Help! I’m overwhelmed!

Setting up a website for the first time can be overwhelming. You’ve been presented with a big, blank canvas to fill with information about your group. What should you include? How should you structure it? Does it really matter all that much?

Yes it does! Let’s talk about it.
Help visitors feel “at home” on your site

Most of us want to feel at ease—especially in the places we visit most. We are drawn to places where our needs are met, and where we feel we belong.

The same applies to websites. If you can remember in the past visiting an ugly, disorganized website, filled with outdated information, you probably also remember the desire to get out of there and never return.

In contrast, there are probably times when you visited a site and instantly felt “at home.” It’s was probably well-organized, so you quickly found what you were looking for, and you also found other things you wanted to explore while you were there. So you lingered. You connected with the minds behind the site. You visited again.
We are about to throw a lot of ideas at you. But be selective about what you put on your website. These questions might help you decide what’s valuable:

1. Will it help our group function better?
2. Will it help visitors?
3. Will it make our guests feel “at home”?

Don't implement everything. If you do, your website will be huge, hard to navigate, and hard to keep updated.

Now... on to the content!

What do visitors want to know?

Some things are concrete:

★ Can I donate online?
★ Where do I buy my kid’s uniform?
★ How do I volunteer?
★ What do they use the money for?
★ Who can I talk to about membership?

Others, are intangible:

★ Do I fit in with these people?
★ Are they open to new ideas?
★ Are they organized?
★ Are they friendly?
★ Are they eager to help?
The Basics

Visitors to your site will naturally want to know who you are — and what your organization exists to do.

Be sure to include:

✓ Your organization’s name/logo
✓ Your mission
✓ Your goals (for the year, or in general)
✓ Meeting times/dates
✓ Involvement forms
✓ Past newsletter

Names & Faces

Personal connection is how most people get actively involved in a non-profit groups. Visitors need to know your organization is made up of volunteers who are much like them. These things help:

✓ Letter from your President
✓ List of board members — and their contact information
✓ Pictures of your board
  (This isn’t just for the vanity of your board. Seeing faces helps members make connections in real life, and those connections make involvement less intimidating)
✓ List of committee members
✓ Open positions on your board
Calendars

Be a one-stop shop for current information about what is going on in your group:

✓ Board meetings
✓ Special events/holidays
✓ Conference dates

Members-only pages

Your website is a handy place to keep documents that exclusively benefit your members. However those files should be posted only on website pages that only members can access.

✓ Financial reports
✓ Bylaws
✓ Meeting Minutes
✓ Secure Online Directory
✓ Peer-reviewed articles
The Basics

Events & Programs
When your group puts on an event, make sure members know when & where—and if they are invited!

✓ Dates of all upcoming programs
✓ What happens at each program?
✓ Who is invited?

Awards & Kudos
People like to be involved in organizations that have positive momentum. Let members know if you have been recognized for your good work in the community.

✓ Membership awards
✓ Recognition from your school district
✓ Awards from your council or state organization

Links
✓ Councils
✓ National/State Affiliations
✓ Helpful Resources
Invite Membership

Why join?

Those who are new to your community may have no idea why joining your organization is worth their time and money. Help them understand by explaining:

✓ Who benefits when they join?
✓ How are membership dues spent?
✓ What are the benefits of membership?
  • Discounts
  • Special access

✓ What does joining NOT mean
  • Do I have to volunteer?
  • Do I have to attend meetings?

✓ What is the cost of membership?
✓ How to sign-up to be a member

Click to learn more
Why volunteer?

Volunteering means giving away your valuable time for free. Most want to know if it is worth it, and whether or not volunteer jobs can fit with their other commitments:

✓ Why do you need volunteers?
✓ What opportunities are available for volunteers
✓ “At home” volunteer opportunities

Easing their fears

Doing something new can be scary. Having complete information about what to expect, and what needs to be done ahead of time can help:

✓ How do I request a background check?
✓ How do I sign-up to volunteer— and will I get a reminder email?
✓ Where do I enter the building when I arrive to volunteer?
✓ Where do I park?
✓ Do I need my ID?
✓ Do I need to go through volunteer orientation?
✓ Is there a volunteer handbook that I need to read?
Online Sign-ups

Encouraging online sign-ups benefits everyone. It makes it easy for volunteers to research and commit—and it makes it easier for you to manage and encourage those who invest in your vision!

