Welcome Guide for New VHA Webmasters

Congratulations and welcome to the team! As a Webmaster, you play an important role in advancing the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) five critical priorities, including helping to restore pride, public trust, and confidence in VA. It's a big job, but one that can be made easier by using the many tools and resources available from Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Digital Media Office, like this quick reference guide.

Organized in three primary sections—Getting Started, Maintaining Momentum, and Overcoming Obstacles—this guide provides a brief overview of your role and responsibilities, helpful tips and tricks, and resources for finding more information. Good luck in your new position, and don't hesitate to email VHA Digital Media (VHADigitalMedia@va.gov) with any questions or feedback about this guide.

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Getting Started

[VA Directive 6102](#) and [VA Handbook 6102,](#) *Internet/Intranet Services,* are the authoritative guidelines for the establishment and administration of VA Internet and intranet websites. These guidelines were published in 2008, and are undergoing revision. Until the revised guidelines are published, become very familiar with these documents, as they define the organizational responsibilities for all web activities, outline prohibited practices, and discuss privacy-related issues, security requirements, and accessibility requirements to be aware of.

Requesting Access and Logging in

VHA's Office of Information and Technology (OIT) manages access to VHA's more than 250 websites. TeamSite is VA's primary content management system (CMS) used to update existing Web pages and to create new ones. It is a form-based, commercial, off-the-shelf CMS that is installed on an internal server managed by VA Web Operations.

To gain access to TeamSite, your site's point of contact (POC) must give you permissions within the TeamSite Administrative Tool (TAT). TAT is located at [http://vaww.va.gov/cms/apps/tat,](http://vaww.va.gov/cms/apps/tat) and allows the POC to assign permissions based on your role in the maintenance of websites. The available roles include editor, editor-reviewer, and reviewer.

An editor has access to all of the site's content and all of the system's functions. Before promoting content changes, an editor must have approval from an editor-reviewer or reviewer before content updates are published to the production server. An editor can initiate the approval process with the *Content and Operations Review Workflow* function.

The editor-reviewer has the same site and system access as an editor, but with the additional responsibility of a reviewer. An editor-reviewer can be selected to approve the work of others and approve his/her own work for publication to the production server.

The primary role of a reviewer is to preview and approve content before it is published to the production server.

After receiving a request for user access from your Site POC, OIT will email you a questionnaire. Shortly after completing and submitting the questionnaire, your access will be granted. When the request has been completed, login to TeamSite at https://vaww.cms.webdev.va.gov.

Resources:

- VHA TeamSite Basics Introductory Slide Deck

  https://www.vapulse.net/servlet/JiveServlet/previewBody/40593-102-1-49660/TeamSite%20Training%20Basics%20-%20Draft%20-%20BMS(4).pptx

- TeamSite Administration Tool User's Guide

  http://vaww.va.gov/CMS/docs/va-custom/TAT_1_0_POC_User_Manual.pdf

- TeamSite tutorials

  http://vaww.va.gov/CMS/tutorial/

- Webmaster Conference Call

  Held the last (not fourth) Wednesday of each month at noon Eastern time at 800-767-1750, code 20455. Contact Diane Huber (Diane.Huber@va.gov) to join the VHA Webmaster email distribution group. Minutes can be found at http://vaww.teamshare.va.gov/webmaster.

Website Templates

VA medical centers represent more than 50 percent of the VHA website traffic. In 2013, all medical center websites were redesigned to reflect a core set of 39 required pages and were refreshed with a new look and feel to enhance the VA-wide branding effort. Specific templates for each type of site have been adopted to reinforce familiarity and consistency. In 2015, the pages were updated using responsive design to improve the display of pages on smartphones, tablets, and desktop computers.

Program Office and VA research-related websites were similarly redesigned. VA medical centers and VISNs use the same design templates, while program offices and research-related websites use a different set of templates. When contacting Digital Media with questions about your website or the design templates, please specify the name of the site you are writing about.

Despite the different design templates, there are many common features among the sites, including:

Web Banners

Rotating banners are part of the Internet home page templates used by all VHA Internet sites. Medical center Web pages have four banners, three of which are under your control. The fourth banner is controlled by VHA Digital Media and used for the weekly *Inside Veterans Health* feature story. Program office sites have three banners, all of which are controlled by the Webmaster.

- Image: Use a photo without text overlay.

