WEBSITE

STYLE GUIDE & POLICY MANUAL

City of Carlsbad

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Introduction

The purpose of the City of Carlsbad's government website is to advance the public's health, safety and welfare by providing information about the services, operations and projects of the Carlsbad city government. It is a centralized place where the public can:

- Conduct business such as generating a service request or obtaining bid information
- Participate in city government by having easy access to information about city decision making and opportunities to provide input
- Find out about city news straight from the source
- Learn about city services, events and other activities
- Discover useful city information to improve the quality of their lives, such as information about parks, recreation, library resources, recycling, water conservation, beach safety and community crime prevention

To be an effective tool, the website must be managed so that information is:

- Up to date
- Easy to read
- Accurate
- Tailored to the intended audience
- Working properly (links, online applications, etc.)
- Accessible
- Legal
- Consistent in style across all sections and departments

These guidelines are intended to maintain the city's website to meet these goals.

The city's Website Style Guide & Policy Manual is updated from time to time. For the most up-to-date copy, please visit the communications page on the city's Intranet.

For information about writing style, please review the city's writing style guide.

Website roles

The city's website uses a content management system that allows city staff to maintain information on the website directly, without going through the city's IT Department or Communication & Engagement Department.

To ensure continuity and quality, staff in city departments will serve in one of the following roles.

Super user

Staff in Communications & Engagement and the city's IT Department are considered super users. This allows these staff to make changes to templates, assign roles and perform other administrative activities on the website.

Department liaison

One person in each department serves as an extension of and liaison to the IT and Communication & Engagement departments in the following ways:

- Request new templates for department use and new website features
- Act as a resource for department staff and ensure department staff follow the style guidelines and policies listed in this guide
- Train new users how to perform the functions required for their role (training videos are available)
- Assign individuals to the appropriate approvers or authors group within their respective content areas (IT does the actual set up)

Publisher

- Review, approve and publish content.

Editor

- Develop and update content for approval.

Writing for the web

Effective website content is short, to the point and easily scanned. Staff interested in training on how to write for the website should contact the Communication & Engagement Department.

- The tone for the city website should be friendly, welcoming and jargon free.
- The City of Carlsbad uses The Associated Press (or AP) style as the default writing style.
- The city has approved some deviations from AP style for clarity of city communication. These are included in the city's Writing Style Guide and are also available on the communications page of the Intranet.
- Content may be written in the first person ("we," "us," etc.) or third-person (City of Carlsbad, the city).

Put "actionable" content first

- Most people do not come to the city website to learn about what you do.
- Don't feature department mission statements, general descriptions of department functions or other background information prominently.
- Ask the person who monitors your department's general email or phone line what the most common requests are and put those proximately on your department website landing page.

Know the user

- Do not use jargon, including acronyms and abbreviations, if the intended audience would not easily understand those terms.

Web users scan

- People don't read word by word on the web.
- Break information into "chunks" that can be easily scanned.
- Use subheadings to break up long text into sections.
- Use bulleted lists whenever possible.

Use links

- Ensure text used for links make sense out of context. Avoid phrases like "Click here," "here," "more," etc. In the sentence, "Click here for company information," the phrase, "company information" should be the link and not "Click here."

Be clear, direct and immediately engaging

- Lead with the main point, then elaborate.
- Don't save the main point for the end of the paragraph.

Proofread

- Don't rely on computer spell-checkers.
- Ask a co-worker to proofread the copy before you post the content.

- Proofread again after the page is published. Things can look quite different online and errors can occasionally be introduced in the process.

Be consistent

- Follow the city style guide for numbers formatting, address formatting, capitalization, etc.
- Use Q&A not FAQ or other variations for lists of questions.
- Use “Contact Us” instead of “Contact Information” or other variations.

Accessibility and usability

The power of the web is in its universality.
Access by everyone regardless of disability is an essential aspect.

