Government of Canada   **Gouvernement du Canada**

Standard on Web Usability

ℹ Note to reader

The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat is currently reviewing the *Standard on Web Usability* to realign the dates within the standard to the timelines of the Web Renewal Initiative.

Common Services Policy: Rescinded May 13, 2021 with the exception of subsection 6.5.3, Guard Services, in Appendix E: Mandatory Services which will remain in effect until March 31, 2023. On April 1, 2023, the Common Services policy will be rescinded in its entirety and archived.

1. Effective Date

1.1 This standard took effect on September 28, 2011, and was updated on March 31, 2013.

1.2 New websites and Web applications must meet the requirements in Section 6 when they are published. Existing websites and Web applications must meet the requirements in Section 6 by March 31, 2016, with the exception of requirements 6.1.2 and 6.1.3, which must be met by July 31, 2013.

1.3 This standard replaces Part 1: Standard on Web Addresses and Part 3: Standard on Common Web Page Formats of the *Common Look and Feel 2.0 Standards for the Internet*.

2. Application

2.1 This standard applies to "departments" as defined in section 2 of the *Financial Administration Act*, with the exception of paragraphs (b) and (c), and unless excluded by specific acts, regulations or Orders in Council.

2.2 Section 6 applies to all Government of Canada websites and Web applications that:

- Are public-facing (i.e., available to individuals and businesses outside of the Government of Canada); and
- Are those for which the department is accountable.

2.3 Requirements 6.1.4 and 6.1.6 do not apply to Web pages that are not in HTML or XHTML (e.g., PDF documents).

2.4 Requirement 6.1.7 applies only to Web content that is archived on the Web.

2.5 Sections 7.3 and 8.2 relating to the role of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat in monitoring compliance and directing consequences for non-compliance do not apply with respect to the Office of the Auditor General, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner, the Office of the Information Commissioner, the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer, the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and the Office of the Public Sector Integrity Commissioner. The deputy heads of these organizations are solely responsible for monitoring and ensuring compliance with the standard within their organizations, as

well as for responding to cases of non-compliance in accordance with any Treasury Board instruments that provide principles and guidance on the management of compliance.

3. Context

3.1 The Government of Canada's presence on the Web is highly complex. Each department's Web presence offers a wide variety of content to support informational and transactional services for individuals and businesses. Web pages are delivered through various devices and technologies that are constantly evolving. The Government of Canada is committed to optimizing the user experience with the online information and services provided through its Web and mobile presence.

3.2 This standard mandates a basic structure for the design and layout of Government of Canada Web pages. This structure makes it easier to find and use information and services on Government of Canada websites. The *Technical Specifications for the Web and Mobile Presence* prescribes the visual elements and identifiers that apply to this structure. This standard supports an appropriate degree of consistency across websites and Web applications while giving departments the flexibility to use evolving technologies and to develop information and services for their target audiences.

3.3 For the purposes of this standard, Web usability is defined as the extent to which specified users can find, understand and use information and services online. Web usability can be measured through the effectiveness and efficiency with which users can complete defined tasks online.

3.4 To help ensure that websites and Web applications can be used effectively and efficiently, Web usability principles and approaches, such as user-centred design, should be implemented.

3.5 This standard supports the _Policy on Management of Information Technology_ and the management of the Government of Canada's Web presence by providing senior departmental officials, departmental chief information officers (CIOs) or equivalents, as well as heads of communications or other officials who support the management of information technology (IT), with additional requirements to ensure consistency in IT management processes.

3.6 This standard is issued under the authority of section 7 of the _Financial Administration Act_ by the Secretary of the Treasury Board pursuant to subsection 6(4) of the _Financial Administration Act_ and section 3.5 of the _Policy on Management of Information Technology_.

3.7 This standard is to be read in conjunction with the _Standard on Web Accessibility_, the _Standard on Web Interoperability_ and the _Standard on Optimizing Websites and Applications for Mobile Devices._

4. Definitions

4.1 Definitions to be used in the interpretation of this standard are in Appendix A.

5. Standard Statement

5.1 Objective

5.1.1 The objective of this standard is to ensure that Government of Canada websites and Web applications achieve a high level of Web usability.

