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1) Current performance baselines

- a) Do you have current benchmarks for onlinedegrees.kent.edu regarding inquiry, application start, completion, and enrollment volumes attributable to the site?

Yes. Kent State Online tracks the full prospective student lifecycle through our CRM, Slate, which is fully integrated with onlinedegrees.kent.edu. This allows us to monitor and report on all key conversion points, including inquiry, application start, application completion, and enrollment.

- b) What are the conversion rates at key stages (visit to lead, lead to application, application to enrollment)?

Kent State Online tracks conversion rates across all key stages, including visit to inquiry, inquiry to application, and application to enrollment. Specific benchmarks can be shared as needed during later stages of the evaluation process.

- c) Can you share key site metrics such as traffic by channel (specifically non-branded organic), engagement on program pages, and current Core Web Vitals or accessibility scores?

Yes. Kent State Online monitors key website performance metrics, including traffic by channel (with visibility into non-branded organic), engagement on program pages, Core Web Vitals, and accessibility standards.

We leverage platforms such as GA4 and Siteimprove to track performance and inform ongoing optimization. High-level insights and benchmarks can be shared during later stages of the evaluation process.

2) Target business outcomes and KPIs

- a) Over the next 12–24 months, what specific improvements are you aiming for regarding online inquiry, application, and enrollment growth?

Over the next 12–24 months, Kent State Online aims to increase overall inquiry, application, and enrollment volume, with a strong emphasis on improving lead quality and conversion to enrollment. We are focused on attracting prospective students who are well-aligned with program offerings and ensuring clear pathways to guide them to the best-fit program—whether within Kent State Online or across the broader university. The goal is to support sustained enrollment growth through more efficient and student-centered recruitment.

- b) What are your goals for organic search visibility and non-branded traffic?

Kent State Online is focused on increasing organic search visibility and growing non-branded traffic as a key driver of sustainable, long-term enrollment growth. Our goals include expanding keyword coverage across program and career-focused searches, improving rankings for high-intent non-branded terms, and increasing qualified organic traffic to

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program pages. The selected partner should identify opportunities, establish benchmarks, and define measurable growth targets aligned with these objectives.

- c) Are there specific targets for internal efficiency, such as content production speed or reducing dependency on external vendors?

Kent State Online prioritizes an in-house approach to content development and website management, with a focus on maintaining agility and control.

We are interested in improving internal efficiency—particularly in content production workflows and site updates—while reducing long-term dependency on external vendors. The ideal partner will provide strategic guidance and scalable solutions that empower our team to operate independently, rather than relying on ongoing outsourced execution.

- d) How would you rank your top priorities (e.g., enrollment growth, student "fit," brand experience, cost savings, or internal governance)?

Kent State Online's priorities are centered on a student-first approach, ensuring prospective students can easily find, understand, and engage with programs that align with their goals.

From there, our priorities are:

1. Student fit and experience
2. Enrollment growth
3. Data-informed performance and continuous optimization
4. Brand experience and consistency
5. Scalability across programs and academic themes
6. Internal efficiency and governance

This approach supports sustainable growth by aligning student needs with institutional goals and measurable outcomes.

3) Phasing and priority of future-state capabilities

- a) Of the items listed in the RFP (e.g., personalization, AI experience layer, smart forms, multisite readiness), which do you consider "must-haves" for the initial 12–18 months versus later phases?

For the initial 12–18 months, Kent State Online prioritizes capabilities that directly support user experience, personalization, and conversion. This includes personalization, an AI-enhanced experience layer (e.g., search and content recommendations), and improvements to SEO, content structure, and conversion pathways.

We currently leverage Slate for form functionality, so enhancements in this area should align with and integrate into our existing ecosystem.

Capabilities such as expanded multisite readiness and more advanced AI applications may be considered in later phases as part of a scalable, long-term roadmap. The selected partner should help define and prioritize these phases based on impact and feasibility.

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b) Are there any capabilities you explicitly do not wish to pursue?

Kent State Online is not seeking solutions that create long-term dependency on external vendors for routine content updates or site management. We prioritize platforms and approaches that empower our internal team to manage and scale the website efficiently. We are also not interested in duplicative functionality that overlaps with existing systems (e.g., CRM and form management), and we will prioritize solutions that integrate effectively within our current ecosystem.

4) Team, governance, and content velocity

a) What is the anticipated team structure for content strategy, design/UX, technical administration, and SEO/analytics?

Kent State Online currently manages content strategy in-house, with support from external partners for design/UX, technical administration, and SEO/analytics.

Our goal is to continue strengthening internal capabilities across these areas while leveraging external partners for strategic guidance and specialized expertise as needed. The selected partner should support this model by enabling our team to take on more day-to-day ownership while providing consultative support to enhance performance and scalability.

b) What are your expectations for how quickly new program pages should go live and the ongoing volume of new content per quarter?

Kent State Online manages the creation and publishing of new program pages and ongoing content development internally. Timelines and content volume are driven by internal priorities and program needs.

The selected partner may support improvements to templates, workflows, and overall content performance, but content creation and publishing will remain an in-house function.

c) What do the current governance and approval workflows look like?

Kent State Online maintains centralized governance for website content and updates. Content is developed and managed by KSO, with collaboration and subject-matter input from program coordinators and academic units.

Approval workflows follow a structured process, with content routed from KSO to program stakeholders for review and back to KSO for final approval and publishing. This approach ensures accuracy, consistency, and alignment with institutional standards.

5) Technical and data landscape

a) Beyond Slate and catalog APIs, what key systems will integrate with the site (e.g., CRM, marketing automation), and are any changes planned for these in the next 2–3 years?

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In addition to Slate and catalog API integrations, Kent State Online leverages marketing automation and engagement platforms, including Element451, as well as analytics and tracking tools to support the full prospective student lifecycle.

We anticipate continued evolution of our technology ecosystem over the next 2–3 years and will prioritize solutions that offer flexibility and seamless integration with existing and future systems. The selected partner should be able to adapt to and support this evolving environment.

- b) How do you define a "qualified lead," and which system serves as the source of truth for each stage of the funnel?

Kent State Online defines a qualified lead as a prospective student who has demonstrated meaningful intent and alignment with program offerings, typically through inquiry submission and engagement with program-specific content.

Slate serves as the system of record and source of truth for all stages of the prospective student lifecycle, including inquiry, application start, application completion, and enrollment.

- c) Are there specific data export or API requirements we should account for beyond full access to content and code?

Kent State Online expects solutions to support open data access, including the ability to export data and integrate via APIs with existing and future systems.

We prioritize flexibility, interoperability, and avoidance of vendor lock-in. All content, code, and data should remain fully accessible and transferable to support long-term sustainability.

6) Agency and implementation partners

- a) Do you currently work with an external agency for strategy, UX, or development? If so, will that partnership continue as-is, or are you open working with a different agency partner on this project?

Kent State Online currently partners with external agencies for select strategy, UX, and development support.

As part of this RFP, we are evaluating opportunities to establish a new partnership that aligns with our future-state goals. We are open to transitioning these responsibilities to the selected partner.

- b) If you do not have a partner, should we include a recommendation for an agency partner to assist with the implementation, ongoing development and support?

Yes, vendors may include recommendations for an agency partner to support implementation, ongoing development, and maintenance.

However, Kent State Online prioritizes solutions that empower our internal team and minimize long-term reliance on external resources. Any recommended approach should align with this model.

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CMS/Platform

- 1) What CMS platform currently powers onlinedegrees.kent.edu, and is the University seeking to migrate to a new CMS platform as part of this initiative?

Onlinedegrees.kent.edu is currently powered by the Brightspot CMS, while the broader university web ecosystem operates on Drupal. At this time, the University is not actively seeking a CMS migration as part of this initiative and expects solutions to align with and integrate into the existing environment.

- 2) Is the University seeking a vendor that provides the CMS platform itself, or primarily a digital agency that will operate and optimize the website on an existing platform?

