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An Ideal Historic Site Website

This list can help you identify the most important information to post to your website so that it serves as the crucial communication tool for visitors to your historic site or heritage organization. Use all of your social media to drive traffic to your website, so your website becomes the central hub for all information about your organization and site.

Your website must be able to be updated at any time by staff or volunteers in your organization using a content management system provided by your web designer. Everyone using the website should be trained by the web designer to be able to enter and change photos and text. In addition, there must be a commitment to keep the website up to date on a regular basis so that visitors have the current information. Websites have become an essential communication tool. Over 80% of visitors check an attraction's website before deciding to make the trip. Your website needs to be complete, attractive, up to date, make it easy for a potential visitor to learn about your site and want to visit.

Your website is a critical part of the brand for your site and organization. The website needs to be well designed and consistent with your brand color scheme.

This list details what an ideal website would contain. You do not have to have all these elements at once. Discuss your immediate needs with your web designer and build your website over time.

Home/welcome page. The home page is the face of your organization on the internet. This page should contain the most up to date news, most important visitor information especially open hours and event highlights and a few good photos of visitors having a good time. The home page should be easy to navigate with logical tabs and links that allow visitors to go further into your site.

The Home Page should also have links to your Facebook fan page, Twitter feed, Flickr (photo sharing site) and your blog (if you have one). If you have pod casts about your site, have a link from the home page to their location further into your website. If you want people to sign up for your mailing list, have a link from the homepage to the location for mailing list sign up on your website. Finally, you must have a Donate NOW button on your home page that brings the visitor directly to the donation page (either on your website, PayPal, or other third-party site).

We recommend the following tabs. Each tab will have a drop-down menu with the name of subpages for each tab. Call these tabs what you wish, but make sure you include all the information. Add one or two more tabs if

you want visitors to get specific information fast. Each of the tabs will have a landing page with general information and then subpages with specific information. Some of the information in each of the tabs will be redundant, do not worry; different audiences need similar information. Here are some recommended tabs.

1. About us
2. Pressroom
3. Discover (or stories, history, or other title to indicate that the historical background is in this tab)
4. Education
5. Visiting
6. Support

1. About us Tab

This tab focuses on the organization that runs the historic site, rather than the building itself.

About us page (landing page). Contact information and general information about your site; a list of all board (and advisory board) and staff members (if any); very brief basic history of your historic site or heritage program. Contact information for staff, directions, a map (you will use this information again in the Visiting tab). Tell when the office is actually open (dates and times). Add a few nice photos. Consider having the mailing list sign up link on this subpage too.

Subpage for organizational documents and agendas. This page would have your current vision and mission statements, IRS 990 form for current year and previous year, any current strategic plan, annual reports since inception, and a link to Press room for PDF of all newsletters. Posting all of these documents reinforces that you are a transparent nonprofit organization.

Subpage for committees. One subpage for any major committees of your organization, with lists of projects, work plan for current year and list of whom to contact for each committee if someone is interested in volunteering. Photos of committee members having fun are always good here. Link to volunteer subpage (see info below).

Subpages for specific events. Your larger events may merit their own subpages with more photos and descriptions. Perhaps put vendor contracts, sponsor packages on these pages can be located here, so they can be downloaded and sent back.

Subpage for volunteers. Briefly explain the role of volunteers in your organization. Include a list of short job descriptions, which we call "HOT JOBS" for volunteer projects that need volunteers now. Include a volunteer interest form, which could be interactive, or PDF form potential volunteers can fill out and send to the office. This page could also have testimonials and photos about how much fun everyone is having working at your site.

Subpage for photo album. Photos of events (could be a click through to Flickr, Shutterfly or other photo-sharing website) or link to Facebook page with photo albums. Note the ownership/copyright of the photo if board or staff members do not create it.

2. Press Room tab

Press room page (landing page). All press releases in PDF format or link format (see below), any good recent articles from local paper about your site and organization (reproduced with permission or link to the newspaper's website), how the press can reach you phone, fax, cell, email addresses.

Subpage for annual reports. All of your annual reports in PDF format since inception (if you do an annual report).

Subpage for newsletters. All of your paper newsletters in PDF format since inception and/or the archive of all of the email newsletters you send.

Subpage for downloadable photos. High quality copyright free photos for the Press to use about your organization, site, and events. Links to other photo sharing sites (Flickr, Shutterfly etc.) where you post photos about your activities.

3. Discover tab

The Discover tab is meant for potential visitors and should be organized around a small handful of subpages, perhaps based on interpretive themes of your site. These pages can have links to other pages further into the website on important people and events that the theme explores and identify.

Discover page (landing page). Photos and text to invite the visitor to spend an afternoon. Discusses opportunities for visiting your site and how it connects with other sites in the area as part of a planned theme. Include links to those pages further in your website. Identify key themes for your site and the inspirational programs you produce for visitors.

Subpage on admissions. Tell how much you charge for adults and children (for walk in tours), when the site is open, when your tours occur. Tell how much you charge for group tours for adults. Have a list of your upcoming events here with dates, admission fees, and links to those pages.

Subpage on visitor amenities. Note if you have any kind of shop, picnic tables or food service for the public or schools. Note if your restrooms and parking locations are handicapped accessible. Post your map here again.

Subpage on basic history of the site. Short narrative about the key interpretive facts you wish to convey about the property. Include historic and current photos and further links to other specific subpages on themes, people, or events.