5.2 Expected Results

> **5.2.1** Government of Canada websites and Web applications respect usability principles and approaches.

6. Requirements

6.1 Web managers, functional specialists, Web content owners and equivalents are responsible for the following:

6.1.1 Ensuring that websites and Web applications meet the requirements for website addresses described in <u>Appendix B</u>.

6.1.2 Ensuring that websites and Web applications meet the requirements for global notices described in <u>Appendix C</u>.

6.1.3 Ensuring that Web pages meet the requirements for context-sensitive notices described in <u>Appendix D</u>.

6.1.4 Ensuring that websites and Web applications contain the mandatory elements described in <u>Appendix E</u>.

6.1.5 Ensuring that the Web development process meets the user-centred design requirements described in <u>Appendix F</u>.

6.1.6 Ensuring that websites and Web applications meet the requirements in the *Technical Specifications for the Web and Mobile Presence*.

6.1.7 Ensuring that archived Web pages include an archived content notice to clearly inform users that the <u>Web page has been archived on the Web as described in the *Technical Specifications for the Web and Mobile Presence*</u>.

6.1.8 Ensuring that <u>websites and Web applications are optimized for mobile devices as described in the *Technical Specifications for the Web and Mobile Presence*</u>.

6.2 Senior departmental officials, designated by the deputy head, are responsible for the following:

6.2.1 Overseeing the implementation of this standard in their department and carrying out the activities referred to in Section 7.2.

6.2.2 Encouraging personnel to collaborate departmentally and interdepartmentally, to share expertise, and to build reusable components and tools.

6.2.3 Ensuring that Web content supports the department's mandate and priorities, and that key performance indicators are defined.

6.3 Departmental CIOs, or equivalents, are responsible for the following:

6.3.1 Ensuring that software and systems acquired by the department enable websites and Web applications to meet the requirements of this standard or that they can be modified to enable them to do so.

6.3.2 Encouraging personnel to collaborate departmentally and interdepartmentally, to share expertise, and to build reusable components and tools.

6.4 Heads of communications are responsible for the following:

6.4.1 Ensuring that goals, content owners and target audiences are identified for each of the department's websites and Web applications.

6.4.2 Ensuring that domain names are approved for use, in consultation with the Privy Council Office.

6.4.3 Ensuring that links to government priorities are approved for placement on the department's home page, in consultation with the Privy Council Office.

6.4.4 Ensuring that <u>social media icons are used on Government of Canada websites as described in the *Technical Specifications for the Web and Mobile Presence*</u>.

6.4.5 Encouraging personnel to collaborate departmentally and interdepartmentally, to share expertise, and to build reusable components and tools.

6.5 Centres of Expertise are responsible for the following:

6.5.1 Serving as the primary point of contact between the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's Chief Information Officer Branch and their department for questions and communications related to interpretation and implementation of this standard and related guidelines and tools.

6.5.2 Participating in the interdepartmental Centres of Expertise forum, chaired by the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's Chief Information Officer Branch, to stay current with evolving Web and mobile standards, guidelines and tools.

7. Monitoring and Reporting

Deputy heads

7.1 Deputy heads are responsible for monitoring adherence to this standard within their departments, consistent with the provisions of the Treasury Board's *Policy on Evaluation* and *Policy on Internal Audit*, and for ensuring that appropriate remedial action is taken to address any deficiencies within their departments.

Senior departmental officials

7.2 The senior departmental official, designated by the deputy head, is responsible for supporting his or her deputy head by overseeing the implementation and monitoring of this standard in his or her department, bringing to the deputy head's attention any significant difficulties, gaps in performance or compliance issues and developing proposals to address them, and reporting significant performance or compliance issues to the Chief Information Officer Branch of the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat.

Government-wide

7.3 The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat will monitor compliance with this standard in a variety of ways, including but not limited to, the following:

- Assessments under the Management Accountability Framework;
- Examinations of Treasury Board submissions, departmental performance reports, results of audits, evaluations and studies; and
- Work performed in collaboration with departments.

