Request for Proposals

Management of Technology Infrastructure

The Society for Political Methodology seeks bids to host, manage, and maintain its website ([http://polmeth.org](http://polmeth.org)), listserv, membership database, and internal file-management system.

**Background**

The Society for Political Methodology (henceforth “the Society”) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit which also serves as the organized political methodology section of the American Political Science Association. The purpose of the Society is to facilitate the academic endeavors of its members, including the production and dissemination of their research, the enhancement and reach of their pedagogy, and the quality and quantity of their service in political methodology, i.e., in research methodology and design, in data collection and measurement, in statistics, and in theoretical and empirical modeling in Political Science.

The Society’s website, listserv, and file-management system is currently hosted, managed, and maintained by the Center for Empirical Research in the Law ([http://cerl.wustl.edu](http://cerl.wustl.edu)) and the College of Arts & Sciences at Washington University in St. Louis.

While the Society’s technology infrastructure is technically under the control of the President of the Society, much of the responsibility for day-to-day operations are delegated to faculty members at the host institution. Currently, these faculty “webmasters” are Betsy Sinclair and Jacob Montgomery at Washington University in St. Louis. These faculty webmasters are charged with supervising the IT staff charged with the technical aspects of hosting, managing, and maintaining the technology infrastructure.

**Scope of Work**

The Society’s current website and listserv are the public face of the Society. The database management system and file sharing system play important roles in managing membership, conference data, and important internal documents.
The key parts of the Society’s current website are:
- various pieces of static information
- functionality for joining the Society or renewing a membership
- functionality related to the Society’s annual conference
- interfaces to the Society’s publications
- a paper archive
- a poster archive
- a syllabus archive
- functions for charitable donations to the Society

Additional critical technology services include:
- an email listserv
- a searchable listserv archive that displays content in an attractive manner
- a membership database
- capabilities for file sharing

The new host will need to maintain this functionality (if not the actual form of the website). In addition, the Society seeks to expand and improve its web infrastructure in a variety of ways. These include:

- improving the membership system
- improving the conference system
- improving the curation of archived content
- creation of a password protected system for storing official documents with multiple levels of permissions

The sections below provides additional details on both the current infrastructure and the improvements the Society would like to put in place.

**Website**

**User Experience (Admin)**

The current website was custom built and is not imbedded within a modern content management system (CMS). Changes to the content – whether static pages or templates – require changes to raw HTML or PHP code. In all, the structure of the current website requires assistance from technical staff to make even minor changes, and modest changes to functionality or template format are time consuming and difficult.

*Technical requirements:* It should be possible for non-technical staff to edit content, preferably through the use of a WYSIWYG editor. Similarly, all pages that display
content drawn from a back-end database should be displayed according to
templates that can be edited through the CMS system. Further, it should be possible
to manage webforms and linked databases through an intuitive and easy-to-use
backend. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Easy to update content
- Easy to update web form fields
- Capability to have emails sent to a target email after a webform is completed.
- Easy to add/remove admin access
- Web form submissions must be downloadable to Excel or CSV file.
- Administrators must be able to edit field content directly

We suspect that these goals will be best met using a well-known CMS such as
Wordpress, Joomla, or Drupal, but are open to other possibilities.

**Staffing requirements:** The future host will be responsible for managing software
updates, patches, and extensions in the basic CMS software.

**Static Content**

The Society website features a moderate amount of static content. Examples
include: a list of the current officers, a list of the Society’s various awards along with
past winners of those awards, a detailed listing of the various committees of the
Society along with current and past membership, a list of Fellows of the Society, the
Society’s annual calendar, and a few other items. Much of this static content is
updated approximately once per year.

**Technical requirements:** It should be possible for non-technical staff to edit static
pages, preferably through the use of a WYSIWYG editor.

**Staffing requirements:** The future host of the website will need to maintain this static
content. It is important that updates to the static content are made in timely
fashion. The content of these updates will typically come from the President of the
Society and the faculty webmasters.

**Archived Content**

The Society website serves as a repository for working papers, poster presentations
and syllabi. These items are held in a publicly searchable, browsable archive with a
front end on the Society website. When new content is posted and approved, an
email is automatically generated for the listserv. The holdings are from 1995 to the
present.

**Technical requirements:** The archive should be integrated into the content
management system. Submissions should be ingested through webforms that add
the content to the database. Once approved, the new content should automatically
be added to the searchable archive. Once selected by users, individual items should be displayed using a standard attractive template.

*Staffing requirements:* It will be important for a future host to be thoughtful and purposeful in curating this collection of documents. At a minimum, some level of filtering will be needed to prevent the posting of “junk science” and other inappropriate materials.

**Annual Conference**

Each July, the Society holds the Annual Meeting of the Society for Political Methodology. This is an invitation-only conference that is hosted by a rotating set of universities. The conference typically has between 150 and 200 registered attendees.

Invitations to the conference are competitive and require paper proposals and/or poster proposals to be submitted along with supporting information. The call for proposals typically goes out in late February or early March. Proposals are received over the next month, the program committee then makes invitation decisions, and invitees are notified shortly thereafter. Invitees must then register to attend the conference.

Under the current system, initial proposals are submitted via a web interface linked off of the Society’s website. Proposals are inserted into an SQL database. Reports are then sent to the program committee to make invitation decisions. These invitation decisions are sent back to the system’s administrative team in a CSV file. The team then inserts this information back into the conference registration database. Invitations are sent out via an automated system and responses are recorded automatically in the conference registration database. The conference organizers at the host institution are sent registration information at regular intervals as well as at their request. The leadership of the Society and the conference hosts do not have the ability to query the registration database directly. This basic functionality must be maintained and enhanced.