- Image size:
    - Program offices and research sites: 500 x 275 pixels
    - VA medical centers: 340 x 210 pixels

- Button Label: 25 characters max

- Story Title: 30 characters max, two lines, spacing cannot be controlled

- Story Link: Link for "Learn more" ("Learn more" is standard link text and is not editable)

- Story Content: Approximately 100 characters

Web Badges and Callouts

Web badges link to another Web page and are used in the right column of the VHA Internet templates.

- Use in rows of four on pages without a right column and rows of three on pages with a right column.

- Badges are 180 x 60 pixels.

- Must be created using the VHA Badge Photoshop Template http://vaww.va.gov/WEBCOM/docs/VAMC_badge_template_NEW.psd.

- All badges should maintain the same background, border, type styles, and colors.

  - Using different colors in the icon is permissible if changing the color would change its meaning (i.e., changing a yellow ribbon to blue removes its symbolic meaning of support for Servicemembers, so it must remain yellow).

- Visit the VHA Badge Library for available badges: http://vaww.va.gov/WEBCOM/badges.asp.

Web callouts are used in the left and right columns of the VHA Internet templates, where customizable.

- Callouts are 184 x 90 pixels.

- Must be created using the VHA Callout Photoshop Template http://vaww.va.gov/WEBCOM/docs/Callout_Template.psd.

- Visit the VHA Callout Library for available callouts: http://vaww.va.gov/WEBCOM/callouts.asp.

Creating New Websites

All VHA Websites are owned by the VISN Director or the Chief Officer for the sponsoring program office. You will need to obtain approval from the Director or Chief Officer before creating a new website. After obtaining the appropriate approval, submit a request for secondary permission to VHA Digital Media by completing a VA Web Request form. In your request, be sure to include specifics of any web applications, database needs, and the overall purpose of the site.

VHA Digital Media will verify that appropriate approvals have been received and coordinate development space with Enterprise Web Infrastructure Support. The office will also review new websites for compliance with federal, VA, and VHA regulations and mandates. Websites that do not meet standards may be denied posting to the production server until deficiencies have been corrected. VHA Digital Media will notify the Site POC of website approval or disapproval with required changes. Please allow additional time if further reviews are required.

When all approvals are secured, VHA Media Management will forward approved request to Enterprise Web Infrastructure Support for first-time promotion. Web applications with advanced functionality will require additional administrative steps to ensure they meet all VA and Federal security and privacy requirements. Once an approved website is moved into production, it must be registered with VA Web Registry. Registration is automatic for sites hosted by VA Web Operations. Sites hosted elsewhere are required to be registered by facility or program staff. Note: Web applications may require further technical reviews, including security scanning.

Plain Language

The Plain Writing Act of 2010 requires federal agencies to write "clear Government communication that the public can understand and use." VA fully supports this act, and we need your help to comply.

You should use plain language in any new publication, form, or publicly distributed document, including any website, that:

- is necessary for obtaining any federal government benefit or service or filing taxes;

- provides information about any federal government benefit or service; or

- explains to the public how to comply with a requirement that the federal government administers or enforces.

As a Webmaster, you must ensure that all home pages, all major entry points, and all navigational elements of your websites are written in plain language, spelled-checked, and grammatically correct before posting. When writing web content using the principles of plain language:

USE:

- Active Voice—The active voice avoids confusion by clarifying the doer of an action or the action you want your reader to take.

  EXAMPLE:

  Passive: It was determined by the researchers that the report was inconclusive.

  Active: The researchers determined the report was inconclusive.

- Informative Headings, lists, and tables—Critical research shows reading from a computer screen is slower than reading on paper and that most users scan web content rather than reading word-by-word. As a web writer, you can improve scanning by providing clear links, headings, short phrases and sentences, and short paragraphs.

- Logical Organization—Remember your audience and write for everyone who will read

your material. Write what readers need and want to know; organize content to answer their questions.

- Reading Level—Seventh grade reading level whenever possible

AVOID:

- Information the user doesn't want

- Jargon, abbreviations, and legalese

- Long sentences or paragraphs

- Passive Voice

Resources:

- VA Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs
  http://www.va.gov/opa/Plain_Language.asp
- Federal Plain Language Guidelines
  http://www.plainlanguage.gov/howto/guidelines/FederalPLGuidelines/index.cfm

508 Compliance

Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires that all website content be accessible to people with disabilities. This applies to Web applications, Web pages and all attached files on the intranet and Internet. Each month, OIT runs a 508 compliance report on websites in the VA portfolio, using a tool called WorldSpace. The resulting report is made available to Webmasters to monitor and improve their sites compliance.

