

Online Access to Public Meetings

Best Practices for Web-based Public Meeting Management

Public meetings are important spaces for democracy where any resident can participate in civic life and hold public figures accountable. But how does the public know when meetings are happening? It isn't easy! These events are spread across dozens of websites, often in different data formats.

How accessible are your meetings?

Use this guide to improve your info online >>

POOR:

- Meeting information is not posted online (this is in violation of the Open Meetings Act if your agency has a website).
- Meeting information is only available in a PDF. Even if the PDF is posted online, that PDF is likely not searchable, not easy to find, and not up-to-date if details changed after it was created.

LIMITED:

- Meeting source information is incomplete, missing key points like start/end times, addresses, and dates.
- Meeting source information is located on a website that lacks a structured, consistent format.
- It takes more than 3 clicks from the homepage to get to the meeting information.

GREAT:

- Each meeting has a date, start/end time, location, and a clear explanation of what body is meeting.
- Events are searchable by date, name, topic, and type.
- Meeting source information is structured, consistent, and easy to find on a public website, such as in a calendar, web feed, or API.



Essentials for formatting web-based meetings:

Locations

[Location name]: [Street number],
[Directional (optional)], [Street
name], [City], [State], [ZIP]

Ex: "Harold Washington Library:
400 S. State Street, Chicago, IL
60605"

Dates

[Day of the week], [Date], [Year]
Ex: "Friday, June 15, 2018"

Times

[Start time] to [End time]
Ex: "12:00 PM to 3:00 PM"

Things to avoid:

- Data separated by only new lines or whitespace.
- Inconsistent formatting of dates, times, etc.
- Pages that can only be viewed via a POST request.
- Pages that require submitting cookies to view (common in VIEWSTATE-based ASP sites).



All photos by Sebastian Hidalgo / City Bureau

From GOOD to GREAT:

Feeds and APIs are the best way to share structured information with others. Most calendar systems and services already provide a way to generate feeds from a calendar of events.

Benefits of a web feed:

1. Web feeds provide easy structure for events and, because they draw their data from the original source, are always up-to-date.
2. Allow you to add collaborators and centralize the meeting information of multiple agencies.
3. Interested parties may 'subscribe' to the feed and receive notifications as events are scheduled and/or updated.