Enterprise Operational Standard: Web Design

As developed by the Web Design Workgroup – March 13, 2012
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Contents

Statement of Purpose

The Web is one of the most important means by which the State communicates with the public. Often an agency's website is the only interface that a citizen or business has with a particular agency. As website usage by the public continues to grow, it is critical that Iowa's state websites present a professional, user-friendly, integrated portal to state information and services.

All state websites must be accessible to the broadest possible audience and easy to understand and use.

The Internet should be used to facilitate cost-effective and efficient business. This means that the Internet should be seen as a tool for streamlining agency business practices, completing transactions without paper, reducing the number of paper forms and incoming calls, answering commonly asked questions, etc. Maintaining standards for consistent website design and management across the enterprise is necessary to meet the needs of the public and to provide the best possible electronic services.

State of Iowa presence on the Internet must be professional, comprehensive, and coordinated.

While eGovernment Services within the Office of the CIO and the Department of Administrative Services will provide general coordination, the ultimate stewardship of the State of Iowa's presence on the Internet rests with State agencies. It is each State agency's responsibility to contribute to a professional, appropriate, and coordinated presence for State of Iowa on the Internet. The purpose of the State of Iowa Web Design Standard is to:

- Reinforce Iowa.gov identity and make it clear to users they are on an Iowa Executive Branch site
- Provide consistency and continuity in website appearance
- Improve the quality, usability and accessibility of State web sites and services for the public
- Ensure that critical state links appear on all agency sites
- Integrate agency sites, web applications and the portal, to support the "one government" approach and move away from bureaucratic separation of information
- Increase efficiency of website development and management by agencies

Scope

This standard applies to all Executive Branch agency websites. All websites must comply with the State of Iowa Web Design Standard.

Definitions

Agency – An agency is any government entity including departments, divisions, sub-divisions, boards, commissions, etc.

Agency Public Facing Website – A website comprised of web pages that can be viewed by the general public without login credentials.

Browser Environment – A browser environment is a combination of browser software, a version of that software, and the platform it is running on. Some examples would be: Internet Explorer for Windows, Safari for Mac OS, Chrome for Android, or Safari for iOS.

Mobile Devices – Combine telephone, email, text message and web browsing functionality into a single wireless device. Mobile devices are BlackBerry, iPhone and other smartphones. Also considered can be laptops, tablets, netbooks, iPads and similar devices.

Online Service – An online service is a service that allows a two way transaction between citizens and government through a web page.

Elements of Web Page Standards

This document presents two categories of guidance for State of Iowa websites:

- • Required: A required item is a standard that all State of Iowa websites shall follow. These items have been selected as required out of usability or accessibility concerns or to promote consistency in website appearance across state agencies.
- • Recommended: A recommended item is a standard that should be followed in most cases, but that, for a variety reasons, is not required.

1   Site Components
These items are components every website shall include. These are site-wide items, not page specific.

1.1 "About" Page or Section [Required]
Each website must include an "About" page or section that contains at minimum a statement of the agency's purpose (i.e. mission, vision, etc.). A link to this page or section must be visible in the root level of the primary navigation or in the agency header and must use the word, "About," in the link text. The about page or section may also include any other information that agency deems necessary.

1.2 "Contact" Page [Required]
Each website must include a "Contact" page that contains at minimum general contact information for the agency including phone number, address with a map or link to a map, and an email address or contact form. See also 5.2.6.1.

1.3 Search [Required]
Each website must include site-specific search functionality. See also 5.2.7.

1.4 Title Tag [Required]
Each website shall use unique, descriptive page titles across all pages. See Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.4.2. - http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/.

1.5 Page Titles [Recommended]
Website page titles should be formatted with the page specific title first followed by the agency or website name. This helps the user identify where they are and what site they are on when moving from tab to tab in the browser.

1.6 FAQ Page or Section [Recommended]
Each website should include an FAQ page or pages to address common questions users might have. This empowers the user to self-serve and find their own solutions.

1.7 Search Engine Optimization [Recommended]
An XML site map file can be generated for search engines. This helps maximize the indexing by search engines and might increase the page ranking.

1.8 Site Analytics [Recommended]
Connect the site into some type of analytics reporting. The data collected can be used to make decisions about the content on the site and its relevance.

2 Design Elements

These items are elements that shall be incorporated into each agency website's design.

2.1 Sliver Header [Required]
Each public facing web page must include the official state-wide sliver header at the top. Implementation must follow directions at http://www.iowa.gov/sliver/directions.php.

2.2 Agency Header and Logo [Required]
Each website design must have a consistent page header that includes, at a minimum, the agency name and/or logo/branding. The agency logo/branding must link to the website homepage.

2.3 Navigation - Primary [Required]
Each website design must have consistent primary, top-level navigation across all pages. Primary navigation must be laid out horizontally at non-mobile resolutions.

2.4 Navigation – Second Level [Recommended]
For websites that utilize a second level of the navigation, the secondary navigation may be vertical and should not be on the bottom.

2.5 Navigation – Home Link [Required]
Each website's primary, top-level navigation must include as the first item a link with the text "Home" to the website homepage.

2.6 Footer [Required]

Each website's design must include a consistent page footer that includes at minimum a contact link, policy link(s), and a plugins link.