Kent State Online is open to solutions that include either a CMS platform, digital agency services, or a combination of both.

However, we have a strong preference for a partner that can provide an integrated approach—supporting both platform capabilities and strategic services—while minimizing reliance on multiple external vendors and enabling our internal team to maintain day-to-day ownership.

- 3) Does Kent State expect the selected vendor to provide CMS hosting infrastructure, or would the University consider a CMS platform hosted by the vendor with development and marketing services delivered by a separate partner?

Kent State Online is open to both vendor-hosted CMS solutions and University-aligned hosting models.

However, we strongly prefer a single partner that can provide an integrated solution—including platform, hosting, development, and strategic support—to reduce complexity and ensure accountability. Any solution should also maintain flexibility, data ownership, and support for in-house management.

- 4) Can the University provide additional detail on the expected content management model for Kent State Online staff, including the anticipated number of editors, governance workflows, and approval processes?

Kent State Online utilizes a centralized content management model, with a limited number of internal editors responsible for content creation, updates, and publishing.

Governance and approval workflows are structured, with content developed by KSO and reviewed in collaboration with program stakeholders before final approval and publication.

The selected partner is not expected to create content, but may support improvements to content management workflows, templates, and publishing efficiency.

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- 5) Are there specific integration requirements or existing workflows between the website and Slate CRM that vendors should plan to maintain or improve?

Yes. Vendors should plan to maintain and, where appropriate, improve existing integrations between the website and Slate CRM, particularly for inquiry forms and prospective student data capture.

Vendors should also account for current catalog API integrations that support program content and related academic information on the site. Any proposed solution should preserve these workflows while improving efficiency, flexibility, and overall user experience.

- 6) Should vendors assume that the project may include a full rebuild or migration of the existing website, or is the primary focus on optimization and ongoing development of the current platform?

Vendors should plan for a potential full rebuild of the website, including migration of existing content to a modernized, scalable structure.

Following initial implementation, the focus will shift to ongoing optimization, performance improvements, and the continued evolution of the site to support long-term growth and user experience goals.

- 7) To support internal ownership of the website, does Kent State anticipate a distributed content model where program owners or departments manage their own content within the CMS?

No. Kent State Online utilizes a centralized content model, with content management and publishing maintained by the KSO team.

While program stakeholders provide input and subject-matter expertise, they do not manage content directly within the CMS. This approach ensures consistency, quality control, and alignment with institutional standards.

Managed Hosting Infrastructure Clarification

- 8) Current Hosting Environment

- a. What platform currently hosts onlinedegrees.kent.edu (cloud provider, infrastructure type, CMS hosting model)?

Onlinedegrees.kent.edu is currently hosted on a vendor-managed cloud environment utilizing the Brightspot CMS.

- b. Is the current environment cloud-based or on-premises?

The current environment is cloud-based.

- c. Are there existing infrastructure components that must remain in place (DNS provider, CDN, WAF, etc.)?

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Kent State Online operates within the University's broader IT and security environment, and certain infrastructure components may be required to align with institutional standards. Vendors should be prepared to integrate with existing systems where necessary while also recommending solutions that support performance, security, and scalability.

- d. Are there any institutional standards or preferred cloud providers that vendors should follow?

Kent State Online aligns with University IT and security standards and will require the selected partner to meet applicable institutional requirements.

At this time, there is no specific cloud provider requirement; however, vendors should propose solutions that meet higher education standards for security, scalability, and compliance.

- e. Will the hosting vendor be expected to fully replace the existing hosting environment, or operate alongside any current infrastructure components?

The University is open to solutions that may replace the existing hosting environment as part of a modernized, scalable approach.

Vendors should outline recommended hosting models, including how they would support performance, security, and integration with any required institutional systems.

9) Traffic, Scale, and Performance

- a. Can Kent State provide current traffic metrics for the website, including:
 - i. Average monthly visits
 - ii. Peak concurrent users
 - iii. Seasonal traffic spikes (e.g., enrollment campaigns)?

Kent State Online can provide high-level traffic metrics, including average monthly visits and seasonal traffic trends tied to recruitment cycles and campaigns.

We can also provide directional insight into peak usage patterns and site demand. More detailed traffic metrics can be shared as needed during later stages of the evaluation process.

- b. What are the expected growth projections for traffic over the next 3–5 years?

Kent State Online anticipates continued growth in website traffic over the next 3–5 years, driven by expanded digital marketing efforts, SEO strategy, and program portfolio growth.

Rather than prescribing specific projections, we expect the selected partner to establish benchmarks and recommend achievable growth targets aligned with overall enrollment goals.

- c. Are there known high-traffic events or campaigns that significantly increase demand?

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Yes. Kent State Online experiences increased traffic during key recruitment periods, including application deadlines, enrollment campaigns, and promotional events such as Free Graduate Application Week.

Traffic may also increase in alignment with paid marketing campaigns and seasonal recruitment cycles.

- d. Are there specific performance targets beyond Core Web Vitals (e.g., page load thresholds)?

Kent State Online prioritizes strong site performance, including fast load times, accessibility, and overall user experience.

While we monitor Core Web Vitals, we do not prescribe fixed performance thresholds at this time and expect the selected partner to recommend and maintain best-practice performance standards aligned with modern web expectations.

- e. Are there any global audience requirements that require CDN edge optimization outside the U.S.?

At this time, Kent State Online does not have specific CDN edge optimization requirements outside the United States.

However, we are interested in expanding our international reach and expect solutions to support scalable global performance as needed.

10) CDN, DNS, and Edge Security

- a. Does Kent State currently use a Content Delivery Network (CDN) for this site?

The current site is supported by a vendor-managed hosting environment, which may include CDN capabilities.

Vendors should outline their recommended approach to content delivery and performance optimization.

- b. If so, which CDN provider is currently in use?

The current CDN provider is managed as part of the existing hosting environment. Vendors should outline their recommended approach to content delivery and performance optimization.

- c. Does the university maintain centralized DNS management, or will the hosting partner manage DNS for this property?

DNS management is handled within the University's broader IT environment. Vendors should be prepared to coordinate with University stakeholders as needed and outline their recommended approach to DNS management as part of their solution.

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- d. Are there institutional requirements or restrictions regarding CDN or DNS providers?

Kent State Online aligns with University IT and security standards, and any applicable requirements or restrictions will be communicated as needed.

Vendors should propose solutions that meet higher education standards for performance, security, and reliability.

- e. Is Kent State currently using any bot mitigation or edge security services (e.g., Cloudflare, Akamai)?

Kent State Online does not currently manage bot mitigation or edge security services directly as a standalone solution.

Vendors are encouraged to propose approaches that support site performance, security, and protection against malicious or automated traffic.

11) Security Requirements

- a. Does Kent State require compliance with any specific security frameworks (for example):
- i. SOC 2 **Yes**
 - ii. ISO 27001 **No**
 - iii. NIST **No**
 - iv. State of Ohio cybersecurity standards? **Yes**
- b. Are there university-mandated security controls that must be implemented in the hosting environment?

Kent State Online aligns with University IT and security standards, and any required controls will be communicated as part of the implementation process.

Vendors should propose solutions that meet higher education best practices for security, compliance, and data protection.

- c. Should the hosting provider integrate with Kent State identity systems (SSO, SAML, or Active Directory)?

Integration with Kent State identity systems may be required depending on the final solution and use cases. Vendors should be prepared to support standard enterprise authentication methods (e.g., SSO, SAML) and coordinate with University IT as needed.

- d. Does Kent State require regular vulnerability scanning or penetration testing of the hosting environment? What is the frequency of testing/scanning?

Kent State Online aligns with University IT and security practices, which may include vulnerability scanning and security assessments as required.

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Specific requirements and frequency will be determined in coordination with University IT. Vendors should be prepared to support industry-standard security practices, including regular testing and monitoring.

- e. Are there specific logging or SIEM integration requirements with university security systems?

