



AGA Chapter Website Guide

AGA – Advancing Government Accountability

Why a Chapter Web Site?

Electronic communication has become ubiquitous. Websites and group emails provide another vehicle in the ever-present challenge of communicating within the organization. A website can provide you members and prospective members with up-to-date information about your chapter's events, meetings and news. The site can be a companion to email postings and chapter newsletters, providing members and other interested parties a consistent place to get on-demand information about the chapter.

Needs Assessment

The first step in your chapter web site project website project is to assess the needs and objectives of the web site. Following are a list of questions to consider, the list is not meant to be all inclusive, rather a starting point for questions specific to your AGA chapter:

- Who is your audience?
- What type of information would your audience be interested in?
- Frequency of updates, how quickly will your data need to be updated – just a thought here – obtain a good balance. A site that has too much change may frustrate the audience if they cannot quickly locate what they need, while a site that rarely changes will not attract members to get information from it.

What makes a web site GREAT?

There are many sources for helping you develop a great web site. Start by reviewing the AGA National Website Guidelines section, which includes basic guidelines as well as the chapter web site judging criteria. What items on these lists will meet the needs of your audience - remember these are just guidelines, just as each chapter has unique characteristics, each website will be unique. There are also great suggestions in the Cheap and Easy Website Section Number 3.

As a basic guideline to a great chapter it should strike a good balance of professionalism, some 'spice' to create interest, up to date applicable information, and ease of navigation – if a user gets frustrated trying to find the data they may never come back.

Easy two-way communication can also contribute to the effectiveness of the website. Interactive forms can provide members an easy and efficient method of communicating on many levels including event registration; feedback; changing contact information; signing up for community service projects; etc.

A cohesive team of members who help provide data for the site and review the site periodically can be a tremendous asset in developing an effective site. As with any form of communication what seems straightforward and logical to the webmaster may be confusing or difficult to find for other users.

Find a Web Site Coordinator

Naturally the same basics that apply to finding any chapter leader apply to finding a web site coordinator. With today's software a dedicated member with good follow through and a commitment to advance government accountability is a much higher priority than

any particular technical skills. You need a member who is willing and committed to keep the site updated – nothing will destroy the success of your site faster than a stagnant, out dated site.

While we are very confident that any of our AGA members can easily learn to develop and maintain a website with just a little time, we also recognize that there may be an aversion to this approach. Don't let this stop you from having a website. An option may be to have a web site coordinator who coordinates all the data and has someone with technical expertise actually publish to the web – this could be a college student, a professional web development company, or a coworker of a member.

The chapter may want to consider options such as purchasing software – front page is a popular option among the 'non-techies' who don't want to become a programmer. Another option is to find a mentor and identify what software they use, talk with them, a good mentor can be invaluable and it may be advantageous to be on the same software they use.

Many members have successfully learned their web software through online help and trial and error, however sometimes it is helpful to take a class. Check out local colleges, computer stores, training centers, adult education centers, community education, etc.

Check with AGA National Office for a web site mentor. Many other chapter web masters are more than willing to share their web history with you.

And of course, remember to have FUN and enjoy the opportunity!

Where should you put your web site?

There are many options for where to put your web site, and it will take a little time and research for you to determine the best place to put your AGA Chapter website. Options include:

- On your own Web Server
- On a Member's or Employer's Server
- Through your ISP's page site option
- Free-page Web site service
- E-commerce service
- Web Hosting Provider

For the typical AGA Chapter, generally you can throw out owning your own server as cost prohibitive and unnecessary.

E-commerce sites are really designed to allow customers to use one shopping cart while visiting several sites. This is a type of super store where you can visit several sites then proceed to one checkout. Unless you are entering the world of the web for the main purpose of selling your chapter services or products you will probably want to steer away from this option. It is rather expensive and not really geared to a non-profit organization.

Some AGA Chapters have worked with one of the **supporting Employers** for their website. You will be able to pick these chapters out from the list of websites by their address, which will read something like www.employer.gov/agachapter. The advantage to this method is that it will probably be free and you may be able to get in person

technical support, depending on the agreement with the employer. The major disadvantage is that you will probably always have to have an employee of the entity as your webmaster. You may also have security issues and limitations on the types and sizes of files you can post.