Subpages on house themes, people, or events important to the site. Create separate tabs if there is considerable information you wish to convey. Include historic and current photos. Create links to other pages further into the site on specific people places or themes. This portion of your website could go very deep if you have lots of information. Check the links often to pages further down your website work or you will frustrate virtual visitors.

Subpage on collections. Post information and photos on furniture and decorative arts. This subpage can be organized by room or period. This subpage is a good place to post good photos to entice visitors to see the

authentic pieces you display. This subpage can have many links to other places on the website, please check the links regularly to make sure they work.

Subpage on other research collections. Discuss other collections, archives, paper-based collections, and libraries you have available at the site. Tell how the public can use them, hours open and who to call.

4. Education tab

This tab lists all of the educational programming ideally grouped by audience (schools, adults, or special interests).

Education page (landing page). Discusses in general all of the audiences for which you provide specific programming during the year. Many photos of people having fun at your site will help a great deal here.

Subpage for school programs. Discuss the educational content of the visit and if it meets state history standards. Tell the cost per student for visiting (and how many adult chaperones are required and if there is an admission fee for them). Include information about reservations, advance payment (check, purchase order, credit card with the link to the Donate Note button if you will accept payment online), and when to book for student tours. Discuss any special programs for home schoolers; include dates, costs and how to sign up.

Subpage for adult program. Show the variety of options available at your site. Link to events calendar and to any subpage with description of upcoming events, make sure each description includes costs and how to pay for advance tickets. Include a link to the Donate Now button to take online orders.

Subpage for special audiences. If you host events for specific audiences such as scouts, or community service opportunities, collector clubs, summer camps etc. include information here or links to the program description, cost and how to buy tickets. Include a link to the Donate Now button to take online orders.

Subpage for annual events. If you host one or more signature events, post information, dates and how to buy tickets for the upcoming event. Include photos of past events and link to any news articles about past events. Include a link to the Donate Now button to take online orders.

Subpage event calendar. Use a yearlong calendar from your web designer, to post events, meetings, or open hours throughout the year. The open dates/times must be kept strictly up to date.

5. Visiting tab

This is the tab to describe what a visitor will see when they come to your site. This tab may have a large number of subpages to describe all of the activities and amenities available. Here are some basic subpages to consider.

Visiting landing page. MUST HAVE all of these things on landing page

- GPS address of organization,
- Formal name and nick name (if any) of organization/site,

- Phone number (of someone who will answer the phone within half hour),
- Street address,
- Open days and times,
- Website address,
- Email address (of someone who will answer an email within an hour),
- Map of site (with parking locations indicated including handicapped parking),
- Map of how to get to the site,
- Written directions of how to get to the site,
- Admission costs and rules (like no dogs) and who is admitted free if there is a distinction
- List of events for the next 2 weeks,
- Requirements for masks, proof of vaccination and social distancing policy,
- Organizational brochure as PDF,
- Membership brochure as PDF.

Other things to consider for this page:

Up to date events for the next two weeks with links to major events in the next three months. Include descriptions of events and how to buy tickets. Locations for parking cars and busses. Include explicit written directions from major traffic arteries (and which exit to use).

It is ideal if the map can be downloaded as a PDF document (make sure it prints on an 8.5 x 11 piece of paper in black and white.)

Your open hours must be up to date. There is nothing more disappointing to a visitor than checking your website and seeing you are open when they want to come, making the drive, and you are closed. Keep the open hours up to date.

Subpage for area hotels. This can be a list that you create about downtown hotel options, or a link to the local Convention and Visitor Bureau that lists all hotels in the area. You should highlight hotels in downtown as well as downtown attractions with links to these businesses websites.

Subpage for area attractions. This page should have descriptions, photos, and links to other sites nearby what are open regularly or are part of your theme tour. Have links to other sites or organizations and attractions that are predictable visitor draws to provide your visitors with other ideas of places to visit if they come to see you for an afternoon. Describe if you are part of a theme tour or byway, trail, or larger entity, and provide links to those organizations. Stress that coming to your site is one part of a day or weekend activity.

Subpage annual events. Same as above

Subpages for specific events. Same as above.

Subpage event calendar. Same as above.

6. Support tab

Support landing page. Tell how visitors and residents can support the organization and site. Talk about your capital campaign (if you are in the midst of one and provide links to the subpages for that effort) or fundraising projects, such as conservation of an important piece. Talk about successful past efforts. Provide links to membership page and other giving opportunities.

Subpage for membership. Describe the specific benefits of belonging to your organization, including the various membership levels and costs. Offer several ways to pay: 1. by check with a membership PDF form they download, fill out and send; 2. create an interactive form on the website itself if you wish to have a shopping cart feature on your website; 3. a link to a third-party website like PayPal, Network for Good or other vendor. If you set up your own Donate Now page (shopping cart), use a reliable service and a secure page to take credit cards for donations. Ideally, you should be able to use the secure page to take any kind of payment, including vendor fees, sponsorships, and event and ticket sales, memberships.

Make it easy to give, and consider offering recurring payments via a pledge form, to permit people to give small monthly gifts (such as \$5.00 or \$10.00 a month) using a credit card or direct debit to their checking/savings accounts. Ask your credit card service about options for pledging. Talk with your website design to get good advice for taking online donations.

Other important items to put on your website

Privacy policy, copyright information, web master contact page. These are usually located at the very bottom of the home page and every major page. Ask your web designer for advice about creating a privacy policy.

This list is by no means exhaustive; we would love to hear about how you use your website to communicate about visitors about your historic site or heritage organization. Please contact us at heritageconsultinginc@gmail.com. Learn more about us at our website www.heritageconsultinginc.com