✓ **Event volunteers**—Give them numerous jobs to select from, and a variety of time slots

✓ **I am interested in doing...**
   Volunteer “Interest” forms allow volunteers to tell you what sorts of jobs they are generally most interested in. (Decorating, Event coordination, etc.)

✓ **Automated reminders**—Be sure to set these up because, everyone needs reminding sometimes
Say thanks!

Thankfulness goes a LONG way with volunteers! Don’t miss an opportunity to encourage your fellow laborers, and tell them you value what they do.

✓ Set up automated thank yous— Email your thanks to volunteers a day or two after they help with events and special projects.

✓ Create a “Volunteer of the Month” page. Include a picture with your kind words.

✓ Post pictures showing volunteers at work. Choose pictures that include a diversity of volunteers and include volunteers having fun!

✓ Inspire volunteerism by posting inspirational graphics
Once you have a good foundation laid for your website, you can start thinking about ways to **enrich the experience** for your visitors. **This will look different for every organization.**

Since many of our organizations serve children and families, we will focus on **ideas for education-based groups** here. Some can be used by any group. Others might make a good springboard for fresh ideas.

### Stay Connected

With all the different options out there, communication is both easier and harder than ever! Decide as a board how you intend to communicate to members, and then pass that information along to them in a clear way.

- eNewsletter
- Email
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Text (ex: Remind 101 app)
- Apps
- Online directory
  
  Be sure to let members know that they can communicate with each other easily with just a few clicks
Enrich the experience

Community Activities

School life is intimately connected with life in a larger community—especially your city. Consider posting about:

✓ Free activities and events
✓ Local libraries, art museums, galleries, science museums, zoos and sports activities with links to their websites for more information
✓ How to register to vote
✓ Dates for upcoming elections

Hot topics

Parents and kids often need help understanding:

★ Bullying
★ Healthy Kids
★ Special Needs
★ Healthy Eating
★ Stress & Kids
★ Parenting classes
★ Steroids
★ Alcohol & Drugs

Include links to already-existing resources. Ask teachers and parents what they believe would be valuable to include.

MembershipToolkit.com
Guides

These are the BEST resources for high school groups. Supply information members are eager to know but don’t know who to ask, such as:

- College Application tips
- Annual school activities
- Graduation
- Homecoming Week traditions
- After School Resources & Enrichment

Recommendations

Ask parents and faculty recommendations for their favorite activities and create a directory for all parents.

- Tutors
- Athletic programs (competitive and recreational)
- Dance & The Arts
- Science programs
- Summer camps & activities
Academic Pursuits

Confusion over expectations, and changes in education can really rock your parents’ world! Help them out by posting on topics such as:

★ **Apps!** — Kids love to do educational activities disguised as games, which makes “best apps” by grade level a very engaging topic for parents.

★ **Academic Milestones** — Many parents are curious what students are expected to know by grade level. Ask your principal or lead teachers for these.

★ **Math!** — Many parents—even those with Ph.D.s— can feel confused and frustrated by how math is taught. Ask teachers for grade appropriate resources, including: videos, apps, blogs, websites, and games.

★ **Reading Lists** — Ask your librarian for a list of age-appropriate books for students. This is especially helpful for summer months. Some school and community libraries also provide a “summer reading challenge” to keep kids in books.

★ **Attendance Works** — Why does it matter if students are in school or on school on-time? Don’t assume that all parents understand the importance. Administrators should set clear expectations and be specific on why attendance matters.

★ **Spelling & Vocabulary lists** — For grade-school level kids
The Basics

Some school websites are difficult to navigate or even find. Consider including:

✓ Address
✓ School hours
✓ Important phone numbers & emails, including the front office and attendance
✓ Calendar – link to your district’s calendar
✓ School lunch menu or link to your district’s menu
✓ Link for parents to make a lunch payment
✓ Lunch schedule
✓ Bus schedule
✓ Parent Portal — to check grades & absences

Celebrate Students

Re-post or link to:

★ Student awards
★ Student accomplishments
★ Club award and recognitions
★ Sports & fine arts competitions
Teachers & Staff

Encouraging staff and keeping a warm connection between teachers and parents is an art. But it all starts with face and name recognition:

★ **List the teachers and staff** in your school
★ **Include pictures** of your school administrators

★ **Principal’s Page.** If your principal would like to share something with parents, give him or her a page to do so. This is a great place to share something personal about herself, her family, or her education philosophy and how it impacts the school’s mission. She may encourage parents to support your PTA/PTO, and celebrate past success. Don’t forget to include a picture so parents know who your principal is when they see her on campus.

