

How to...

Build an impactful website

Why your website matters

As a grassroots organizing group, having a strong website will help support:

- **Connection and community building:** A well-crafted website can serve as a powerful tool for engagement and mobilization. It provides a centralized hub for your audience to learn, connect and stay updated on your groups' activities. This helps strengthen the sense of community and belonging among supporters.
- **Amplifying your message:** Through strategic content and calls to action, your website can broadcast your mission to wider audiences, ensuring your cause reaches beyond your immediate network.
- **Mobilization for action:** Whether it's signing petitions, attending rallies and events, or donating, a well-structured website makes it easy for visitors to engage with your movement and take meaningful action... whether that's donating, signing a petition, writing a letter to a representative or showing up to an event.
- **Credibility and trust:** A well-crafted website fosters trust and legitimacy, showing that your group is serious, organized and dedicated.
- **Information accessibility:** With clear navigation and updated resources, visitors can access important information at any time, reinforcing continuous support, engagement and trust.

Isn't social media enough?

In a world where social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram seem to be the dominant pages defining both individuals, businesses and activist groups web presence – many have questioned what the point is in creating and/or maintaining a website if it is inherently easier to foster deep engagement through the ability to “Like,” “Follow” and “Favourite” you. And that's a really good question!

Why having a strong website is important to have in combination with social media:

- You should use a website as your **anchor or traffic director**. Create channels where you can direct your audience back and forth to your website and social platforms.
- Unlike social media platforms, a website **acts as a central, controlled space** for your content and messaging
- Social media trends change rapidly, but a website provides a **lasting presence** that isn't subject to algorithm shifts
- A well-designed website **enhances your group's credibility**, especially when working with news outlets and publications, large donors, etc.
- Websites offer more space for **detailed content, resources, and calls to action** compared to social media's limited formats
 - You can use a website as a **public archive** of your group's history, successes, etc.
- Websites provide **full control** over design, content and data, unlike social media where policies and layouts can change unexpectedly.

How to define your website goals

Start by identifying key objectives

Clear goals will guide the design and help maintain focus during development and planning.

Probing questions to start you off – *Is your group seeking to:*

- Increase awareness about your cause?
- Engage more with your community through newsletters, updates, and interactive content?
- Encourage donations and fundraising?
- Recruit volunteers and event participants?

Common website goals for grassroots groups are:

- **Raising awareness:** Educate your audience about your cause(s), campaigns and their importance.
- **Engaging your community:** Using newsletters, interactive content and events.

- **Encouraging donations and fundraising efforts**
- **Recruiting volunteers:** Providing clear avenues for engagement and involvement.

Once you have defined your website's key goals, you can then use those to as the North Star while you build and improve your website and develop a content strategy.

★ **Tip!** Ensure the goals of your website reflect and reinforce your group's mission statement.

If your group already has a website and identified goals but is looking for ways to improve, consider:

- Asking for feedback A great way to get another perspective on the effectiveness of your current web presence and website is to ask your community. For example: Send out a survey in a newsletter or post-event feedback form. Conduct a small focus group session. Seek out a volunteer from your network who can lend their expertise towards identifying areas in need of improvement.
- Conducting a web audit A web audit helps groups identify what's working well on their website and what needs improvement. It may seem like an overwhelming task, but if you break it down into manageable steps and take it page by page – it will be much less daunting.

Online resources to help you conduct a web audit

- [Broken link checker](#)
- [Accessibility checker](#)*see section below on **accessibility** for more guidance!
- [Website Audit Checklist](#)

Develop a content strategy

Building a strong website starts with a simple plan to make sure all your content works together to support your goals. A content strategy ensures that every piece of content on your website serves a purpose, whether it's to raise awareness, drive donations, recruit volunteers or inspire action. Fear not: It doesn't have to be complicated! Focus on small, actionable steps and you'll see big results over

time. Create a shared file and/or spreadsheet to document your content strategy, plan your content calendar and monitor changes.

★ **Step one:** Focus on your group’s goals

Ask yourself: *What do we want our website to do?* Are you trying to inform people about an issue? Get them to attend events? Support your campaign with donations? Start with your top 2-3 goals. Write these down together as a group.

If you already have a website... Review your current content and ask: *Does this help us reach our goals?* If not, tweak or remove content that feels random or off-message.

If you are creating a website from scratch... Think about how your site will achieve your mission. Use your goals to create a basic “roadmap” for your content – what pages you’ll need and what purpose each serves.

★ **Tip!** By using your defined objectives, your group can create a content roadmap that works cohesively to achieve your mission, rather than scattering efforts across disconnected messaging.

★ **Step two:** Understand your audience

Knowing your audience and supporter base is a great way to tailor your content strategy around their needs, preferences and challenges.

If you already have a website... Use tools like [Google Analytics](#) to identify how visitors interact with your site and what content resonates most. Or conduct audience research through surveys and interviews to identify what your supporters care about, what motivates them to act and what type of content do they connect with best.