Kent State Online aligns with University IT and security standards, and any logging or SIEM integration requirements will be communicated as part of implementation.

Vendors should be prepared to support standard logging practices and integration with enterprise security monitoring systems as needed.

12) Data Classification and Compliance

- a. Does the website store or process any regulated data (PII, FERPA-protected student data, etc.)?

The website facilitates the collection of prospective student information (PII) through integrated forms; however, this data is processed and stored within the University's CRM (Slate), not directly on the website.

Vendors should ensure that any proposed solution supports appropriate handling of data in alignment with applicable regulations, including FERPA.

- b. Will any online form submissions or CRM integrations temporarily store user data within the hosting environment?

Online form submissions are integrated directly with the University's CRM (Slate), where data is processed and stored. The website itself is not intended to serve as a system of record for user data.

Vendors should outline how their solution handles any temporary data processing and ensure alignment with University data security and privacy standards.

- c. Are there data retention or log retention policies vendors must follow?

Kent State Online aligns with University data governance and retention policies. Data stored within institutional systems, such as the CRM (Slate), is managed according to those standards. Vendors should be prepared to support applicable data and log retention requirements for any systems within their scope and ensure alignment with University policies.

- d. Are there restrictions on data residency beyond U.S.-based infrastructure?

Kent State Online aligns with University IT and data governance standards, which may include requirements related to data residency.

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Vendors should be prepared to support U.S.-based infrastructure and outline how their solution meets applicable data residency, security, and compliance expectations.

13) Disaster Recovery and Backup

- a. What Recovery Time Objective (RTO) and Recovery Point Objective (RPO) does Kent State expect for the website?

Recovery objectives, including RTO and RPO, are governed by University IT and disaster recovery standards. Specific thresholds will be determined in coordination with University stakeholders. Vendors should propose recovery objectives aligned with industry best practices for high-availability public-facing websites and outline how their solution supports reliability, continuity, and minimal disruption.

- b. Are there requirements for multi-region failover or geographic redundancy?

Requirements related to multi-region failover and geographic redundancy are governed by University IT and infrastructure standards. Specific expectations will be determined in coordination with University stakeholders.

Vendors should propose solutions that ensure high availability, resilience, and continuity of service, including appropriate redundancy and failover capabilities aligned with industry best practices.

- c. Does the university require periodic disaster recovery testing?

Kent State Online aligns with University IT and security practices, which may include disaster recovery planning and testing as required.

Vendors should outline their approach to disaster recovery, including testing protocols, frequency, and validation of recovery capabilities.

- d. What backup retention policies are expected (e.g., 7 days, 30 days, longer-term archival)?

Backup and retention requirements are governed by University IT and data governance standards. Specific retention durations will be determined in coordination with University stakeholders.

Vendors should propose backup and retention strategies aligned with industry best practices, ensuring data integrity, availability, and support for recovery needs over both short- and long-term timeframes.

- e. Should backup copies be stored in separate infrastructure or separate regions?

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Backup and disaster recovery requirements are governed by University IT and data governance standards. Specific requirements, including backup storage location, will be determined in coordination with University stakeholders.

Vendors should propose backup strategies that support data resilience, security, and recovery, aligned with industry best practices.

14) Development, Staging, and Deployment

- a. How many environments does Kent State expect to maintain (e.g., production, staging, development)?

Kent State Online expects a standard multi-environment setup (e.g., development, staging, and production) to support testing, quality assurance, and deployment.

Vendors should outline their recommended environment structure and how it supports efficient workflows, stability, and scalability.

- b. Will Kent State require separate environments for development partners such as iFactory?

Kent State Online does not anticipate maintaining separate environments for individual external partners.

Vendors should propose environment structures that support secure, efficient collaboration within a centralized model, while maintaining appropriate access controls and governance.

- c. Are there specific deployment approval workflows required by the university?

Formal deployment approval workflows are determined at the university level and may vary depending on the systems and stakeholders involved.

Vendors should outline recommended deployment and release management practices that ensure stability, quality assurance, and alignment with institutional requirements.

- d. Will Kent State require sandbox environments for experimentation or feature testing?

Yes, Kent State Online anticipates the need for sandbox or testing environments to support experimentation, feature validation, and continuous improvement.

Vendors should outline how these environments are structured and managed to enable safe testing without impacting production.

15) Integrations and API Dependencies

- a. Are there additional integrations beyond the Slate CRM and course catalog systems referenced in the RFP?

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Current primary integrations include Slate CRM and the university course catalog system. Kent State Online anticipates potential future integrations as the digital ecosystem evolves. Vendors should be prepared to support flexible, API-driven integrations.

- b. Will the hosting vendor need to support real-time API calls to institutional systems?

The site currently supports integrations such as Slate CRM forms and catalog data, which involve API-driven interactions.

Vendors should be prepared to support real-time or near real-time integrations as needed, while ensuring performance, reliability, and scalability.

- c. Are there any authentication or firewall requirements for API connectivity to campus systems?

Requirements for authentication, firewall access, and secure connectivity to campus systems are governed by University IT and security standards. Specific requirements will be determined in coordination with University stakeholders.

Vendors should be prepared to support secure API connectivity using standard enterprise authentication and network security practices.

- d. Will Kent State provide integration documentation or technical contacts for these systems?

Integration documentation and technical contacts may be available depending on the system and will be coordinated through the appropriate University teams.

Vendors should be prepared to collaborate with University stakeholders to gather requirements and support successful integration.

16) Monitoring, Support, and Operations

- a. What support coverage expectations does Kent State have (e.g., 24x7 monitoring, business hours support)?

Kent State Online expects 24x7 monitoring of the website, including uptime, performance, and critical issues.

Day-to-day support is expected during standard business hours, with clearly defined escalation paths and response times for critical incidents outside of business hours.

Vendors should outline their support model, including monitoring, incident response, SLAs, and ongoing optimization support (e.g., performance, SEO, and technical maintenance).

- b. Are there required incident response SLAs for critical outages?

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Yes, vendors are expected to define incident response SLAs for critical outages, including clear response and resolution timeframes based on severity levels.

Vendors should outline their approach to incident management, escalation procedures, and communication protocols to ensure timely resolution and minimal disruption.

- c. Does Kent State expect monthly operational reporting (uptime, performance, security events)?

Yes, Kent State Online expects regular operational reporting, including uptime, performance, and security metrics.

In addition, monthly reporting and meetings focused on SEO performance, analytics, and ongoing optimization are expected to support continuous improvement.

- d. Will the hosting vendor be expected to participate in regular operational reviews with the KSO team?

Yes, the selected vendor will be expected to participate in regular operational and performance reviews with the Kent State Online team.

These reviews should support ongoing alignment, performance monitoring, and continuous improvement.

17) Future Architecture and Expansion

- a. Does Kent State anticipate launching additional microsites or subdomains under this hosting environment?

Kent State Online may consider launching additional microsites or subdomains in the future. Vendors should ensure the platform supports scalable, flexible site architecture to accommodate potential expansion.

- b. Should the architecture support multi-site management from launch, or only in future phases?

Multi-site management is not required for initial launch but may be considered in future phases. Vendors should outline how their solution can support multi-site capabilities as the platform evolves.

- c. Are there plans to support additional recruitment or marketing platforms in the same environment?

Kent State Online may expand the use of the platform to support additional recruitment and marketing initiatives over time.

Vendors should ensure the solution is flexible and scalable to integrate with evolving marketing technologies and platforms.

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- d. Will Kent State require hosting support for AI-driven experiences or services referenced in the RFP?

Yes, Kent State Online anticipates the need to support AI-driven experiences as part of the platform's evolution.

Vendors should outline how their hosting and architecture can support AI-enabled features, ensuring performance, scalability, and integration flexibility.

18) Migration Requirements

- a. Can Kent State provide details on the current site architecture and CMS environment to support migration planning?

Yes, Kent State Online can provide details on the current site architecture and CMS environment to support migration planning.

