

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ALBERTA

WEBSITE GUIDELINES

**FOR MEMBERS OF
THE LEGISLATIVE
ASSEMBLY,
CONSTITUENCY
OFFICES AND
CAUCUS OFFICES**



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WEBSITE GUIDELINES

Introduction

Either in their capacity as representatives of and in a particular electoral division or as they carry out their government or opposition role in the Legislative Assembly, an important role of Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) is to communicate with the citizens of Alberta. This activity is carried out by individual Members and through each caucus office. Media used for this has included print, radio, television, signage on buildings and vehicles and personal appearances.

In this Internet age all caucuses and many MLAs are using websites and social media sites such as MySpace and Facebook as an additional communications tool. We anticipate that this trend will continue. To assist you as Members, constituency staff and caucus staff, we have developed guidelines regarding the development of, maintenance of and responsibility for websites and social media sites.



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Authorities Applicable to Websites¹

MLAs: MLA communication with constituents is governed by section 5 of the Constituency Services Order (RMSC 1992, c. C-1, as amended). The Order states:

- 5(1) The Allowance may be used to pay expenses which relate to non-partisan communication between the Member and his constituents...
- (2) An item may not be paid for under subsection (1) if it bears any political party logo, promotes political party activities, solicits political party funds or memberships or contains personal criticism of another Member.
- (3) If a Member contracts for a service to facilitate communication, the Member shall, where reasonably possible, contract with a person who is licensed and insured to carry out that service.

The Expenditure Guidelines for Members of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta also apply to MLA/constituency websites.

Caucuses²: Caucus communications are referred to in the Legislative Assembly of Alberta Expenditure Guidelines for Caucus, Effective December 14, 2006. Page 2 states that the purpose of a caucus budget is to conduct activities in support of the Members' parliamentary role, which includes "support the communication of policy positions and debate on legislative matters important to Albertans." Advertising and communications are a legitimate type of caucus expense subject to the prohibition in page 3 that states that:

- Caucus activities and transactions should be separate and distinct from party activities, party identity (logos, colours, web pages), events or transactions and particularly election activities. Furthermore, during an election period Caucus activities and expenses should be restricted to ensure that there is no perception of utilizing these funds for electioneering activities.

- There should be no appearance of influencing the voting public by making payments to individuals or organizations that are donations (cash or in-kind) or are of a fundraising nature.

Caucus management is directed to refer to the most current version of the Expenditure Guidelines for Caucus for details on allowable expenses.

¹ Where appropriate, “website” and “social media site” may be used interchangeably.

² For the purpose of this document “Caucus” will refer to either Caucus or Independent Member.

Funding

MLAs: Section 1 of the Constituency Services Order entitles every Member to a Member’s Services Allowance (MSA) each fiscal year. An MLA may use these funds for communications expenses authorized under section 5, including website development, hosting, maintenance, or security. Domain name registration on behalf of Members and constituency offices are paid by the Legislative Assembly Office (Information Technology Services branch).

Caucuses: Each year the Special Standing Committee on Members’ Services approves funding for each caucus via a formula. Each caucus may allocate the funds not dedicated to committee support, subject to budgetary restriction, to the operations of its office. This includes website development, hosting, maintenance, security or domain name registration.

Considerations and Guidelines

Who is developing or maintaining your site?

If a professional is developing your site for a fee, we require the execution of an independent contractor agreement to protect you and the Legislative Assembly Office. Any contract for web design must be reviewed by the LAO and signed by the Clerk, and its term should not extend past twelve (12) months. Alternatively, if a volunteer will be providing design, maintenance or other assistance with your website, we require a volunteer placement agreement to be completed for the same reason. The agreement defines the services being provided, scope of the project, deadlines, costs, input from the Member or caucus, responsibilities of the contractor, insurance, privacy/confidentiality issues, approvals and dispute resolution mechanisms. Contact Human Resource Services (HRS) for details on the contracting process and required approvals.

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Other considerations:

- **If someone is volunteering to design or maintain your website, what are their qualifications?** While having someone volunteer to provide services is a great way to keep costs down, you must be certain that the individual has the adequate training and experience to provide you with a professional-looking website that is compliant with current Orders and any relevant guidelines. Ultimately, you as the Member or the caucus whip or director of caucus/chief of staff are responsible for the website, so you must be aware of and comfortable with both the content and technical elements of your website.
- **Are there any risks?** It is your responsibility as the Member or the caucus whip or director of caucus/chief of staff to be aware of all design and content on your website. You should ensure that you provide effective oversight of all persons involved to ensure that you do not experience any technical, legal, procedural or confidentiality issues due to your selection or supervision of the person(s) involved with your website.
- **Who is updating content?** If your staff is responsible for updating the site, does s/he have the skill set to do so? Staff may require training to ensure that s/he has the appropriate knowledge and skills to properly maintain the website.
- **Who owns the site?** Pursuant to the independent contractor or volunteer agreement any site developed or maintained with Legislative Assembly Office funds or resources becomes the property of the Legislative Assembly Office. It must be clear in any agreement that the Legislative Assembly Office on behalf of the Member or caucus owns the website it pays for and is responsible for the content, regardless of media, on the site. Copyright is retained by the Legislative Assembly Office.