If you are creating a website from scratch... Think about *who* you want your audience to be (e.g., Are they community members, donors, policymakers, youth?). *What might motivate them to support your group?* Tailor your content strategy around who you want to attract. Create content that speaks directly to their concerns and shows how they can make a difference and take action.

★ **Step three:** Use Search Engine Optimization to expand your content’s reach

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is all about helping your website show up higher in search engine results (like Google or Bing) so more people can find it. Google scans through billions of websites to find the best answers, SEO helps your website become one of those “best answers”. *How?* Through **keywords!** Keywords are the words or phrases people type into search engines. SEO involves including those keywords into your website’s content, so search engines know your site is relevant. SEO isn’t about tricking search engines – it’s about making your website better for people *and* easier to find. With good SEO practices, you’re helping your message reach the people you want to reach!

★ **SEO in action!**

Imagine you’re running a campaign for clean water. If your site is well-optimized, someone searching “*how to protect local water sources*” will find your website in the results. From there, they might be inspired to join your campaign or donate to your group.

- **Use relevant keywords:** Identify and integrate high-impact keywords that your audience is likely searching for.
- **Tips & tricks:**
 - Use keyword variations – alternate between related phrases (e.g. “climate change solutions” and “solutions to climate change”).
 - Balance keywords with readability – avoid overloading pages with keywords (called “keyword stuffing” and can get your website flagged), instead focus on natural placement and integration.
- **Write meta descriptions:** Write compelling meta tags and descriptions in their respective fields (in the backend of your website) to improve visibility in search results. Include your keywords in these spaces.
- **Utilize internal linking:** Connect pages on your site to improve navigation and improve SEO rankings.

Online resources to help strengthen your SEO:

- [Nonprofit SEO: The Ultimate Free Guide and Checklist](#)
- [Seobility SEO checker](#)

★ **Remember:** Your content strategy can be adapted, refined and improved to meet your group's emerging needs and/or shifting goals.

Five key design principles of an impactful website

Take your website goals and content strategy and put them into action! Though you are the architect of your website – these are five key design principles that will ensure your website is strong, effective and impactful.

1. A clear call to action(s)

The rule of thumb for an effective, accessible website is that **anyone can find what they are looking for in under three clicks**. A website with a clear call to action featured on the homepage will make that even easier for visitors!

- Use buttons and CTAs that stand out and lead to essential, relevant actions (e.g., “Join Us,” “Donate Now”, “Volunteer with us”, etc.).
 - The key objectives identified by your group will help determine what CTA to feature (e.g., event registration, petition ask, etc.)
 - OR – you can feature multiple CTAs by utilizing banner configurations that display them in a timed carousel
- Strengthen your CTA and homepage by including:
 - Your group’s mission statement
 - Story/Brief history of group
 - Impact metrics (e.g., [ClimateLegacy](#))

EXAMPLES OF A CLEAR CALL TO ACTION:

- [350.org](#)
- [EcoJustice](#)
- [ClimateLegacy](#)

2. Accessible, easy to navigate and responsive features

Having an accessible website is the cornerstone of an effective, impactful website. An inaccessible website excludes people with visual, auditory, motor and cognitive impairments, those using assistive technologies like screen readers or voice input tools and those with limited digital literacy or older devices.

Not only is it important for ALL sorts of websites – it's also a reflection of your group's commitment to inclusivity and justice. **By ensuring most folks can engage with your content and participate in your cause, you're reducing digital inequity and making your movement stronger, more equitable and more impactful.**

When you have an accessible website, you broaden your reach, remove barriers to action, build trust and credibility and in some regions (Ontario) you are [complying with law](#).

Tips for keeping your website accessible and easy to navigate:

- Keep your layout intuitive with clear, easy-to-navigate menus
 - Ensure the menu banner is fixed on each webpage
- Adhere to web accessibility standards
 - Provide alt-text for images
 - Ensure strong colour contrast for readability
 - Design descriptive links (e.g., “Learn more about volunteering” instead of “Click here”)
 - Use appropriate headings, subheadings and captions
 - Implement keyboard navigability for improved usability
 - Make the site navigable via keyboard and screen readers
- Consider mobile-first design
 - Over 50% of web traffic comes from mobile devices so design with mobile users in mind
 - Use responsive design techniques so content adapts seamlessly to various screen sizes

- Most website platforms/hosts will have a feature in the backend that will allow you view how the site is displayed on mobile devices. It is a valuable tool that can really help you make critical design decisions.
- Visual appeal
 - Incorporate your branding elements (colours, fonts, logo, etc.) consistently throughout your website
 - Choose high-quality images that evoke emotion and illustrate your mission and objectives
 - Avoid clutter to keep visitors focused on key messages and CTAs

Online resources to strengthen your websites accessibility:

- For Ontario-based groups: [Free AODA training](#)
- [Accessibility checker](#)

3. A comprehensive information hub

A well-organized information hub on your website serves as a centralized repository for critical resources – enhancing accessibility and engagement.

