

Sustainability – Summary – 2017-03-16

Sustainability and scalability are at the heart of every decision regarding the Operations Manual.

Development of the first chapter includes front-loaded work toward establishing and standardizing a) design; b) structure (including underlying file structure); c) language and content; and d) workflow.

Standardization of design and modularization are key to sustainability and scalability of this project. Fundamental to issues of updatability, consistency, and reliability of information are issues of single-sourcing and content reuse. Multiple appearances of the same content must be mirrors of a single source.

The Operations Manual itself will appear to be a single website, but each individual chapter (e.g., COLA, Intake, DMV) is actually a child site nested in a master. This modular approach allows for developing, adding or deleting, and updating of individual chapters while the Operations Manual site overall remains intact. Each chapter will have an individual publication/revision date.

Style sheets, master pages, and other templates and standards have been created for use across multiple individual projects (chapters). Efforts have been made toward standardizing design and navigational standards (which enhances predictability and usability) for the end-user, while standardizing design and content creation (and providing scalability) for the author.

Long-term sustainability of a digital project also pertains to housekeeping issues regarding file structures and file names. The underlying file structure needs to be conducive to single-sourcing, and comprehensible to future generations. Files need to be identifiable and findable. Best practices are followed in regard to file structure and naming conventions. Files have meaningful filenames. Files are in their proper locations/folders. Efforts are made toward meaningful names for graphics files, especially, rather than files named simply “img” or “untitled,” and auto-numbered.

Project Notes are kept regarding styles and formatting of images and various content types. (Example: Screenshots are captured at 300dpi resolution, with no border or drop shadow. They are redacted at 11% blur, saved in png format, and named with the screen name in question. They are kept in a shared location in the main root directory of the source files, so that the same screenshot can be used or referenced across all chapters...)

Master pages have been developed to streamline content creation and for stability and standardization. Efforts have been made toward code and styles that are clean and simple and also, efforts are made to limit the number of styles used. This is to simplify (and standardize) content creation in the future.

Single-sourcing of content serves at least two important goals: it allows for updating information in one place only -- which ultimately saves time -- and, more importantly, it preserves the consistency and integrity of the information, since edits made in any appearance of that information are reflected throughout all other appearances. Using these tools requiring planning.

Some of the ways content is single-sourced in this manual, which contribute toward updatability, consistency, and integrity of information, include the following:

1. (Modular) content that is common across and/or within chapters is kept in a shared location. Multiple appearances of a single article of content are actually mirrors of a shared file. Updates to a shared file can be synced across chapters.
2. Names of people, organizational structures, and other entities that could change in the future are embedded as <user-defined-variable> fields. When a name or other value changes in the future, the value of the field can be edited, then synced throughout the manual. (Example: Change “Division of Child Support Enforcement” to “Child Support Services” throughout the manual.)
3. Where steps within parallel processes are identical, the various entries in the table of contents point to a single file. (Example: Some steps in the TA and Non-TA

COLA processes are and should be identical. Therefore, they are mirrors of one another so that if the content is edited in one place, it changes in both places.)

4. Efforts are being made to keep the code clean. Cleanness of the code contributes toward sustainability of the project because code in templates is copied so many times over, but also because the product will be output to PDF and paper. The project is being written in HTML. In the translation from html to pdf or print, extraneous or bad code disrupts the formatting of the output. Care is being taken to keep code clean and simple, and to keep issues regarding output to paper always present in the design.

5. Efforts are made for files to have meaningful file names, for graphics files to be named (rather than “img” or “untitled”), and for files to be in their proper folders. (There is a large number of files.)

6. Regular backups are made of the source code.

A number of other tools specific to the RoboHelp software program are used to manage various types of recurring content or elements.

A “Troubleshooting” section in each chapter allows for easy expansion of troubleshooting information as it arises (via BPO shared mailbox, for example). The fact that the full text search feature works so well means that content concerning specific troubleshooting issues is easy to find. Troubleshooting content is also findable through the Index, which itself is searchable and has live links to topics where index words appear.

The manual will be published directly from the authoring program. This will allow for publishing updates only to selected pages, rather than republishing the entire web site each time that a single page needs to be updated.

This is a summary of some of the issues relating to sustainability, and some of the mechanisms and solutions employed to confront those issues.