

PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICE

PHOENIX.GOV STYLE GUIDELINES

For the new phoenix.gov, there is a focus on enabling the website to be viewed from any Internet-enabled device, less yet more meaningful content, and creating a good user experience (UX).

The Public Information Office (PIO) developed these guidelines to 1) maintain the integrity of the new website, 2) assist department web maintainers effectively manage content in the new phoenix.gov, 3) encourage the most effective use of technology, and 4) facilitate consistent design and branding.

This document includes best practices/tips compiled from a variety of sources, including Riester, the city's web design consultant, and addresses website management, content creation, digital media, formatting and phoenix.gov governance. The guidelines will be updated as needed.

Please contact Margaret Shalley, Public Information Officer, at 602-262-1623, or via email at margaret.shalley@phoenix.gov with questions or feedback regarding this document.

PIO strongly encourages maintainers to involve their department Public Information Officer (PIO) in their website strategies and content creation.

SITE MANAGEMENT

Maintaining a website is more than just adding text and cool images – a website is a living thing and therefore requires constant care to keep it operating efficiently:

1. *Publish only what customers are looking for.* Use Google Analytics to help make decisions regarding what content should remain on the site and where to focus resources. The ITS web team can provide those reports to you.
2. *Audit your content regularly.* Check content often for broken links or out of date information.
3. *Evaluate whether a new page is needed.* Be sure you have enough content for a webpage. Having two sentences on a page is not user friendly nor does it make sense. If you find yourself in this situation, re-evaluate whether the page is even needed and if the content can be represented somewhere else.
4. *Keep the mobile user in mind.* The new phoenix.gov is designed to be viewed on any Internet-enabled device; therefore, keep in mind that large file uploads will have an impact on customer smartphone customer data plans and usage as well as excessive page scrolling.

CONTENT CREATION

Careful planning is key to ensure customers can easily find information, and maintainers should create content from their customer's perspective to enhance UX:

1. *Do not bombard customers with a lot of text.* When it comes to writing for the web, less is definitely more. Maintainers are encouraged to write as "tight" as possible so as to not force customers – especially mobile users – to scroll excessively. Using bullets is a great way to break up content, but try not to have pages containing only long lists of bullets.
2. *Do not use pdf's as substitutes for webpages.* Web content that is relatively static should live on a webpage vs. a pdf. Maintainers are encouraged to restrict use of pdf's except for such things as event flyers, reports, or anything meant to remain in printed form.
3. *Use good keywords in page headings and subheadings.* Web users tend to skim web pages because they want information quickly and don't want to have to read a lot of text.
4. *Use "calls to action."* Get customer attention right away by placing important or actionable content at the top of web pages, including what information can be found on the page.
5. *Do not reference location on your pages.* Avoid directing customers to look "left," "right," "above," or "below" for information since content will shift around on the page depending on the type of mobile device.
6. *Enhance search engine optimization.* In the new phoenix.gov, we are driving customers to use the search field and therefore helping them find web content is critical. Use good keywords most relevant to the page and, whenever possible, hyperlink those keywords to supporting webpages.
7. *Use clear and concise language.* Avoid using bureaucratic terminology ("cityspeak"), being overly technical, and using acronyms without spelling them out. What makes sense to city staff may not make sense to customers.
8. *Follow Americans with Disabilities Act guidelines for web.* These accessibility guidelines require web maintainers to use Alt tags for photos and graphic elements on government websites to accommodate special mechanical tools used by visually impaired people to read websites.
9. *Adopt the Associated Press (AP) style for certain content.* AP style for writing includes standards for such elements as capitalization, format for dates, and numbers and will help ensure consistency across the entire phoenix.gov website. Your assigned PIO can help with this, and an AP style "cheat sheet" is available with the other phoenix.gov website training materials.
10. *Include a minimum amount of content on web pages.* Pages should have a bare minimum of one paragraph of keyword-rich content. A good rule of thumb would be around three or four paragraphs.

DIGITAL MEDIA

Photos and videos make website interesting and engaging. However, we want our web pages to also be professional and cast the city in a good light:

1. *Work closely with your department PIO.* The PIO is a great resource to provide guidance as to what digital media is appropriate for phoenix.gov in terms of branding and messaging.
2. *Only embed videos from the city's official YouTube channels into media galleries.* This ensures we are using only professionally produced PHX11 videos or videos owned/licensed for public use by the city.
3. *Do not use the video option in SharePoint to insert videos into a webpage.* This currently is not web responsive – the ITS team is working on a solution to make this an option.
4. *Use only images owned by the city of Phoenix.* Maintainers can avoid copyright issues by working with the department PIO to find archived city photos or to coordinate with the city photographer to take new shots.
5. *Start with good quality original photos.* It is always better to start out with high-resolution images because they allow the flexibility to resize smaller or larger as per phoenix.gov design standards without distortion or pixelating. Be sure to resize the image before uploading to SharePoint vs. resizing on your webpage.
6. *Always optimize photos for web.* Once again, be respectful of the mobile user by properly preparing images for the web. Optimizing helps decrease load time resulting in less impact on customer data plans.
7. *Formal headshots/portraits.* These photos of city management, elected officials and staff are taken by the official city photographer in PIO. Headshots should be closely cropped for use on city web pages:



