Website Basics

A website can help broadcast information about your organization to the general public. It can help you increase awareness of your organization, pass information to your employees or volunteers, or publicize fundraising events. With these instructions, you will be able to quickly and easily create a well-organized website.

Planning
Before you can complete any of the other steps, you must have a good idea of what your website will be like. Consider the following questions carefully before beginning the other web design steps:

- What are the goals for the website?
- What is the main topic of the website?
- Why do you want to make a website?
- What do you want your audience to do in response to the website?

The design and content of your website should reflect your answers to the above questions.

Another important aspect of website planning is ongoing maintenance. You should try to keep the information up-to-date by changing the content frequently.

In order to implement a website you must:
1) Acquire a domain name.
2) Secure a web server to host your site.
3) Secure software to build website.
4) Design and build the website.
5) Track website use. Refer to the Web Analytics document.

Acquiring a Domain Name
A domain name is the “easy to remember nickname” for the Internet server where you will be able to upload the contents of your website. It is also part of the website address that people will use to get to your website.

Guidelines
Choose a domain name appropriately. You should aim to make your website easy to find for visitors by making sure your domain name is:

- Short
- Descriptive
- Easy to remember - your domain names should be as similar to your organization name as possible
- Hyphen-free
- Number-free
- Meaningful
- Unique
- Utilizes keywords
The ideal situation is that your organization has its own domain name for several reasons:

1) People will be able to easily remember your domain name. They will simply type in your organization and add an extension to reach your webpage.

2) This domain name will not be trademarked by another organization. Since your organization name is owned by your organization, you will have the rights to the domain name. If your website does use trademarked phrases or words, you could easily be sued by the company that owns that phrase.

Examples of Domain Names:

1) YMCA.net
2) Walmart.com
3) Baylor.edu
4) WacoHumaneSociety.org

Registering Your Domain Name

After deciding on your desired domain name, the name must be registered with the ICANN organization. You can do this through a domain name registrar. You pay the registrar for the use of your domain name annually. Popular registrars include Register.com and GoDaddy.com. If you have your website hosted, then that hosting organization may be able to register your domain name, too.

Use the domain extension appropriate for your organization. Common extensions are listed below. Register all three extensions so that visitors can find the website from all three and your website will get more publicity.

- .org – used for nonprofits and other types of organizations
- .com – most common
- .net – commonly used by internet service providers, web hosts, or other businesses involved in internet infrastructure; also, often used by businesses for their intranet websites.

Securing a Web Server to Host Your Website

You must secure space on a server where the files of your website will be accessible on the Internet. This server is referred to as a web host. There are two options for hosting: you can either host your own website or you can buy space from an online web hosting service.

Hosting Your Own Website

This option can make it easier to update your website since you have immediate access. You also avoid paying fees to web hosting services.

However, drawbacks include:

- Lots of expenses – You would have to maintain powerful server hardware with a permanent 24 hour high speed connection.
- Server license – You would have to pay for an expensive server license.
- Labor expenses – You would need someone to install and maintain the hardware and software for your server. It can get very costly to deal with bugs, viruses, network and other issues that could affect your server’s performance.
Using a Hosting Service
It is more common to let an Internet Service Provider host your site for a monthly or yearly fee. You can have faster connection speeds because an Internet Service Provider will have more powerful hardware. Also, your website will be more secure and stable with an online hosting service. Typically, you will find domain name registration in a hosting site. Examples of hosting services are: HostGator.com and GoDaddy.com.

Secure Software to Design Your Website
The next step is to install software that allows you to write your own website code or automatically generate the code you need to create your website. You can either use HTML coding (not recommended), a web development software package, or a content management system.

HTML Coding
Web pages are built in a language called HTML, which you can write yourself using a simple text editor like Notepad. With this option, you can completely customize your website to your exact specifications. However, it takes lots of time, expertise, and money to learn and maintain HTML code.

Web Development Software
You can purchase software packages to build your own custom designs without having to write the HTML code. Similar to HTML coding, web development software can be challenging to use in implementing a website, but allows you to truly customize every element of your website. Examples of two popular web development software packages are briefly described below.

