

.gov Reform Initiative

Department of Health and Human Services 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 Health and Human Services, 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 Health and Human Services.

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

no.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) has Web governance that sets principles of operation and Web practices. HHS is a very large, federated Department consisting of 11 Operating Divisions (OPDivs), several as large as or larger than many other federal Agencies, in addition to the parent HHS Agency itself (considered for these purposes as an additional OPDiv). In general, each OPDiv Web operation is run as a separate entity. OPDivs within the department have varying levels of governance. For those organizational reasons as well as lack of funding for projects across the OPDivs, the Department has not had an Agency-wide Web strategy. Across the full Department, inconsistent adherence has been given to the principles of Web Governance established by the HHS Secretary in 2007. The HHS Web Council is now drafting revised and enhanced Agency-wide Web Governance and its associated the Web Improvement Plan for presentation to the Secretary.

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

Given the organizational structure outlined above, there is no centralized control or even knowledge of cross-department Web resource management. OPDivs are responsible for aligning resources, but tracking of resources – and evaluation of outcomes – is often limited or non-existent. Each OPDiv's Web operation is organized and funded separately, and that can also be splintered. For instance, within an OPDiv, there may be multiple Web Content Management Systems (CMS), multiple hosting arrangements, multiple development contracts and Web functions that are divided in where they are housed and staffed.

The Office of the Secretary (OS) Web Communications Division (WCD) provides some technology/infrastructure available on an enterprise basis (i.e., Percussion CMS, Google Search Appliances, Web development contracts and Google Maps), but not all OPDivs make use of these opportunities. Lack of coordination among multiple Agency contracting offices further complicates the ability to capitalize on shared or enterprise Web resources, as do security procedures and Enterprise Project Life Cycle (EPLC) requirements. WCD, however, does manage Section 508 compliance monitoring across the entire Department through the use of a Web crawler application.

The Agency-wide Web Governance and associated Web Improvement Plan currently under development will address both the alignment of Web resources to Agency priorities, work within the EPLC process, and an increased use of shared services and resources.

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

As per the response to Question #1, HHS is federated and the responsibility for the management of Web content is handled independently by the OPDivs. WCD provides monthly reports on Section 508 accessibility covering the content of all OPDivs but it remains up to the individual OPDivs to act on those reports. All other aspects regarding content quality are managed at the OPDiv level. WCD provides a basic set of Web standards. OPDiv adoption of those standards is voluntary. HHS is a recognized leader in the application of usability testing to the development of Web sites. WCD maintains two fully equipped usability laboratories which are available to all in the Department to use (and which are also used at no cost by many other federal agencies).

The Agency-wide Web Governance and associated Web Improvement Plan currently under development will establish Agency-wide guidance and standards covering all aspects of Web content management. HHS believes that establishing content review schedules for Websites will significantly help establish content that is more current and well managed.

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?

As per the response to Question #1, HHS is federated and responsibility for the management of Web content is handled independently by the OPDivs. Almost all OPDivs make use of some variation of a "voice of the consumer" (VOC) tool. Many sites use the Foresee ACSI survey tool; others make use of a customizable survey tool developed by WCD (and OMB approved). WCD has also developed a second, less complex, VOC tool that solicits visitor suggestions for site improvement which is now being used on select priority Websites. Visitor suggestions flow into a database and feedback loop that generates ongoing incremental site improvement, based on evidence-based conclusions from User Centered Design processes, methodological usability and focus group testing.

However, unless testing and site refinement are codified as part of standard Web operations it would be impossible to ensure that all sites are meeting customer needs on a continuing basis.