Additional documentation and access will be coordinated with the current platform provider and relevant University stakeholders as needed.

- b. Are there any content or asset storage locations outside the current CMS that must be migrated?

The majority of content and assets are managed within the current CMS environment. Any additional content or asset locations, if applicable, will be identified and coordinated as part of the migration process.

- c. Are there expectations regarding downtime during migration or cutover windows?

Kent State Online expects minimal disruption to site availability during migration and cutover. Vendors should outline their approach to minimizing downtime, including deployment strategy, timing, and risk mitigation to ensure continuity of service.

- d. Will Kent State require redirect management or SEO preservation planning during the migration?

Yes, redirect management and SEO preservation are critical requirements during migration. Vendors should outline their approach to maintaining search rankings, preserving URL structures where appropriate, and implementing comprehensive redirect strategies. Coordination with the current platform provider and relevant stakeholders will be required to support a smooth transition.

19) Operational Governance

- a. Who within Kent State will be responsible for hosting oversight and operational coordination?

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Kent State Online will serve as the primary point of contact for hosting oversight and operational coordination.

Coordination with University IT and other stakeholders will occur as needed, depending on the scope of the issue or initiative.

- b. Does Kent State require the hosting provider to participate in security reviews or compliance audits?

Yes, the hosting provider may be required to participate in security reviews and compliance audits as determined by University IT and security standards.

Vendors should be prepared to support applicable reviews and demonstrate compliance with relevant institutional and industry requirements.

- c. Are there change management or release approval processes vendors must follow?

Change management and release approval processes may vary depending on the type of update and are coordinated through Kent State Online as needed.

Vendors should outline recommended approaches to change management and release processes that ensure quality, stability, and appropriate oversight.

20) Design

- a. Can you share what CMS platform and hosting environment currently powers onlinedegrees.kent.edu?

Onlinedegrees.kent.edu is currently powered by the Brightspot CMS, with hosting managed through the platform provider, Everspring.

- b. Approximately how many total pages, media assets (images, videos, PDFs), and blog posts currently exist on the site? Additionally, are there content elements outside the website (e.g., landing pages in other tools) that should be considered in scope?

Kent State Online can provide the following estimated content volumes to support migration planning:

- Core pages (including homepage, program pages, blog landing page, standard pages, and author pages): 135
- Blog posts: 418
- Tags: 122
- Videos: 45
- Images: approximately 1,000+

These figures are estimates and will be finalized during project discovery. Not all assets may require migration, as some may be unused or deprecated.

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Content is actively being updated and expanded, and additional pages, blog posts, and assets will continue to be added during the RFP and project planning timeframe.

- c. The RFP references onboarding timelines and discovery approaches but does not specify a desired go-live date or phased milestone targets. Does the university have an anticipated launch timeline or a target date by which the new or restructured site should be operational?

Kent State Online anticipates a target go-live in early 2027 to allow for appropriate planning, design, development, and migration, though earlier timelines may be considered. Vendors should propose a realistic project timeline with phased milestones, including discovery, design, development, and launch, aligned with this general timeframe.

- d. Is the university able to share an approximate budget range or ceiling for this engagement?

A budget range is not being provided at this stage.

Vendors are encouraged to propose solutions aligned with the scope outlined in the RFP, including clear pricing structures and options based on varying levels of service and functionality.

- e. The RFP references integration with Slate for inquiry, lead capture, and recruitment workflows. Can you clarify the current Slate implementation and whether the vendor will be expected to build within Slate or solely integrate via Slate's APIs?

The current implementation utilizes Slate forms for inquiry, lead capture, and recruitment workflows.

The selected vendor will be expected to integrate with Slate rather than build within it. Integration is primarily handled through existing Slate forms and standard methods.

- f. The RFP emphasizes AI-enabled features with transparency and human-in-the-loop governance. Does Kent State University or KSO currently have an institutional AI use policy, approved AI vendor list, or specific restrictions on AI technologies (e.g., limitations on third-party LLM providers) that the selected vendor should be aware of when proposing AI capabilities?

Institutional guidance related to AI use is currently evolving at Kent State University. Vendors should be prepared to align with emerging policies, governance standards, and any applicable requirements related to AI technologies, including transparency, data privacy, and human oversight.

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- 1) CMS Preference and Flexibility: Section 6.0 emphasizes a desire for "non-proprietary" solutions and "internal KSO ownership". Would the University confirm if a Managed Open Source solution—specifically WordPress paired with an Enterprise Visual Builder such as Elementor or Divi—meets the requirement for a modular, non-restrictive architecture?

Kent State Online is open to a range of CMS solutions, provided they support modular, scalable architecture and enable strong internal ownership.

Preference will be given to solutions that offer a cohesive, integrated platform with robust support, rather than requiring multiple systems or fragmented tools to achieve core functionality.

- 2) Slate CRM Depth: Regarding the integration with Slate, is the University's primary goal the seamless embedding of Slate-hosted forms, or does the "Future State" requirement include a need for bi-directional API data exchange to enable dynamic content personalization based on real-time lead status?

The current primary use of Slate is for the seamless integration of Slate-hosted forms for inquiry, lead capture, and recruitment workflows.

Kent State Online is open to exploring more advanced capabilities over time. Vendors should ensure their approach supports potential future enhancements, such as deeper integrations or data-driven personalization, while maintaining flexibility.

- 3) Search and Discovery: The "Future State" specifications mention "Conversational search" and "Filterable program discovery". Is the University currently utilizing a third-party indexing tool for these functions, or should the vendor propose a new "Intelligent Discovery Engine" (e.g., SearchWP/FacetWP) as part of the core stack?

Kent State Online does not currently utilize a dedicated third-party indexing or discovery tool for conversational search or advanced filtering.

Vendors should propose an intelligent search and discovery solution as part of the core platform, supporting features such as conversational search, filterable program discovery, and an enhanced user experience.

- 4) Content Volume: To provide an accurate fixed-fee quote for migration services, can the University provide an estimated count of unique pages, blog/news posts, and PDF assets currently residing on onlinedegrees.kent.edu that are designated for migration?

Kent State Online can provide the following estimated content volumes to support migration planning:

- Core pages (including homepage, program pages, blog landing page, standard pages, and author pages): 135
- Blog posts: 418

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- Tags: 122
- Videos: 45
- Images: approximately 1,000+

These figures are estimates and will be finalized during project discovery. Not all assets may require migration, as some may be unused or deprecated.

Content is actively being updated and expanded, and additional pages, blog posts, and assets will continue to be added during the RFP and project planning timeframe.

- 5) Copywriting Responsibility: Will the awarded vendor be responsible for generating original marketing copy for the 90+ academic program pages, or will the University provide updated source text for the vendor to format and optimize?

Kent State Online is responsible for all content creation and the majority of content publishing. The selected vendor will not be responsible for generating original marketing copy but may support formatting, optimization, or technical implementation as needed.

- 6) VPAT Scope: Section 4.47 and Form 7 require information regarding Electronic Information Technology ("EIT") compliance. Does the University require a VPAT specifically for the proposed front-end user experience, or is a VPAT also required for the back-end administrative CMS interface?

A VPAT is required for both.

- 7) Budgetary Guidance: The RFP notes that contracts exceeding \$1.0 million require Board of Trustees approval. To ensure our proposed "Future State" innovations remain fiscally aligned with University expectations, can the University disclose a "Not-to-Exceed" budget or a preferred price range for the initial 3-year term?

No. We do not share budgetary information.

Vendor 4 of 9

- 1) Does the scope include UX strategy and visual/interface design services, or is the selected vendor expected to work within existing brand standards? If design is in scope, please clarify expected deliverables.

The selected vendor will be expected to work within established Kent State University brand standards.

UX strategy and interface design are within scope, with a focus on enhancing user experience, usability, and conversion. Vendors should outline their approach to UX and design, including key deliverables such as wireframes, prototypes, and design systems aligned with institutional guidelines.