2.6.1 Contact Link [Required]

Each website's design must include a link in the footer to the "Contact" page.

2.6.2 Policies Link [Required]

Each website shall include a link in the footer to the Iowa.gov policies page.   Agency websites may also have agency specific policies. In this instance the Iowa.gov policies link will be included with agency policies.

2.6.3 Sitemap Link [Required]

For websites that provide a sitemap, a link to the sitemap must be in the footer.

2.6.4 Plugins Link [Required]

For websites that require the use of special software to view content (i.e. viewers, media players, plugins, etc.) the website's design must include a link in the footer to the site where appropriate software can be acquired. If multiple software types are needed, website designers may choose to place all of the appropriate information on a separate page and link to that page.

2.6.5 Copyright Notice [Required]

If agency content is copyrighted, a copyright notice must be placed in the footer.

2.7 Search Form [Required]

Each website's design must include a site-wide search form in the top quarter of all pages.

2.8 Professional Design [Required]

Each website's design shall look official and professional. The following items are strongly discouraged: blinking text, hit counters, popup windows, handwriting fonts, overly-stylized fonts, and "Easter eggs" (hidden features, practical jokes, etc). Any deviation from this recommendation shall be supported by specific reasoning and goals.

3 Look and Feel

These items pertain to the style of the website. They are not specific elements, but overall look and feel.

3.1 Consistency [Required]

All subpages on a website must have a consistent look.

3.2 Link Styles [Required]

All body content links should be styled consistently throughout the website. Links in the text should all be the same font, color, style and have the same hover behavior. For accessibility, the link should be distinguished with some style (i.e. bold, italicized, underlined, etc.) besides a distinctive color.

3.3 Body Text [Required]

Website body text (paragraphs, lists, etc.) must meet the following requirements: For body text, blinking or moving text is prohibited. Follow WCAG 2.0 – subsection 1.4.4 -
 http://www.w3.org/TR/UNDERSTANDING-WCAG20/visual-audio-contrast-scale.html

3.4 Social Media Links [Required]

If an agency uses social networks/services, the links to those services need to use recognizable social network-specific graphics on the homepage of the site.

3.5 Navigation – Current Page Clearly Marked [Recommended]

Each page should provide information to let users know where they are in a website. This can be done through breadcrumbs or other means.

3.6 Page Width [Recommended]

Websites should be designed to not require horizontal scrolling for more than 10 percent of their user base (as determined by analytics) unless it is a specific design feature.

4 Content

These items pertain to body content throughout the entire site.

4.1 "Online Services" [Required]

If agencies offer services online to their users, they must be referred to as "online services".

4.2 Descriptive Link Text [Required]

Link text must be descriptive so that it remains meaningful when read out of context.

4.3 Content Format [Required]

Standard HTML shall be used where content is being created for display in a browser. Non-HTML documents shall be used only when 1) documents are intended for printing, 2) precise or official document layout is important, or 3) documents contain content that cannot be displayed using standard HTML.

4.4 Link to Documents or Downloads [Required]

Links to non-HTML documents or file downloads must open in a new tab.

4.5 Link Behavior [Recommended]

All links, except those to documents or downloads, should open in the same browser window or tab. When a new window is required, an indicator should notify users that a new window will be opened.

4.6 Link to Top for Long Page [Recommended]

For long pages, especially those with long listings, an anchor that returns the user to the top of the page should be provided at the bottom of the page. Please note many organizations evaluate website usability based on the existence of a link to top for long pages.

4.7 File Type Indicator on File Downloads [Recommended]

Links to download files should include an indicator to let users know the file type. This can be done textually or with the use of an icon. An indicator of file type may help the site visitor determine if they want to download the file and more clearly identifies there is a file available for download.

4.8 Link Content for Single Source of Truth [Recommended]

Links to content in other organizations and associated websites is preferred over copying content into the agency website. The "single source of truth" should be preserved. Example: link to the Administrative Rules site for agency rules instead of posting a document to the agency site with the rules. Linking to the authoritative and original source of information helps to make certain information is accurate at all times. The person who owns and/or maintains the content is responsible for storing it and keeping it up-to-date.

5 Usability

5.1 Browser Compatibility [Required]

All websites shall be designed to look and function correctly in 80 percent of the browser environments used by the audience of their website as determined by analytics.

5.2 Mobile Compliant [Required]

Websites must be designed to be mobile responsive/adaptive and present content in a manner that is easily read on mobile devices. Websites shall present content ~~in a specialized way~~ for use on mobile devices.

5.3 Images [Recommended]

Attention should be paid to the file size of images. Optimally, no single graphic will exceed 50kb and the sum of all graphic elements on a page would not exceed 400 kb. Smaller images improve the response time of the website and benefits users with low bandwidth.

Updates This standard will be reviewed at least every two years and updated as needed.

Effective Date This revised standard takes effect immediately.

Enforcement This standard will be enforced pursuant to Iowa Administrative Code 11 -25.9 (8A).

Variance The Iowa Administrative Code, section 8B.21.5, provides for waivers of information technology operational standards. Requests for a waiver of any requirements of this standard will be submitted in writing to the State CIO.