

OUTLINE FOR WEB PUBLICATION STANDARDS AND PROCEDURES

This outline may help you develop thorough web publication standards and procedures for your agency. A couple of hints:

- Be specific – make sure your rules are not ambiguous
- Provide examples, when possible (e.g., “do” it this way; “don’t do” it that way)

I. INTRODUCTION

- Describes what these rules cover: internet? Intranet? Social media? Other?
- If you use an official style guide – such as the *Associated Press Style Guide* - to supplement this document, say so
- Tell where to go with questions or requests for exceptions to the requirements (e.g., contact the Agency Web Manager at webmanager@XXX.gov)

II. COMPLIANCE WITH LAWS:

Describe specific procedures for complying with laws, regulations, and OMB requirements cited in the policies, including:

- Accessibility
- Privacy
- Records management
- Copyrights and attribution
- Paperwork Reduction and Paperwork Elimination (forms)
- Open Government Directive

III. COMPLIANCE WITH MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

Describe specific procedures to implement the management controls described in the policies. For example:

- Dating and maintaining current content
- Testing web-based applications

IV. RULES ABOUT CONTENT

- Describe specific **procedures** to comply with requirements described in the policies
- Describe specific **standards** or **guidelines** for content. For example:
 - Audience and purpose: For every page, the audience and purpose must be clear and unambiguous.
 - Writing and organization: Use plain language both for all web content.
 - Tone and voice: Web content should be conversational, as if you were speaking to the person. Web content (sentences, paragraphs, link “teasers”) should be written in second person (for example, “We’ll show you how to use this page”). Segues between major content sections, too, should be conversational and in second person (“you”). Web content should be written in the active voice.
 - Though it’s not necessary to use complete sentences, it is essential to use correct grammar.
 - Spelling and proofing: All web pages must be checked for spelling and grammatical errors before they are posted.
 - Time zones: For events (broadcasts, webcasts, meetings, conferences, conference calls, etc.) that span time zones, provide both the Eastern Time (ET) and the Pacific Time (PT). That will help eliminate confusion for people living in other time zones.

- Phone numbers: Phone numbers will be shown as follows:

Example: (555) 555-5555

If there is an extension, the phone number will appear like this:

Example: (555) 555-5555, ext. 55

- Print publications: Print publications must be posted in PDF format or reformatted so they are web-friendly. Information contained in PDFs must also be posted in a text file, to ensure that it is accessible.
- Terror alert level - The terror alert level will be posted only on the front page of the national website.

V: RULES ABOUT WEB PAGE DESIGN

- Describe specific standards or guidelines for content. For example:
 - Functionality: All Internet web pages – including web-based applications – should work across all platforms. Intranet pages must be accessible in the Department's standard browser.
 - Web-based applications: On the first screen of an Internet application, include a link to the agency's home page. Web-based applications should include a mail-to link or post a telephone number that visitors can use to ask questions and report problems. Web-based applications must include standard metadata on the front page of the application.
 - Standard colors and fonts
 - Case: Topics and headings (page headings, sub-headings, and section dividers) should be in title case. In title case, the first word and all principal words are capitalized.
 - Page headers: Page headers (not to be confused with the "page title" that appears up in the blue bar at the top of the screen) are extremely important features of each web page. They should communicate – at a glance – the subject of the page. They also will serve as the text for any links to that page. So choose the wording of your page headers carefully. Page headers should be short – normally no more than 3-5 words. Page headers should be no more than one line. Page headers should use key words that the target audience would be sure to understand
 - Text: Break text into short segments. Use headers or section dividers to help people get to the sections they want, quickly. Put your most important information at the top of your page.
 - Page Length: Pages should be no more than 2 screens, to make it easy for visitors who want to print the pages
 - Topics: Topics should be chosen carefully, with all due consideration for the audience being served. When possible, choose words that are – or could be – common across federal websites. Words used to describe topics must be easily understood by the audience and should not be ambiguous.
- Include guidelines on anchor tags or "Jump To's," tables, and frames

VI. RULES ABOUT FILES

Describe specific procedures and guidelines about files, such as:

- HTML Coding
- JAVA And Javascript
- File Names
- Case

- File Name Extensions:
- Folder Names
- Application Files
- Video
- File types
- Powerpoint files
- PDFs
- Audio and video files
- Virus protection
- File size
- Redirects
- Aliases (shortened URLs)

VII: RULES ABOUT LINKS

Describe specific procedures and guidelines to implement the linking policy and to maintain good, audience-friendly content. Examples:

- Format of links
- Defining a link. For example: The words that are underlined, leading to a link, should describe what the user would find at the linked page.
- Listing links: For example: Lists of links should appear in “sentence case” (first letter of first word capitalized and no other capitalization except for proper nouns, acronyms, abbreviations). When using a list of links, list them in alphabetical order unless links intentionally follow chronological order or links intentionally lead the user through a logical sequence
- Case
- Testing links
- Links to commercial sites
- Required links

VIII: RULES ABOUT GRAPHICS

Describe specific procedures and guidelines about graphics, such as:

- The website “brand”
- Image and graphic types:
- Thumbnails
- Colors (e.g, Images and graphics should use at least 256 colors and a color depth equal to or greater than 8 bits)
- Sizes
- Cropping
- Borders
- Height and width
- Vertical space and horizontal space
- Text labels
- Text alternatives
- Animated graphics

IX: RULES ABOUT POSTING

Describe specific procedures and guidelines about posting, such as:

- Posting rights (how they’re issued, who may have them, etc.)

- Storage and testing: for example: All web pages and their associated images and graphics associated with them are stored in the development area. Files may not be posted to the “live” production server – where they can be viewed by the public – until they have been reviewed and tested to ensure they meet all technical requirements and until the content has been approved by all appropriate authorities within the organization
- Removing files

X: RULES ABOUT ARCHIVING

Describe specific procedures and guidelines about archiving appropriate content, including how and when content should be sent to the National Archives

XI: RULES ABOUT SPECIFIC WEB TECHNOLOGIES OR CONTENT TYPES

Describe specific procedures and guidelines about technologies and content to be used on the website such as mailing lists, discussions, real-time chats, calendars, webcasts, and blogs hosted on the site.

- Be sure to include who can authorize these special capabilities and how they should be established

XII: RULES ABOUT NEW MEDIA

Describe any additional rules about when and how to use new media, including social networks, microblogs, external video and audio sites, and other web-based media outlets.

- Be sure to include who can authorize use of new media and how they should be managed and monitored

Appendices

You may want to append such things as:

- A web dictionary to provide the spelling and definition for certain commonly used words, for example:
 - Website (one word)
 - Email (no hyphen)
 - References to the Nation's capitol should be "District of Columbia." The word "Washington" will refer to the state of Washington.
 - “Field” is capitalized when referring to that component of HUD’s organization.
 - Online should be one word - no hyphen
 - Web Manager is two words, and both are capitalized
- Metadata
- Writing standards