Through your **ISP (Internet Service Provider)** is another alternative some AGA Chapters have chosen. Most ISP's will allow users a limited amount of space for posting on the web. They have addresses like: <http://members.aol.com/agachapter>. You may have a member in your chapter who is purchasing ISP time and space and would be willing to let the Chapter use the space. The advantage is that this may cost your chapter nothing. The disadvantage is that you will be tied into that ISP and you will be reliant upon one member to update your website. What if the member wants to change to a different ISP or moves out of your chapter area? Also, most ISP's provide very limited space and types of services.

AGA Chapters have also used Free-page Websites. Free page websites share a lot with the ISP alternative. The main advantage is that it is free. The major disadvantage is that they often require you to have a marquis or advertisement on the web site. Some of the advertisements may not be of the professional nature that you would like to portray for your chapter. If you are in a situation where this is the only alternative you can find for your chapter, look for a provider that will not require the advertisements. See the section on Cheap and Easy Websites for details on utilizing this cost effective method of hosting your website.

Web-Hosting Provider offers the greatest flexibility and many offer a very decent price. A Web-Hosting Company sells you space on their computer server. These companies have a range of services that they can provide or support such as:

- Technical Support Levels including help designing the web site
- Online Ordering system (this can allow you to have credit card)
- Pop email
- Email forwarding
- Mailing list software, etc.

The major advantage of a Web-Hosting Company is the flexibility to your chapter. You are more likely to have a permanent chapter web address and most likely you will be allowed more freedom if you ever need to change webmasters. You will also have more freedom of specifying your needs when choosing a hosting company. Most hosting companies offer different levels of service and will help you choose the minimum necessary (and therefore lowest cost) for your needs. You are also likely to have a much higher level of technical support with a Web-Hosting Company than with a free option. The disadvantage is that these options cost at least \$10 per month and can go up depending on the services that you choose. In addition if you choose to purchase your own domain name such as www.agachapter.org then you may need to register with a domain service for up to \$35 per year. (Warning some hosting companies may provide this service and they may be the owners of your domain name. Check this out, especially if you are paying a registration fee. You will want to take your own domain name with you if you need to ever change web-hosting companies)

Another general note to consider up front is what type of web publishing software are you planning to use. There are many options from writing your own HTML to converting

Word Documents or Publisher Documents. However many non-professional (i.e. volunteer AGA members) have found that FrontPage is an excellent tool for beginning web masters (and FrontPage Express can be downloaded for free). If you are going to use FrontPage, you may want to take advantage of some of the features and will therefore need to make sure that your where you put your web will support the FrontPage bells and whistles, they can be very helpful for first time web designers.

Comparison Tool: We have provided a basic spreadsheet for you to use as comparison when shopping for web-hosts. With the ever-changing electronic world it would be impossible for us to recommend specific web-hosting companies. Your best bet is to run a search for Web Hosting to see what is out there and the best deal when you are ready to venture into a new web presence. Good Luck and remember to enjoy this new adventure!

Cheap and Easy Web Pages

Don't have a web page for your chapter?

Costs too much?
No expertise?
Too technical?

Guess what? If those are your excuses, you have no excuse! You can build a basic chapter website in just a few hours and it can cost as little as NOTHING! Just follow these three easy steps:

Number 1: You need a host to post your website to the world (and beyond).

The best way to find a host for your chapter's website is to use the internet itself. Go to your favorite search engine (Google, Dog Pile, Lycos, etc.) and type in "Free Web Pages". You will get some junk, but for the most part you will get either links to web hosting vendors or web pages that list other hosting sites. As a variation to this add your locality (City and state) to see if there are any local web-hosting vendors.

What you get:

You get what you pay for! Most offer a "Free" service that is supported by advertisements that "Pop-up" on your web page. Your web page URL (web address) is linked to their web address. You get a limited amount of web space, e-mail addresses, and volume of hits allowed on your pages each month. All for FREE.

However, for a few bucks more (\$5 - \$25 per month) you can get rid of the ads, have your own URL (www.agapodunk.org), more space, more e-mail addresses, etc. Basically, the more you pay, the more you get. See the section on 'Where to put your website' for more information on these hosting sites.

Recommendations:

It is difficult to get specific, the internet changes daily, and what may be the best solution today may be entirely different tomorrow. Additionally, your chapter may have unique needs that could make the difference on what is 'best' for you. Use what meets your needs and fits your budget. Most allow room to grow and upgrade as you get more sophisticated. Some even offer their own page creation software that requires little or no

knowledge of HTML (Internet web page authoring language). More on technical expertise later!

