

Section 2: Web Products and Web Development and Redesign

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Introduction

All AHRQ products and tools that are printed are also posted to the AHRQ Web sites. The AHRQ Web sites contain a vital source of information about the Agency and its programs. This section highlights basic issues that need to be addressed when developing Web products or sites under contract that will be publicly available when they are launched. (Grantees, please see Appendix 2-B, Web Instructions for Grantees.) Appendix 2-B covers what grantees need to know to ensure that contract deliverables comply with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) legal and policy requirements, including accessibility for persons with disabilities.

Please contact your Office of Communications and Knowledge Transfer (OCKT) managing editor for guidance pertaining to Web products you are developing. All questions and requests for guidance about developing or redesigning Web sites or tools may be directed to the AHRQ Web Site Manager. Contact information is at the end of this section.

All AHRQ products and tools that are printed are also posted to AHRQ Web sites. Some AHRQ sites are managed by an on-site Web team, and off-site contractors manage third-level domain sites. To make the sites appear seamless, guidelines must be followed to ensure a branded look and feel.

Web Products

All content for AHRQ Web sites must undergo editorial reviews in OCKT. At a minimum, contractors must ensure the copy is free of typographical errors and adheres to the *U.S. Government Printing Office Style Manual*, available at www.gpoaccess.gov/stylemanual/browse.html. Nothing marked “draft” should appear on a public site. Placeholders should not be used for content that does not exist. Government-funded sites should not have anything designated “under construction.” Once materials are uploaded, they are published and considered in the public domain unless they contain copyrighted materials.

All publishing rules pertaining to print products, such as copyright, references, citations, style, and so forth also pertain to Web site documents. Please refer to Section 1 for specific requirements.

Clearances

New and redesigned Web sites and tools require clearance by AHRQ and HHS before launch. AHRQ Offices and Centers must coordinate the AHRQ review through OCKT, and OCKT will coordinate the departmental clearance. Publications cleared for printing are cleared for Web uploading at the same time. Web-only documents must also be cleared.

AHRQ Offices and Centers are responsible for ensuring that subsequent Web site postings on sites that contractors host are regularly reviewed for appropriateness and

currency. If there are questions about whether material is appropriate, contact the OCKT managing editor.

Accessibility

All materials posted on AHRQ Web sites must be fully accessible to persons with disabilities and comply with requirements under Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. Federal agencies must provide equal access to their information and services to disabled individuals. Requirements are specified in Section 508 for electronic and information technology, which includes Web sites and multimedia products. Equivalent alternatives are required for auditory and visual information, such as providing alternative descriptive text for images for the visually impaired and captions for video files for the hearing impaired. Online transcripts are required for all audio. Inaccessible files may only be posted if links to them are near accessible versions (such as a PDF file near the accessible Web version). For standards and guidance, go to the HHS site on Section 508 at www.hhs.gov/web/508/index.html. For external links from a Federal Government Web site to partner products or files that are not compliant with Section 508 accessibility requirements, a special accessibility notice must be co-located with the link on the Federal site. The accessibility notice link is www.ahrq.gov/accessibility.htm.

An example of an accessibility notice is as follows:

These file formats are not resident on a Government Web site and therefore do not comply with the requirements for Federal information resources under Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

OCKT uses software to evaluate Web site accessibility and can provide a report on any violations of Section 508 that need to be addressed before a site is launched. Standards and guidance are available at www.access-board.gov/508.htm. For more information, see Appendix 2-C, Creating Accessible Files and Technologies.

Intellectual Property

As with printed material, all copyrighted and trademarked materials must be noted and any constraints related to the materials must be specified. Public domain does not extend outside the borders of the United States; therefore, foreign countries must request specific permission for use. Citation of the source is essential. Contractors must coordinate with AHRQ on copyright permission requests and follow trademark guidelines.

See Section 1 on Copyright, Licensing Agreements, and Related Intellectual Property Requirements; Appendix 1-A, Copyright: Permission Forms and Licensing Agreement; and Appendix 1-B, Trademarks.

Linking

Links to Web sites outside the .gov domain constitute an implied endorsement and create a business advantage for the linked sites. The Office of Management and Budget requires agencies to conduct a risk assessment of external links, and potential links need to be assessed against HHS and AHRQ linking policies and criteria. If a site deviates from these policies, then the specific review and selection criteria must be justified and posted

on the Web site for full disclosure. Outside Web resources may link to Agency resources if the link is not displayed in a way that would imply an endorsement by the Agency of a specific commercial product or service. AHRQ follows the HHS Web standard for external link disclaimers and icons.