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- 2) Does the scope of this engagement include creation of new written content (program pages, blog posts, student services copy), or is the vendor's role limited to building and managing the CMS infrastructure and workflows that enable KSO staff to create content themselves?

The scope of this engagement does not include the creation of new written content. Kent State Online is responsible for content creation. The selected vendor's role is focused on building, maintaining, and optimizing the CMS platform and workflows that support KSO staff in creating and managing content.

- 3) Can the University confirm what CMS platform currently powers onlinedegrees.kent.edu, and whether the current vendor will be contractually required to provide structured data exports to facilitate migration to a new platform?

Onlinedegrees.kent.edu is currently powered by the Brightspot CMS. The current platform provider will be expected to support reasonable data access and export as needed to facilitate migration. Coordination will occur between the selected vendor, the current provider, and relevant University stakeholders.

- 4) The RFP mentions the possibility of 'substantial restructuring or rebuilding' of the current site. Will the University expect a full site rebuild to be included in the base proposal pricing, or is the initial contract intended to cover ongoing optimization with a rebuild scoped separately as a project?

The University anticipates that the engagement will include a full site rebuild, inclusive of redesign and migration, as part of the base scope.

Ongoing optimization, maintenance, and enhancements are also expected as part of a continued partnership following launch.

- 5) The future state section describes a range of capabilities including personalization, program discovery tools, community features, and AI-assisted matching. Are vendors expected to price these future state capabilities as part of the initial proposal, or are they intended as indicative of roadmap direction only?

The capabilities outlined in the future state are intended to represent a longer-term roadmap and vision for the platform.

Vendors should focus initial proposals on core platform functionality, with the ability to support these capabilities over time. Vendors may include optional pricing or approaches for future enhancements as part of their response.

- 6) The RFP references a 'growing blog and content marketing strategy.' Is the vendor expected to produce blog content as part of the engagement, or solely to provide the platform and SEO strategy that supports KSO-produced content?

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The vendor is not expected to produce blog content. Kent State Online is responsible for content creation.

The selected vendor's role is to provide the platform, technical SEO support, and strategic guidance to support and optimize KSO-produced content.

- 7) Regarding the required Slate integration: does the University expect the vendor to build and maintain Slate configuration and forms, or is the scope limited to front-end integration with an existing Slate environment managed by KSU internally?

The scope is limited to front-end integration with the existing Slate environment. Kent State University manages Slate configuration and forms internally. The selected vendor will not be responsible for building or maintaining functionality within Slate.

- 8) Does a documented, stable API currently exist for the university catalog program data, and will access credentials and documentation be provided to the incoming vendor? Or is building this integration from scratch part of the expected scope?

The current site utilizes an API-based integration for university catalog program data. Details regarding the existing implementation, including access and documentation, will be evaluated as part of the transition. Vendors should be prepared to work with the current integration or propose an alternative approach if needed.

- 9) Beyond Slate and the university catalog, what other third-party systems or tools are currently integrated with onlinedegrees.kent.edu that the incoming vendor would need to replicate or maintain (e.g., marketing automation platforms, CRM, chat tools, analytics beyond GA4)?

In addition to Slate and the university catalog, the site integrates with standard analytics and marketing tools.

Kent State Online is also interested in expanding capabilities in areas such as marketing automation, chat, and user engagement tools. Vendors should be prepared to support existing integrations and accommodate future enhancements as part of an evolving digital ecosystem.

- 10) Will the vendor be required to implement Single Sign-On or any other authentication mechanisms for the site or its CMS, and if so, what identity provider does Kent State use?

The website does not currently require user authentication or Single Sign-On for public-facing functionality.

If authentication is needed for CMS access or administrative users, vendors should support standard enterprise authentication methods and coordinate with University IT as needed.

- 11) Is GA4 currently implemented on onlinedegrees.kent.edu, and will the incoming vendor be given access to the existing GA4 property and historical data as part of onboarding?

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GA4 is implemented on onlinedegrees.kent.edu.

Access to analytics data will be coordinated as part of onboarding; however, the level of access to existing properties and historical data may vary. Vendors should be prepared to work with available data and support continuity of tracking moving forward.

12) Will the incumbent vendor be contractually required to cooperate with the incoming vendor during the transition period, including providing data exports, API documentation, and knowledge transfer? If so, is there a defined transition period and timeline?

The University anticipates that the current platform provider will support transition activities as needed; however, specific contractual requirements and timelines will be determined as part of the transition process.

Vendors should be prepared to collaborate with the current provider and University stakeholders to facilitate data transfer, documentation, and knowledge sharing.

13) Approximately how many total pages, blog posts, and content items currently exist on onlinedegrees.kent.edu that would need to be migrated to a new platform?

Kent State Online can provide the following estimated content volumes to support migration planning:

- Core pages (including homepage, program pages, blog landing page, standard pages, and author pages): 135
- Blog posts: 418
- Tags: 122
- Videos: 45
- Images: approximately 1,000+

These figures are estimates and will be finalized during project discovery. Not all assets may require migration, as some may be unused or deprecated.

Content is actively being updated and expanded, and additional pages, blog posts, and assets will continue to be added during the RFP and project planning timeframe.

14) Will the selected vendor be provided access to existing Google Search Console data, current backlink profile, and keyword ranking data to inform the migration and SEO preservation strategy?

Access to existing SEO data, including Google Search Console, backlink profiles, and keyword rankings, will be coordinated as part of the transition process; however, the level of access may vary.

Vendors should be prepared to work with available data and implement best practices for SEO preservation and continuity during migration.

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15) Does the University expect the current site to remain live and operational until the new site is fully launched, and if so, is the vendor responsible for managing the parallel environment and cutover?

Yes, the current site is expected to remain live and operational until the new site is fully launched. The existing platform provider will maintain the current site during this period. The selected vendor will be responsible for coordinating migration and cutover activities in alignment with the transition plan.

16) The RFP asks vendors to outline retainer vs. project models. Does the University have a preferred engagement model, or are vendors free to propose the structure they believe best serves the engagement?

Vendors are encouraged to propose the engagement model they believe best supports the scope and long-term success of the project.

Kent State Online is open to evaluating different approaches, including project-based and retainer models.

17) Section 4.31 references a possible performance bond at 100% of contract price. Can the University confirm whether a performance bond will be required for this engagement, and if so, at what contract value threshold?

A performance bond is not required for this engagement.

18) Can the University provide any indication of the anticipated budget range for this engagement to help vendors calibrate their proposals appropriately?

No. We do not share budgetary information.

19) Can the University provide guidance on the relative weighting of the evaluation criteria - specifically between technical capability, SEO maturity, higher education experience, AI readiness, and price?

Evaluation will consider a combination of factors, including technical capability, SEO maturity, higher education experience, AI readiness, and overall cost.

While all criteria are important, particular emphasis will be placed on the vendor's ability to deliver a scalable, high-performing platform that supports enrollment growth and long-term digital strategy.

20) Does the University intend to award this contract to a single vendor, or is it open to awarding different components (e.g., hosting, development, SEO) to multiple vendors?

We are open to either scenario but prefer a single award.

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21) The RFP requires vendors to provide SLAs and emergency response procedures. Can the University define what constitutes an 'emergency' for this engagement, and what the expected response and resolution time targets are?

An “emergency” would include critical issues that significantly impact site availability, core functionality, or user experience, such as site outages, broken integrations, or major service disruptions.

Vendors should define response and resolution time targets based on severity levels and outline their approach to incident management, escalation, and communication.

22) Can the University describe the size and technical capability of the internal KSO team who will manage day-to-day content operations, and how many editors are expected to use the CMS regularly?

Kent State Online has a small, centralized team responsible for day-to-day content management and content creation.

The core team consists of approximately two primary users, with a small number of additional contributors who may access the CMS as needed.

23) Does the current site have an existing WCAG 2.1 AA audit or accessibility assessment that the incoming vendor can reference, or is establishing that baseline expected to be part of the initial engagement?

The latter.