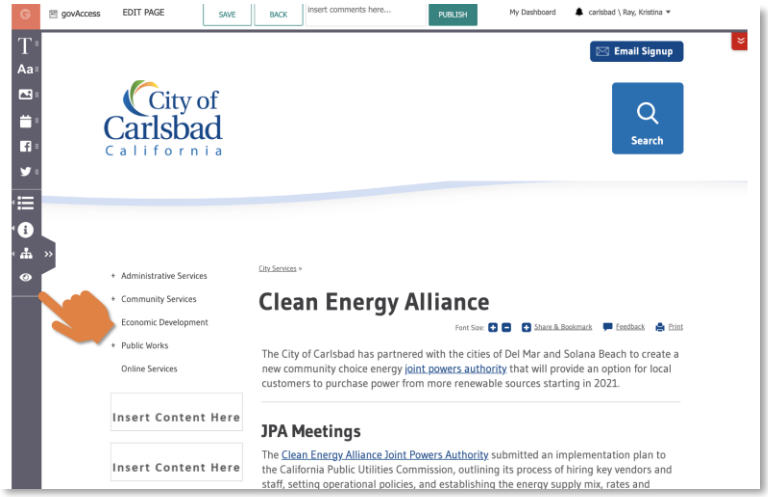
Tim Berners-Lee, W3C director and inventor of the World Wide Web

Website should be fundamentally designed to work for all people, whatever their hardware, software, internet speed, language, location or ability. When a website meets this goal, it is accessible to people with a diverse range of hearing, movement, sight and cognitive abilities.

The city's website, including the guidelines in this document, has been designed for accessibility.

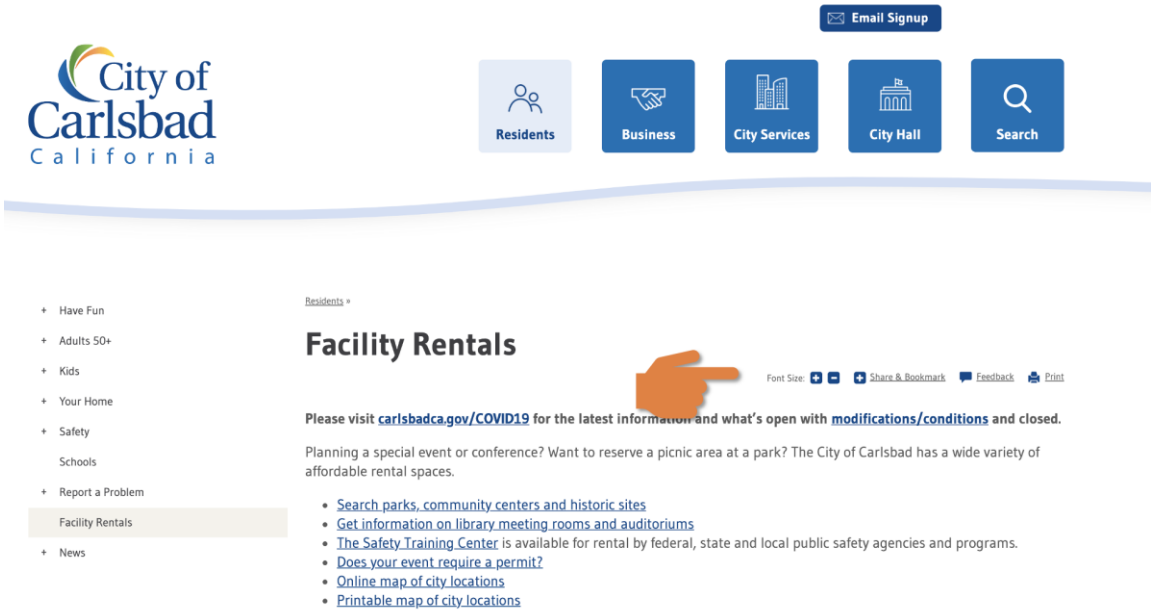
Devices
In 2021, about half of all visits to the city website are from a mobile device. The city website has a responsive design, meaning that it will rearrange and resize elements on a page for maximum useability.

