



Benefits of Having a Website

Since you've signed up for this course, you've probably already thought about the value of having a website, some of the benefits of which include:

Legitimizing your organization by giving it a virtual home

Having a platform to encourage or collect cash donations

Having a place to share your mission, location, and contact information

Your website can serve more than one purpose.

Among other things, your website can inform, describe, educate, advertise, and seek (IDEAS):



Inform

Inform your community about your organization's volunteer opportunities and job openings



Describe

Describe your work and accomplishments



Educate

Educate your community about specific issues related to your work, such as homelessness, domestic violence, or the plight of refugees



Advertise

Advertise your mission and services to your target beneficiaries



Seek

Seek in-kind donations and financial support

These IDEAS can serve as the building blocks of your website.

Defining the Main Purpose of Your Site

While there may be several things you would like your website to do, to create the best content and most effective layout, it's a good idea to articulate what you see as the main purpose of your site. Knowing this will not only help you generate and structure your content but will also allow you to evaluate your website and determine if it is accomplishing its goal.

Unless you define what you want your website to accomplish, it will be harder to decide what content to include or evaluate your website.

These questions lead to your first assignment, which is to get clear on why you want a website. What are the top three things you want your website to do?

Exercise #1: What Essential Content Must Your Website Include?

To ensure your website is populated with the best, most relevant content, you need to know its purpose and what it is intended to communicate. Below is a quick exercise to help you identify your top reasons for having a website:

 **Total time: 30 minutes**

Materials: A timer, a piece of paper, a pen, and a highlighter

Exercise Steps

1 Brainstorm (10 minutes)

Set a timer for 10 minutes and brainstorm everything you can think of that you might want to include on your website. Your ideas can range from the general (contact information and directions to your office) to the specific (specific details about your organization's history and services). Write all your ideas down. Do not try to prioritize them or put them in any order.

2 Highlight Top Three (10 minutes)

After the 10 minutes is up, set your timer for a second 10-minute block. In this second period, review the results from your brainstorming session and use your highlighter to highlight three topics that you see as most important to include on your website. Your organization may want a website mainly to publish contact information along with a brief description of your services. Or, you may want your website to serve as an information hub about a particular issue.

3 Find Themes (10 minutes)

Set the timer for a final 10 minutes. Studying your list of top three topics, look for themes or commonalities. Are the topics related to educating the public about an issue, promoting your organization's work, recruiting human resources (volunteers or staff), or seeking financial and in-kind resources and donations? If you see a common theme, write it down. If the three topics you've identified have different themes, identify the themes for each topic and then rank the topics by their level of importance. Don't overthink this step. You aren't going to be locked into these choices; this exercise is just to help you think through the purpose and main themes for your site, which will help you create a site navigation plan later in the process.

At the end of this exercise, you'll have a list that will look something like this:

Example A

1. Organization's mission and history (Promote)
2. Description of services and beneficiaries (Promote)
3. Overview of the issue your organization addresses (Educate)

Or perhaps like this:

1. Contact information and directions for making in-kind/cash donations (Seek)
2. Description of organization's mission, history, and accomplishments (Promote)
3. Overview of staff and any open positions (Recruit)

You'll be refining and expanding your topics, so don't worry about getting the wording just right. For now, it's all about uncovering some of your IDEAS. Your site ultimately may cover everything listed above and more, but to create the framework for your site, your top three topics will form the pillars.