



## APPLICATION FORM

All applications must include the following information. Separate applications must be submitted for each eligible program. **Deadline: June 3, 2019.** Please include this application form with electronic entry. If you do not receive an email confirming receipt of your entry within 3 days of submission, please contact [Gage Harter](#).

### PROGRAM INFORMATION

County: Loudoun County

Program Title: Putting the user experience first: Improving digital government services through design and governance

Program Category: Communications

### CONTACT INFORMATION

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### SIGNATURE OF COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR OR DEPUTY/ASSISTANT COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR

Name: Tim Hunsbret

Title: County Administrator

Signature: [Handwritten Signature]

## **Putting the user experience first: Improving digital government services through design and governance**

### **ABSTRACT**

The need to provide modern digital services to a relatively young, tech-oriented community compelled Loudoun County to redesign and reimagine the County's website, loudoun.gov. One major innovation was the development and implementation of a new web governance structure and policy designed to ensure the continued effectiveness of the site beyond its initial launch period. The program focuses on putting the user experience first: giving our customers what they want and need from their digital government services. The program also presented an opportunity to thoughtfully define and implement the County's brand and graphic identity standards program.

### **CHALLENGE/OPPORTUNITY**

Loudoun County, Virginia, is a rapidly growing county in the National Capital Region, encompassing approximately 400,000 residents. More than 70 percent of the world's internet traffic passes through Loudoun County on a daily basis: data centers occupy nearly 10 million square feet currently in operation. Loudoun ranked #1 nationally in 2016 in household income for the 2012-2016 period out of all jurisdictions in the nation. With a vibrant economy and an active tech sector, the County's median age is 36.1.

The need to provide modern digital services to a relatively young, tech-oriented community compelled us to redesign and reimagine the County's website, loudoun.gov.

As the platform for our 2012 website site was phased out, we had an opportunity to truly reimagine the County's website, ensuring that our customers' needs would inform the navigation and architecture of the site. As the 2012 site was not mobile-friendly, the Public Affairs and Communications Team focused on improving the experience for mobile users while developing navigation that made our residents' top tasks easier to access. One major innovation was the development and implementation of a new web governance structure and policy designed to ensure the continued effectiveness of the site beyond its initial launch period.

The website project also presented an opportunity to thoughtfully begin to define and implement the County's brand and graphic identity standards. We found that the 2012 website banner had become the County's de facto "logo" without a deliberate graphic standards/identity program, so we undertook the design of a new wordmark and brand/graphic standards program simultaneously.

### **THE PROGRAM**

Our goals for this website redesign and governance program included:

- Enhanced user experience for the public
- Use data analytics to inform information architecture and design
- Purge outdated/unnecessary content
- Improve document management
- Implement an improved process to maintain the new website
- Higher standards/greater professionalism to better serve the public
- Adherence to the county's brand standards with a more modern look and feel
- Training and skill development for departmental web managers and contributors

Our 2014 site:



### Research phase began in September 2017

To focus on the customer's needs, we dug deeply into our website analytics. We identified the top 20 pages visited, as well as the top 20 search terms, to discover what the public was seeking to do or find on our site.

Public Affairs and Communications staff members worked closely with each of the County's 32 departments to collect call logs, perform content reviews, map business processes, and survey citizens, all with the goal of eliminating unnecessary web content, improving the accessibility and effectiveness of key web content, and maintaining a focus on the website as a customer service function.

### Redesigned site launched in November 2018

We purged approximately 20 percent of our existing content and reformatted our pages to include buttons and graphic links to the top tasks (as identified through our analysis of our top searches and most visited pages). Our website vendor, CivicPlus, provided design and technical assistance and migrated the existing web content to the new site.

In addition, we developed seven microsites for frequently accessed departments, including Animal Services; Elections; Fire & Rescue; Health and Human Services; Parks, Recreation and Community Services; Sheriff; and Transit.

We added an "Open Government" page to make County data, including interactive maps, easier to find on the site.

We focused on mobile-friendly design and content, reducing the number of words and editing the content to be more accessible on smartphones.

### Website governance program

To maintain the integrity and effectiveness of the site, it was imperative to develop policies and procedures that would enable us to not only set website standards, but enforce and preserve them.

Often, web teams spend many months redesigning their website, but don't have a post-launch strategy in place to maintain it or protect all of their hard work.

