

How to Get Started

This toolkit is designed for those who have a site template or platform to populate.

- Audience. Identify the target audience(s) your site will serve.
- Site Mission. What is the mission of your site? Some sites push information out to visitors, others are interactive and seek input or involvement from visitors.
- Special Functions: Are there any special functions you want your site to do. These might include collecting donations online, having an interactive or static calendar, seeking subscribers for a newsletter, etc.
- Compare Models. How do organizations with similar missions or objectives craft their sites? Evaluate sites used by other non-profits, bearing in mind that the purpose or focus of the site may differ.
- Management. Identify the person(s) who will be responsible for maintaining content and making basic decisions about how material on the site is displayed. Identify who should have administrative access to the editing functions of the site.
- Design by committee. This is an opportunity for staff to share ideas and suggestions to create a website that envelopes the ideals and goals of the organization. Collaborating with other invested staff builds cohesiveness and ownership of the organization's website. If not well managed, there is a risk of creating a site that has a hodgepodge of elements rather than one clean vision.

Best Practices for Home Page Elements

- Start with the basics. A simple starting point is to draw everything out on paper, step by step how people will use the site before jumping in to build the site.
- Simplicity. Do not overwhelm the visitor with too much information and text.
- Navigation. Decide on a few (five or fewer) main navigation points visitors can use to drill down into the site's content.
- Graphics. Use graphics rather than lots of text to get the visitor's attention.
- Main message. Design a short block of text that lets the visitor know immediately what the site is about. Remember not every visitor to your site knows in advance what he or she is looking for, and may land there after using a search engine.
- Organization Identification and/or Logo. Prominent placement of your organization's name and logo if available.
- Headers/footers. If your template allows, this is an excellent way to make sure your visitor sees certain information on every single site page. SLLS' new site, for example, features a donate button at the foot of every page of the site, where it is unobtrusive but always present. The same is true for key partner logos.
- Navigation tabs. Make sure these are brief and understandable.
- Embedded Hyperlinks. Link key graphics and buzzwords on your home page to internal pages with key content to keep the home page streamlined.

Best Practices for Overall Site Content

- Readability for your audience. Keep your text simple if your goal is to reach visitors with limited reading ability. This rule also applies to any content. Simple words carry more clout.
- Organization. Keep like elements together. Don't make your visitors wade through too much text or too many pages.
- Accessibility. Keep text blocks short and use a sufficiently large font.
- Web fonts. Text in sans-serif fonts like Arial and Verdana may be easier to read online.
- Use of key graphics throughout. Images can carry more weight than words.
- Keep it fresh. Find a way to incorporate new content into your site on a regular basis. This could be through tools like a news page or a calendar tool to let visitors know what your organization has done lately.
- Reference points. Have a place where your supporters can learn more about you. This includes space for information about your board of directors, annual reports, if available, and like information.
- All about you: make sure visitors know how to contact your organization. Make it easy for them.
- Being social. Consider incorporating social medial tools to enhance the reach and impact of your site.

Objectives

- Presence. Your online presence will have the greatest impact and effect given constraints of cost and time.
- Reach. Your site will enable more people to connect with your organization and use its services.
- Support. Your site will present your mission, achievements, and how they can help keep the organization strong.
- Media. You will have a portal where the media can access information needed for fact-checking for deciding whether to write about you.

Benefits

- Outreach. The site will enable those who need your services to find you.
- Visibility. The effectiveness of your site will boost your presence online and on the ground.
- Support. The site will provide a portal for those who wish to provide financial or other forms of support.

Audience

- Most nonprofits in the access to justice community have three separate audiences, each with different needs. Your site's content must carefully achieve a balance among considerations regarding accessibility, sophistication and impact to meet the demands of reaching each audience.
- Your target service populations. Your site is a point of contact for those who need help. Your site must use simple text and tools to connect them with the services you provide. These tools will vary among organizations. This may mean a listing of offices with contact information. Other tools may be access to a phone hotline or instant messaging service. Tools may include resources visitors can read online or download. The last of these should not clutter the pages of your site. House them in an online library and link to them.
- Your funders and supporters. Your text needs to be sleek and professional. Give them a fast read about your achievements. Make it easy for those who want to volunteer to find out how to do that. The same is true for prospective employees.
- Everyone else. People will find out about you by accident on the Internet. Make sure they know what you do and why you do it once they hit the home page.

Associated Costs

- Template costs and technical support are not addressed in this toolkit.
- Staffing costs. Your organization must make a significant commitment to dedicate a significant portion of at least one staffer's time to make your site effective.

Content Type/s

- Descriptive content. This is the general content about your organization, including its mission, description and contact information. Evaluate yearly for freshness. News and Events. This content changes regularly.
- Special Functions. Content regarding specific outreach or funding campaigns emerges as needed with these events.

Advanced Website Consideration

- Mobile compatibility. More people access the Internet by phone. Consider mobile viewing of your site and compatibility with mobile devices. Depending on your platform, you may be able to take advantage of "responsive design" which allows your site to configure itself best to the device used to access it.

Posting Schedule

- News and/or Events. Strive to add new content at least weekly and more often if possible.
- Consider incorporating RSS feeds from partner sites to populate some areas where the news flow may be slow. The same is true for meshing social media tools with the site.

Measurement Strategies and Goals

- Analytics. Know what your analytics tools are and use them. Use Google Analytics or a similar tool if available for your site.
- Site usage. Check your site usage for peak times and frequency of visits to key site elements.
- Visitor characteristics. When are people accessing your site? See other demographic information.
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO) This is a marketing strategy to improve the visibility of your site on the web. Many free SEO measuring tools are available.
- Meta Information (Keywords about your site inserted in a page header and used by search engines to find and include your page in a search result.) Use Meta tags and descriptions to boost the ability of Internet users to find your site.