

State of New Hampshire Website Best Practices



State of NH Website Best Practices

REVISION LOG

Date	Revision/Created by	Description
03/16/2015	Alan Volpe	Ver 1.0 created (pulled and updated from State of NH Web Site Standards and Best Practices v5

State of NH Website Best Practices

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Overview 3

1 Technology 3

2 Accessibility..... 3

Mobile..... 3

Search 4

3 Branding 4

Header/Banner 5

Footer..... 5

4 Functionality 5

Architecture 5

Navigation 6

Organization 6

State of NH Website Best Practices

Overview

WSD has developed these Best Practices as a way to meet and fulfill the State's website standards within the technology and business environments that presently exist. These Best Practices will be updated as changes in these environments are realized and adjusted for. These Best Practices are required to be used in the development of new and redesigned websites that reside or will reside within the State of NH's web environment. The Best Practices are broken down into (4) four categories directly correlating with the main categories in the State of NH Website Standards document.

1 Technology

State websites are to be developed with Adobe Dreamweaver utilizing a template-based approach as to easily facilitate site-wide edits. The templates will generally control the header, navigation, footer and any other elements that will be non-editable by CMS users. Currently the CMS software used is Adobe Contribute. CMS access will be role-based and able to be refined at least down to the directory level of the website. Use of this software by an agency requires the following:

- Purchase of the latest version of Adobe Contribute by the agency.
- Installation of software (one license for one PC)
- Training of all individuals that will be using the software by DoIT Web Content Management staff.
- Retraining of all individuals as deemed necessary by DoIT Web Content management staff.

Currently the State uses a validation software program, called Total Validator, to validate all webpages to the following standards; XHTML 1.1 or HTML 5 (must be backward compatible), CSS 2.1 (3.0 is allowed when it has graceful degradation), WCAG 2.0 AA, spell check (American Dictionary), and broken links reporting turned on.

Monthly reports are run on websites to verify Standards compliancy. Any necessary corrections/changes will be made by the responsible agency or DoIT - Web Support Division.

State websites developed and/or utilizing a different, static or dynamic, workflow will be held to the same State Web Standards and Best Practices as those following the standard workflow.

2 Accessibility

The State has adopted compliance with section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended (29 U.S.C. 794d) for all web applications and sites. Provisions in the standard require all agency websites to meet these standards. The Department of Information Technology (DoIT), Web Support Division (WSD) performs regular monitoring of State websites. Currently websites are validated using the software program, Total Validator, and validated to be WCAG 2.0 AA compliant.

Websites must be designed to be accessible across numerous operating systems, platforms, browsers, devices and accessibility software programs in order to accommodate the broadest user-base possible. Websites must display correctly on Mac, Windows, iOS, and Android-based devices using (at a minimum) the latest 2 versions of their operating systems. Websites must also display correctly in at least the following browsers; Chrome – version 21+ (all platforms), Safari – version 5.1+ (all platforms), Firefox – version 10+ (all platforms), Internet Explorer 8+ (Windows only), as well as any other Web Standards (W3C) compliant browsers. All new and re-designed websites must be tested from top to bottom before going "Live". All existing "Live" websites will be randomly spot check for compliancy.

Mobile

All websites are to be developed using Responsive Web Techniques to create two fixed and one variable sized screen layouts. The Desktop version measures either 955 pixel wide (agencies) or 1000 pixels wide (portal site). The Tablet version measures 730 pixels wide and generally resembles a narrower version of the Desktop version.

State of NH Website Best Practices

The Phone version has a variable size of 320-420 pixels wide. This version re-organizes the content by “stacking” content on top of each other in a column. Base style sheets and templates are available from the Web Content Management Group at wcm@nh.gov.

Search

All webpages must utilize the following SEO (Search Engine Optimization) practices:

- If website is third-party hosted, then search capabilities must include the ability to search and index, at a minimum, the content of HTML pages, PDFs, and Microsoft Word documents (including .docx).
- Following the State’s Website Standards and these Best Practices will result in a better search result standing since the major commercial search engines rate consistent, logical, well coded, and frequently updated webpages very high.
- The <title> will consist of the page (content) title as well as the website/agency name (ex. <title>Contact Us | Department of Transportation</title>)
- The <meta description> will contain a phrase or sentence describing the content of the page. This tag is usually what will show up as the description in most search result pages.
- The <meta keywords> will contain a list of keywords commonly used throughout the page content. Some of these keywords may be common to all pages throughout the website, but some must correspond to the specific content on that page.
- The <h1> will be used as the title of the page content and <h2>, <h3>, <h4>, and <h5> will be used as subtitles, section heads, column heads, list title, etc. These tags should be thoroughly styled (through CSS) to coordinate with the design (look and feel) of the website. They should never be left to display in their default (varies by browser) state.
- All filenames should be descriptive of the content of the file. Filenames should be from 1-3 words separated by a hyphen to ensure that search engines can discern the individual words of the filename.

3 Branding

The branding of a State of NH website is designed to present a consistent, professional image and instill confidence in the website’s authenticity. In order for branding to be effective, it must be consistently present on all State of NH websites. Deviation from the branding standards and best practices on any one website will only serve to dilute the effectiveness and sense of authenticity of all websites within the State of NH’s web environment.

