

# **SDCN Website Review Guide**

The Web Site Review Template is only a guide for writing a report. It does not have to be strictly followed.

The template is broken into five main categories.

## **Mission and Objectives:**

This section is to determine what is the purpose of the web site and if has made any impact as of yet.

## **Information Architecture (IA) Assessment:**

This section is to help break down the structure of the existing site's underlying purpose and construction. Of course this information is hard to get at in a two-day assessment.

The bulk of this information will come from email correspondence and/or a phone interview with the site's producers and from analyzing the existing site layout and online content. The correspondence should cover such aspects as the organization's goals, intended target audience, the actual target audience (based on feedback) if known, number of staff, number of staff involved with web communications, expertise of the staff, resources available, commitment to web communications, how the site structure was chosen and any concerns they have regarding the web site.

These aspects are all important when analyzing and suggesting improvements to the site. The "Proposed Site Architecture" can also be viewed as "Any Site Changes." These are all suggestions based on what the site is currently and how the producers see the site evolving.

The content inventory should include a list of the top sections of the site and all modules underneath them, if indeed there is more than one module on the site. Modules are action-focused areas of web sites with a common theme. Modules usually lie in sections the web site is broken into. For example, the SD Webworks is a module on the SD Gateway site.

If there are several modules, reviews of "Content Analysis" should be done repeatedly for a selection of modules (no more than three).

The general observations are things about the site that should exist. In general if an article has over five pages it should be placed on the web as a downloadable PDF, MS Word file, etc. Another standard is that a user should be able to get to any information within three clicks of the main page. In order to test this look up various subjects and see how quickly the browser takes you there. This reflects the navigation and site structure. Of course a site should also work in all major browsers or it will alienate a large portion of intended audience.

The homepage analysis will explain what the page says to an outside viewer – is the information clear and inviting.

**Technical and Visual Assessment:**

This will be made by doing a thorough investigation of the existing web site.

Load times reflect the size of the actual pages and how long it will take the typical viewer's browser to download the page. There are programs online that do this assessment. The one used here at IISD has been "Bobby" (<http://www.cast.org/bobby>). It shows the size of all the elements on the web page, in particular graphics, and the estimated download time from a 28.8 modem. I think it is appropriate to do more than test the main page in order to get an overall site assessment. The standard time a user will wait for a page to download is 10 seconds. It takes roughly 1 second for every 3 KB -6 Kb so the size of a page should generally be 30 - 60 KB or less. Some pages will need graphics, and as long as the user is notified that it will take longer in order for the images to download, they will get frustrated. If the main goal of the site is to disseminate information then heavy graphical pages are not needed.

User annoyances are commonly used features that bother most users. These are things that should be absent in a professional site. The breaking back button is when the code resets the browser's back button so when hit it will remain at that site. Internet users do not like having their navigation control taken away from them and will resent it. Having a new window open can cause many problems. Among them is navigation control lost and more importantly if the user is on an older computer it can lock up the processor and shut down then computer. A site should never require a user to download any plug-ins. The site should be ready to view. Internet surfers have also been trained to ignore any banner size graphics (468x60 pixels). When they see images this size, especially at the top of the page, they assume it is an advertisement and avoid reading it in full. They no longer want to "Punch the Monkey." Of course a web should be kept up to date and avoid link rot. All broken links should be reported with their proper URL.

Site consistency is rated on a scale in order for better feedback. Much of this is judgment of the reviewer, but the reviewer also has the chance to fully explain their position. It is very important for a site to be consistent from the positioning of navigation tools to the actual language that is used. A user needs to feel that everything is part of a whole in order to trust the content of a site.

**Site Promotion:**

Meta tags are very important for search engines to direct traffic to a particular site. In many cases site owners are not the ones who have actually done the HTML mark-up and they may not even know what the Meta tags are. It is a good idea to bring it to the forefront because they reflect the purpose and themes of the site.

Search engine results also reflect how the most popular search engines are reading the site. The choice of which search engines to use is up to the reviewer – just make sure they are well known. If the site constantly has a bad showing the site may need to be registered or the Meta tags may need to be changed.

Search engine inclusions are those search engines in which the site has been registered. This information will come from the correspondence with the site's producers.

The linkages section is a review of who and how many visitors and other web sites connect to the reviewed site. To find out how many other sites are linked to a particular site use something like AltaVista's link search option. All you have to do is type, "link:http://whatevertheURLis" and it will respond with the total number of sites linked to it and the links to those sites. Also of note is asking if the organization uses anything to track the number of people visiting the site, where they are linking from and what search criteria brought them there. To what detail does the tracking device go into.

### **Administration and Maintenance:**

This is to determine the future strength of the site's existence. It will help determine the seriousness of the organization's commitment and ability to expend resources to web development. It will also help determine how efficient the management side of running the site is.

All the sections have a "comments" section to further elaborate any of the findings. The conclusion is to state the over all assessment of the web site. The last section is for concrete suggestions that the organization should be able to follow given their resources and management structure.

# SDCN Website Review

Reviewer Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Reviewer Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Background Information:**

Name of Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

URL (Opening Page): \_\_\_\_\_

Webmaster Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Staff: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Staff Involved with Web Communications: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Mission and Objectives**

Goals: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Audience:

Intended: \_\_\_\_\_

Actual: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Are all the organizations programs represented? \_\_\_\_\_

Does the site extend the development of programs? \_\_\_\_\_

Has the Internet provided new opportunities? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **Information Architecture Assessment**

**Structure:**

Content Inventory: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Content Analysis: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Site Structure: \_\_\_\_\_

**General Questions:**

- Is There a Site Map Available? \_\_\_\_\_
- Is the Sitemap Available from All Pages? \_\_\_\_\_
- Is There A Search Feature? \_\_\_\_\_
- Is the Search Feature Available from All Pages? \_\_\_\_\_
- Is most information within the 3 Click standard? \_\_\_\_\_
- Does the site work across browser platforms (and older versions)? \_\_\_\_\_
- Are Large Files Downloadable and in what format? \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

Homepage analysis: \_\_\_\_\_

Proposed Site Architecture: \_\_\_\_\_

**Technical/Visual Assessment**

**Load Times:**

Main Page (URL) \_\_\_\_\_ Time (seconds) \_\_\_\_\_

Top Layer (URL)

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_



## Site Promotion

### Meta Tag Information:

Description: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Keywords: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Search Engine Results:

	Top Ten	Top 20	Top 50	Not Found
1. _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. _____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. _____	_____	_____	_____	_____

### Search Engine Inclusions:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

### Linkages:

How many sites are linked to the site? \_\_\_\_\_  
How are people finding the site? \_\_\_\_\_  
Tracking devices \_\_\_\_\_  
Comments: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Administration and Maintenance

Is there a Webmaster? \_\_\_\_\_  
If no, who runs the site, and in what capacity? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

How are policies and procedures defined? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Is there a place in the budget for site creation/updating? \_\_\_\_  
How often is the site reviewed and updated? \_\_\_\_\_

Who is the user contact, and what is the average response time? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Overall Conclusion:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Suggestions for Improvements:**

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