We developed and implemented a new website governance policy, replacing outdated policies that no longer fit the current landscape of digital government. It reflects a partnership between the Public Affairs and Communications division and the Department of Information Technology.

Highlights of that governance policy include:

- Content should be created with the end-user (our customers, members of the public) in mind rather than based on the County's organizational chart, internal processes or staff preferences.
- The County's target audiences for the public website typically include various segments of the public, not staff. Therefore, navigation and information architecture for the public website will be based on primary audiences' needs, best practices in website design, and the website conventions that the County adopted at the time the site was created.
- The County's website should enable visitors to find desired information and complete intended transactions quickly.
- To promote an effective website, the County should promote and maintain a consistent user experience across webpages and digital properties.
- Loudoun County aims to assure access to its digital content; therefore, content should be accessible to all site visitors, including to people with disabilities. [The] website should follow current state and federal legal guidelines for website accessibility and the guidelines of the Plain Writing Act of 2010.
- Presentation of digital content should be optimized for known commonly-used devices and technologies including mobile devices and various browser connectivity speeds.
- The County website must meet or exceed standards and best practices for system security, secure transactions, and protection of personal data and identity, and any other measure required by the Department of Information Technology.

The new governance policy and procedures provide access to only those staff members in departments who have been trained in the presentation and development of digital content. They undergo regular, consistent training provided by the Public Affairs and Communications division, and serve as the direction of their department directors, who share responsibility for ensuring that standards are met.

## **COSTS**

- The County avoided significant costs associated with procuring a new website by continuing its contract with the current website vendor, who specializes in website development for local governments across the country. The County's Department of Information Technology
- Total website vendor costs for standing up the new website, which included project management, network, developer, programming, graphic design, and consultant services, was \$55,470.
- For the 14-month duration of the redesign project, one FTE was designated full-time to the project; to train and oversee the governance and maintenance of web content, two staff members devote approximately 30 percent of their time on an ongoing basis.

## HOW IT FULFILLS THE VACo CRITERIA:

This program merits a Savvy award because it offers an innovative solution to delivery of digital services, and provides a model that other local governments may learn from or implement in their own localities.

It goes beyond just developing “an attractive website” to focus on putting the user experience first: giving our customers what they want and need from their digital government services.

It has had measurable results: increasing the number of individuals using our digital services, as well as increasing the number of individuals using our services on mobile phones. In addition, this project implements policies and procedures to ensure that our digital services continue to be provided in an effective and efficient manner by training and equipping County staff.

## RESULTS/SUCCESS

Recent analytics indicate that our goals are being met. A year-over-year comparison of the same five month period indicates that we have increased the number of website visits by 47 percent.

Most of that increase is in the form of mobile phone users: we added approximately 400,000 mobile visits, while maintaining nearly the same number of desktop visits.

### December 1, 2017-April 1, 2018 (old website):

Total Visits	899,613
Desktop	754,117 (83.8%)
Smartphone	78,330 (8.7%)
Tablet	61,500 (8%)
Other	5,666
Total Unique Pageviews	1,516,055

### December 1, 2018-April 1, 2019 (new website):

Total Visits	1,327,176
Desktop	750,953 (57%)
Smartphone	481,617 (36%)
Tablet	86,211 (6%)
Other	8,395
Total Unique Pageviews	2,325,334

We have trained staff in 30 County departments on best practices in web content creation, and have met with department content managers in a new users group, which will meet regularly to continually develop their skills. In addition, we are launching our new brand and graphic standards, including our new wordmark and colors, as seen on our new site ([loudoun.gov](http://loudoun.gov)):



PAY TAXES



REAL ESTATE  
ASSESSMENTS



JOB



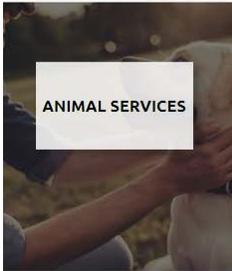
BOARD AGENDAS &  
DOCUMENTS



PERMITS & LICENSES



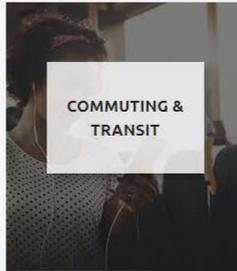
REPORT A CONCERN



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