**City of Madison, Wisconsin
Information Technology**

Web Policies, Standards, and Guidelines

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Introduction

The City of Madison's website (cityofmadison.com) is the official site of the City of Madison. All material and graphic images on the site will meet and maintain the highest standards of accuracy, fairness, and access. Special care is taken to ensure that the information is current and accurate. The City's website is a highly visible way to promote and share the many City programs, services, and information available to residents, businesses, and visitors. The goal of the City website is to be user-friendly, accessible, and have clear navigation and search tools.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to establish policies, standards, and guidelines for the City's websites. Policies ensure consistent navigation, branding, and user experiences throughout the City's websites. These policies provide an enforceable governance model around how the City's websites are managed and maintained to keep development and maintenance costs to a minimum. Standards provide City employees with tools for creating and maintaining the City's websites. These standards outline what is essential to maintain a consistent, professional, and well-managed site. Guidelines aid content editors and web developers for City websites. Users are highly encouraged to follow these guidelines to enhance the experience of visitors to City websites.

All policies, standards, and guidelines are periodically reviewed and updated as necessary by Information Technology (IT).

Scope

These policies, standards, and guidelines cover all City of Madison official websites – both public-facing and internal websites – regardless of where they are hosted, and anyone developing on these sites including vendors and other third-parties.

Exceptions

Any exceptions to these policies or standards require written approval of IT Director or their designated employee. Requests shall be in writing, will state the specific policy or standard that is being challenged, and the business reason for the exception. The decision of the IT Director shall be final.

Consequences for Noncompliance

Any agency, organization, group, or application that represents the City of Madison, or that is hosted by the City of Madison, that fails to comply with these policies and standards may be required to take their website or web application down until it is in compliance.

Staff Responsibilities

Agency Web Content Editors

Agency Web Content Editors are the cornerstone to ensure the effectiveness of the City's website. Since there are often training requirements and learning curves involved in performing the work of content editors, these staff should be permanent, non-rotating positions. Staff that are known to be in the position for less than two years are discouraged from being tasked as a content editor. Content editors must be permanent City employees

The responsibilities of Agency Web Content Editors include:

- Ensure that all information on the website conveys the agency's message in a consistent, accurate, and timely manner.

- Ensure that all content on the agency's website has completed the agency's internal review process prior to being published. The Department/Division head is ultimately responsible for the content that is displayed by the agency.

- Identify who will prepare the content.

- Organize and format the content.

- Publish or request the publication of content using the process defined for the agency.

- Keep web content organized and current (i.e., removing any pages that are obsolete, inaccurate, or not timely).

- Provide feedback to appropriate sources regarding the type of comments, complaints, or inquiries that are received from residents to identify city-wide issues.

- Follow the City of Madison Web Policies, Standards, and Guidelines, and all City policies, APMs, and City Ordinances.

- Fix broken links.

City Web Manager

The City Web Manager has overall responsibility for the City of Madison's websites, City-hosted sites, and web applications. The Web Manager's duties include, but are not limited to:

- Oversight of all City of Madison websites and web applications.

- Approval of all in-house developed web applications.

- Approval of all new websites.

- Approval of the use of any outside resources for website development.

- Approval of the use of any outside developed web applications.

Department/Division Heads

Department/Division Heads are ultimately responsible for the content that is specific to the agency or service they have responsibility for. They are responsible for designating who will be their Agency Web Content Editor(s) and ensure these individuals receive sufficient training and are sufficiently competent to do the work.

Web Team

The Web Team operates under the direction of the City Web Manager as part of Information Technology. Their duties include, but are not limited to:

- Design, develop, test, deploy, and maintain City websites and web applications.
- Provide support for City web applications and the standard website management tools.
- Manage content on the City's homepage, shared portal pages, and content that is not agency-specific.
- Participate in the review of web applications.

Policies, Standards, and Guidelines

Accessibility & ADA Requirements

As a government site, all pages will be designed to meet requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 508 standards. The City of Madison Website Accessibility Policy outlines our goals, guidelines, and expectations.

Coding Requirements

Web application development will follow the appropriate coding standards of the language, framework, or software being used. Web application development is limited to the Web Team. Any exceptions require the written approval of the IT Director.

Content Review

Poor spelling, grammar, bad URLs, and out-of-date pages can quickly turn off any visitors and erode confidence in the entire City of Madison website. Use the following quick check guidelines to prevent this:

- **Check spelling:** Proof read all content prior to posting it on a website and use spell checking utilities.
- **Check links:** Test every link to ensure that it is working properly and sending the user to the appropriate location.
- **Check for timeliness:** Check pages regularly to see that the material is current or timely.

Documents

Whenever possible, content should be placed on a webpage instead of in documents. Avoid using PDF's and Microsoft Word documents to share information. All PDF's must be accessible and text-searchable.