7.4 The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat will review this standard and its effectiveness at the five-year mark from the effective date of the standard (or earlier if warranted).

8. Consequences

8.1 In instances of non-compliance, deputy heads are responsible for taking corrective measures, within their organization, with those responsible for implementing the requirements of this standard.

8.2 Consequences of non-compliance with this standard can include any measure allowed by the _Financial Administration Act_ that the Treasury Board would determine as appropriate and acceptable in the circumstances.

8.3 Appendices C and D of the _Framework for the Management of Compliance_ list examples of consequences of non-compliance for institutions and for individuals.

9. Roles and Responsibilities of Government Organizations

9.1 The Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's Chief Information Officer Branch, in consultation with other departments, is responsible for the following:

9.1.1 Developing standards, guidelines and tools, and providing interpretive advice and guidance on this standard and its supporting instruments.

9.1.2 Communicating and engaging the government-wide Web and mobile community on the plans, progress, risks and challenges associated with implementing this standard and its supporting instruments in the federal government.

9.1.3 Providing support to the committees and working groups, as necessary, to address government-wide challenges and opportunities related to implementing this standard and its supporting instruments.

9.1.4 Amending the _Technical Specifications for the Web and Mobile Presence_ as required, in consultation with Strategic Communications and Ministerial Affairs.

10. References

10.1 Relevant Legislation

- *Financial Administration Act*
- *Official Languages Act*
- *Privacy Act*

10.2 Related Policy Instruments and Publications

- *Common Services Policy*
- *Communications Policy of the Government of Canada*
- *Directive on the Management of Information Technology*
- *Directive on Official Languages for Communications and Services*
- *Directive on Privacy Practices*
- *Federal Identity Program Policy*
- *Foundation Framework for Treasury Board Policies*
- *Framework for the Management of Compliance*
- *Policy on Evaluation*
- *Policy Framework for Service Improvement in the Government of Canada*
- *Policy on Government Security*
- *Policy on Information Management*
- *Policy on Internal Audit*
- *Policy on Management of Information Technology*
- *Policy on Privacy Protection*
- *Policy on Official Languages*
- *Standard on Optimizing Websites and Applications for Mobile Devices*
- *Standard on Privacy and Web Analytics*

- *Standard on Social Media Account Management*
- *Standard on Web Accessibility*
- *Standard on Web Interoperability*

11. Enquiries

Please direct enquiries about this standard to your department's Web Standards Centres of Expertise. For interpretation of this standard, Web Standards Centres of Expertise should contact the following:

Digital Policy

Office of the Chief Information Officer

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat

Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0R5

Email: DPPN@tbs-sct.gc.ca

Appendix A: Definitions

archived Web page (*page Web archivée*)

A Web page that is:

- Maintained for reference, research or recordkeeping purposes;
- Not altered or updated after the date of archiving; and
- Stored in a digital repository.

An archived Web page may be provided on the Web but must be clearly identified as being archived.

banner (*bannière*)

The area immediately below the Government of Canada navigation bar that includes site-specific content such as the site title and the site-specific search.

behaviour (*comportement*)

The action, reaction or functioning of a system, under normal or specified circumstances.

body (*corps*)

The area between the header and footer of a Web page that contains page-specific content and may include secondary navigation.

breadcrumbs (*fil d'Ariane*)

A navigation tool that provides links to the pages above the current page in the website's hierarchy.

date modified (*date de modification*)

The most recent date on which the Web page content was formally issued, substantially changed or reviewed.

dimensions (*dimensions*)

A measure of spatial extent, especially width, height or length.

favicon (*favoricône*)

An icon associated with a website or Web page that may be displayed in the address bar of the browser, next to the page's name in a list of bookmarks, and next to the page's title on a browser tab.

footer (*pied de page*)

The area at the bottom of a Web page that contains information that is persistent across a website, such as links to contact information and terms and conditions for the website.

