



Websites for Community Groups

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Why your organisation needs a website

The internet has become an integral part of our society, and there is an expectation that information from all kinds of organisations can be found online.

A website provides your members and the people with whom you work with a simple means of finding out what your organisation is doing, and is a way of communicating with a wider public. It is important that the website is accurate and presents up-to-date information.

Your website can be used to:

- Provide information 24 hours a day
- Improve local contact with your organisation
- Publicise membership and enable new members to join
- Publicise news, meetings and events
- Raise funds
- Gain feedback from members and the public on local issues
- Raise awareness of any issues and campaigns
- Meet any legal requirements for publishing information

The responsibility for maintaining the website can be given to one person or shared by several members of your organisation.

Benefit: Build authority

Having a quality website will demonstrate that your organisation is established and substantial, and increase your standing and authority. You can build on this by publishing comment articles and reports on issues; or press articles about your organisation, including reviews of your events.

Benefit: Connect with your local community

A website will increase the number of people who are aware of your organisation, so you cease being invisible to the people trying to find you online.

It will enable you to publish more information about your group, what you offer, how to join or get involved, minutes of meetings, your history, etc. For example, you may maintain a building and

hire out space to local community groups and residents. You can provide all the information a prospective client needs to know.

You can publicise your events, allow your users to add your event to their online or mobile calendar, and share it with Facebook, Twitter and other social networking.

You can publish news immediately, with a wider reach. Include press releases, notes for editors, and contact details. Online and print news will be able to find out about you more easily, and local journalists would be grateful for background information and press-ready copy and images. You can increase the reach further using social networking.

You can enable people to register to be on your e-mailing list, to receive your newsletter, event publicity, latest news, requests for volunteers, etc.

The website can enable your members and the local community to ask questions and give feedback, either through an online form or via discussion forums. Feedback forms are more direct and private. Discussion forums are interactive and open to the whole community.

Websites can also be used for surveying the opinions of local people – asking specific questions to get the answers you need.

There are many examples of how forms, forums and surveys could be used, such as: co-ordinating responses to planning applications; discussing local topics of interest or concern; conducting research into the provision of new services, or how an event was received; running campaigns.

There are even more ways of building community online:

- Link to the websites of complementary organisations in your area, and like-minded organisations in other areas
- Publish photos and videos, create a buzz around your organisation using social networking tools like blogging, Facebook, Twitter etc
- Be creative!

Benefit: Connect with your members

A website could include a closed 'members area', which is available to members for sharing information and discussing issues.

This area could be used to

- Publicise members' meetings; invite members to contribute to agendas; approve minutes and agendas; discuss agenda items and other issues
- Provide additional information on issues; allow members to offer personal views and opinion
- Provide members' contact details
- Distribute draft versions of documents – event posters, news releases, etc
- Put together grant applications

Benefit: Save time and money

A website provides enquirers with instant access to information 24 hours a day, which will reduce the number of day-to-day enquires that have to be handled personally.

Information can be added, appended or deleted instantly, ensuring that the web site is up-to-date and accurate.

Printed publicity can be reduced in size and direct people to extra information on your website, saving printing costs. Event posters can be distributed online for members to print and put up themselves. Documents can be distributed online, again saving printing costs and paper.

The website can also provide helpful links to other organisations. In particular, if an issue is not organisation's responsibility, the website can direct enquirers to the right organisations that can help, saving the time of both the enquirer and your organisation.

Benefit: Tool for fundraising

Your website can enable people to donate to your organisation there and then, or at least tell them how they can donate.

You can encourage people to raise funds via sites like Just Giving, and publicise specific appeals: their objectives, fund-raising target and progress.

It could also carry paid adverts for local businesses, or an automatically-generated feed from Google AdSense, configured to match your organisation's and audience's interests. You can also generate income through affiliate programmes:

- Linking to e-commerce websites, which reward per click or % of spend
- Rewards for signing up to a service such as energy or landline

What should be on your website?

Content needs to be relevant, easily found, accurate and up-to-date. Focus on what your audiences need to know and what you want them to do, rather than on your organisation.

The main categories will partly depend on what your organisation does, but could include:

- About Us: what your organisation does; what services it provides; its values, aims and objectives; where it operates; how to join or get involved
- Contact Us: at least one email address that is looked at regularly, preferably the contact information of the main people involved with photos
- Where to find us: address, Google map, public transport and parking information
- Get involved: how to join; volunteer opportunities
- Latest news
- Upcoming events, and reports of past events
- Photo gallery
- Any frequently asked questions (FAQs)
- Any useful links

The website could include other features, such as:

- Sign-up for regular newsletters
- Campaigns: materials to download; petitions
- Document library
- Follow Us: Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, RSS
- History of the organisation
- Biographies of the main people involved
- Guest book, discussion forums, feedback form, surveys

What should NOT be on your website?

Do not publish any copyright images or text. If someone complains about any content, it is easier just to remove it. Be aware of what is being said on any discussion forums, and remove anything that is libellous or likely to offend. You may want to approve comments before they are posted.

You must not post confidential or commercially-sensitive material on the part of the website accessible to the public. Any sensitive information should reside in a 'members only' area. Remember to think carefully before you post draft documents. When drafts are approved, they can be moved to the public area.

Managing your website

There are three phases to a website: the initial design and development, maintenance, and promotion.

- During the **development**, it can be useful to form a group of interested parties within your organisation. These could help with the brief for the website, and contribute content and images. There should be a clear decision-making process. If you are engaging a web developer, one

authorised person should be designated as the contact with the developer, to avoid confusion.

- Website **maintenance** includes keeping content on the site up-to-date and creating fresh content. Always check that: meeting dates are correct; minutes of meetings are posted as soon as possible; names and contact details are correct.
- It is vital that you tell your community about your website: its address, and what it provides. There are many ways of **promoting** your website, but the main things to think about are who you want to reach (e.g. potential members, local citizens, donors), and how best to reach them.

It is useful if the control of your website resides with more than one trusted person. This ensures that there is never too much expectation on one individual, and provides a back-up if one person moves on.

As your website grows, you may find it helpful to designate responsibility for different areas of the site to relevant individuals. You may decide to have a website group/committee, or to discuss website content as part of your regular meetings.

Please call on **Websites Ahoy!** if you need any advice.

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