

Setting Objectives

Most governments create their Web sites around this simple objective: to easily and quickly provide essential information to citizens, businesses, and visitors. They then develop a set of more narrowly defined goals. Here are some ways to help you set objectives that will focus the work on your site.

Identify players (stakeholders) and resources

In order to identify the objectives that work best for you, think about the stakeholders and resources involved. The stakeholders are the people and groups working on the project and affected by it. Your stakeholders may include constituents, municipal departments, elected officials, external government agencies, and other groups that are key to your project's success. Identifying these groups and understanding what they want or need, and how your site will affect them, will help you make decisions about its features.

Compile an inventory of all the resource needs. Identify those that you don't have and develop plans for getting them. Acquiring these resources can involve budget requests or more creative methods such as devising new models for collaborating or sharing resources.

Tips from colleagues

- Choose an objective that's manageable. It's better to start small with an objective that you can deliver successfully.
- Stick to the objective. Avoid overloading the site with too many extra features that don't help fulfill your main goal.

Define and set goals

Think about the services and information citizens, businesses, and local groups want from your government. Can you quickly and easily deliver them on a basic Web site? Establishing a set of concrete goals will help frame the project and drive decisions about design, implementation, and management.

Participants said it was important for them to remember they were creating a government site, not an entertainment one. That helped them keep their objectives clear and simple.

Some of the goals that were established by participants include:

- Creating a 24-by-7 town hall
- Boosting tourism and development
- Making pending legislation more accessible to citizens
- Putting all forms and applications online
- Publishing election results in real time
- Integrating Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to benefit citizens, emergency workers, economic developers, and construction companies

Build and maintain a policy framework

Before beginning a Web site, be sure you have policies in place regarding: purpose of Web use in municipality business, appropriate use by staff, public access to municipal records, privacy and confidentiality of personal or sensitive information, security of computing and network resources, and records management.

Review existing policies about computing, telecommunications, records management, copyright, and similar topics. Some will continue to serve you well and others will need to be updated to take the Web into account. Specific programmatic policies, especially ones about handling personal information, may need to be updated.

Economic development is one of the clear themes on the City of Albany's Web site.

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Think of policies as guiding principles, not as technology-specific procedures. The rate of change in the underlying technologies requires that policy statements focus on service objectives rather than on the technologies themselves. Policies guiding the use of technology resources should be reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain useful and appropriate.

Be user-centered

A user-centered or citizen-centric approach keeps efforts focused on what citizens want and need from your government's site. Citizens may not know which department handles certain programs and services. That's why sites should be organized from the perspective of the citizens looking in, not from the perspective of government looking out.

Use themes to anchor your site

In New York State, several local and county government sites are anchored with tourism or chamber of commerce information. Tourism sites offer details about popular attractions and a calendar of events, as well as hotel and restaurant information. Chamber of commerce-related sites offer demographic and commercial real estate information, as well as economic statistics about the labor market and manufacturing. Anchoring your site with one or more of your government's priority themes attracts a predefined set of users and helps them recognize your site.

Schoharie County uses tourism as one of the main themes to anchor its Web site.