Government of Canada websites and Web applications (*sites Web et applications Web du gouvernement du Canada*)

Websites and Web applications for which the Government of Canada is accountable. The types of websites and Web applications include departmental sites, initiative sites and sub-sites. Further definitions of the types of sites are provided below.

departmental site *(site de ministère)*:

A collection of Web pages that collectively represents the department (e.g., Environment Canada's website).

initiative site(*site d'initiative*)**:**

A group of Web pages that collectively represent an initiative of the Government of Canada. Initiative sites frequently have a different domain than from their departmental domain (e.g., www.youth.gc.ca is an initiative site).

sub-site(*site secondaire*)**:**

A group of Web pages within a larger departmental or initiative site, where the collection of Web pages are intended for a particular audience and whose specific purpose is to feature a prominent program or service. Sub-sites may have a different sub-domain or domain from their departmental domain (e.g., www.army.forces.gc.ca is a sub-site).

Web application(*application Web)*:

One or more Web pages that allow users to interact and perform specific transactions.

header (*en-tête***)**

The area at the top of a Web page that contains information that is persistent across a website, such as the site title, visual identifiers, search, navigation bars and breadcrumbs.

home page (*page d'accueil***)**

An entry page to a website. On a bilingual or multilingual website, it is displayed by selecting a language on the splash page.

interstitial page (*page interstitielle***)**

A Web page displayed before a requested content page that provides information the user should know before proceeding.

location (*position***)**

A place where something is or could be located.

presentation (*présentation***)**

The visual representation of something.

primary domain name (*nom de domaine principal*)

The domain name that represents a website's primary purpose and that is commonly used to access and identify the website.

secondary navigation (*navigation secondaire*)

Local navigation that helps users move within a section of a site.

server message page (*page de messages du serveur*)

A Web page that notifies a user of a problem on the Web server.

site navigation bar (*barre de navigation du site*)

A global navigation bar that helps users move from section to section across an entire website, typically, via navigational elements such as links.

splash page (*page d'entrée*)

A Web page at the root of a website where users can select the language of the website.

user-centred design (UCD) (*conception axée sur l'utilisateur*)

An iterative process for creating websites that involves users to ensure that the final product is usable by the intended audience.

Web usability (*facilité d'emploi des sites Web*)

The extent to which specified users can find, understand and use information and services online. Web usability can be measured through the effectiveness and efficiency with which users can complete defined tasks online.

Web content (*contenu Web*)

Information and sensory experience to be communicated to the user by means of a user agent, including code or markup that defines the content's structure, presentation and interactions. (Source: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, Appendix A: Glossary)

Web page (*page Web*)

A non-embedded resource obtained from a single Uniform Resource Identifier (URI) using HTTP plus any other resources that are used in the rendering or intended to be rendered together with it by a <u>user agent</u>.

- ***Note 1:***Although any other resources" would be rendered together with the primary resource, they would not necessarily be rendered simultaneously with each other.
- ***Note 2:***For the purposes of conformance with these guidelines, a resource must be "non-embedded" within the scope of conformance to be considered a Web page.

For further information and examples, please consult: <u>Web page, Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, Appendix A: Glossary</u>)

Appendix B: Web Addresses

1. Domain Names

1.1 Primary domain names for Government of Canada websites and Web applications are registered in the Canada.ca or .gc.ca sub-domain.

1.2 Primary domain names provide equal treatment to both official languages by implementing at least one of the following options:

1.2.1 Unilingual names for each official language. For example, <u>www.youth.gc.ca</u> for English and <u>www.jeunesse.gc.ca</u> for French.

1.2.2 Bilingual monomial names or compound terms that accurately represent the website's primary purpose in both official languages. For example, www.justice.gc.ca, www.ec.gc.ca or www.infoexport.gc.ca.

1.3 Unilingual domain names resolve to the home page of the website in that language. For example, <u>www.youth.gc.ca</u> resolves to the English home page, and <u>www.jeunesse.gc.ca</u> resolves to the French home page.

1.4 Bilingual names resolve to the splash page of the website **except where the language preference is known**, where they instead resolve to the home page in the corresponding language. For example www.justice.gc.ca will resolve to a splash page unless the language preference is known.