You should ensure you have the answers to these questions before proceeding to avoid confusion, time delays or future problems.

IT Impacts

There will be a number of technical considerations to take into account before initiating or updating your website. The Legislative Assembly Office does not host, design, maintain or troubleshoot MLA/constituency or caucus websites. Therefore, you must ensure that you are clear about what your service provider/web host will provide. Have you considered the following?

- ***Who will do the web hosting?*** As the Legislative Assembly Office (LAO) does not provide web hosting support or services, you need to select a third party to provide hosting services. Any contract for web hosting must be reviewed by the LAO and signed by the Clerk, and its term should not extend past twelve (12) months. Contact Human Resource Services (HRS) for details on the contracting process and required approvals. Hardware or software purchased using LAO funds to facilitate website hosting are the property of the Legislative Assembly Office and are to be used solely for hosting that MLA/constituency or caucus website. These resources may not be used to host or to support any external, third-party websites.
- ***What level of web hosting/service do you need?*** Service providers can provide different levels of service for different costs depending upon certain criteria like the level of complexity, the size and media to be used (i.e., print, audio, video, pictures).
- ***Is your site dynamic or static?*** If your site will only have posted information for the reference of people who visit it, it may be fairly easy to update and not require a high level of service. However, if you have a more sophisticated website where visitors have the opportunity to interact with the site (e.g., complete surveys, sign up for newsletters, download podcasts, etc.), this may require a higher level of service from your web host.

You must not load or operate any applications or devices supporting your website that may impair the functionality, performance or security of any IT resources provided by the LAO. If you are unsure as to what the effects of implementing a website are to your current systems or if you have some general questions about websites, please contact the Manager of IT Operations in the Information Technology Services (ITS) branch.

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Costs

As noted above, funding is provided to Members and caucuses that may be used to pay for the development and operations of a website. You should consider the following when budgeting for a website:

- What are the one-time costs, like development?
- What are the periodic fixed costs, like web hosting?
- What are the variable costs, like content updates and enhancements?

Remember that website expenses will be expensed in the fiscal year to which they relate.

Declaration of Domain Names/Websites with the LAO

Members who establish websites for the purposes of communicating with constituents and wish to pay for the design, development and operating costs from their MSA must complete the prescribed declaration form and file it with the Financial Management and Administrative Services branch. Declaration forms are available on Our House, the LAO's intranet site. These websites may be eligible for MLA liability insurance coverage* and will be subject to the Guidelines on Dissolution of the Alberta Legislative Assembly at the call of a general election or by-election. Caucuses are also required to complete the declaration form.

Warning: Websites that are operated by the MLA or caucus that are not funded through the LAO and are not declared with the LAO may not be eligible for MLA liability coverage.*

* MLA liability coverage is subject to the terms and conditions of coverage maintained by the Risk Management and Insurance Division, Alberta Finance.

Domain Names

A domain name is both the website's address as well as a meaningful identification for your site. When considering what domain name you wish to adopt, please consider that a consistent naming approach will make it easier for citizens to find your site and allow for easy administration at the call of a general election or by-election.

Member/Constituency Office Website: The LAO has purchased, registered and retained exclusive use of domain names bearing the names of all electoral divisions. In advance of developing a constituency website a Member must contact the ITS branch to arrange for the use of a domain name for his/her constituency. This domain name belongs to the LAO and cannot be transferred to a political candidate or party or to a Member for personal use.

Caucus Website: For a caucus the domain name must conform to any conditions arising from the most current version of the approved Legislative Assembly of Alberta Expenditure Guidelines for Caucus.

When registered to the caucus with the LAO and/or paid with Legislative Assembly funds, the domain name belongs to the LAO and cannot be transferred to candidates or the party at election time. Use of a political party name outside the context of its caucus is not appropriate for a domain name paid for by the LAO.

Data Security

When selecting a provider for web hosting, it is very important that you know on whose server the website data resides. If you are collecting information from those who access the site, you must be clear that you know where that information resides and how it is protected. This is especially important if any personal information that could identify individuals is collected to ensure that its confidentiality is protected.