To gain access to these reports, send a request to the VHA Section 508 team (Section 508@va.gov). Please be sure to include the top level URL (e.g. http://www.tampa.va.gov) of the VAMC and/or VISN website(s) you manage. It may take up to two business days for your request to be processed. You will not need to request logon credentials to access the WorldSpace scan reports for the site(s) you manage. All of the information needed to view and remediate non-conformant webpages or documents is accessible via a dashboard that anyone can view when logged in to the VA network.

Resources:

- VHA Section 508 Intranet

  http://vaww.va.gov/webcom/508.asp
- VHA WorldSpace Scans

  http://vaww.va.gov/WEBCOM/WorldSpace.asp
- VA Section 508 Intranet

http://vaww.section508.va.gov

- Best Practices

  http://vaww.section508.va.gov/Best_Practices.asp

- Training Options

  http://vaww.section508.va.gov/Training.asp

Maintaining Momentum

Managing Web Changes

Helpful Hints for Working in TeamSite

- Do not copy and paste from a word processing program (e.g. MS Word) directly into the content section for a given Web page

- Use the following HTML code for special characters (&,",')

  - ‘ single quote left: '

  - ’ single quote right (apostrophe): '

  - “ quote left: "

  - ” quote right: "

  - & ampersand: &

- When creating new pages or uploading files, do not use spaces in the file name.

  - Photo_of_VAMC (OK)

  - Photo of VAMC (Not OK)

  - Photo-of-VAMC (OK)

- Do not use quote marks in the metadata description field

Managing the Facilities Locator and Leadership (F&L) Directory

The F&L Directory is used to manage certain contact information on the VA medical center pages—Leadership, CBOC, and Patient Advocate. Data in these content areas is automatically pulled from the F&L Directory. If there are errors in any of these areas, please make the required changes in the F&L admin application. Changes to the directory are published nightly, so changes made today will not appear on your website until tomorrow.

Leadership positions contained in the F&L Directory include Director, Associate/Assistant Director, Chief of Staff, and AD/PCS or Nurse Executive. Phone numbers are required for executive management in the directory. If a phone number is not provided, the individual will not appear on the website.

Individuals listed as *Patient Advocate* will appear in the top box on the Customer Service page. People marked *Customer Service* will appear in the second box on the Customer Service page.

Requesting Changes to Left Navigation

The left navigation bar is generally standard across all pages in your website. Portions of the bar are also standard across all medical center sites. If you want to make a change to the left navigation bar, email a request to VHA Digital Media (VHADigitalMedia@va.gov).

Reverting to Previously Published Web pages

Did you make a mistake and need to revert back to a previously published version of the file you're working with? If so, don't fear. You can use the CMS function called *Get from Production,* to replace a file on the TeamSite server with the version of the file currently in production. This function can be useful when you wish to undo changes made to a file since it was last submitted or to restore a file that has been deleted in error. The CMS tracks up to 20 versions of each page you have modified in TeamSite. For specific instructions on how to use the *Get from Production* feature, view the associated tutorial at http://vaww.va.gov/CMS/tutorial/Reverting.asp.

Completing Periodic Reviews

To keep your websites current, accurate, accessible, and compliant, the VA Handbook requires that a date stamp appear on all VA home pages, all major entry point pages and all individual documents posted to the Web site to show visitors that the content is current and has been reviewed within the past 12 months at a minimum (see Best Practices Guide at http://vaww.va.gov/6102), or that the material viewed is an historical or archival document.

You should update or remove outdated or obsolete content as soon as possible unless it is mandated to be on the website.

In your reviews be sure to:

- Ensure any updated or new content is task-focused and appropriate for the web;
- Fix any HTML, CSS, Javascript, and Section 508 issues on the Web pages;
- Check the metadata and make any necessary corrections
- Update the "Date reviewed" metatag;
- Check for and update any broken links; and
- Clean up the directory, archiving or removing outdated content.

Archiving and Removing Content

Once you've determined that content should be archived or deleted, you must decide whether to archive the content on the shared drive or on the website.

Archiving to the shared drive:

Completely remove all outdated files and materials from the website and store the files in a central archive folder on a designated shared drive. The archive folder and subfolders should be organized along the web server folder structure to retain the original context.

Save a copy locally by going to File > Save As. Choose Web Archive, single file (*.mht) for "Save as type."

- Make sure all links to the deleted file are removed from files that are remaining on production servers.

- Submit the deleted file and updated pages at the same time.

- Move archived material to CDs when the shared drive is full.