What is out there (Short cut!):

- GeoCities (Yahoo)
- Tripod and Angelfire (Lycos)
- Local hosts
- FortuneCity
- Thefreesite
- Freewebspace.org

Alternatives:

- Piggy-back on an Agency's web page.
- Get space from a local college or university (Community Colleges could be an excellent source).
- A member's home ISP (Internet Service Provider) – especially if they have a "Broadband (cable modem or DSL connection) Connection" at home.
- Co-op with another local professional organization.
- Contract out (Can be cheap if you find the right person).
- Be creative!

Number 2: *How do I do what I need to do?*

Web page authoring has become a lot simpler than it used to be 10 years ago. Remember when word processing went WYSIWYG 15-20 years ago. Well the same thing applies to creating a basic web page – What You See Is What You Get. Web Hosting sites offer their own web page development software and gets the basic job done. HTML programmers or high cost software can deliver the fancy stuff. However, this section is about "Cheap and Easy" so we can skip that stuff.

The Basics:

Most easy to use web page creators use WYSIWYG layout and design. Click and drag to create a "Text box", type in your words, adjust the font, style etc, and you're done. Create a new box for the next text. Want a picture or graphic? Click on the button to add a graphic or picture. When you are done give your page a file name just like any document on your PC.

If you want to add your own picture, you have to upload it. This can be as simple as click the upload icon, select the picture name from your hard drive, and click to upload. Then you select you picture file name instead of one of theirs. This also works for MS Word files, Spreadsheets, or Adobe Acrobat files.

If you create your pages off site from your host you will have to upload them to the host site. This is frequently called FTP (File Transfer Protocol). All you need to know it is like copying a file from one place to another.

Links:

This can be as easy as to highlight the words or text box or picture and then select the make a link icon. Type in what you want to make the link to (e-mail address, data file

(word processing, acrobat, or spreadsheet), another web page (yours or any other page on the web)) and click OK.

Alternatives:

- Hire a college student (They can always use the money).
- Send a member to school (Again community colleges are great and cheap).
- Buy some books (you will need someone to read them though).
- Trade web page development for advertising.
- Be Creative!
- Find a mentor, especially one who is already maintaining an AGA website.

Tools:

- Software from the host (usually free).
- Microsoft Front Page (OOPS! I forgot cheap – this will cost over \$100).
- 1st Page (Free software available from www.evrsoft.com) This software is customizable from beginner to pro.
- PrintPack Pro from www.software602.com can create Acrobat formatted files for web page use. It is only \$20 per license and works using the “Print” function with PrintPack as the “Printer” the end result is a .pdf file instead of a printed page. A full blown Adobe Acrobat costs over \$100 so we won’t discuss that here. The only issue is that you won’t be able to change the document like you could with Adobe’s software. Don’t lose your source file! It does less but it also costs less.

Number 3: *Content – Its all about “Stuff” and NOT “Fluff”*

Stick to the basics and serve your members and potential members. You don’t need, nor do you want, the entire world wanting to see your web pages. Plan what you will create before you start whacking on the keyboard and flinging the mouse around.

Basics:

- Keep it consistent and use the same logo and color layout on each page.
- Only post what you plan to maintain – nobody likes outdated web pages with meeting information from six months ago.
- Graphics, animation, video clips, and pictures are neat but can be overdone. They also chew-up your space if you have a limited budget.
- Give the members what they want.

Homepage:

- Logo with a banner to repeat on each page listing Chapter name and location.
- 1-3 quickies (Mission, next event, hot stuff, links to other pages)

Communications:

- Contact points (Officers and chairs: phone and e-mail)
- Newsletter (Best as a link to Acrobat file or word processing document).
- Meetings (more info on current and a schedule for the others).
- President’s Message (Monthly – can be a link)

Registrations:

- Link to word processing or spreadsheet document.
- Link to acrobat file.
- On-line is great if you have the expertise to do it.
- Directions to meeting site.
- Agenda for current meeting.

Other Possibilities:

- Chapter History
- Chapter CGFM activities and benefits
- Chapter membership activities and benefits
- Be Creative! (But be tasteful)

Links:

- National Office Home Page
- National Office Membership Page
- National Office CGFM Page
- National Office Members Only Page

Using links to the National Office pages is an easy way to provide members and prospective members with information on specific topics. However, it is recommended that you provide information on the local chapter aspects of these areas. Also, be sure to make sure your links are current. If a URL changes and you don't you have created a frustrated customer and a bad impression of how your chapter operates.

Conclusion: "It ain't over till it's over!" Yogi Berra

There is a wide range of "Cheap and Easy" methods and tolls for chapters to use in creating a web site. The key is to do what is available within your means (Time, Talent, and Treasure) and do it well, make it interesting, and keep it current.