Acceptable uses of documents on the City website include:

- **Records:** reports, agendas, minutes, and other non-editable documents.
- **Printable documents:** posters, pamphlets, brochures, and other documents designed for print can be published as PDF's.
- **Forms:** fillable PDF's or Word documents that are required for City business processes.
- **Spreadsheets:** tabular data that is meant to be editable may be published in Microsoft Excel format or to the Open Data portal.

Forms

Forms must follow accessibility best practices and appropriate standards. Follow the City Style Guide for form standard fields, and best practices for improving user experience.

Free Software

The use of free software, shareware, open-source code and tools, and code snippets are not allowed unless it can be demonstrated to adhere to our security standards. These items may contain vulnerabilities, including insecure coding practices, viruses, and other malware. Considerations must be given to the ongoing support and maintenance of any additional software or code. The City must ensure that we comply with any licensing or copyright requirements, and the City Attorney's Office must review and approve any legal terms and conditions.

Any new software must follow the New Software Request Process (APM 3-20). This applies to all software and online services, including free software.

Homepage: Highlights, Announcements, & Calendar of Events

The goal of highlights and announcements is to promote timely content. All content displayed on the City's homepage must meet the following criteria and be displayed in accordance with the following guidelines:

- Short term in nature.
- Timely topic.
- Beneficial to our residents and/or visitors.
- Beneficial to the City.
- Normally not displayed earlier than two weeks prior to an event.
- Normally removed promptly after the event.
- Announcements normally run for a maximum of two weeks.

Languages

The default language of City of Madison websites shall be English. Providing pages and information in other languages, while it may be desirable, is not required unless there is a specific APM, Ordinance, State or Federal Law, or City policy that mandates it.

The City of Madison Language Access Plan defines the goals and expectations for providing information in multiple languages. Most commonly supported languages include English, Spanish, Hmong, and Mandarin (Traditional Chinese).

Licensing

Information Technology will serve as the central administrator of all licenses for software used within City of Madison websites. Purchasing, upgrading, and renewal of all software licenses must be coordinated with, and receive approval of, the City Web Manager.

Links

Broken links: agencies shall monitor their agency website to ensure that these are replaced or removed.

External links: follow the City of Madison Web Linking Policy (APM 3-13). All external links should be set up to open in a new window. Links that do not meet the policy criteria will be removed. Links should be periodically reviewed to confirm that the policy criteria are still being met and that the site still exists.

Internal links: should open in the same window.

Naming Conventions

The following represents naming convention standards for all City of Madison websites:

Agency website names

- The folder names of the agency websites will follow official City of Madison agency designations.
- If an agency is a subordinate to a larger department, their folder will be underneath the department folder. Example: www.cityofmadison.com/parks/golf/

File and folder naming conventions

Follow these standards to avoid compatibility problems when naming files and folders:

- Always use lower case letters for file names and extensions.
- Use only alphanumeric characters (i.e., a-z and 0-9 in names).
- Never use special characters, except the hyphen "-", in file names.

- Never use spaces or underscores in a file or folder name.

- Use descriptive names and, when possible, limit them to a few words. Avoid creating unreadable file names for the sole purpose of limiting character length.

- Avoid using dates and version numbers in file names unless directly related to the content (i.e. annual/monthly report).

Once a name is selected, continue using the name in all subsequent references and version to ensure that links remain intact.

Page Layout

The following represents page layout standards for all City of Madison websites:

Accessibility Statement

A link to the City of Madison's Accessibility Statement will be displayed on each page within all sites that are part of the City of Madison website.

Copyright

A copyright notice will be displayed on each page within all sites that are part of the City of Madison website. Example: Copyright © 1995-2022 City of Madison, WI.

Dating of pages

Time-sensitive pages should have a date and/or time of when it was last generated, updated, or reviewed. All content should be reviewed for relevance and accuracy every six months. When website visitors find webpages that appear to be outdated, confidence in the entire website can be compromised.

Page size

Not everyone has access to high-speed internet, unlimited data, and/or fast devices. The goal should be to make the pages load as quickly as possible. If there is a large image, or one that distorts the page design, consider using a thumbnail image that will open in a new window if clicked on.

Templates

All webpages on the City's website will be displayed using defined templates as created by the Web Team. The templates will provide the basic formatting, navigation, and required policy content. Each template will have a specific area where Agency Web Content Editors can modify content.

Web policies

A link to the City of Madison Web Policies will be displayed on each page within all sites that are part of the City of Madison website.

Photos and Images

To reduce storage space and download times, all images must be resized to appropriate dimensions and resolution. All images must be labeled with alt attributes for compliance with accessibility requirements.

Refer to the City of Madison Photo Policy for more information about image use.

Plain Language

The use of plain language helps improve the ability of all website users to understand the information being communicated.

Reading level: All web content should be at an 8th grade reading level or lower. Use simple words and phrases that are understandable to our residents.

Task-oriented content: Write the content with the goal of simply explaining tasks users need to complete. Limit a page to only content directly related to a topic. If the user may need more background information, place the supplemental content on a subpage.

Active voice: Use active voice instead of passive voice.