Original



Cropped

8. *Use the proper photo sizing specifications.*
 - a. For images on homepage zones: maximum 640 by 480 pixels on the long edge, including headshots
 - b. For city staff headshots: See above
 - c. For media gallery slider images: maximum 1024 pixels on the long edge, 72 dpi
 - d. For the promo slider: maximum 1024 pixels on the long edge, 72 dpi
 - e. For the interior webpages: image specs to be determined soon
 - f. Phoenix.gov homepage slider: 428 pixels wide x 300 pixels height
9. *Try not to overwhelm users with too much media on homepages.* Too many images on homepage media galleries may overwhelm the end user. PIO recommends no more than 5 or 6 pieces of media in galleries when used on a homepage.

FORMATTING

Engaging content and digital images provide interest to a web page, but formatting also is very important to allow customers to easily scan for the desired information.

1. *Observe page naming conventions.* Be sure to keep your page names short but understandable so they will make sense when SharePoint adds dashes and they become part of the webpage web address. For example, "City of Phoenix Hero Program" would become "City-of-Phoenix-Hero-Program" - a better page name would be "Hero Program" and result in a shorter filename of "Hero-Program."

The dashes between the words allows search engines to parse them more effectively and improve searchability.

2. Avoid including the name of the parent site in the page name. For example, if phoenix.gov/pio/media is the parent level, do not include "media" as part of the page name:

Don't:

phoenix.gov/pio/media/**media**-contacts.html
 phoenix.gov/pio/media/**media**-resources.html
 phoenix.gov/pio/media/**media**-requests.html

Do:

phoenix.gov/pio/media/contacts.html
 phoenix.gov/pio/media/resources.htm
 phoenix.gov/pio/media/requests.html

3. *Check that your bulleted link lists are "thumb friendly."* On a desktop computer, links are easily seen and clicked on. On a tablet or smartphone, however, small links can be hard to use. Check your bulleted links by resizing your page in a smartphone view.
4. *Identify pdfs on your page.* Using pdf icons is no longer required on phoenix.gov, however, be sure to set them up to open in a new tab and add "Adobe Reader Required" at the top of the pages where links to pdfs are present.
5. *Identify external links in the web content.* "Leaving the site" disclaimers are no longer required when linking to approved external websites on the new phoenix.gov; however maintainers should identify the destination website for the customer's benefit vs. just indicating, "click here," and set the link to open up in a new tab. The Law Department also asks that maintainers be vigilant about what kind of sites to which we choose to link – do fact and site checks.

6. *Avoid using "click here."* Set better expectations by hyperlinking the words and using a call to action verb (i.e., "[visit the Head Start webpage](#)").
7. *Keep web text black.* Black is the best color for text on webpages except for hyperlinks. This is because information highlighted in color may not be visible to users depending on their mobile device and also because users may think colored text is a hyperlink when it is not.
8. *Use bullets to highlight important information.* Breaking up content into bullets makes it easier to read.
9. *Avoid making interior pages look like department homepages.* Department homepages have been set up to have unique layouts and these layouts should not be duplicated elsewhere in your department website to avoid confusion for our customers.
10. *Be sure to use the proper heading styles and be consistent in their use.* The new heading styles available on phoenix.gov are H1, H2 and H3. SharePoint will automatically apply the H1 style to page headings – use H2 for subheadings and H3 for sub-subheadings on your pages.
11. *Linking to interactive, rich content in a full-browser screen display.* There are some sites on phoenix.gov that are interactive in nature and use graphics to invite users to click and learn. Be sure when linking to them to set up to open in a new tab so the user can easily back out of them.

GOVERNANCE

The Public Information Office, in partnership with Information Technology Services, oversees phoenix.gov as the official source for city news and information. Web maintainers have an important role to ensure phoenix.gov remains transparent and to protect the city's online presence and credibility.

1. *Keep your department PIO in the loop.* This is important since PIOs are the content approvers for phoenix.gov as well as the primary source for guidance on city branding and messaging.
2. *Non-phoenix.gov websites.* Phoenix.gov is the official city website – maintainers are encouraged to meet with the Public Information Office and Information Technology Services before considering moving any content off of phoenix.gov as per A.R. 1.92.
3. *Linking to commercial websites.* Maintainers are advised to be careful when linking to commercial websites unless the city has a formal business relationship with that business. Otherwise, it gives the impression the city is endorsing the private entity and constitutes advertising, which is a violation of the laws governing .gov websites.
4. *Follow standards for use of the city bird logo.* The Public Information Office oversees the use of the city's corporate symbol. If you have any questions about its use, please contact your department PIO.