

Website Best Practices & Innovations Report

Comparative benchmarking in North American public sector government websites



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Working with you to transform the way you deliver services to customers.

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Purpose of this report

This report is intended to provide government leaders with opportunities to evolve and enhance their public sector websites to better meet the needs and expectations of their citizens. We have developed website evaluation tools to assess the leading practices that can be applied to government websites to improve the way services are delivered to citizens and businesses.

Our website maturity model has been built on more than 10 years of experience in public sector website transformation as well as extensive research on leading principles in usability and design from a user-focused perspective. This model has been applied to assessing a extensive range of North American government websites to determine trends, innovations, and areas of high maturity and customer satisfaction.

This comparative research can be used by all government leaders as a tool in digital transformation projects for public sector websites.

Overview

Different sectors and organizations across the globe spend large amounts of money performing comparative research and analysis. Why? Their goal is to find new and better ways to improve their services, reduce costs, and make their customers happier and more satisfied.

Government leaders have the same goals. But public sector websites are falling short – they have evolved from initial brochureware but are now challenged with new business models for online service delivery. Citizens, as consumers, expect their government to offer access to information and services online. Moving services that have been traditionally in-person to an online environment takes a high degree of strategic and practical planning. With so many departments and agencies, it can prove to be a challenge to create a cohesive and efficient process that meets the needs of the people it is meant to serve.

We see a need for cities to benchmark themselves against each other to determine better and more innovative ways of service delivery to potential areas where costs can be reduced or processes made more efficient. Cities are looking to empower users to self-serve in a way that meets their needs and expectations.

However, very few cities have either the time, money or resources to conduct the type of in-depth comparative research we offer in this report. We are confident this report can be used to help address this need.

Cities continually evolve and enhance their digital presence to test drive new and innovative approaches, as well as to ensure accessibility and inclusion. There is no need to reinvent the wheel and start from scratch, if there is a way you can investigate innovations that have been successfully integrated and considered high value by users. These “tried and true” leading practice approaches can be used as a springboard for adoption, to minimize risk and maximize the chance of success with high user satisfaction.

This is why benchmarking can have a huge impact. You can learn from other cities by uncovering features and functionalities considered valuable by end users that others have adopted . These insights

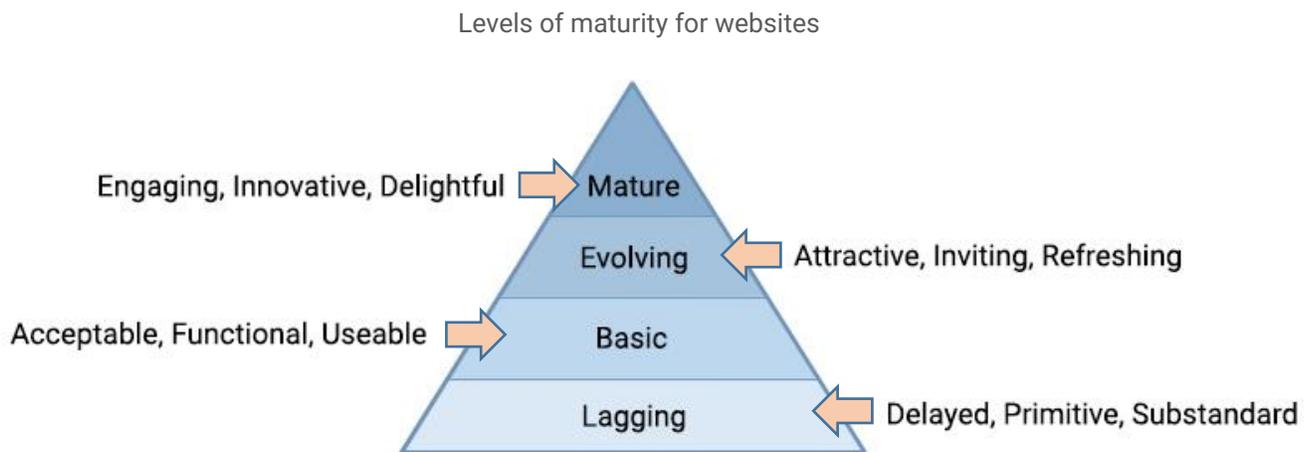
allow you to more efficiently integrate leading practices that have been determined to be effective and desirable into websites. Cities are recognizing that citizens are looking to their government to provide them with smart, efficient, time-saving services that meets their needs and expectations. New technologies are continually supporting improved service delivery, and cities want to be able to make smart choices within their budget for greater efficiency and effectiveness.

This report will provide decision-makers and website practitioners with valuable insights into opportunities for digital service delivery and point to ways for improvement. By following the leading practices outlined in this report, government leaders will be able to find better ways of doing business online as well as undertake lasting and effective improvements.

Website leading practices & assessing maturity

Public sector websites should be leading-edge and service-centric, as well as compelling, intuitive, and user-focused. These sites should resonate with key audiences, reflect the appropriate brand and image, and allow citizens to easily access services and obtain information easily and effectively.