★ **Teacher Favorites** Provide a list of each teacher’s favorite things. This is a great resource for parents who would like to purchase holiday and year end gifts, and makes the teachers feel special. Publish Teacher’s Favorite lists on website pages that are restricted to members only.

Statistics

Parents need to know what your school is doing well, and what areas need improvement. If your district publishes information regarding test scores and attendance rates, include these on your website.
Why we raise money

Fundraising is typically not included in your organization’s goals but for many it is a vital way to support your school.

★ How do students benefit when the school budget is supplemented (class parties, uniforms...)
★ What goals are you trying to reach this year?
★ How were funds raised in past years used?

How we raise money

Let your families and community know how they can contribute.

★ Online donations — Include a button on your fundraising page to make it easy!
★ Box Tops — What should they collect, and how should they turn it in?
★ Major fundraisers for the year — Carnivals, Fun Run, cookie sales — and how to participate
★ Spirit Nights — When, where and why
★ Community partners — Many local and national stores offer a percentage back to schools who sign up. Amazon Smile, Target, and many grocery stores. Provide registration or enrollment links for parents, and include all the information they will need to link their shopping account to your school.
Sponsors

A great way to raise funds for your parent organization is to ask businesses and families to sponsor your PTA/PTO.

Be transparent in the process of soliciting sponsors and be sure to understand the difference between a sponsor and an endorsement. Endorsements or commercial advertising are not permitted for a non-profit.

★ How to become a sponsor
★ Sponsor page
★ What levels of sponsorship are available, and what benefits are associated with each.

Endorsements

PTA cannot not endorse or recommend sponsors, so be sure to include the following disclaimer:

“The mention of any business or service in this publication [or website] does not imply endorsement by the PTA.”
Some things just do not belong on your website. And all of them have serious potential consequences.

You may be tempted, but don’t:

- **Post critical opinions or articles** about another organization or an individual.

- **Publish pictures and names of students without permission to do so.** Some kids have good reasons to hide their faces. Don’t be the organization responsible for helping a violent relative find out where a kid lives.

- **Use pictures that are copyrighted that you do not have permission to publish.** Copyright laws have teeth these days. When in doubt, leave it out. Get your images legitimately by creating them yourself, downloading them from a free-content publisher, or buying them.

- **Post advertisements** (which are different than Sponsors)
Next steps

Now that you have great ideas in mind, it’s time to get organized. **Your website “navigation” is a great place to start.** Try to think of it from the perspective of a first-time visitor. What are they looking for? What do you want them to do? Make it easy for visitors to find and do things on your site.

To get you started, here is a sample navigation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home</th>
<th>Our PTA</th>
<th>Membership</th>
<th>Events</th>
<th>Fundraising</th>
<th>Do Good</th>
<th>Shop</th>
<th>My Account</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support &amp; Protect</td>
<td>Why Join PTA?</td>
<td>All Events</td>
<td>Fundraising This Year</td>
<td>SIGN UP</td>
<td>Spirit Store</td>
<td>Forms/Sign-Ups</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals</td>
<td>App!</td>
<td>Calendar</td>
<td>Donate</td>
<td>Volunteering</td>
<td>Donate</td>
<td>My Interests &amp; Skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Names &amp; Faces</td>
<td>Book Fair</td>
<td>Read-a-thon</td>
<td>Read-a-thon</td>
<td>Party Planners/Room Parents</td>
<td></td>
<td>Previous Orders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpool Reminders</td>
<td>Reflections (Art)</td>
<td>Retail Rewards</td>
<td>Grandparents, Welcome</td>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td></td>
<td>Account Settings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News &amp; Stories</td>
<td></td>
<td>Box Top!</td>
<td>Treat-a-Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Recent Activity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
More than 50% of all website visits are served up on a mobile device.

Traditionally-constructed websites are hard to view on small screens—let alone navigate! You need a “mobile-friendly” website.

All Membership Toolkit subscriptions come with a mobile-responsive website template—which you can use, regardless of your technical ability. If you can type an email, you can edit your own site!