Be sure to check your pages to make sure they are easy to ready in all formats.
Accessibility issues do not only refer to people with limitations but to people who use out of date browsers or small monitors, have a slow Internet connection, or access the web on a mobile device.



Font sizes

- Do not try to manually change the font size.
- Font sizes can be adjusted by the user by clicking on the font icon on every page.



Alt tags on images
When using images, include descriptive but concise and complete "alt" (alternative) tags for those who are blind, have limited vision or have images turned off in their browser settings. Use empty "alt" tags if the image has no relevant content or function. Alt tags for all images are required for a compliant website. Naming conventions for the alt tags should be used to ensure consistency throughout the site. If there is no alt tag in place, a screen reader will just read "image."

- A picture of a dog would be a "dog in the park"
- Flower fields might be, "Carlsbad flower fields"
- Avoid words like "picture of" or "image of"
- Keep alt tags to five to seven words or fewer when possible

Organization

- Is the layout of the website logical?
- Is it easy to find information?
- Is it written in an easy-to-understand manner?

Links

- Ensure text used for links make sense out of context. Avoid phrases like "Click here," "here," "more," etc. In the sentence, "Click here for company information," the phrase, "company information" should be the link and not "Click here."
- Users should be able to use the tab key to click through the links in a logical order if they cannot or do not use a mouse.

Advertising

The City of Carlsbad does not allow advertising on its website. Listing of city partners, such as Adopt a Trail sponsors, are allowed. Logos may not be larger than the city logo. The use of any logo other than the city logo must be approved in advance by the communication and engagement director.

Alternate domain names and sites

Alternate domain names/Short URLs

- The website content management system has the ability to create shortened URLs for use on informational materials.
- Short URLs should be one word, all lower case. If that's not possible, words can be abbreviated. The goal is that the intended audience understands what the URL is for.
- Examples:
    - www.carlsbadca.gov/police
    - www.carlsbadca.gov/input
    - www.carlsbadca.gov/wildwestfest

Official city website

- The city website, www.carlsbadca.gov, is the only official website for the City of Carlsbad.
- City staff may not establish or maintain standalone websites.

Calendar

The city calendar is managed by each department. The purpose of the calendar is to provide event and meeting information of interest to the community.

Staff may recommend events for inclusion on the city homepage. The Communication & Engagement Department is responsible for choosing which events appear on the homepage and when. The goal is to showcase a variety of events for different audiences.

Event Name (required field)

- Enter event name in title case.
- **CORRECT:** Police Department Volunteer Orientation
- **INCORRECT:** Police department volunteer orientation

Simplify event names by keeping event names under five words or fewer or on two lines.

Description (required field)

- Describe the event in no more than three brief sentences.
- Use default text format only.
- Do not use bullets or numbers.

Emergency page activation

In an emergency, an orange banner can be activated on the city's home page to show a text message and link to emergency information. This is the default method of highlighting emergency information under the following conditions:

- Major incident affecting or concerning city residents
- Activation of the EOC

Decision to activate/deactivate/choose level

The decision to activate the display of emergency information will be made by the communication and engagement director in consultation with the assistant director of emergency services. This decision will be based on:

- Severity of the incident
- Effect on the Carlsbad community
- Need to highlight emergency information compared to the need to continue to highlight information about the daily services of the city

E-notifications

The city is not using the e-notification feature of the website content management system. The Communication & Engagement Department manages a Constant Contact account that may be used by departments needing to send mass email campaigns.

File size

For ease of downloading, keep PDFs, ZIP files and other downloadable files to no more than 5 MB, if possible. If necessary, compress files or, only if they cannot be compressed enough, break documents into multiple files.