Dreamweaver (website address)
Dreamweaver is a web design and development application. It provides a visual editor so that you can design your website without writing HTML code and a code editor so that you can change the HTML code Dreamweaver generates for your website. This method is simpler for you because you do not actually have to write the HTML code yourself, but still takes time to learn the application tools, and is the pricier of the two options. Dreamweaver runs on both Macs and PCs, and is good for more complex websites.

Microsoft Expression Web (website address)
Microsoft Expression Web is another tool for creating, designing, and editing websites. Like Dreamweaver, the HTML coding is created for you as you add graphic elements to the website. However, it costs less to purchase than Dreamweaver. For very simple websites that you create on your own (in a PC environment), Microsoft Expression Web is a good choice.

Content Management Systems
A content management system (CMS) is a software package that lets you build and maintain a website quickly and easily. It stores the actual website content in a database and can automatically pull the content out and show it on the appropriate pages based on the design you set up in advance. This allows the CMS to separate the content of the website from the graphics of the website.
In the table below, a few content management systems are briefly described.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Management System:</th>
<th>About:</th>
<th>Suggested for:</th>
</tr>
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| **SquareSpace** – With SquareSpace, you can easily create a simple website with multimedia. | • Drag and drop editor option  
• Handles multimedia  
• Creates mobile friendly sites  
• Template layouts  
• Standard plan - $10/month; Unlimited plan - $20/month | More visually-oriented sites |
| **WordPress** – WordPress is one of the easiest systems to install and understand. With thousands of free predefined themes available, you can maintain and update your website without expertise. | • Add-ons available  
• Doesn’t handle complex sites very well  
• Can be difficult to add custom features  
• Can be difficult to customize the core functionalities  
• Free to create and host website | Blogs, small business sites, and personal sites |
| **Wix** – With a drag and drop editor, Wix is an easy to use content management system. | • Predetermined formats  
• No coding  
• Simple drag and drop feature  
• Free to create and host website | Small business sites |
| **GoogleSites** – With GoogleSites, you can create a website for your employees and volunteers to view information. | • Create a page with a single click  
• Customize the layout or choose from a template  
• Free to create and host website | Sharing information within the organization |
Design and Build the Website

Design the Website Theme

1) Select or create the theme which represents the look and feel of your entire website. It is important to make a theme because this will make your website cohesive and tie all of the web pages together. The benefit of using a Content Management System is that it has predetermined themes that you can choose from and customize.

2) Add pictures and graphics for visual appeal. Caution: Don’t go overboard because that can slow down the navigation on the website.

3) Use add-ons (sometimes referred to as widgets) to add capabilities to your website like calendars, surveys, links to social media sites, a shopping cart, etc.

Add Content to Your Website

The content is what people visit your website for. It is the most important aspect of web design, so it is important that you spend a significant amount of time thinking about what information to include. Content management is an ongoing process and you should update your website frequently. You should gather a possible list of topics and make those into separate pages.

A sitemap is a listing of all of the different pages. An example is included below to show the basic web pages that you should include in any website pertaining to a nonprofit organization. This should be used as only a starting point for your website; you can and should add pages that are specific to your particular organization.

- Home
- About Us
- Mission and History
- Fundraising/Donations
- Volunteer Opportunities
- Staff
- Examples of Our Work in the Community
- Employment and Internship Opportunities
- Contact Us
Basic Web Design Considerations

There is much literature on effective and ineffective designs of websites. A discussion of this is beyond the scope of this topic. A quick Internet search on “nonprofit website design best practices” will yield several articles on the topic. One such article from NTEN is found here. A few design considerations are listed below:

- Your organization’s mission should be immediately apparent.
  - Focus on your home page. You can utilize different design elements such as borders, headings, and pictures to make your organization’s purpose clear to the general public and emphasize the main objectives of your website. Also, make sure your home page is simple. Use large pictures and large text to attract people and create interest in your organization’s website.

- Make your website consistent with your other promotional materials.
  - This will increase recognition of your organization and its mission.

- Include a “Donate Now!” button on every page.
  - If visitors visit different pages, they will be able to make a donation from each page.

- Do not include too much text on one webpage.
  - Ideally, your visitors will not have to scroll down the page for the important information. Your visitors will lose interest if they see an extremely text heavy webpage. The pages should be scannable and concise.

With an effective website, you can better publicize your organization. This will help you to receive more donations, get more attendance to fundraisers, and successfully communicate information about your organization to employees and volunteers.