Conversational language: Use conversational pronouns as if talking with the reader (you, your, we, us, our). When there is a need to use third-person pronouns, use "they" instead of "he or she" and "their" instead of "his or hers."

Things to avoid: Abbreviations & acronyms, complex language & jargon, and expressions & figurative language.

Promotional URLs

URLs referred to in news releases, email notifications, publications, marketing materials, business cards, etc. should refer to a general URL such as www.cityofmadison.com/streets. This makes it easier to remember and easier to type. Also, deeply nested (long) URLs are more subject to change as websites are redesigned and reorganized over time. The main or general URL is less subject to change.

If there is a need to promote a page that has a long URL, content editors can request a short, promotional URL be created for marketing needs.

Questionable Content

Questionable content and images can be defined by answering yes to any of the following questions:

1. Does it violate any of our Web Policies, Standards, and Guidelines?

2. Is there a risk to the security of the City's computer resources? Adherence to the City of Madison Network Security Policies and Procedures is required.

3. Does it constitute endorsement or favoritism of a specific organization, agency, or business?

4. Could it reflect negatively upon the City of Madison?

5. Does it fail to meet the standards set forth in the Web Linking Policy (APM 3-13)?

6. Does it violate any City Ordinances or other APMs?

7. Is the content inappropriate in anyway? Does it contain objectionable statements or remarks that may be offensive?

8. Will the content and/or image severely effect page download times or server storage capabilities?

The City Web Manager will, upon request, consider content that has been reported to be questionable and take necessary actions to protect the City of Madison.

Responsive Design

Sites will be usable on commonly used devices and browsers. Our goal is to ensure that all City of Madison websites are functional regardless of the user's device or browser.

Security

All software on any City of Madison websites or on any sites hosted by the City of Madison shall follow the security standards outlined below.

All software on any City of Madison websites or on any sites hosted by the City of Madison shall follow secure coding practices. Standard security requirements include, but are not limited to:

- Web applications will protect against vulnerabilities outlined by OWASP.

- Web applications will not allow for inappropriate exposure of sensitive data.

- Web applications will validate and sanitize inputs to protect against cross site scripting, SQL injection, and related injection attacks.

- Web applications will implement proper authentication and authorization.

- Web applications will ensure proper encryption of data.

Site Names, URLs, and Domain

The City of Madison uses the second level domain of cityofmadison.com. All official City websites, including those of agencies, divisions, or other fiscal or operating units of the City, as well as staff performing City functions, should use names within cityofmadison.com for websites. Since agencies, divisions, and other units are a subset of the City, domain and host names are expected to reflect an association with the City, a unit, or a service to the City.

Use of a domain name other than cityofmadison.com should be rare and will require the approval of the Web Manager for purchase, and also when the domain name comes up for

renewal. IT may refuse a name if it is deemed inappropriate or if it may cause confusion about the purpose of a system.

The funds required to purchase or renew other domain names will come from the agency requesting it. IT manages the registration of the domain name to maintain centralized management and inventory of all domain names being used by the City. IT has several staff that can administer the names, helping to ensure that we receive notification so that they do not expire unknowingly.

The default behavior for additional domain names will be to set them up as a redirect back to the appropriate site within cityofmadison.com. For example: madisonpolice.com will redirect to cityofmadison.com/police.

Social Media

IT manages the infrastructure of the City of Madison's social media presence. Social media accounts are governed by the City of Madison Social Media Policy (APM 3-16). Comments posted to City social media accounts/pages are governed by the Social Media Comments Policy.

Surveys

SurveyMonkey is the current City of Madison survey tool. Each agency is responsible for creating and managing their own SurveyMonkey accounts and surveys.

Under Construction Pages

"Under construction" or "coming soon" pages should not be used. Only publish pages when the content is available.

Web Application Software

All web application software standards are inventoried in the City of Madison Technology Standards Directory. Any new software must follow the New Software Request Process (APM 3-20). This applies to all software and online services, including free software.

Web Development Tools

All web development tool standards are inventoried in the City of Madison Technology Standards Directory.

Agency Web Content Editors

Agency Web Content Editors will use the following software to create pages and manage website content:

- Adobe Contribute
- Content Management Systems

- Drupal

- Web Applications

Maps

ArcGIS Online from ESRI is the official map application solution for the City of Madison. Map applications should utilize the official City of Madison GIS repository as administered by IT.

Video

The IT Media Team manages streaming video for the City of Madison. No video/media files are to be placed on the web servers. If an Agency Web Content Editor has video that they would like to have embedded on their site, they will work with the Media Team to upload the video to the appropriate streaming location.

Web Team

The Web Team's standard web development tools include:

- Adobe Dreamweaver

- PHP Storm

Web Services & API's

Where practical, database transactions conducted via the City of Madison website shall be with the Service Oriented Architecture, and make use of Web Services and JSON or XML tagged data.

Website Architecture

The City of Madison website, as developed and/or maintained by City staff, will use ColdFusion or PHP. The primary Content Management System is Drupal.