24) Can the University clarify what categories of student data the vendor will have access to through the Slate integration and inquiry forms?

The vendor will not have direct access to student data within Slate.

The website facilitates the collection of prospective student information through Slate-hosted forms; however, all data is processed and stored within the University’s CRM environment. Vendors should ensure secure handling of any data passed through integrations in alignment with University policies.

Vendor 5 of 9

1) Can you confirm the current CMS platform and whether it is expected to remain in place for the duration of the engagement?

Onlinedegrees.kent.edu is currently powered by the Brightspot CMS.

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The University is open to evaluating alternative platforms as part of this engagement and does not require the current CMS to remain in place.

- 2) Are you open to a model where responsibilities are split across partners (e.g., one vendor for platform/hosting and another for UX, design, SEO, and digital experience)?

Kent State Online is open to models where responsibilities are split across partners; however, a cohesive, integrated solution is preferred.

Vendors that can provide a comprehensive approach across platform, hosting, UX, and ongoing optimization are strongly encouraged.

- 3) Can you clarify the expected balance and phasing between supporting the current site and advancing future-state enhancements?

The current site is expected to remain operational during the transition period, with the existing platform provider maintaining day-to-day functionality.

The selected vendor's primary focus will be on planning, designing, and delivering the future-state platform, followed by ongoing optimization and enhancement post-launch.

- 4) Can you provide more detail on the expected scope and volume of ongoing work (e.g., typical monthly support, enhancements, releases, and optimization efforts)?

Ongoing work is expected to include a mix of platform maintenance, performance optimization, SEO support, and incremental enhancements.

The volume of work may vary over time, but vendors should anticipate regular monthly engagement, including updates, improvements, and strategic support aligned with enrollment and marketing goals.

- 5) The RFP indicates a preference to remain on the current platform, while also referencing the potential for substantial restructuring of the site. Can you clarify how far you anticipate evolving the existing implementation within that constraint?

Kent State Online is not restricted to the current platform and is open to solutions that best support long-term goals.

Vendors may propose either an evolution of the existing implementation or a full rebuild on a new platform, provided the approach supports scalability, performance, and internal ownership.

- 6) Given the breadth of services outlined, how much flexibility do you have in structuring the engagement (e.g., phased approach, scoped priorities, or differentiated roles across partners)?

Kent State Online is open to flexible engagement structures, including phased approaches, scoped priorities, and defined roles across partners.

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Phasing is acceptable provided that site continuity and performance are maintained throughout the transition. Vendors should outline recommended approaches to prioritization and delivery aligned with project goals.

Vendor 6 of 9

- 1) What CMS is currently in use for Kent State Online, and does the University have a preferred CMS platform (e.g., Drupal, WordPress), or is the solution CMS-agnostic?

Onlinedegrees.kent.edu is currently powered by the Brightspot CMS.

Kent State Online is open to evaluating a range of CMS solutions and is not limited to a specific platform. Vendors should propose solutions that best support scalability, performance, and internal ownership.

- 2) Will hosting be part of the vendor's scope, or will the solution be deployed within Kent State University's existing hosting infrastructure? If vendor-hosted, are there preferred platforms or requirements?

Hosting is expected to be included as part of the vendor's scope.

Vendors should outline their hosting approach, including infrastructure, performance, security, and scalability. Solutions should align with higher education standards and integrate with University IT requirements as needed.

- 3) Is there an established budget range or funding allocation for this project that can help guide scope and solution alignment?

We do not share budgetary information.

- 4) Can you provide details on required integrations (e.g., CRM, analytics, marketing automation, and admissions systems), and any specific systems currently in use?

Key integrations include the University's CRM (Slate) for inquiry and lead capture, as well as the university course catalog for program data.

The site also utilizes standard analytics and marketing tools. Vendors should be prepared to support these integrations and accommodate additional tools related to marketing automation, user engagement, and recruitment as needed.

- 5) What is the estimated volume of content to be migrated (e.g., number of pages/assets), and what level of content cleanup, restructuring, or governance is expected from the vendor?

Kent State Online can provide the following estimated content volumes to support migration planning:

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- Core pages (including homepage, program pages, blog landing page, standard pages, and author pages): 135
- Blog posts: 418
- Tags: 122
- Videos: 45
- Images: approximately 1,000+

These figures are estimates and will be finalized during project discovery. Not all assets may require migration, as some may be unused or deprecated.

Content is actively being updated and expanded, and additional pages, blog posts, and assets will continue to be added during the RFP and project planning timeframe.

Kent State Online anticipates a level of content review and cleanup during migration, including the removal of outdated or unused assets and improvements to content organization. Content governance and decision-making will remain with Kent State Online, with the vendor supporting content structuring, migration planning, and best practices to enhance usability, SEO, and overall site performance.

6) What are the primary user journeys and success metrics for the recruitment website?

Primary user journeys include exploring programs, identifying the right academic fit, requesting information, and starting an application. Supporting journeys include engaging with content (e.g., blog, resources), understanding costs and admissions requirements, and navigating to relevant support services.

Success is measured through key recruitment metrics, including inquiry submissions, application starts, application completions, and enrollments. Additional metrics include engagement on program pages, conversion rates across the funnel, and overall site performance and user experience.

7) What level of stakeholder engagement (workshops, interviews, approvals) is expected during discovery and design phases?

Kent State Online anticipates a collaborative discovery and design process that may include stakeholder interviews, working sessions, and periodic reviews.

Engagement will primarily be coordinated through Kent State Online, with additional input from key stakeholders as needed. Vendors should outline a structured but efficient approach to stakeholder engagement, including workshops, feedback cycles, and approval processes.

Vendor 7 of 9

1) Can you provide an approximate budget range for this project?

We do not share budgetary information.

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- 2) Are there any organizational priorities (e.g., new program offerings, regional expansion, etc.), that should guide prioritization in this redesign effort?

Key organizational priorities include the ongoing launch of new academic programs, expansion of online offerings, and continued growth of Kent State Online's presence and brand.

Additional priorities include improving support for adult and graduate learners, enhancing program discovery and user experience, and strengthening enrollment-focused outcomes through more effective digital engagement. The University is also interested in supporting future capabilities such as community-building, personalization, and scalable content and marketing initiatives.

- 3) Are there particular audiences you would like to improve engagement with?

Kent State Online is focused on improving engagement with non-traditional and modern learners, including adult learners, working professionals, and those seeking flexible or competency-based education pathways.

The site should support the needs of these audiences by emphasizing flexibility, career outcomes, accessibility, and clear pathways to enrollment.

- 4) What analytics platforms and user behavior data are currently available to inform decisions in the discovery phase of the project? Can you please provide that data?

Kent State Online utilizes standard analytics tools, including Google Analytics (GA4), along with additional marketing and performance reporting tools.

Available data may include traffic sources, user behavior, engagement metrics, and conversion activity. Access to analytics data will be coordinated as part of onboarding; however, the level of access to historical data may vary. Vendors should be prepared to work with available data and supplement insights as needed during discovery.

- 5) How will success of the new site be measured across the core goals (enrollment, faculty research visibility, storytelling, SEO, etc.)?

Success will be measured primarily through enrollment-focused outcomes, including inquiry submissions, application starts, application completions, and enrollments.

Additional measures of success include improvements in organic search visibility and non-branded traffic, engagement with program and content pages, and overall conversion rates across the user journey.

The site will also support broader goals such as storytelling, brand visibility, and highlighting faculty and program impact, with performance evaluated through engagement metrics and content reach.

- 6) Is <https://onlinedegrees.kent.edu/> the only site within the current scope, or are there other URLs? If there are other URLs, could you please briefly describe the sites (URL and purpose)?

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And if there are other sites or microsites, do you anticipate centralizing them under one domain?

<https://onlinedegrees.kent.edu/> is the primary site within the current scope of this engagement. Kent State Online may consider future expansion, including additional microsites or subdomains; however, no additional URLs are currently in scope.

7) Are there any subdomains in scope?

