

Designing Your Library Website

There is no one way to design and build a website. When designing a website for a library, or any organization, start by considering who will be using the website and why. Answering this question will help you decide which content to put on the site, how to organize the information, and choose visuals. This exercise will walk you through the planning process using a design thinking approach.

The Problem:

You have been tasked to redo the library website and drive more traffic to the site.

So let's start planning.

Start with People

Start by looking at your community demographics, and the goals of the library.

1. Who goes to your library? Why?
2. What does the library want to accomplish? Why?
3. What are the most popular library services? Why?
4. Are there any underutilized resources?
5. Who doesn't go to your library? Why?
6. How do people access resources now?
7. Where are patrons when they access your services? On which device? Location?
8. Have people given you feedback about any library services? Positive, negative or neutral?

There are a variety of ways to observe and collect this information. Here are a few ideas:

1. Distribute surveys to existing library patrons.
2. Distribute surveys via local schools, popular community gatherings, etc.
3. Engage patrons in conversation at the library.
4. Get out and talk to people around town.
5. Go to community planning and development meetings
6. Look at circulation/ service use statistics, broken down by demographic and service

Start Making Decisions

Now let's start using some of the information we collected while empathizing with the community.

Start compiling this information. Make a list of your "Must Have" features, "Would Like to Have" features, and "Definitely Do Not Do" features. This will help you prioritize time and design ideas later.

1. Outline who goes to your library. Are there primary age groups, or reasons people go?
 - a. Tailor a section of your website to your primary demographics. Add a children's page, adult page, teen page, and highlight popular services
 - b. Label things on your site based on how people describe services in the library
2. Look at your library's mission statement. Are your current services meeting all of your goals?



- a. Your website is equally as important to board members, city officials, and donors.
 - b. What makes your library valuable to stakeholders?
3. What is popular?
 - a. Find out what each main demographic enjoys at the library and feature it on the website!
 - b. Build a rotating features page, or update your blog frequently to keep the site fresh
4. Are there any underutilized resources?
 - a. Describe these services differently on your site. Are the services easy to find?
 - b. Market in outside locations.
5. Who doesn't go to your library?
 - a. Which resources could you offer that you don't currently?
 - b. A website may reach those who do not physically use library services
6. How do people access resources now?
 - a. Do more people use physical or digital resources? Highlight different resources for different demographics, if necessary.
 - b. Add more digital options to extend your resource/ service offerings
7. Where are patrons when they access your services?
 - a. Is your website design mobile-friendly? Can it adapt to different screen sizes?
 - b. If patrons are short on time, they probably won't read large blocks of content. Keep your ad blurbs short, but engaging.
8. Have people given the library feedback?
 - a. A new website is a great way to try new things.
 - b. Show people the library is changing/ adapting to suit new needs.

Website Primer

Before we launch into brainstorming layout ideas, take a look at this resource from Adobe, outlining the [Top Website Layouts That Never Grow Old](#). This will help you brainstorm layouts and give you a better idea of when to use, and when not to use, different layouts and design styles.

Designing Layout & Content

Hopefully you took ample notes during the previous section, because it's time to start designing. In this step, you are going to think of at least three options for a website design. You can sketch them out if you're designing from scratch, or choose pre-made themes if you're using WordPress.

Make a few lists to get yourself organized. Begin gathering content and images for the site as you go along. Websites are generally made up of a series of different pages. Write a list of the different pieces of content you would like on the site. Here are some common pages found on library websites:

- Home/ Blog
- About the Library/ Community
- Contact Us
- Hours & Location
- Kids/ Teen Resources
- Library Services
- Calendar of Events
- Access to Online Account Services

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Now it's up to you which of those you want, if you want to add any additional sections, and how you want to format the pages.

Look at your list from the previous step of "Must-Have", "Would Like to Have", and "Do Not Do". There is only so much space on a screen before things get cluttered, so start brainstorming the following:

1. How do you want your overall site to look?
2. How do people find information?
3. How do I want to organize the navigation menu?
4. What do people access most frequently?
5. Do I have images to add visual appeal? Are the images relevant?
6. What size should the font be to be readable?
7. Do I have a library logo?
8. Is there a preferred color scheme?

Look at other websites for design inspiration. If you're using WordPress or a similar service, start looking through available themes since you will be constrained by what the theme allows you to change.

Prototype

Now you're ready to see what it looks like digitally. Choose one design you like the most. Since you're just prototyping now, go for speed rather than detail/ accuracy.

For WordPress:

Feel free to use WordPress themes to test directly. Start with the home page and one content page to make sure the design looks the way you want. At this stage, it should still be relatively easy to switch themes and play with different ideas.

Ask a few staff members, or some well-involved patrons to take a glance at the prototype.

For Designing from Scratch:

If you're coding the site, or having a developer do it, start building your prototype in Google Slides, PowerPoint, or a graphic design program if there is one you prefer.

Prototype the home page, including navigation, header and sidebar. Focus only on appearance at this stage. Then add one content page for layout purposes. Gather feedback from staff. Don't start coding until you know that is the design you want. This will save a lot of time down the road.

Test

Now that you've gathered a bit of feedback about layout, colors, readability, you can start doing the full website. Build every page and add the finalized content, images and links.

Have multiple people test the site. Now you can gather full feedback from actual users in the library.

Repeat

Use the feedback gathered to improve the site continually. Feel free to return to previous steps. Design thinking is not always a linear process!