Contractors are responsible for assessing links according to AHRQ linking policy requirements and the evaluation checklist provided. Contractors must comply with the HHS Web standard on External Link Disclaimers and Icon at www.hhs.gov/web/policies/webstandards/disclaimer.html. For the Agency's linking policy, see Appendix 2-E, AHRQ Linking Policy.

Web Development and Redesign

Web sites and tools supported through contracts are Federal information resources. For contractor-provided Web sites and redesigns, a checklist must be submitted for each contract deliverable. See Appendix 2-D, Web Site Initiation Checklist for the checklist. For guidance on developing effective toolkits, see Section 6.

AHRQ has resources to provide technical assistance to ensure your deliverables meet the requirements outlined in this section. Please work with your project officer and the AHRQ Web Site Manager who will conduct a preliminary review of your Web-based product. For recommendations and guidance on requirements and best practices for Web sites, go to www.howto.gov/web-content. Also refer to HHS Web Standards www.hhs.gov/web/policies/standards.

See Section 7 for a visual example of the HHS branding bar and AHRQ banner and footer for Web sites.

See essential information on clearance, accessibility, intellectual property, and linking in the sections above.

Technical Assistance for Web Tools

For any tools posted to the Web site that may require technical assistance, please provide the following information:

- Written instructions on the use of the tool.
- Contact name, telephone number, and email address for technical assistance.
- Mechanism for future updates and revisions, if applicable.

This information must be provided along with the tool or product to be posted. Provision of technical assistance support should be included in the lifecycle costs of the product.

Source Code

AHRQ's intent is to make tools available to the public; clinicians; health planners and providers; and other Federal, State, and local government agencies. Software and products resulting from these projects should be easily transportable to other users and

developers. The best way to ensure adoption and implementation for these audiences is to have a Web-based final product that is platform independent. Coordinate with AHRQ on infrastructure requirements for housing any robust back-end applications before they are developed.

Developers must deliver source code for any technical application to the Agency with the product. This provides AHRQ with the knowledge of how the application was created and enables the Agency to make corrections, updates, or conversions as necessary to keep pace with technological changes once the product is released.

Usability

Web usability resources must include usability testing, evaluation, and modification as an integral and recurring part of the development effort to ensure resources are effective for the electronic business processes they are designed to facilitate. A set of Research-Based Web Design and Usability Guidelines is available at www.usability.gov/guidelines.

Prior to release, Web sites and applications, including mobile sites and apps, must be available for evaluation using usability heuristics. Feedback and issue resolution must be documented and coordinated with OCKT.

The Web site design must meet compliance with multiple browsers, including mobile devices.

Domain Names

OCKT obtains domain names through the HHS Web Communications Division, which approves domain names.

All domain names for any Web resource paid for in whole or in part by Federal funds must be registered as .gov domains by AHRQ through HHS with the General Services Administration (GSA) unless a waiver from the HHS Secretary is obtained. Contractors and non-government employees do not have the authority to register domain names for an HHS site. Although the Agency may use other domains, such as .org, .net, .edu, and .com, the .gov domain must be registered and be the primary domain. The .gov domain name will need to be indexed by USA.gov, the GSA portal to government-funded resources. Coordinate domain name requests with the AHRQ Web Site Manager, who can advise on current policy.

Privacy, Web Techniques, and More

The Privacy Act affects all AHRQ sites, and the standard AHRQ footer must include a link to the site's privacy policy. Web sites must follow that policy. A machine-readable format of the privacy policy notice must also be uploaded to the Web site. AHRQ conducts a privacy impact assessment to determine what kind of personal information is contained within a system, what is done with that information, and how that information is protected.

AHRQ staff members periodically audit sites to ensure they observe their stated privacy policy. A Privacy Act system notice may need to be prepared and published for users to

register on a site if the registrations represent a group of records, under the control of the Agency (or a contractor), that can be retrieved by personal identifier. This notice must go through several levels of review—including the HHS Office of General Counsel—and be published in the *Federal Register*.

Contractors must work in coordination with AHRQ staff for submission of the Privacy Act system notice, to adopt or modify the general privacy policy of the AHRQ main Web site, and to respond to questions on the worksheet for a privacy impact assessment.