There are four general stages of website maturity: lagging, basic, evolving or mature. Websites can be considered within a certain stage based on how well they conform to leading practices, as well as how users perceive their effectiveness in achieving specific outcomes.

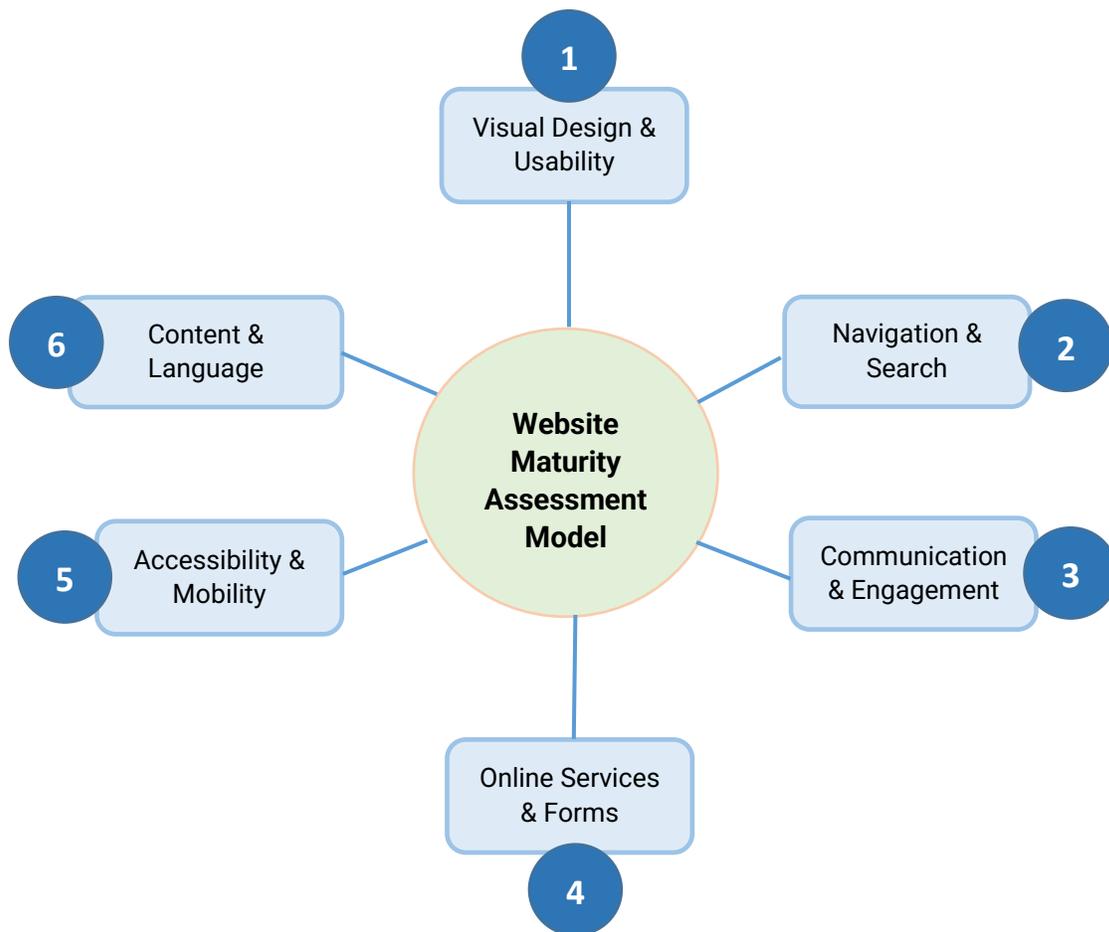


To determine the maturity level of a website and how well it resonates with users, we conduct an activity called a **heuristic evaluation**.

[Heuristic evaluation](#) involves examining the interface and judging its compliance with recognized usability principles (the “heuristics”). A site’s interface is reviewed and compared against accepted usability principles and leading practices. A list of ten (10) user interface design guidelines were developed in the 1990s by prominent usability experts Jakob Nielsen (the [Nielsen Norman Group](#)) and Rolf Molich. These original heuristics can be considered broad “rules of thumb” as opposed to specific usability guidelines. However, both products and technology have advanced and evolved significantly since this time. These guidelines, although still applicable, are now too general in a world where technology is constantly changing and mobile devices are now predominant.

In addition to these general heuristics, the evaluator considers any additional usability principles or results that come to mind that may be relevant for any specific dialogue element. A series of category-specific heuristics that apply to a specific class of products were developed by ForwardVu Solutions based on our extensive research and experience, and used as a supplement to the general heuristics as part of annual, ongoing research. This supplementary list of category-specific heuristics was built by performing competitive analysis and user testing of existing websites in the municipal public sector and incorporating principles to explain usability problems that were found.

Based on this extensive competitive analysis, the ForwardVu Website Maturity Assessment Model was created to determine how well websites met key usability principles.



A total of **6 key categories** were defined within the model, with each category containing **10 associated usability principles and leading practices**.