Archiving on the website:

Only outdated content that is **legally required** to be on a website can be archived on the website. Such content must be clearly identified as archive material that has been retained for reference purposes. Move the archive material from the existing location on the live site into a subfolder named "archive" and include:

- Prominent notification at both the top and bottom of each page, as shown in the samples below. (For PDFs, be sure to add this information to the source file for consistency where possible.)
  Sample header:

    This file is provided for reference purposes only. It was current when produced, but no longer is maintained and may now be outdated. Persons with disabilities having difficulty accessing information on this page may e-mail XXXX for assistance. Please see http://www.publichealth.va.gov to access current information.

  Sample footer:

    This information on this page is archived and provided for reference purposes only.

- Use clear links to the live site in the archival notification (e.g., www.publichealth.va.gov-live website home)

Checking for Broken Links

It's a good practice to check for broken links regularly. We suggest you do this once a month for all the sites that you manage. While many of the sites won't show broken links month to month, it won't be uncommon to uncover new broken links with each monthly check. Free tools such as W3C's validator http://validator.w3.org/checklink can make checking for broken links relatively easy.

Evaluating Site Effectiveness

Monitor your site's traffic regularly to see what user's like and don't like about your Web pages. By knowing your site's most requested pages and its most common entry pages and exit pages, you can find good indicators of questions that Veterans may have. If you know what is working well, you can optimize your site to provide more of it or better access to content that is in high demand.

- Google Analytics—Access real-time and historical data since April 2013 for sites within the www.va.gov profile https://vaww.ewis.eo.va.gov/rc/?get=Analytics

    o View our VHA Introduction to Google Analytics Slide Deck: https://www.vapulse.net/servlet/JiveServlet/previewBody/50851-102-1-62080/Intro_to_Google_Analytics_August2016_v2.pptx

- ACSI—Get monthly customer satisfaction summary data for www.va.gov: http://vaww.va.gov/6102/American_Customer_Satisfaction_Index_Survey_Reports.asp

- WebMetrics—View real-time and historical data for intranet sites with profiles at https://vaww.ewis.eo.va.gov/rc/?get=Analytics

Overcoming Obstacles

508 Compliance: Making Files Accessible

Making content accessible to people with disabilities online begins with making files compliant from the start—during the design phase. By considering accessibility issues during design, you can identify potential issues early and get help, saving time and money later on.

When preparing web content, use the Standards Checklist to help you ensure compliance with the Section 508 guidelines. You can review the checklist before you create your file, and also print it out and check off each item after you have created the file, or when you receive the file. For questions or assistance completing the checklist, email Section508@va.gov.

VA Section 508 offers various types of training to help you better understand how to design accessible content. The office recognizes that people learn in different ways and presents training in a variety of formats, including intranet- and Internet-based webinars, self-paced courses through the VA Talent Management System, web tutorials, and on-demand.

508 Compliance: Checking Accessibility and Fixing Issues

Adobe Acrobat XI Pro is an industry-standard software application used to create and edit PDF documents. It also contains a robust "Accessibility Full Check" that will scan PDF documents for 508 conformance and allow you to edit existing documents to make them 508 conformant. Adobe Acrobat XI Pro is the gold standard in VHA. If a document passes the "Accessibility Full Check," then it is considered Section 508 compliant.

To request a copy of Adobe Acrobat XI Pro, follow these steps:

1. Obtain your supervisor's approval and business justification for the software

2. Once approved, users may contact their local Tier 1 Support Server Desk to request a ticket for Acrobat XI Professional software

3. Provide the following information:

   o Your Name

   o Network User ID

   o Computer Name

   o Supervisor's Approval

   o Business Justification

4. The Service Support Request will be assigned to the local IT Support staff/group and the software will be pushed to the user's machine. For remote employees, if the software cannot be pushed, local IT Support staff will provide further instructions to obtain the software.

Resources:

- Section 508 Audit Tools/Resources
  http://vaww.section508.va.gov/SECTION508/Audit_Tools_Resources.asp

Monthly Digital Media Training

Held third Wednesday of the month at 2 p.m. Eastern Time on 1-800-767-1750, code 43210, and online with screen sharing so you can follow along with the instructor. Past class materials along with further discussion is available on VA Pulse at https://www.vapulse.net/groups/vha-digital-media-training.

Maintaining Open Dialogue

VHA employees have a wealth of knowledge that they are willing to share. When you have questions or aren't quite sure what to do next, don't hesitate to reach out to the vast network of employees willing to assist you. In closing, we wish you the very best in your new position, and look forward to a long and productive partnership.

This guide is new as of August 2016. Again, if you have any suggestions for new content areas or other ideas on how to make it better, send your ideas to VHA Digital Media (VHADigitalMedia@va.gov).