

WEBSITES 101:

STRATEGIES FOR CREATING AND MAINTAINING A GREAT WEBSITE



A RESOURCE GUIDE FROM CAG OXFORDSHIRE

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly digital world, having a robust online presence is essential for community groups to thrive. Whatever your mission, aims and objectives, a well-designed and maintained website can be the cornerstone of your outreach, communication, and impact.

This comprehensive guide is tailored specifically for community groups looking to establish and sustain their online presence effectively. From the initial steps of planning and designing your website to ongoing maintenance. We've curated a wealth of practical tips, best practices, and resources to empower you every step of the way.

No matter where you are in your website journey, this guide is designed to equip you with the knowledge, tools, and inspiration you need to build and maintain a successful online presence for your community group.

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GETTING STARTED

PURPOSE

Identifying the purpose of your website is crucial for ensuring its effectiveness in serving your community group's goals. Begin by asking yourselves what you aim to achieve with your online presence. Are you looking to raise awareness about your cause, attract volunteers, solicit donations, or provide resources and support to your community? Clarifying your website's purpose will not only guide its design and content but also help you tailor your messaging and calls to action to effectively engage your target audience.

AUDIENCE

Understand the demographics, interests, and needs of your target audience. Who are they, and what are they looking for when they visit your website? Are they tech savvy or do they need more hand holding? Tailor your purpose to meet their expectations and fulfill their requirements.

ACTIONS

Determine the desired actions you want visitors to take on your website. Whether it's signing up for newsletters, attending events, making donations, or joining the group, ensure your purpose drives actionable outcomes that contribute to your group's growth and impact.

DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

STRUCTURE AND NAVIGATION

- Use easily understandable labels for navigation links. (Eg: home, about, news, get involved, contact)
- Add submenus for other pages. (Eg: meet the team, our history, our projects, our stories etc)
- Avoid jargon or ambiguous terms that may confuse users.
- Place the navigation menu in a prominent and consistent location across all pages of the website, typically near the top or in a sidebar.
- Keep the number of navigation items manageable, ideally between 5 to 7 items, to avoid overwhelming users with too many choices.

DESIGN

- Use fonts, colour, spacing, and contrast to prioritise key elements and create a structured layout.
- Stick to no more than 2-3 fonts and colours to ensure consistency and avoid a cluttered look.
- Incorporate high-quality images, videos, graphics to break up the text and guide the eye around.
- Use whitespace effectively to improve readability, create visual breathing room, and focus users' attention to important content.
- Use buttons and links to guide people around the site seamlessly.

YOUR HOMEPAGE

DESIGN A VISUALLY APPEALING AND INFORMATIVE HOMEPAGE THAT GRABS VISITORS' ATTENTION AND ENTICES THEM TO EXPLORE FURTHER.

- Highlight key content, such as upcoming events, recent news, or impactful stories, to engage visitors immediately.
- Provide clear calls-to-action (CTAs) on the homepage to encourage visitors to take desired actions, such as signing up for newsletters or donating.
- Include a section or widget highlighting upcoming events, meetings, workshops, or fundraisers hosted by your group. Provide essential details, such as dates, times, locations, and registration information, to encourage attendance.
- Use high-quality images, videos, or graphics that resonate with your audience and visually represent your group's mission, activities, or impact. Ensure that visuals are relevant, engaging, and aligned with your brand identity.
- Display key metrics or achievements that demonstrate your group's impact and effectiveness. This could include the number of people served, funds raised, projects completed, or community initiatives supported.
- Recognise and acknowledge partners, sponsors, or supporters who contribute to your group's success.

ACCESSIBILITY AND CONSISTENCY

- Design navigation menus and pages to be responsive and accessible on various devices, including desktops, tablets, and smartphones. Most people will access your site via their phone, so ensure this view works as well as the desktop one. *
- Include descriptive alt text for all images to ensure they are accessible to users who rely on screen readers or have images disabled.*
- Ensure sufficient color contrast between text and background elements to improve readability for users with visual impairments.
- Establish a consistent layout and design throughout your website to provide a cohesive user experience.
- Use consistent branding elements, such as logos, colours, and typography, across all pages of the website.
- Maintain consistent navigation menus and placement to help users navigate your website easily and predictably.
- Make sure all your links and buttons work. Keep coming back to check and maintain this.