Fonts

The website has been set up with the correct fonts (font, size and color). Users cannot change these styles.

How to highlight important information?

- Use subheads to break up long blocks of text.
- Use bullets to separate information into smaller pieces.

User ability to adjust font size

Some people may have trouble seeing text in the default size. The city's website allows font size to be increased or decreased (see accessibility and usability guidelines section).

Headings

Select heading styles in the content editor tool. Use headings sequentially, starting with level one for the page title.

- DO NOT manually format headings.
- DO NOT use heading styles to format content.

Subheadings

Subheadings immediately beneath main headings should be avoided, if possible. It is recommended to start with text after a main heading.

Contact information

Several page templates have a content box that can be used for department contact information.

TIP: You might need to use shift+enter for content to appear single spaced.

Example:

City Hall
help@carlsbadca.gov
760-434-2820
1200 Carlsbad Village Drive
Carlsbad, CA 92008
8 a.m. - 5 p.m. M - F

Or
Class registration
760-XXX-XXXX
XXXX@carlsbadca.gov

Special events
760-XXX-XXXX

In cases where the email address is long enough to wrap, use the word email instead and link the email address:

Parks Maintenance
760-XXX-XXXX
Email

Full list of department contacts (LINK)

HTML code

The content management system has the page formatting already programmed. Even if you know HTML coding, DO NOT add custom code to the city website. If you need a different page layout or template, contact the Communication & Engagement Department.

The only exception is to fix pages not displaying correctly. This often happens when pasting directly from Word. You may go into the HTML code to delete SPAN tags and fonts if you know how to do this.

Homepage

Content on the homepage is managed by the Communication & Engagement Department. Departments that want to place content or links to content should contact the department to discuss.

Images

Do not add images to a page unless the template has a slideshow feature or an image is essential for communicating to your audience, such as an infographic, flow chart or project

rendering. Work with the Communication & Engagement Department to obtain or create images for the website. Additional guidance for image use is included in the accessibility and usability section of this document.

Images must be the correct size and format. See the list of widgets and website graphics style guide in the appendix for image specifications.

Links and external linking policy

- Add a "tool tip" when creating a link. The tool tip shows when a user hovers over the link to provide information about the link. Tool tips should be written in all lower case (except proper nouns).
- Example:
    - meeting agendas
    - Carlsbad map

- Select "open in new window" for all external links and documents.

External linking policy

- Only links that comply with the city's external linking policy may be added to the city website.
- The city's linking policy can also be found through a link on the bottom of the website homepage.
- If you are not sure whether or not a link is allowed, check with the Communication & Engagement Department.

Logos

- The city logo appears in the upper left area of every page on the city website. Adding the city logo elsewhere on the site is not needed.
- Do not add department logos, program logos or other logos to the city website.
- Logos for organizations that sponsor city programs, facilities and events may be shown on the city website. No logo should be larger than the city logo. Prior approval from the Communication & Engagement Department must be obtained before adding a non-city logo to the website.

Metadata

Metadata makes it easy for the user to search and retrieve information. When creating a site or page, make sure that they contain descriptive metadata that will help site visitors retrieve, use or manage information on the site.

Good metadata

- Relates to page/site content

- Includes elements such as title of page and key words that would make the page easily retrievable and/or searchable

Mobile first

About half of the city's website visitors are viewing the site on a mobile device, usually an iPhone. Before publishing a page, check the mobile view to ensure it is easy to read in the mobile format. You may even want to first create your page looking at the mobile view.

Navigation labels

The navigation names should consider the audience and use the most simple and direct language as possible.

- Names of site navigation should be free from jargon, abbreviations and wordiness.
- Use the ampersand (&) for headings, left hand navigation and photo buttons.
- Shorten left-hand navigation that wraps around to a second line. All left-hand navigation should fit on one line.
- Use title case for navigation.