Something as basic as a one-page web site that:

- Lists the upcoming meeting with a few sentence description with a phone number for details (a link to a registration document would be better).
- Links to key elements of the National Web Page (Home, Membership, CFGFM, and Members Only).
- Has two or three contact points (Phone and e-mail).
- Has a link to the last newsletter.

Can be an effective tool for the chapter and a key resource to its members.

Such a page can be created for FREE with minimal effort and easily maintained. From such a start you can grow your web site as you need. So start small (Cheap and Easy) and go from there! Just remember that this is not necessarily work – it is fun – if you let it be.

AGA National Website Guidelines

The AGA National Office encourages all chapters to design and operate a website in order to promote better communication amongst members, as well as, potential members.

Statistically, you have a better chance of reaching the most people by utilizing a website. Once the site is in place and running, your chapter now has the opportunity to save on printing and postage costs because you now have a communication tool to display each of these items.

To assist your chapter in this venture, the National Office has a list of guidelines and tools that were developed for your benefit. If you have any questions or concerns about this information, please contact a member of the Communications Department at jcurtin@agacgfm.org.

Chapter Identity

When the AGA national logo was introduced at PDC 2000, many of you were interested in using the new identity in your chapter stationery, publications and websites. Because of your enthusiastic response, we've provided guidelines, templates, logos and fonts to make this process as easy as possible.

By using the corporate identity system you are helping to strengthen AGA's image around the globe. This makes AGA look like the strong, professional organization it is.

If you have any questions, please contact AGA's Director of Communications, Marie Force at mforce@agacgfm.org.

To access the chapter identity section, go to:
<http://www.agacgfm.org/membership/identity/>

Basic Content Suggestions:

- Chapter history: list when your chapter originated
- Post Chapter Newsletters and fliers
- Chapter Leadership: list the contact information for all of your current chapter leaders
- Offer a calendar of events: post all of your upcoming meetings, conferences and social get-togethers on an easy-to-us calendar
- Post meeting-minute information: list the notes from the previous chapter meeting so that online viewers can stay in tune with your progress
- Post local employment opportunities: this could be a valuable way for your chapters to get people to revisit your site if you post job announcements in your area.
- Post a membership application

- Webmaster contact button: it is always a good idea to list an email address for the webmaster so that they can be warned if anything is down on the site.
- Links section: offer a page that links to the AGA National Office, as well as, other agencies that might be of assistance to your members.
- Post pictures from chapter meetings and events

Annual Chapter Website Competition

The National Office conducts an annual chapter website competition each spring to honor those sites that achieve excellence. Two awards are offered within each chapter grouping (A, B, C, D, E) and presented at the annual professional development conference and exposition held during the summer months.

We encourage you to review the judging criteria for this competition and to try to incorporate these items into your chapter websites.

If you have any questions about the criteria, please contact jcurtin@agacgfm.org.

Website Competition Criteria

Description	Points
Use of multimedia attributes	
Sound bits (Voice narration)	2
Animation	2
Music	2
Other	2
Information Exchange	
Questionnaires	3
RSVP Forms	3
Applications	3
Related Links	3
Chapter Information	
Chapter Board Members	5
Bylaws	5
Current Activities & Training Events	5
Mission Statement	5
Newsletters	5
Activities and Training Events for the Year	5
Link to AGA's National Website	5
Webmaster email button	5
Strategic Plan	5
Other	5
Content	
Information is kept current	5
Consistent Header on each page	5

General appearance – professionalism	5
Promote AGA chapter activities	5
User Friendliness	
Speed of accessing the site	4
Intuitive nature of the site (easy to navigate)	4
Grand Total	100

Attachment A

Here is a checklist that may be useful in evaluating different hosting options. Most of this information will be available on the internet sites of hosting companies.

Web Hosting Check List

Hosting Company

Account Set Up Fee?

Monthly Fee?

Annual Fee Discount?

Non Profit Discount?

Additional Charges (hits or data transfers)

Amount of Disk Space

Monthly Transfer Limit

Domain Name

Will you own it?

Pop Email

Number of Addresses

Mail Forwarding

Mail Responder

Mailing List (great for Newsletters)

Secure Server Available

Is Data bases Linking provided?

Are Java applets allowed?

Is RealAudio or Video allowed

Are password-protected pages allowed?

Technical Support

What Hours

Any Limits

Toll Free Number

Any Additional Charges

FrontPage Compatible?

Other?