform currently holds an ICP License from China's MIIT for full legal operation in mainland China for the RLSD sub-site.

The current provider hosts and maintains the existing solution, with the following high-level technical details:

- Wordpress-based core with highly bespoke plugins and WCAG-compliant themes
- Bespoke data structure and tables for competition entries, profiles, and other data
- Servers in US, UK and Mainland China, scalable to additional regions with growth
- Multisite setup with shared infrastructure for sub-site use
- Version-controlled codebases via git
- WAF, Routing, Load Balancing, CDN, and Anti-DDoS via Cloudflare Pro
- Security & XDR via SentinelOne, Monitoring with NewRelic, Sentry, Solarwinds PaperTrail
- Automated virus/malware scanning of user-uploaded assets
- Comprehensive Backup and Disaster Recovery strategy in place
- Full staging environment with both sub-sites replicated without PII for testing
- ~10k Activated User accounts and profiles
- ~3000 projects with ~8000 project assets (images/videos/PDFs)
- EU GDPR (and UK GDPR) compliant
- Accessible in mainland China with ICP License in place.

Objectives. The goal for 2025 and beyond is to create an integrated system for the key components of the technology infrastructure. As noted above, the components of the infrastructure include:

- chooserealleather.com and realeather.com
- rlsd.internationaldesigncomp.com

- onlynatural.internationaldesigncomp.com
- onlynaturaldesign.com
- usleather.org/isp.com
- crm and communications integration
- translation services integration
- digital asset management software
- leather learning
- Integrated cloud-based life cycle inventory and life cycle assessment website interface

With nine major technology components that are currently partly or mostly independently managed, LHCA is agnostic whether there should be a single integrated service provider or multiple service providers with expertise in particular service areas.

Bidders are not required to bid on all technology components but are requested to bid on each technology component that they do bid on separately. Bids should include cost to update and/or build the current service and an estimated cost to maintain (and provide routine updates) to the service over the course of 24 months. [NB: The initial contract will be for 12 months with an annual renewal.]

Current technology platforms must be maintained. There is some urgency in updates to certain key services including CRM, communications, the digital asset management software and updates to the usleather.org/isp.org websites. With that in mind, each section should include an implementation timeline.

III. Statement of Work

The following components are open for proposals. Bidders may bid for any combination of the following components. LHCA may not choose to implement all components. For this reason, please label and cost each component separately.

The proposals should provide, depending on the components bid, software, hardware and systems. Design ie, graphic for interfaces, will be provided by the marketing team. Additionally, all websites require they be accessible to people with disabilities consistent with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

As LHCA, RLSD, Only Natural and the other LHCA brands and their respective competitions continue to grow year-on-year, LHCA is looking to continually improve the platform used to deliver the competitions. As the platform has grown and technologies have evolved, a number of areas have been highlighted for improvement of process, functionality, services, and integration.

Competition platform (internationaldesigncomp.com)

The competition platform, either as an iteration of the current solution or a reimplementaion, must continue to be secure, compliant, performant, reliable, and accessible. Data protection, security and compliance continue to be key considerations for any future development or solution.

Various processes that the competition administrators and content moderators follow can be optimized and streamlined. Enriching data within the admin interface with additional context, links, and statistics would allow moderators to make quicker decisions, and allow administrators to navigate more quickly without needing to jump between areas of the CMS.

Adding near real-time statistics for both lifetime and current year/competitions, such as the number of projects/entries, entries by competition, entries by region, entries by college/university, and other key metrics will allow the team a better understanding of the competition performance both during and after the competition events. The ability to export this data for further analysis in tools such as Excel would also be a benefit, as the metrics are often used in next year's print and promotional campaigns.

Automation and the use of AI technologies in the backend may provide an additional benefit to the admin and moderator teams. Translations of content to provide a multilingual experience (currently only in English) would make competitions more accessible, and the use of AI or automated translations may allow this to be done while keeping costs to a minimum and allowing teams to focus effort elsewhere.

Integration with third-party platforms such as newsletter CRM systems would help with marketing for the platform, and the addition of social login/registration may streamline the user experience for participants and guests, especially guests signing up only to vote as we anticipate this would drastically reduce the amount of input needed to create an account. In some regions where email addresses are less prominent, social sign-in or sign-up via mobile number (SMS) would also be of benefit. Where social links or SMS based communications are used, further CRM ability to send push notifications for direct communication to users would be desirable.