There are no subdomains currently in scope.

Kent State Online may consider subdomains as part of future growth and expansion; however, they are not part of the current engagement.

8) How many content types does the site(s) have?

The site includes several primary content types, including program pages, blog/content articles, student experience and support pages, and FAQs.

Additional content types include landing pages, author pages, and media assets such as videos and images. Vendors should anticipate structured content models that support both recruitment-focused and content marketing use cases.

9) How many taxonomy categories and terms are currently used?

The site utilizes a taxonomy structure that includes tagging and content categorization to support organization and discovery.

Current estimates include approximately 100+ taxonomy terms. Additional taxonomy structures may be refined as part of the redesign to support improved content organization and user experience.

10) Approximately how many pages is <https://onlinedegrees.kent.edu/>? And approximately how many pages are any other sites that are in scope (if there are any)?

The site includes approximately 135 core pages (including program pages, landing pages, blog landing, and standard pages), along with 418 blog posts and additional media assets.

Content is actively being expanded, and additional blog posts and pages will continue to be created during the RFP and project planning timeframe. There are no additional sites currently in scope.

11) Is there a target number of stakeholder interviews or departments we should plan to engage during Discovery? Could you please briefly describe the stakeholders/groups?

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There is no defined target number of stakeholder interviews. Discovery is expected to include a focused group of primarily internal Kent State Online stakeholders, with the potential for limited input from select external partners if needed.

The overall approach should remain streamlined and efficient, prioritizing key decision-makers and subject matter experts.

12) Will content strategy or rewriting support be needed, or will the University be doing all content refresh and editing? If content support is needed from the vendor, approximately how many pages will the vendor need to review, edit / rewrite? And how many pages of new content will be needed?

Kent State Online manages all content strategy, creation, and editing internally. The selected vendor will not be responsible for writing or rewriting content.

Vendor support should focus on enabling content through the CMS, including structure, templates, and optimization recommendations where appropriate.

13) Does the current site use any custom-built features? Can you please briefly describe the functionality of these? Do you wish to retain this functionality in the new site?

The current site utilizes a custom-built integration with the university catalog API to dynamically populate program content.

This functionality is essential and must be maintained or improved in the new site to ensure consistency, accuracy, and alignment with institutional data sources.

14) Are there any external systems that this site will integrate with? Could you please list the integrations that will be needed.

The primary integrations include the Slate CRM (for inquiry and lead capture via embedded forms) and the university catalog API (for dynamic program content).

Additional integrations may include analytics platforms (e.g., GA4) and potential future marketing or engagement tools. Vendors should propose flexible integration capabilities to support evolving needs.

15) What level of integration is currently used or projected, ie, iframe, api, links etc.?

The site primarily utilizes API-based integrations, particularly for the university catalog to dynamically populate program content.

Embedded forms (e.g., Slate) may leverage iframe or similar approaches, and standard link-based integrations are also used where appropriate. Vendors should support a range of integration methods, with a preference for scalable, API-driven solutions where possible.

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16) Is there an existing design system in place that should be utilized for this project? Do you wish for the vendor to align designs to this design system or are you seeking new designs or variations from the vendor?

Kent State University has established brand standards that must be followed. Within those guidelines, Kent State Online is seeking updated design approaches and user experience improvements tailored to a modern higher education audience.

Vendors should align with institutional brand standards while proposing new design concepts, layouts, and interaction patterns that enhance usability, engagement, and conversion.

17) Will the vendor need to do any graphic design work for the site? Or is that handled entirely by the University?

Graphic design is primarily handled internally by Kent State Online.

However, the vendor may be asked to support design needs related to the website experience (e.g., UI elements, layout components, or visual enhancements) as needed.

18) How will proposals be weighed between design innovation vs. strict brand alignment?

Proposals will be evaluated based on the ability to balance strong design innovation with adherence to Kent State University brand standards.

Design approaches should enhance user experience, engagement, and conversion while remaining consistent with established institutional guidelines.

19) Are there any internal tools or processes already in place for accessibility testing that should be used and followed by the vendor team?

Kent State Online currently utilizes Siteimprove for accessibility monitoring and testing.

Vendors should align with existing tools and processes, while also bringing recommendations for best practices and additional enhancements as needed.

20) Will the selected vendor be responsible for setting up and configuring analytics dashboards and SEO monitoring tools? Are there any existing tools in use for tracking SEO currently?

Yes, the selected vendor will be expected to support analytics dashboard setup and SEO monitoring. Kent State Online currently utilizes GA4 and existing dashboards through the current vendor, as well as tools such as Siteimprove. However, there is a desire to enhance reporting, insights, and overall visibility into performance. Vendors should propose improved analytics and SEO measurement approaches.

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21) Do you expect any internal development team members to be involved in the project? Or any other internal team roles contributing? If so, could you please briefly describe the roles and how many hours / month these team members will likely contribute to the project?

Kent State Online does not have a dedicated internal development team for this project.

Internal involvement will primarily include a small KSO team supporting content, strategy, and project coordination. Level of effort will vary by phase, with more involvement during discovery, content planning, and review/approval cycles.

22) Page 23 of the RFP mentions “Multisite Readiness.” Could you clarify - are you able to provide a description of the multisite environment you envision? For example, are you seeking one codebase from which additional sites can be easily spun up, with centrally governed templates and brand styling enforced through all sites? Or are you seeking a hosting environment where it is “many sites” rather, where individual sites with their own code (not a shared code base), each site in a container in the hosting environment and not centrally governed? And ultimately, approximately how many sites could you envision potentially existing in this environment?

Multisite readiness is intended as a future-state capability rather than an immediate requirement. Kent State Online is interested in a flexible approach that would allow for additional sites or microsites to be created efficiently, ideally leveraging shared templates, components, and brand governance where appropriate. At the same time, there should be flexibility to support variations in content or structure as needed.

There is no defined number of future sites at this time, but vendors should anticipate a limited number of additional sites or subdomains tied to recruitment, marketing initiatives, or specialized audiences.

23) Also from Page 23 of the RFP, intranet is mentioned. Is there currently an intranet that needs to be redesigned within the scope of this project? Or are you simply referring to future readiness for an Intranet?

An intranet redesign is not in scope for this project.

The reference is intended to reflect future-state awareness only. Kent State Online may explore intranet or internal-facing solutions separately, but this engagement is focused on the external recruitment website.

Vendor 8 of 9

1) What CMS/platform is Kent State Online currently using, and are there any constraints or preferences regarding future platform selection (e.g., Drupal, WordPress, headless)?

The current site is built on the Brightspot CMS.

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Kent State Online is open to platform recommendations and is not restricted to a specific CMS. The preferred solution should support flexibility, scalability, and strong internal ownership, with minimal reliance on proprietary constraints or external vendors.

- 2) To what extent is the current site architecture expected to be evolved vs. fully replatformed as part of this engagement?

Kent State Online is open to both evolution of the current architecture or a full replatforming, depending on what best supports long-term goals.

A full rebuild and migration is a strong possibility, followed by ongoing optimization and enhancement. Vendors should propose the approach they believe will best support scalability, performance, and internal ownership.

- 3) Are there existing component libraries, design systems, or content models in place today that must be retained or extended?

There is no formal component library or design system currently in place beyond Kent State University brand standards.

Vendors should propose scalable component libraries, content models, and reusable structures that support consistency, efficiency, and long-term content management.

- 4) Does Kent State prefer a vendor-managed hosting solution (e.g., Acquia, Pantheon, WP VIP), or should vendors propose fully managed infrastructure as part of their response?

Vendors should propose a fully managed hosting solution as part of their response.

Kent State Online is not tied to a specific hosting provider and is open to recommendations that support performance, scalability, security, and ease of management.

- 5) Are there existing institutional standards or constraints related to hosting, DevOps, or cloud providers (e.g., AWS, Azure)?

Kent State Online does not define specific hosting, DevOps, or cloud provider requirements. Vendors should propose solutions aligned with industry best practices, while ensuring compatibility with broader university standards where applicable.