* your web design software will give you options to manage these

CONTENT CREATION

- The static content of your website will be worked up in your 'getting started' and 'development' phases. This is the bones of your website and includes your who, what where, when, why and how.
- However, a static website does not encourage continued engagement. If you want people to remain engaged and keep coming back, you need to create and add new content to your site.
- Adding new content also helps with Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) aka how you appear in Google searches as Google likes sites that are busy and active.
- Consider writing a blog every month, adding upcoming events, or sharing news from other organisations. Visitors that see updated news and information on a website will see that the group is active and be more inclined to follow your CTAs.
- A website that has outdated information and news suggests a group that is not currently active and may put people off.
- If you use your social media accounts to share your most recent news, ensure you have a link to your website as well so people that aren't on social media can find the info too. and you can direct users between the two showing consistency in the messaging across platforms.

MAINTENANCE AND OPTIMISATION

- Try to do updates and add new content every month. Whether it's a clean up- taking down old events and adding new ones, adding a new blog or uploading new pictures, etc.
- Plan your content as much as possible so it's easy to see what is coming up and when website updates are required. If you know you have events plotted throughout the year, you can set times and dates when the website will need updating with this info. If someone is sharing a post on social media, can they make it a blog or news item on the website too?
- Assign roles where possible so it's not all on one person and ensure more than one person is trained to use the website backend. Have a rota or comms channel (eg: Google doc, email thread, Whatsapp or Slack) where you can keep people updated. If someone leaves you need to be able to access the website so make sure everything isn't just in one person's head.
- Check in with your site analytics to see whether your site is being viewed and what content is being looked at. Use this to inform where you put your energy. Are people only looking at the homepage or navigating to other pages? Analytics can usually be viewed in your site's 'dashboard'.

PROMOTION

Search Engine Optimization (SEO): Optimise your website's content with relevant keywords to improve its visibility in search engine results. Most website providers have a section for this in their dashboard.

Social Media Marketing: Share your website content on social media platforms to reach a wider audience. Engage with your followers and encourage them to share your content with their networks.

Email Marketing: Build an email list of subscribers interested in your organisation. Make sure your subscribe link is shared on the website and when you are out and about – consider a poster with a QR code. Send regular newsletters with valuable information and to keep subscribers engaged and drive traffic to your site.

Content: Create valuable and informative content such as blog posts, videos, infographics, or podcasts and share this content across various platforms to attract and retain your audience. Write guest posts for other websites to reach their audience and build backlinks to your site.

Engage with Online Communities: Participate in relevant online forums, groups, or communities. Provide helpful insights and solutions to establish yourself as an authority in your field and promote your website when appropriate.

RESOURCES AND TOOLS

There's lots of 'no code' (meaning you don't need to know how to code a website, also known as 'drag and drop') platforms to host and create websites.

If you haven't already purchased a domain name, you can usually do this through the platform too and have all your 'web' things in one place. If you have a domain name, the website provider will be able to 'point' to this. You will need to know where it is 'hosted' and how to access the login details etc.

Website hosting can vary in price, but average is around £100-150 a year plus the domain which is usually about £15 a year (after any initial deals and freebies). You can usually also play around and create your website before having to sign up and go live. Once your site is live, you will usually have to recreate the whole thing if you decide to change provider so there is some sense in getting it right!

Some offer a free basic site but your domain name would need to include the site's branding. eg.yourgroup.wixsite.com/ or Googlesites.

The most popular are:

GOOGLESITES

HOSTINGER

SQUARESPACE

WIX

GODADDY

IONOS

WEEBLY

WORDPRESS

MORE RESOURCES AND TOOLS

Canva - Brilliant for creating graphics, email headers, social media posts, blog banners etc.

There's a free version or you can upgrade to the premium version which is free for nonprofits and opens up loads of great templates, images and features.

You can create a brand identity on here that matches the look and style of your website (or vice versa) to ensure consistency from your website to your social media and newsletters etc.

Chat GPT - Have a go at getting your content written for you. (I used it to generate some of the content in this guide!) You need to tweak and make it your own but it's great if you don't know where to start with a blog or some website copy.

Free stock images sites - Pixabay, Pexels, Unsplash

Imagery is super important for an engaging website. Try to get real photos of your group's activity and ensure you have permission to share but also make use of stock images too which are royalty free. There are a few sites I use regularly to search for images. Your website builder will usually have a library of stock images available too.

WATCH OUR WEBINAR

We hosted a webinar in March 2024 all about creating and maintaining your website. Much of the content from that informed this guide. We'd like to say a big thanks to Kate Birch from Webworks Studio and to Nicole from Oxford City Farm for their invaluable contributions.



[WATCH HERE](#)

CONTACT US

We hope this guide has been useful and practical. If you have any questions or suggestion for improvements, then please drop us a line.

If you are based in Oxfordshire and help to run a community action group and are not already in our network, come and join us! We can offer support on marketing and comms, legal structures, insurance and put you in touch with other like minded groups and folks. Get in touch at info@cagoxfordshire.org.uk

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