To maintain infrastructure costs as more assets are uploaded and improve front-end performance and user experience, automated scaling/resizing and compression of uploaded user assets would be a valuable addition. Further mobile and tablet optimization with consideration of low-end devices and poor network connectivity would further increase accessibility of the platform to users from less privileged backgrounds and regions.

The proposal costs should include detailed explanation of how the current platform would be developed/expanded and maintained.

Real Leather. Stay Different Website (chooserealleather.com/realleather.com)

The current Real Leather. Stay Different. website is built in Wordpress. It needs to be maintained and routinely updated both as a stand along and integration it with the competition platform and other technology tools including CRM and communications.

While the website is fully functional, it will benefit from ongoing design updates and content updates and improvements to align with modern web standards and best practices. This includes ensuring continued responsive design compatibility across all devices, and optimizing for SEO and performance.

Additionally, currently the website does not have a content management interface, requiring site maintenance through the admin interface. A content management interface will allow key users to write, edit and approve content within the content management interface. The bid should incorporate providing training and documentation for our team to manage the updated site.

The proposal costs should include detailed explanation of how the current website would be developed/expanded and maintained.

Leather and Hide Council of American Website (usleather.org)

The current Leather and Hide Council of American website is built in Drupal. It needs to be updated and migrated to the WordPress platform. The goal is to enhance user experience, improve functionality, and ensure seamless integration with other technology tools including CRM and communications. maintained and routinely updated both as a stand along and integration it with the competition platform.

This website requires updating the current website design and content to align with modern web standards and best practices, migrating the existing website into a new WordPress site, ensuring all content, features, and functionalities are preserved and enhanced and implementing responsive design to ensure compatibility across all devices. The website should be optimizing the website for SEO and performance.

As part of the migration to WordPress, the website will require a content management interface, requiring site maintenance through the admin interface. A content management interface will allow key users to write, edit and approve content within the content

management interface. The bid should incorporate providing training and documentation for our team to manage the updated site.

The proposal costs should include detailed explanation of how the current website is updated to the same system as chooserealleather.com would be developed and maintained.

Industry Sustainability Program (isp.com)

Part of the Leather and Hide Council of America website will be an integrated Industry Sustainability Program domain. This is a separate domain that will stand alone but will also be integrated into the usleather.com website within a frame or other similar space.

Contract Relations Management and Communications

LHCA will migrate to a single CRM and communications software. The likely SAAS platforms are Monday.com CRM and MailChimp. The CRM will need to be integrated into the websites as appropriate. MailChimp will need to be integrated into the websites so that team members can seamlessly send messages on behalf of the different campaigns (Real Leather. Stay Different., Only Natural, L&HCA, etc.) to a variety of targeted recipients.

The proposal costs should include AI Integrations for translations and newsletter generation based on the use of standard CRM and newsletter systems. While CRM and newsletter systems have not been confirmed and could be adjusted based on the results of these proposals, they are likely to be Monday.com CRM and MailChimp.

There are multiple opportunities for the integration of AI into all of the websites.

For example, each site has regularly posted articles. After several posts accumulate, they are then selected for sending through the communication platform (e.g., MailChimp). An AI integration should be able to allow a user to select the blogs and then generate an html compliant newsletter with appropriate headers, footers, web assets, content written in Smart Brevity™ with links to the original blog, ideally prepopulated into the communications platform.

The Real Leather. Stay Different. website includes translations in Spanish and Chinese. When content is added in English, it should be automatically translated and the appropriate language content manager notified so that they can login in and approve the content. The same should happen when a newsletter is generated in English where there is a foreign language website.

The proposal costs should include AI Integrations for translations and newsletter generation based on the use of the existing/ newly developed website platform with output to the appropriate foreign language website/newsletter. While the newsletter systems has not been confirmed and could be adjusted based on the results of these proposals, it are likely to be MailChimp.

Digital asset management software

LHCA maintains multiple brands, including LHCA, RLSD, Only Natural. LHCA maintains teams in more than eight countries. Brand management requires being able to reliably and seamlessly, maintain and share digital and video assets.

LHCA requires a digital asset management software that can be used by multiple offices and allow users to seamlessly integrate digital assets into websites and social media.

The proposal costs should include suggested DAM which can be integrated with the website development platform and the cost of operation and integration.

Cloud hosting

The platform currently works globally, with primary data storage in the US and regional servers in the UK and China. The global infrastructure supports fast performance across different regions and is designed for data compliance with local regulations, such as GDPR in Europe and the ICP requirements in China. The platform currently holds an ICP License from China's MIIT for full legal operation in mainland China for the RLSD sub-site. Some details are provided in the above in the Background and Objectives section.