*Technical requirements:* Ideally, it would be possible for non-technical staff (e.g., conference organizers and / or Society officers) to modify existing webforms or generate new ones. The associated databases should be visible to users with appropriate permissions. So, for instance, it should be possible for organizers to run reports and to make edits to associated database fields. This would allow for the decision process to be submitted within the CMS system itself rather than going through staff. Particular attention should be paid to setting up the forms and database such that letters of recommendation are appropriately integrated into the applications.

*Staffing requirements:* Staff will need to work with organizers to make modifications to webforms, database fields, and help generate reports.
**Publications Interface**

The Society has two main publications: *Political Analysis*, which is a peer-reviewed journal published by Oxford University Press and *The Political Methodologist*, which is a newsletter (currently published as a blog at Rice University).

The Society’s website links to both of these publications. Further, in the case of *Political Analysis* which has full text access only to subscribers, the Society’s website allows users to submit their user ID and password to Oxford University press for authentication. These user IDs and passwords are, in principle, given to members after joining the Society.

*Technical requirements:* The current functionality should be maintained. In the future, these publications may need to be more directly integrated into the website.

**Charitable Donations**

As a 501(c)(3) non-profit, the Society can accept charitable contributions. The primary mechanism for this is a PayPal interface on the Society website. No major changes are required here, although this page could be given more prominent display on the site.

**Additional basic requirements**

- Must be mobile friendly
- Appropriate use of Alt tags for sight-impaired
- Heading tags for sight-impaired
- Resizable text
- Distinguishable text (color/contrast) and clean design
- Include social media icons (Facebook, Twitter, etc) and “Share” tools
- Logical menu structure
- Site map
- Site search
- Web forms must offer the ability to send a copy to the submitter

**Listserv**

The Society also runs the POLMETH mailing list. This mailing list is a moderated list that is currently run by Washington University. Submissions to the list from 1998 to the present are archived and made publicly available on the Society website. The listserv moderators have typically been, and currently are, graduate students at the host institution. The moderator positions are unpaid positions.
**Technical requirements:** The current functionality of the listserv should be maintained. Further, a comprehensive archiving system is needed to fully integrate the archive and to ensure that future posts are archived in a similar manner. Third, the archives must be displayed in an attractive manner, similar to the current system. Preferably, the archive display should be fully integrated into the website as it is in the current version.

**Staffing requirements:** The new host will need to recruit moderators for the website.

**Membership database**

The Society has approximately 1,000 members. Currently, these members can join the Society (and renew their membership) through three channels: a) Through the American Political Science Association (APSA), b) through the European Political Science Association (EPSA), or c) directly through the Society via its website. It is currently the case that the vast majority (90% or more) of members join and renew through APSA.

When an individual joins the Society through the APSA, their dues and membership information are transmitted to the APSA. These dues are deposited in an APSA bank account. The Society leadership can request withdrawals from this account but the funds never cross into the Society’s own bank account. APSA provides membership information to the Society at yearly intervals in the form of CSV files but at the moment there is no direct connection between the APSA member database and the Society’s member database.

When an individual joins the Society through EPSA their dues and membership information are transmitted to the EPSA. The collected dues are transferred to the Society’s bank account via a PayPal transfer at 6 month intervals. Similarly, the membership information is given to the Society at 6 month intervals in the form of CSV files but at the moment there is no direct connection between the EPSA member database and the Society’s member database.

When an individual joins the Society through the Society’s website their dues are deposited directly in the Society’s bank account and their membership information is inserted directly into the Society’s member database.

**Technical requirements:** In the future, the Society would like to streamline and automate the membership system so that membership information from APSA and EPSA memberships is automatically inserted into the Society’s member database. Similarly, we wish to explore ways to streamline the monetary transfers from the EPSA to the Society. Doing this will likely require at least a modest redesign of the
member database and the associated API. It will also require close work with Society leadership and the IT teams at EPSA and APSA.

**Official Document Storage**

Currently, the Society’s website maintains a small number of publicly viewable official documents (the Society's bylaws, the bylaws for the APSA Organized Section on Political Methodology, and the Society's conflict of interest policy).

*Technical requirements:* The Society would like to create a centralized repository of documents with a secure web access, control over permissions to various files and folders, and basic versioning. A modified version of a standard file sharing system such as GitHub or Dropbox may be possible.

**Deliverables**

The Society seeks the following deliverables:

- Transfer of the existing website, along with all of its existing functionality, to a new host.
- A redesign of the website appearance to make it more inline with contemporary aesthetics.
- Additions to, and modifications of, the membership functionality as described above.
- Additions to, and modifications of, the conference organization and registration functionality as described above.
- Maintenance and redesign of the POLMETH listserv as described above.
- Ongoing curation of the Society’s archived content as described above.
- Maintenance and timely modification of the website’s static content as described above.
- Development of a centralized, password-protected storage facility for official documents as described above.
- Ongoing maintenance of the website and associated databases.
- Occasional development of new functionality.
- Next business day service.

**Requirements for Proposal Preparation**

Proposals should be submitted in writing and should contain the following details:

- Brief descriptions of the educational background, relevant professional experience, and technical skills of the key IT staff members who will be working on the project.
• The number of person hours that can be devoted to the project per month.
• A brief description of the organizational hierarchy among the IT staff with a clear statement of who the overall team leader will be.
• A description of the physical infrastructure that can be devoted to the project.
• A description of how the deliverables will be produced. More detail is preferred to less.
• A description of how the host university will fund the work conducted by the IT staff. Formal letters of support from university administrators are not necessary at the proposal stage, but such letters will be required before an award can be made.

Timeline

The current host will stop maintaining the website on August 31, 2015. The target date for the transition to a new host to be completed is July 1, 2015. The target date for the contract to be awarded to the new host is February 27, 2015.

Contact Information

Questions and completed proposals should be addressed to:

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