- **Use of cookies.** As a result of changes in Federal policy, AHRQ sites can use persistent cookies and other measurement and customization techniques—if certain issues such as privacy are addressed (see OMB Memo M-10-22 at www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/assets/memoranda_2010/m10-22.pdf).

Social Media and Interactive Features

AHRQ encourages use of social media tools (such as Twitter, blogs, Facebook, and wikis) and interaction between members of sites through collaboration, discussions, and comments.

If the use of social media or interactive features is being planned, please involve the AHRQ project lead and OCKT early in the process. See OCKT contact information at the end of this section. Also, see Section 4 on Social Media Policy.

An excellent online resource is the HHS Center for New Media, at <http://newmedia.hhs.gov>.

Web Site Mailbox and Records Management

For each Web site, include a “Contact Us” link for customers to submit comments or questions. Web site email is subject to the same privacy and records management issues that affect the overall Web site as well as departmental standards for handling inquiries and customer feedback. Each Web site must provide relevant “frequently asked questions” that are included in the customer relationship management system used to handle AHRQ Web site inquiries. Draft guidance for writing frequently asked questions is available at <http://answers.hhs.gov>.

Contractors are required to maintain the Web site mailbox to provide and update related frequently asked questions and to maintain an electronic archive of responses. This archive is reviewed annually to determine if the contents should be retained. Contractors must submit the number of inquiries handled on a fiscal year basis to the AHRQ Web Site Manager for inclusion in Web metrics for Agency reporting under the Government Performance Reporting Act.

For guidance on records management requirements, go to the HHS Web at www.hhs.gov/web/policies/webpolicies/webrecords.html.

Surveys and Other Information Collection

If information is collected from the public other than the minimum needed to provide a service, approval from OMB must be obtained. This process includes collecting information or feedback from users for surveys or evaluations, regardless of how the information is collected (Web site, email, paper). A notice must be posted at the point of collection with the OMB approval number and a statement on the process of collection. AHRQ project officers must coordinate with the Agency's Paperwork Reduction Act officer to obtain the appropriate approvals. Currently, Doris Lefkowitz and Bill Carroll serve that function for the Agency.

Electronic Freedom of Information Act

The Agency is required to have an electronic Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) library and to provide materials that can be requested under the FOIA in electronic form. HHS requires Agency-funded Web resources to provide a link to the AHRQ FOIA page at www.ahrq.gov/foia.

Contactors must include a link to AHRQ FOIA page on the main Web site.

Security

Web sites need to be protected against intrusion and corruption or compromise of content. This security is critical if there are business processes or financial transactions conducted on the Web site. Security measures must be specifically delineated for any federally funded Web resources in existence or in development. GSA periodically audits and evaluates Web resources for security. Attacks on Web resources must be documented and reported to the HHS Inspector General.

Contractors must establish and maintain security according to AHRQ and HHS policies and procedures. OCKT can provide assistance in defining and implementing applicable security requirements.

Web Sponsor Identity

AHRQ has principles to identify the Agency as the primary sponsor of AHRQ-related Web sites. These principles reflect HHS best practices for a consistent look and feel of Web resources, reinforce credibility, and support HHS and Agency branding efforts. The four specific principles that should be consistent across all AHRQ-funded Web sites are:

- **Web site URL name.** The name of a Web site should contain AHRQ in the URL unless a domain name waiver from the HHS Secretary is obtained. A Web resource should either be a folder on the main AHRQ Web site (www.ahrq.gov/chiri/) or a third-level domain of the Web site (<http://meps.ahrq.gov>).
- **Title of Web site project.** AHRQ's name should be part of the formal title when referenced in print or promotional materials and appear at the beginning of the Web site's project name. For example: AHRQ's Web Morbidity and Mortality online journal.

- **HHS and AHRQ logos.** The HHS and AHRQ logos should be featured prominently on the Web site and in materials that are used to market that Web site. The AHRQ Web Site Manager will provide a standard Web banner and footer.
- **Web site home page format.** The Web site home page should have common design and navigation elements with the HHS portal and the AHRQ Web site so that all Web sites look as though they belong to the HHS and AHRQ Web sites. AHRQ domain sites must include the standard banner and footer that are branded for Web resources. The AHRQ Web Site Manager will provide technical specifications and templates for developers designing Web resources. See Section 7 on Branding and Design Specifications.

Additional Information

To discuss specific issues or to get additional guidance on Web requirements, contact:

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