1.5 Active domain names can resolve without the "www." prefix.

Appendix C: Global Notices

The following requirements ensure that departments provide notices on their websites and Web applications that inform users about their rights, responsibilities and legal obligations, as well as those of the department that is providing the website or Web application. The notices are available to users by selecting the "Terms and conditions" (*"Avis"*) link from any Web page.

Sample notices, referred in this appendix, are provided on the Web Standards section of the TBS website.

1. Government of Canada Privacy Notice

The Privacy Notice assures users that information automatically acquired through a visit to any Government of Canada website or Web application will not be used other than for the express purposes of Web maintenance, analytics and security.

One of the differences between electronic communications and paper-based communications is that it may not be obvious to the individuals involved whether or not personal information is being collected. The Privacy Notice must provide enough detail to allow users to understand

what and how information is collected, as well as when and how it will be protected, so that they can make an informed decision about whether to use the information or service.

Privacy notices must meet the requirements in the _Directive on Privacy Practices_ and the _Standard on Privacy and Web Analytics_.

Departments can use the sample Privacy Notice or modify it to meet their needs.

2. Third-party Server Notice

The Third-party Server Notice informs users that certain files (such as open source libraries, images and scripts) may be delivered automatically to their browser via a trusted third-party server or content delivery network in order to improve performance.

Departments can use the sample Third-party Server Notice or modify it to meet their needs.

3. Official Languages Notice

The Official Languages Notice informs users of their official languages rights when receiving services from or communicating with the Government of Canada.

The Official Languages Notice is provided for departments to use on their websites and Web applications.

4. Hyperlinking Notice

The Hyperlinking Notice informs users that links to websites and Web applications not under the control of Government of Canada, including social media platforms, are provided solely for convenience of users. The

Hyperlinking Notice must also inform users that the Government of Canada does not guarantee the accuracy, currency or reliability of content, and that the content is not subject to official languages, privacy and accessibility requirements of the Government of Canada.

Hyperlinks to websites and Web applications not under the control of the Government of Canada, including those that incorporate social media icons, do not express or imply endorsement of these products or services.

Departments can use the sample Hyperlinking Notice or modify it to meet their needs.

5. Copyright Notices

The Copyright Notice informs users of content ownership and the conditions associated with reproduction of materials posted on Government of Canada websites and Web applications.

The Copyright Notice – Website notices: Terms and conditions is provided for departments to use on their websites and Web applications.

6. Trademark Notice

The Trademark Notice – Website notices: Terms and conditions informs users that the official symbols of the Government of Canada, including the Canada Wordmark and corporate signatures incorporating the flag symbol or the Arms of Canada, cannot be reproduced for commercial or non-commercial purposes without prior written authorization.

The Trademark Notice is provided for departments to use on their websites and Web applications.

7. Accessibility Notice

The Accessibility Notice informs users that all efforts have been made to achieve a high level of accessibility. It also states that alternative formats can be obtained by contacting the department that provided the information or service.

The Accessibility Notice is provided for departments to use on their websites and Web applications.

8. Social Media Notice

This Social Media Notice informs users of their rights and obligations when interacting with the Government of Canada via social media, as well as what they should expect from Government of Canada social media accounts.

This Social Media Notice includes the following:

1. Content, communication frequency and response time expectations;
2. Explanation of links to other websites and Web applications and ads;
3. Explanation of followers, favourites and subscribers;
4. Comment guidance for:
   a. Topical posts or comments;
   b. Personal information and other protected or classified information;
   c. Advertising, solicitation or spam;
   d. Profanity;
   e. Attacks; and
   f. Discrimination on the basis of race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, or sexual orientation;
5. Consequences for violating the commenting guidance;

6. A statement explaining that sharing content does not imply endorsement; and

7. Accessibility, copyright, privacy and official languages notices that include links to the corresponding legislation or Treasury Board or departmental policies.

Departments can use the sample Social Media Notice or modify it to meet their needs.

Appendix D: Context-Sensitive Notices

The following requirements ensure that departments provide context-sensitive notices that inform users about their rights, responsibilities and legal obligations, as well as those of the department that is providing the information or service. The following notices are available to users within the context described below.

