



What does your website say about your organization?

A tool for evaluating and discussing how your website measures up to your nonprofit's mission and brand promise

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This questionnaire is intended as an assessment tool and catalyst for discussion among decision-makers involved with your organization's web enterprise. So, the grading isn't meant to produce a cumulative "A" or "F". It's meant to provoke discussion about the importance and performance of your website, within each category, given your resources, methods and culture.

Aesthetics and brand consistency

(Are you managing how your brand is perceived?)

- Does your site use the organization's logo prominently and proportionately in the main site interface?
- Does it use colors, fonts and other elements from the identity in the interface and content?
- Does it look specific to your organization, rather than generically templated or off the shelf?
- Does it project an authentic and consistent editorial voice in its text content?
- Does it use respectable grammar, punctuation, and spelling?
- Does the design have a good balance between harmony and contrast (space vs. active elements; large vs. small; bold vs. subtle)? For example, does the visitor's eye know where to look first? Second?
- Do all pages appear to be part of a coherent whole?
- Does it use illustration specific and fitting for your brand identity and voice (as opposed to obviously generic "clipart")?
- Are the photographs visually coherent and effective (clear, in focus, cropped to focus on only what is important to the content it illustrates, colors that don't clash with the interface)?
- Do the site photos represent the full diversity of your organization's community?

IF NOT, you may be missing an important opportunity to present your organization to the world in the most credible and professional light.

Grade: A = 9 or 10 B = 7 or 8 C = 5 or 6
D = 3 or 4 F = 2 or less

Usability

(Are you user-friendly?)

- Is there a clear and logical hierarchy of information presented?
- Is there a maximum of seven navigation items in any one area?
- Can the user tell where s/he is at all times through navigation and headings?
- Can the user always navigate to where s/he wishes to go without having to return to another level or select "back"?
- Does the site give the user feedback when s/he does something with the mouse?
- Is the site accessible to low/no vision users? Users with limited mobility?
- Does it work in a variety of browsers? (not that it has to look identical in all browsers)
- Is there a search field and/or other access points for users beyond the navigation?
- Are the size, line length and linespacing of copy used effectively for readability?
- Are PDFs and other external files used appropriately, with download size warnings?
- Does it avoid extraneous animations, which take the user's time without giving them anything they value?
- Are the graphics optimized as much as possible to minimize download time?

IF NOT, you risk limiting your visitors' enjoyment and interaction with your site, thereby diluting their perception of your site's value and their likelihood of returning.

Grade: A = 11 or 12 B = 8 to 10 C = 5 to 7
D = 3 or 4 F = 2 or less

Updatability

(Are you up-to-date?)

- Does the home page change frequently to reflect events and accomplishments?
- Does your organization have a clear and efficient process for creating, approving, and posting new content?
- Does your site employ a database-driven content management system to accommodate frequent content changes? If not, do you have in-house staff support for updating? (using a WYSIWYG editor or hand-coding)
- Does your site employ SSIs (server-side includes) for templated items ?

IF NOT, it will appear that you don't value your own accomplishments enough to share them by keeping you site current about your work—or if you're outsourcing frequent updates, you're spending way too much money to keep it current.

Grade: A = 4 B = 3 C = 2 D = 1 F = 0

Depth of content

(Are you an expert in your field?)

- Is the majority of your site content authored by your staff or volunteers, as opposed to outside experts with no relation to your organization?
- Can a user find almost everything there is to know about your field or topic on your site?
- Are there comprehensive, or at least extensive, links to other sources on your topic?
- Does your site offer database(s) of information that can be searched?

IF NOT, it will appear that you don't know much about your topic or you don't want to share it.

Grade: A = 4 B = 3 C = 2 D = 1 F = 0

If your mission is at least partially about empowerment, your website should provide for ...

Collaboration among board and/or staff

(Do you value input and collaboration?)

- Does the site make board and/or staff feel involved in your organization?
- Can they share drafts of documents?
- Can they share articles of interest?
- Is there a discussion board for threaded discussions? A Wiki?
- Is there a calendar of events or an internal newsletter?

IF NOT, you may rely on other methods and venues for collaboration, or you don't have the resources to create web collaboration...or you are missing an opportunity for enhancing both your communities' sense of involvement and your organization's opportunities for contribution to growth—from within and without.

Community building among members or the public

(Are you a community activist?)

- Is there a directory of members and/or relevant organizations?
- Are there forms for joining, donating, volunteering, getting more information, giving feedback?
- Are there surveys (such as SurveyMonkey) for giving input and opinion?
- Is there a calendar of events?
- Is there an "email to a friend" feature?
- Does your site allow for sharing among users about a topic through comments, discussion board, or Wiki?
- Does your site provide for photo galleries, or other content-sharing, as appropriate?

IF NOT, perhaps you don't perceive your organization as a catalyst for action.

Glossary of Terms

cascading style sheets (css) a way to define the appearance of a website that is independent of the content. For instance, they define what a major head, paragraph, or numbered list should look like.

content management system a model for setting up a website which employs databases to dynamically generate the entire site in response to a given query. It is an ideal interface for submitting and updating content.

database a structured collection of information. Structure means that pieces of information have been set up in relation to each other so that they can be systematically found by a computer.

dynamic web pages web pages that do not exist until a user accesses them; they are then generated from a template and filled with data (the content is generated on the fly). Contrast with *static pages*.

feedback, user feedback graphical response that indicates an action has been taken by the user.

hand-coding a way to generate HTML without using a WYSIWYG editor.

HTML hypertext markup language—the primary language of websites. A more recent standard is XHTML (extensible HTML). Both identify the function of the various parts of content—a paragraph, a major head, a minor head, a numbered list, and so on. They provide structure to the content.

open source code is code for a program that is put into the public domain so users can use and modify it freely and as needed, with the assumption that they will share improvements with others. Open Source Content Management Systems, such as Drupal and Mambo, have user communities around the world, working to improve them. Contrast with *proprietary code*.

optimization of graphics the practice of making graphic files as small as possible. A balance is struck between image quality and download time.

photo galleries prestructured grids into which staff or users can upload photos. By extension, “gallery” can be used to describe any place on a website where users are able to upload static content to share with others.

proprietary code code for programs that is not in the public domain; it is sold by a company to a user.

server a computer connected to the Internet where websites are hosted so that they can be accessed by other computers.

server-side scripting languages languages that run on a server and give it instructions for generating web pages. Examples include PHP (open source), ASP (Microsoft/proprietary), and Cold Fusion (Macromedia/proprietary).

SSI (server side includes) a portion of a web page that can be stored on a server. It can be used for items that appear on multiple pages, such as navigation. SSIs make it easy to change common content throughout the site with a single instruction, thereby increasing site efficiency.

static pages HTML pages that are retrieved by users exactly as they were written. Their content can only be changed by editing the HTML. Contrast with *dynamic pages*.

SurveyMonkey an inexpensive Web-based survey service that allows users to create surveys linked to their sites and to get reports on the responses.

template (templated items) a formatting model for websites meant to simplify filling with content, revision and expansion.

threaded discussion the practice of users posting content so others may reply to it in sequence. Discussions may or may not be moderated by the site sponsor, depending on how they are set up.

Wiki a system that makes it possible for documents to be written collectively (co-authoring) in a simple markup language using a web browser.

WYSIWYG editor a program used to create HTML that enables the user to see what a web page will look like as it is assembled (what you see is what you get). Examples include Dreamweaver, GoLive!, and FrontPage.

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