It can serve as: (1) a space for **educational resources** where visitors can quickly find fact sheets, FAQs, toolkits and guides about your cause, making you a go-to authority; (2) a **method of empowering supporters** by providing easy access to knowledge for activists, donors and volunteers to equip themselves with the tools they need to advocate effectively and/or; (3) an opportunity to **streamline communications** to reduce repetitive inquiries by hosting detailed answers and updates in a single space.

Regardless of the ‘how’ and ‘why’, **your comprehensive information hub should include:**

- **A resource library:** Downloadable PDFs, infographics, campaign reports, toolkits, forms, and videos.
- **Event calendars:** Provide details about upcoming events, rallies, demonstrations, meetings and/or webinar.

- **FAQs:** Answer common questions to remove barriers to participation and reduce inbox queries.
- **Updates section:** Keep visitors and supporters informed about recent developments, victories and roadblocks.

★ **Remember:** Regularly update your content to reflect current events, CTAs, achievements and campaigns.

4. Social proofing

Social proof is defined as “*psychological phenomenon where people base their decisions on the actions of others*”. Within the context of web design, you can implement principles of social proofing to reassure visitors that your group is credible and impactful.

Types of social proof:

- **Impact metrics:** Display quantifiable achievements like funds raised, events organized, petitions signed, etc.
- **Testimonials:** Share quotes and reflections from supporters, volunteers, group members, donors, etc.
- **Endorsements:** Highlight support from well-known community figures, organizations or experts.
- **Media mentions:** Showcase articles, interviews or features about your group's work.
- **Community involvement:** Use photos and stories from events, demonstrations and rallies to emphasize community participation.
- **Partnerships:** Spotlight other grassroots groups or community organizations your group has partnered with.

Examples of how to integrate social proof opportunities into your website:

- Create a “What Our Supporters Say,” “Media,” and/or “Impact,” section or page
- Add a “Partners” page to highlight collaborations with reputable organizations and fellow grassroots organizing groups
- Embed your social networking feeds into your website

★ **Tip!** Social proof can strengthen your CTAs.

5. Features story-driven content

Storytelling is a powerful way to share impactful narratives, diverse voices and unique perspectives. Grassroots organizing thrives on connecting with people’s values, emotions and lived experiences. Story-driven content is one of the most powerful tools you can use to amplify your group's message, grow your movement and drive meaningful change.

Story-driven content strategically and seamlessly integrated into an organizing group’s website can connect with visitors on a deeper level, inspire action and sustain momentum.

There are *many* ways to feature story-driven content – but the two most common forms are **narrative** and **visual**.

Ways to feature narrative story-driven content on your website:

- **Personal stories:** Highlight the experiences of those impacted by the issue you are actively campaigning on.
 - Consider creating a dedicated “Stories” section
 - **Example:** A story titled “How the community garden transformed my neighborhood” by a local resident
- **Action/Campaign updates:** Share coverage of recent events, successes and/or ongoing challenges.
 - Consider combining historical milestones of the group with personal anecdotes from members who join at different parts in the journey
 - **Example:** A story titled “2018: We started organizing for clean water. Here's how [person’s] story inspired action”
- **Call to action embedded stories:** Illustrate to visitors and supporters how their contributions can have real-life impacts.

- Strengthen your current CTAs through storytelling
 - **Example:** A story titled “Meet Louis: A farmer fighting for climate-resilient crops. Help him by signing our petition for agricultural reform”
- **Profiles:** Spotlight the amazing humans behind your group's efforts through a profile write-up, interview or Q&A format.
 - Consider folding these into your ‘About Us’ section. Or have a monthly profile featured on the homepage.
 - **Example:** “Spotlight on Linda: Organizing for affordable housing in her city”

Tips for capturing narrative story-driven content:

- For events, rallies and demonstrations: Assign someone to be in charge of capturing storytelling content on the ground. *Always make sure to have a consent form ready to go in a shared place that group members can access on the fly*
- For content generation: Include storytelling prompts in your post-event surveys, feedback forms and newsletter.

★ **Tip!** Use authentic relatable language to connect emotionally with your audience.

Visual storytelling is a story told primarily through the use of visual media. Adding visual components to your narrative storytelling will strengthen your message, but you can also integrate visual storytelling throughout your website by featuring impactful, emotive imagery and videos.

Visual story-driven content tips:

- Forgo using stock imagery and/or pre-configured photos from web templates and instead opt for high-quality, emotive, impactful imagery
- Embed high-quality video content when appropriate into relevant webpages
- Always utilize captions and alt-text features
- Credit photographers appropriately

Free-use, royalty-free image websites to source high-quality and impactful images:

→ [*Pexels](#)

- [*Unsplash](#)
- [Climate Visuals](#)
- [Flickr Creative Commons](#)
- [Wikimedia Commons](#)
- Your local community library or archive
- Local photographer clubs and circles

* These are popular photo resources – try to choose images that don't have thousands of downloads.