Sample notices, referred in this appendix, are provided on the Web Standards section of the TBS website.

1. Personal Information Collection Statement

A Personal Information Collection Statement informs users that personally identifiable information will be collected. This notice, or a link to this notice, must be prominently provided where users are requested to enter personal information. Where technology permits, users are provided with the information on how to opt out of using functionality in which additional personal information may be collected, for example, when accessing geo-location services.

The Personal Information Collection Statement must comply with sections 6.2.9 and 6.2.10 of the _Directive on Privacy Practices_ and sections 6.1.1 and 6.1.2 of the _Directive on Social Insurance Number_.

Departments can use the sample Personal Information Collection Statement or modify it to meet their needs.

2. Third-party information liability disclaimer

A third-party information liability disclaimer, or a link to the disclaimer, is placed on each Web page that includes third-party information and immediately before the third-party content that is hosted on the website or Web application. The disclaimer informs users that the information is not under the control of the Government of Canada and is provided solely for the convenience of users. The disclaimer must also inform users that the department does not guarantee the accuracy, currency or reliability of content, and that the content is not subject to official languages, privacy and accessibility requirements.

Departments can use the sample third-party information liability disclaimer or modify it to meet their needs.

3. Crown copyright symbol

In exceptional circumstances in which the department believes that application of the Crown copyright symbol is necessary to protect specific material on its website and Web application, one of the following formats is used:

- © Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, [year]
- © Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada, as represented by the Minister of [legal name of department], [year]
- © [legal title of department], [year]

4. Language Notice

Where a link is provided to a Web page that is not available in the language of the current Web page, a Language Notice informs users of the language of the Web page that is being linked.

For example:

- "(French only)" is added to the end of the link text for each link on an English Web page that that is available only in French.
- "(*anglais seulement*)" is added to the end of the link text for each link on a French Web page that is available only in English.

5. Third-party icons

Where third-party icons are displayed to facilitate the sharing of content via social media, a disclaimer is provided indicating that no endorsement is implied or expressed.

Appendix E: Mandatory Elements for Websites and Web Applications

The following elements are mandatory for each website and Web application:

1. Government of Canada signature and Canada Wordmark, with the following exceptions:

   a. Departments identified by the Arms of Canada use the Government of Canada signature or their approved Arms of Canada signature.

   b. Agents of Parliament are identified by their Arms of Canada signature and are not required to display the Canada Wordmark.

      c. Departments that have received Treasury Board approval to be identified by a symbol other than the flag symbol or the Arms of Canada use the Government of Canada signature or their approved symbol.

2. Mechanism for accessing the website or Web application in each language in which it is available.

3. Descriptive site title.

4. Descriptive page title on each content and server message page.

5. Mechanism for returning to the home page of the site or application.

6. Date of last modification or version identifier.

7. Contact information.

8. Mechanism for accessing the notices listed in Appendix C of the Standard on Web Usability, or links to those same notices.

9. Search mechanism.

The layout and design for Government of Canada websites and Web applications are described in the *Technical Specifications for the Web and Mobile Presence*.

Appendix F: User-Centred Design

The following requirements ensure that users can effectively and efficiently find, understand and use the information and services provided through websites and Web applications.

Web managers, functional specialists, Web content owners and equivalents are responsible for ensuring that, for each website or Web application:

1. User research methods are used to define:

      a. The users of the website or Web application;

      b. The tasks the users will accomplish using the website or Web application; and

      c. The contexts in which the users will use the website or Web application to accomplish their tasks.

2. The users, their tasks and the contexts in which the users accomplish their tasks form the basis for the design of the website or Web application.

3. The website or Web application is designed iteratively; the design process starts with low-fidelity methods, such as mock-ups, and progressively moves to higher-fidelity methods, such as prototypes.

4. The design of the website or Web application is regularly evaluated and improved through usability testing, such as observing users completing tasks, throughout its life cycle.

5. The design of the website or Web application takes into consideration the other service channels, such as telephone and in-person, used to obtain information and services from the Government of Canada.

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