The proposal costs should include detailed explanation of how the current cloud hosting system would be developed/expanded, as necessary and maintained.

Leather learning software platform

This component is under development and is intended to create an educational library that can be explored and used by students in design and working with leather as well as those in the industry to help them build their knowledge base and expertise and by those looking to work in leather and wanting to learn more. Recognising the trends today towards bite sized packaging of high value content this recommendation sets out how to set out the framework for such a Leather Learning Library – and specifically how one would approach the first production of, for example, 10 content units. Content would be developed by a marketing team. The software should integrate into LHCA's current platforms (ie, chooserealleather.com, usleather.org) as well as a white-label platform for universities or companies, and consider the opportunities provided by a subscription model (for data capture/for revenue) and a sponsorship model.

Hosting considerations include:

- Central hosting and links eg leatherlearning.com
- Integration of download tracking eg. registration, body, use etc.
- Site structure and content
- Content promotion and marketing
 - Direct database
 - Channels eg education and trade media
 - Events / other

The proposal costs for this component should include detailed explanation for how a scoping effort (and costs) for the development of a leather learning platform, including backend development and business/LHCA platform facing interface would be developed.

Life cycle inventory cloud-based hosting and lifecycle assessment website

LHCA is seeking technology solution that would involve designing and developing a cloud-based system for hosting life cycle inventory (LCI) data related to animal agriculture and tanning. The system should provide a secure, user-friendly online interface for assessing, comparing, and developing LCA outputs as well as entering additional inventory data to generate comparatives.

The project objectives are to create a scalable cloud-based platform for storing and managing LCI data, provide a secure, password-protected online interface for users, enable users to assess and compare LCA outputs effectively and allow users to add new LCA data and update existing records.

The proposal should include recommendations for a microservices architecture utilizing a cloud service provider (e.g., AWS, Google Cloud, Azure), detail the use of relational and NoSQL databases for structured and unstructured data storage, and outline the process for data ingestion, including API development for data uploads.

The proposal should also describe data validation methods to ensure data integrity and explain the algorithms for processing LCA data and generating reports, including the integration of LCA tools including Ecoinvent and openLCA.

The plan should include the development a web application using modern frontend frameworks, detail the user authentication system, including password protection and role-based access control and include strategies for data visualization to present LCA results effectively.

Because data will be sensitive, the proposal should describe the encryption methods for data at rest and in transit, outline access control measures and regular audit processes, and provide a plan for logging and monitoring user activity.

The proposal costs should include detailed explanation for how a scoping effort (and costs) for the development of an integrated LCA, including backend integration and business facing interface would be developed.

For all components

Finally, the proposal should provide a plan for user documentation and technical support services.

IV. Proposal Format and Selection Criteria

LHCA will select one or more organizations based on the response to this request for proposal.

The proposal format is open and must be submitted electronically. Proposal length will depend on the number of components bid+. Evaluation criteria includes, but is not limited to, the following key points:

- Technical qualifications of the proposer including experience with similar projects, and particularly staff experience and qualifications
- The ability to work with international industry associations
- Proposed budget: the budget should provide a total U.S. dollar amount required to carry out the project, along with the breakouts for the following:
 - Hourly rates and approximate number of staff hours for the project
 - Itemized cost for each deliverable:
 - Multi stakeholder software system scoping, planning and integration capabilities (case studies would be useful supporting documentation)
 - Administrative costs and other miscellaneous costs along with justification for these costs
 - Third party fees that may be incurred
- Timeline of project milestones

Additional details will assist in assessing the overall merit of the proposal.

V. Timing

The duration of the project is approximately 12 months. This project is a priority for the Council and its partners. Thus, we may be able selected organization(s) to begin executing as early as January 2025 and would expect to start not later than February 2025.

VI. Response and Submittal Deadline

Questions or details regarding this request for proposal contact Kevin Latner, Leather and Hide Council of America at Kevin@USLeather.org.

The response deadline for this RFP is January 17, 2025. Final proposals should be submitted via email to Info@USLeather.org, noting LHCA Technology Proposal in the subject line.

The Council reserves the right to withdraw the RFP or award only a portion of the work outlined in the statement of work. The successful proposal will be awarded a contract from the Council.

LHCA requires all contractors not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or national origin. If awarded the contract, the contractor will, in all solicitations or advertisements for employees placed by or on behalf of the contractor, state that all qualified applicants will receive consideration for employment without regard to race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or national origin. The contractor will comply with the provisions of Executive Order 11246, as amended, and of the rules, regulations and relevant orders of the U.S. Secretary of Labor.