Newsroom

The city newsroom is managed by the Communication & Engagement Department. The purpose of this part of the website is to provide information about items of citywide interest to the community and the media.

- News may be added to the newsroom by staff in the Communication & Engagement Department and by the Police Department community relations manager.
- Departments may enable a "news" widget on landing pages so that relevant news appears on their pages.

Hot Topics

- "Hot Topics" includes links to landing pages for issues of particular interest to the community.
- City staff may suggest topics to include in this section by contacting the Communication & Engagement Department.

Non-city content

At this time, the City of Carlsbad does not include news, event information* or other content from outside sources. In some cases, links maybe provided to this information, in keeping with the city linking policy.

* The calendar will include events from outside sources that have received a special events permit at the discretion of the special events coordinator (e.g., private events and events where drawing a crowd would pose a potential safety concern will not be listed).

Page and URL names

Please follow these guidelines for naming pages and links:

- The page name and page title are different.
  - Page title appears at the top of the page.
  - URL is what appears at the end of the web address.
- Use one word for the URL whenever possible.
- URLs should be all lower case, even proper nouns.
- When it's not possible to keep a URL to one word:
  - Run the words together, e.g. parksrecreation
  - Do not use conjunctions or prepositions, such as "and" or "in."
  - Do <u>not</u> use spaces to separate words.
  - Use no punctuation.
- Images (JPGs) and documents (PDFs) also have page names (or URLs), which are equivalent to their file names. Therefore, apply the same naming convention described above when naming PDFs and images.

PDF use

PDFs can be used on the city website when:

- The content is a form people will want to print, fill out or save on their own computers.
- The content contains necessary formatting that needs to be preserved.
- Reports or other lengthy content.

It is better to post information as content (text) on a webpage rather than a PDF.

Important: There should only be <u>one</u> version of an original PDF on the site. The owner of the PDF stores the PDF in the department's documents library. If another department needs access to that PDF, then a link should be created to the PDF: do NOT place a copy the PDF into a different library.

Quality control

The ultimate responsibility for quality control rests with website liaisons. All web content should undergo the same approval process in place for any other information distributed to the public. Information should be reviewed and approved through the normal department approval process before information is put on the city website.

The quality control process should include answering, at a minimum, the following questions:

- Is the information accurate?
- Is the information understandable for the intended audience?
- Is the information formatted with headlines, subheads, bullets and links so it is easy to read for web users?
- Is the copy written according to city style guidelines?

- Are headlines capitalized correctly?
- Does the copy use good grammar?
- Is the copy free from typographical errors?
- Is the page functional (do links work correctly)?

Regular maintenance
In addition to each department performing a quality control process prior to posting information on the city's website, web content should be checked on an ongoing basis by department staff.

- The Communication & Engagement Department will conduct random spot checks of department pages to ensure they comply with this style guide.
- IT will provide weekly reports to website liaisons that show misspellings and broken links. Departments will be in charge of fixing items highlighted in the report in a timely manner.

Business hours format

- Please use the following format:
  Business hours (or Park hours or Library hours)
  Monday – Friday
  8 a.m. – 5 p.m.

Business hours format for different hours and days of operation

Business hours (or Park hours or Library hours)
Monday – Friday
8 a.m. – 5 p.m.
Saturday
10 a.m. – 2 p.m.

Templates

A number of templates are provided for those putting information on the website.

- Department landing page: Use as the entry page for departments, divisions, programs or other topics that have multiple subpages.
- Basic interior page: Use for most pages to provide information.
- "Accordion" page: This format is useful for a page that would otherwise be very long or require multiple pages. Topic headings can be expanded or condensed for each navigation.
- Document folder page: This style is useful for departments with reports, agendas or other documents that need to be displayed.

To maintain a consistent look throughout the website, staff should not change the font selection, color or size. To request a change to a template, contact the Communication & Engagement Department.

Text formatting

Most formatting on the city website has been programmed for you. Do not attempt to change the formatting.

