.gov Reform Initiative

Department of Agriculture Web Improvement Plan
Working Draft as of 10/11/2011

Background

In the [August 12, 2011 Agency Instructions for Completing Web Inventories and Web Improvement Plans](#), Agency CIOs were asked to work with their Agency Web Manager and Office of Public Affairs to submit an Interim Progress Report on their efforts to streamline Agency-managed .gov domains (due September 6, 2011) and to begin development of an Agency-wide Web Improvement Plan.

> "By October 11, Agencies shall develop a Web Improvement Plan that communicates their **strategy for managing web resources more efficiently, improving online content,** and **enhancing the customer experience of Agency websites**." This comprehensive plan will "address the broader objectives of **streamlining content, infrastructure,** and ultimately **improving customer service**."

The purpose of this Web Improvement Plan is to identify the strategy, actions, measurements, and timelines that the Agency is using to streamline website infrastructure, improve web content, and enhance the customer experience with Executive Branch websites.

Agencies are being asked to create a Web Improvement Plan that will be developed iteratively over the next few months. In this plan, Agencies will describe Agency-wide efforts to effectively manage publicly accessible websites in the .gov domain. Only agencies in the Executive Branch are required to submit a Web Improvement Plan. The initial plan for the Department of Agriculture, due to OMB by October 11, 2011, is in the following section.

Step 1: Current State of Agency-wide Web Improvement Efforts

Over the past few months, Agencies have been reviewing their .gov domains, web operations, and other web-related efforts in response to OMB .gov Reform data collection efforts (individual domain inventories, web governance survey, interim progress reports, etc.). The following describes the state of current web improvement efforts at the Department of Agriculture.

1) Does your Agency currently have an Agency-wide web strategy?

No.

USDA's Office of Communications and Office of the Chief Information Officer are currently evaluating the Department's overall web communication activities, including delivery of content, presentation and organization of web sites and pages. A Department-wide web strategy will be developed as a result of the assessment. Several agencies have developed web strategies, directly related to their agency or mission-area objectives. In addition to the Streamlining Federal Website inventory, USDA is evaluating sub-domains to determine whether or not they should remain operational, be consolidated or shut down. The sub-domain evaluation will continue as agencies are working towards redesigning their official web presence to the current USDA.gov look and feel during FY2012. Throughout the process, we will work with agencies to coordinate web communication efforts and evaluate content strategies to ensure USDA is fulfilling its mission through the web.

2) How does your agency currently ensure that Agency-wide web resources are managed efficiently (e.g. governance, technology/infrastructure, hosting, staffing, operations, etc.)?

Web resources are maintained by each agency and their respective web or communication teams in support of their mission. The Office of Communications coordinates monthly webmaster meetings with agency web teams, in addition to weekly public affairs director meetings to ensure alignment of web communication activities, as well as awareness and implementation of best practices. Web applications are controlled through mechanisms that include a Certification & Accreditation process, configuration management procedures, auditing practices, and technology management structures such as CIO, collaborative Office of Communications and OCIO working groups and Technical Review Board. Several agencies utilize web governance boards to ensure appropriate and responsible use of technology and resources in fulfilling the Department's mission.

Marketing, Education & Agency Coordination

- Educate agencies and decision-makers across USDA about offerings, benefits, efficiencies and goals

Application Scoping and Planning

- Determine scope of an application, including requirements, design plans, timeline and metrics.

Developer Setup and Support

- Access environments are coordinated and workstation setup assistance is provided.

Build and Deploy Support

- Migration of applications through the lifecycle environments, as well as support with testing methodologies for general performance and specific tools.

Operations and Maintenance Support

- Introduces application owners to hosting and operations support services, as well as the process for application updates.

3) How does your Agency currently ensure that website content is readily accessible, updated, accurate, and routinely improved?

All websites go through extensive testing before launch such as load testing to ensure optimal performance, 508 Compliance testing, security testing from web inspect to penetrating testing (depending on the criticality of the site) to ensure no vulnerabilities exist.   The USDA and its agencies use a variety of tools and services to ensure content is accessible to users at all times, including link validation and accessibility checks. Content published to USDA and agency websites must first be reviewed or is submitted by public affairs and program personnel with authoritative information.

4) How does your Agency currently ensure that websites are meeting user expectations and needs and that the customer experience with websites is continually enhanced?

Agencies regularly update web content through web and public affairs staff to ensure the right information is available to stakeholders, responding to inquiries and making revisions where appropriate. A number of USDA agencies utilize ACSI/Foresee analytics to provide customer satisfaction feedback, however some have recently terminated the use of this tool due to lack of funding. Analytics tools are evaluated daily, weekly and monthly, to understand aggregate visitor actions or trends. The Department also continually monitors and acts upon feedback from other channels, including its automated question and answer applications, email submissions, and in-person interactions with stakeholders. The Department follows recognized best practices in development, design, and maintenance of web content. Agency teams participate in training and workshops offered by GSA's Web Manager University, within resource constraints.