All State websites/webpages shall contain common elements to clearly identify them as part of the State’s overall web presence. These common elements include but are not limited to a webpage header/banner, a webpage footer, a left-side navigation area, and a content area restricted to the center area of the webpage only or in combination with the right side of the webpage.

State of NH Website Best Practices

Header/Banner

Text Sizer	Language Translation Tool	Official State of NH Website Identifier	
Social Media Buttons <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>		State Seal	Agency, Program or Initiative Name and/or Logo
Date (optional)		Header Sub Navigation (optional)	

The Header/Banner measures 955px wide by 175px tall (a 1000 pixel wide version is available for web portals only). It consists of 4 required areas of information and two optional areas. The top strip measures 25px tall and holds accessibility features including the Text-Sizer tool on the extreme left side and the Language Translation tool next and the Official State of NH identifier on the right side. The middle strip is 125px tall and contains the State Seal and appropriate social media buttons on the extreme left side, and website name and/or logo in the remaining area (center and right). The imagery in the middle strip can overlap into the bottom strip. The bottom strip is 25px tall and holds two optional pieces of information. The date would be on the left side (if used) and sub-navigation would be in the remaining area to the right. The sub-navigation should be flushed right unless it encompasses most of the width of the page and it looks better centered. A Photoshop template of the header/banner is available by contacting the Web Content Management Group at wcm@nh.gov.

Footer

 NH.gov privacy policy accessibility policy	copyright 2014. State of New Hampshire
---	--

The Footer measures 955px wide (1000 pixels wide for portal websites) by 35px tall. On the left side it consists of the State Seal and 3 mandatory links labeled; NH.gov (<http://www.nh.gov>), privacy policy (<http://www.nh.gov/disclaimer.html>), and accessibility policy (<http://www.nh.gov/wai/index.html>). On the right side is the copyright statement. A Photoshop template is available for this by contacting the Web Content Management Group at wcm@nh.gov.

The branding also includes the position of the main navigation (text links only) located on the left-hand side under the banner.

4 Functionality

The purpose of standardizing website functionality is to insure the longevity, flexibility, and overall-effectiveness of the website. A website’s architecture, navigation, and content need to all be organized to work as one to ensure the best user experience. The organization of the website will be developed in the Business Requirements document and demonstrated in a wireframe chart. The Business Requirements document will detail the content’s organization while the wireframe chart will display the top levels of organization of architecture, navigation. The website’s content needs to be layered and organized in a logical manner that is reflective in the site’s navigation and architecture as well as the user’s needs and expectations. Functionality best practices are broken down into three categories; architecture, navigation, and organization.

Architecture

The directory structure of a website should be set up to mirror the navigation plus accommodate any other requirements. Directory folders will be created for each navigation category and will contain at least an index.htm file representing the landing page for that navigation category. All other pages relating to this category will also live within this folder. Additional sub-folders can also reside within the main category folder in-order to accommodate specific needs. All attempts should be made to limit the number of sub-directory

State of NH Website Best Practices

levels to a total of three (main directory, sub-directory, sub-directory) on larger websites and two (main directory, sub-directory) on smaller websites. Development tools (Dreamweaver, ASP.net, PHP, etc.) may also require additional file-specific folders to accommodate their needs. All attempts should be made to having only the Home page (index.htm) reside in the root of the website.

Navigation

All State websites shall provide users with a main navigational area located on the top left-hand side under the Header elements. Each navigational link must have a hover state that meets accessibility requirements. The first navigation link shall direct users to the website's home page. The remaining links shall be determined in the project's Business Requirements document but may include links for: About Us, Contact Us, as well as the optional Site Map. The main navigation is not to exceed two levels deep (main category navigation and sub-category navigation).

A website may also incorporate a secondary navigational area within the Header elements. This area could be a group of buttons (graphic or text) that represent a secondary navigational system based on "filtered content". The navigation could be based on audience types (e.g. citizen, business, visitor), or specific content types (e.g. forms, applications, documents). This secondary navigation, if used, must be used consistently on every webpage throughout the site.

Left-hand navigation links must be text-based links utilizing HTML's <a> tag and cannot rely on any scripting or programming technology in order to work correctly. All forms of secondary navigation (Header navigation, Quicklinks, icon well, etc.) may be in the form of text-based links or graphic-based links. If there is scripting or programming attached to these links, there must be an adequate <noscript> solution presented in the HTML.

In some instances, Web applications may require the full horizontal width of the screen without any left-hand navigation. Special templates can be developed to handle this application-specific requirement. This special template will only be used for the necessary application pages and NOT used on any other pages within the website.

Organization

Clean and logical organization of the content on a State website is required. All content should be organized in a logical order from the perspective of the end user. Content should not be organized by agency hierarchy or any other agency-centric means as this will not be familiar to the end-user. All content on a website should be reviewed by the agency on a regular basis to ensure it is up-to-date. Website content should be reflective of all content posted on the agency's social media platforms. Content should be "fresh", easy to understand, logically organized, well presented and grammatically correct. Content should always be written and presented to the level of its target audience. All topic specific words, acronyms, or phrases should be clearly defined to ensure understanding by the end-user.