

Getting the Most From Your Website: A Crash Course

Essential Questions:

- *Are the goals and objectives for your organization's website clearly and specifically defined?*
- *How do the website objectives further the overall goals of your organization and is there more that the site could do? (Think big - ask dumb questions and make crazy suggestions.)*
- *How might these goals and objectives evolve in the next six months/one year/two years and is the site flexible enough to accommodate potential changes?*
- *Who uses your website? (e.g., clients, donors, content contributors, news media, etc.)*
- *How would you rank the different user groups in terms of their importance to the organization's goals and the ability of the site to affect their behavior?*
- *How are each user group's needs, tasks and goals addressed, or not, by the site?*
- *How and why did the site get to its current state? What is your process for making informed site design and development decisions?*

Basic Research, Analysis and Evaluation:

- *What do you think are the current strengths and weaknesses of your website?*
- *What, if anything, is annoying about your site? (e.g. - slow page loads; long, pointless Flash intros; seemingly meaningless buttons; epic jumbles of text; shapes and colors)*
- *Do a comparative analysis with similar organizations or related sites.*
- *Do an objective, structured evaluation of the site.*
 - *Start wide angle and zoom in: focus on the layout (e.g. horizontal vs. vertical orientation and navigational structure).*
 - *Look at your website with x-ray vision. Focus on the internal structure - the information architecture (IA). Are there unclear and tangled pathways? What is the SEO impact of the current site's IA and content?*
 - *How usable is the site's design in terms of legibility, clutter and ease of navigation?*
- *Sketch out rough site design concepts to make the ideas more concrete and easy to discuss.*

User Testing

- *Create a set of user profiles that lists each group's main needs, goals and tasks.*
- *Create a questionnaire that will ask each user the same questions about your current site.*
- *Try to interview at least three to six people representing all the key types of users.*
- *Create a consistent set of interview questions to ask each user when asking them about the current site.*
- *Before showing them the site, ask them to describe the things they expect to find there.*
- *Avoid asking leading questions (e.g. "You've just watched this video and now want to make a donation.")*