Headings

- Break up long blocks of text with headings and subheadings.
- Use title case for page titles and left-hand navigation titles.
- Use sentence case for all subheadings.

Bullets

- Use of bulleted lists is encouraged.
- Capitalize the first letter of the word that starts a bullet.
- Bullets may have periods or not, depending on the context, so long as the punctuation is consistent in the bulleted list.
- Do not separate a bulleted list with semicolons.

Left hand navigation

- Limit links displayed in the left-hand navigation to no more than eight.
- Left hand navigation may be listed alphabetically or in order of priority.

Video

- Links from the City of Carlsbad YouTube channel may be added to any content page.
- Under special circumstances, other government agencies YouTube videos can be added to city website. Prior to adding, please contact the city's Communication & Engagement Department to ensure it complies with the city's linking policy.

Web glossary

- **Broken link** – A link that doesn't take the user to the intended page. The user will normally get an error message when clicking on a "broken" link.
- **CMS (Content Management System)** – A Content Management System is a bundled or stand-alone application to create, manage, store and deploy content on webpages. Web content includes text and embedded graphics, photos, video, audio, and code (e.g., for applications) that displays content or interacts with the user.
- **CSS (Cascading Style Sheets)** – A style sheet language used for describing the look and formatting of a document written in a markup language. CSS is designed primarily to enable the separation of document content from document presentation, including elements such as the layout, colors, and fonts.
- **Domain name** – Provides a readable and recognizable name to numerically addressed Internet resources. A domain name must be unique; no two organizations can have the

same domain name. For example, www.carlsbadca.gov is the domain name for the City of Carlsbad's website.

- **Drop-down menu** – A list of subtopics or items that appear below a main topic, normally when the mouse passes over the main topic.
- **Global navigation** – Broad or high-level topics that help website users find content within the City of Carlsbad's website. These topics are displayed at the top of every page along a horizontal line positioned below the City of Carlsbad's logo.
- **HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language)** – Hyper Text Markup Language is the main markup language for creating webpages and other information that can be displayed in a web browser.
- **Landing page** – The page serving as a point of entry to a group of related pages. For example, each department's main page is called the department's landing page.
- **Left navigation** – In the City of Carlsbad's Website, the menu of topics and subtopics displayed on the left side of the screen in all the Web pages except for the home page. Left navigation helps users find information in a particular part of the site.
- **Link (hyperlink)** – The use of a word, phrase or image as a navigational tool designed to transport an end user from one Web page to another (when the end user clicks on that word, phrase or image). Often, links appear as underlined words in a different font color to set the link apart from the rest of the copy. The end user's cursor will display a pointing finger icon when the end user hovers over (or rolls over) the linked image or word.
- **Publish** – A process to make particular content viewable to the intended audience. Once a webpage, document or image is published to the city's production website, it becomes viewable by the public "live."
- **RWD (Responsive Web Design**) - A web design approach aimed at crafting sites to provide an optimal viewing experience — easy reading and navigation with a minimum of resizing, panning, and scrolling — across a wide range of devices (e.g. desktop computer monitors, mobile devices, mobile phones).
- **URL (Uniform Resource Locator)** – The address of a resource or file available on the Internet. The URL contains the protocol of the resource (e.g. http:// or ftp://), the domain name (see above for definition) for the resource and the name for the file (address). For example, a page on the Internet may be at the URL http://www.carlsbadca.gov/services/default.asp.
- **W3C (World Wide Web Consortium)** – The World Wide Web Consortium is the main international standards organization for the World Wide Web. About W3C.
- **WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines**) – Part of a series of web accessibility guidelines published by the W3C's Web Accessibility Initiative. They consist of a set of guidelines for making content accessible, primarily for disabled users, but also for all user agents, including highly limited devices, such as mobile phones. The current version, 2.0, is also an ISO standard, ISO/IEC 40500:2012. Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 2.0 Checklist