- 6) How is the Kent State Online team currently structured across marketing, IT, and content/editorial responsibilities?

Kent State Online is a small, centralized team that manages marketing strategy, content creation, and day-to-day site operations internally.

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Content and editorial responsibilities are fully handled by the KSO marketing team, while technical, development, and specialized support functions are supplemented through external partners as needed.

- 7) How many individuals are expected to actively contribute to content creation and management within the platform?

Content creation and management is handled by a small, centralized team of approximately two primary users.

Additional contributors may be involved on a limited basis for review or subject matter input, but day-to-day content operations remain streamlined within the core KSO team.

- 8) What level of internal technical capability should vendors assume for ongoing site maintenance and enhancements?

Vendors should assume limited internal technical capacity for development and advanced site maintenance.

Kent State Online manages strategy and content internally, but will rely on the vendor for technical implementation, enhancements, and ongoing platform support, with a preference for solutions that enable ease of use and reduce dependency over time.

- 9) How does Kent State envision the balance between platform enablement vs. ongoing execution for SEO, content strategy, and CRO?

Kent State Online prioritizes internal ownership of content strategy, SEO direction, and conversion-focused messaging.

The vendor's role should focus on platform enablement, technical SEO, and providing tools, insights, and recommendations that support ongoing optimization. Strategic collaboration is expected, but day-to-day execution of content and campaigns will remain internal.

- 10) Are there incumbent partners or internal teams currently responsible for content marketing and SEO execution?

The current CMS vendor provides support for SEO and technical optimization.

Kent State Online manages content marketing and overall SEO strategy internally, with a preference to strengthen internal ownership while leveraging vendor support for technical execution and enhancements.

- 11) What are the primary KPIs for success (e.g., lead volume, application starts, program-level conversions)?

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Primary KPIs include inquiry (lead) volume, application starts, application completions, and enrollments.

Additional success measures include lead quality, program-level conversion rates, and overall site engagement and organic visibility.

12) Can you provide more detail on the current implementation of Slate and the academic catalog, including any middleware or API layers in place?

Slate is currently used for inquiry and lead capture through embedded forms and does not require vendor configuration or development.

The academic catalog is integrated via an API to dynamically populate program content. This integration is essential and should be maintained or enhanced in the future state.

13) Are there additional systems (e.g., marketing automation, personalization tools, data warehouses) that will need to be integrated?

There are no additional required integrations at this time beyond Slate and the academic catalog. However, Kent State Online is interested in future capabilities such as personalization and other enhanced marketing or engagement tools. Vendors should propose solutions that allow for flexible integration as needs evolve.

14) How mature are current AI or personalization efforts within Kent State Online today?

Kent State Online does not currently have mature AI or personalization capabilities in place.

However, these are key areas of interest for future development. Vendors should propose scalable, transparent solutions that support personalization and AI-driven experiences, with appropriate governance and human oversight.

15) Are there specific use cases (e.g., program matching, chat, content generation) that are prioritized for initial implementation vs. longer-term exploration?

Initial priorities include program discovery and matching, along with conversational experiences (e.g., chat) to support prospective students.

Additional use cases, such as more advanced personalization or AI-assisted content experiences, can be explored as part of a longer-term roadmap.

16) Are there existing governance models, approval workflows, or content lifecycle processes that the new platform must support or improve?

Kent State Online currently follows a centralized governance model, with content managed internally and reviewed in collaboration with program stakeholders.

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The platform should support and streamline these workflows, improving efficiency, version control, and ease of publishing while maintaining appropriate oversight and approval processes.

17) What challenges does the team face today in managing content across programs and campaigns?

As a small team, Kent State Online manages a high volume of programs and content with limited internal resources.

Key challenges include scaling content efficiently and strengthening SEO-driven content planning. Additional guidance, tools, and insights to support content prioritization and optimization would be valuable.

18) Has Kent State established a target budget range or investment level for this engagement, including ongoing support?

A specific budget range has not been provided as part of this process.

Vendors are encouraged to propose solutions and engagement models that align with the scope and objectives outlined in the RFP.

19) How does the University envision structuring the engagement over time (e.g., initial rebuild followed by retainer-based optimization)?

The anticipated approach is an initial rebuild and migration phase, followed by ongoing optimization and support.

Vendors may propose engagement models (e.g., retainer or phased support) that best align with this structure and support long-term success.

20) Who are the primary stakeholders involved in evaluation and decision-making (e.g., marketing, IT, leadership)?

Evaluation and decision-making will be led by the Kent State Online team.

Additional input may be gathered from relevant stakeholders as needed, but the process is centrally managed within KSO.

21) What will differentiate top vendors during evaluation beyond the stated criteria (e.g., strategic approach, higher-ed experience, technical depth)?

Top vendors will differentiate themselves through a strong strategic approach, demonstrated experience in higher education, and the ability to balance technical expertise with usability and internal ownership.

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Emphasis will also be placed on clear, scalable solutions, thoughtful approach to SEO and user experience, and the ability to act as a collaborative partner rather than a dependency.

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- 1) Can you share what CMS platform and hosting environment currently powers onlinedegrees.kent.edu?

The site is currently built on the Brightspot CMS and hosted within a vendor-managed environment.

Kent State Online does not manage the underlying hosting infrastructure directly and is open to vendor recommendations for future-state solutions.

- 2) Approximately how many total pages, media assets (images, videos, PDFs), and blog posts currently exist on the site? Additionally, are there content elements outside the website (e.g., landing pages in other tools) that should be considered in scope?

Kent State Online can provide the following estimated content volumes to support migration planning:

- Core pages (including homepage, program pages, blog landing page, standard pages, and author pages): 135
- Blog posts: 418
- Tags: 122
- Videos: 45
- Images: approximately 1,000+

These figures are estimates and will be finalized during project discovery. Not all assets may require migration, as some may be unused or deprecated.

Content is actively being updated and expanded, and additional pages, blog posts, and assets will continue to be added during the RFP and project planning timeframe.

- 3) How many total pages should be included in the migration estimates?

Vendors should assume that all current website pages are in scope for migration.

Final scope will be confirmed during discovery, and may include prioritization or refinement based on content relevance and quality.

- 4) Will copywriting be needed from the agency partner? If so, please quantify.

No, copywriting will not be required from the vendor.

All content strategy, creation, and editing are managed internally by Kent State Online.

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- 5) The RFP references onboarding timelines and discovery approaches but does not specify a desired go-live date or phased milestone targets. Does the university have an anticipated launch timeline or a target date by which the new or restructured site should be operational?

Kent State Online anticipates a target launch timeframe of early 2027 for the new or restructured site, allowing adequate time for discovery, design, development, and migration.

An earlier launch may be considered if feasible, depending on the proposed approach and timeline.

- 6) Is the university able to share an approximate budget range or ceiling for this engagement?

An approximate budget range or ceiling is not being shared as part of this process.

Vendors are encouraged to propose solutions and engagement models aligned with the scope and objectives outlined in the RFP.

- 7) The RFP references integration with Slate for inquiry, lead capture, and recruitment workflows. Can you clarify the current Slate implementation and whether the vendor will be expected to build within Slate or solely integrate via Slate's APIs?

Slate is currently used for inquiry and lead capture through embedded forms.

The selected vendor will not be expected to build or configure within Slate. Scope is limited to front-end integration with the existing Slate environment.

- 8) The RFP emphasizes AI-enabled features with transparency and human-in-the-loop governance. Does Kent State University or KSO currently have an institutional AI use policy, approved AI vendor list, or specific restrictions on AI technologies (e.g., limitations on third-party LLM providers) that the selected vendor should be aware of when proposing AI capabilities?

Institutional AI policies and governance frameworks are currently in development at Kent State University.

Vendors should propose solutions that prioritize transparency, data privacy, and human oversight, and be adaptable to evolving university guidelines and requirements.

(End of list.)