We **strongly suggest** that you select service providers or website hosts that **do not store** your data outside of Canada. Data stored in the United States may be subject to the USA Patriot Act and eligible for disclosure to U.S. authorities. Data resident in another jurisdiction may be subject to that country's legislation. This may impact your ability to protect the integrity, security and privacy of the data you are posting or collecting.

Content and Design

Content is governed by the rules and principles noted in page 2 of these guidelines, Authorities Applicable to Websites. Thought should be given to the following when considering appropriate content:

- Is this site assisting citizens in providing access to the Member or caucus? Is Member or staff contact information like names, addresses, telecommunications numbers and e-mail addresses clearly identifiable?
- Are links or information regarding nonpartisan community resources included? Is there a

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link to the Alberta Legislative Assembly website, other jurisdictions' websites?

- Links to other websites **should be clearly labelled**. It should not be misleading as to whose website it is.
- Disclaimers should be included in several locations within the website and in close proximity to the related material. This is important because visitors may jump from one web page to another and come to the site from different entry points.
- Does the content focus on issues, legislative activities, policy positions or constituency or caucus events?
- Will information be updated on a timely basis?
- Could any content published on the website be considered defamatory? If there is any concern, legal advice must be sought. Members or caucus management should contact the Office of Parliamentary Counsel before posting.

Note that the rules on content apply to web logs (aka. "blogs"), podcasts, chat facilities, discussion streams or social media sites. Also be aware that Member or caucus websites **must not include links to any political party sites**.

A well-designed website can enhance a citizen's ability to find and use the information on the site. Keep your audience in mind when designing your site. Appropriate HTML language should be used to ensure that search engines can find information easily. You may want to have a search engine, breadcrumb navigation and a site map. An aesthetically pleasing site that uses clear, crisp graphics, fonts and photos can make the site more usable by citizens. You should also design your website to protect it against e-mail addresses being harvested for spamming.

Access to Legislative Assembly visual identity symbols in digital form is available from Communications Services. Access to media clips of speeches during legislative sessions is available from House Services, Hansard Branch.

If you plan to provide links to other nonpartisan community resources on your site, it is appropriate to contact the site's webmaster to obtain permission first. Alternatively, it is advisable to include a "permission to link" statement on your site so that other entities interested in linking to your site are required to ask your permission.

Interactivity

If you plan to have interactive elements as part of your site, make sure that the user's privacy is protected. The information collected must be used for work in support of the Member's roles only and access to it should be strictly controlled. "Cookies" should only track general activity, not specific addresses or personal information. Caution should be exercised in the collection or transmission of personal information at any time and via any medium. This includes collecting personal information for e-newsletters or other notices of interest. See also "Data Security" (page 7 of these guidelines) if a third party is providing this service and/or storing personal information on your behalf.

Any interactive tool, including a blog, social interface or chat tool, should be used with caution to ensure that it does not contravene copyright or contain defamatory material or content not authorized under relevant Orders or guidelines.

Copyright/Intellectual Property

If you or your developer wants to use any text, graphic, picture or other attribute from an outside source, you need permission and may have to pay for its use. In addition, your content should be clearly identified to protect it as copyrighted. Members and their website developers must be aware that images they use may require a license or fee for use. Some attributes have terms of use by which you must abide. It is the responsibility of the Member or director of caucus/chief of staff to ensure that adequate efforts have been made to determine that there is no breach of copyright, terms of use, usage guidelines or other intellectual property rights, including those of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta/Legislative Assembly Office.

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Terms of Use

A “terms of use” statement lets the website users know what the site is for and how you will use any information collected from them. It is important that you let users know that this is a nonparty site if a caucus website or a nonpartisan site if a Member’s website.

Election

Declared Member/constituency office website and caucus website content or operations are governed by the Guidelines on Dissolution of the Alberta Legislative Assembly at the call of either a by-election or general election.

Monitoring and Compliance

Member/Constituency Office: As with any other constituency communications, when an expense is incurred, the website or social media site in question will be reviewed by the LAO to ensure that it is compliant with the Constituency Services Order and any associated guidelines before payment is made.

If the LAO receives a complaint or discovers a noncompliant site, it will investigate to ensure compliance with these website guidelines.

If the operation of a Member’s website interferes with the operations and security of any Legislative Assembly IT hardware or software, the LAO will take immediate action to ensure that any threat to the operation/security of the Assembly information technology infrastructure is eliminated.

Caucus: Prior to the payment of any communications expense associated with the caucus website(s) or social media site(s) it maintains, the LAO reserves the right to review the site to ensure it meets these website guidelines or the most current version of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta Expenditure Guidelines for Caucus.

If the LAO receives a complaint or discovers a noncompliant site, it will investigate to ensure compliance with these website guidelines.

If the operation of a caucus website interferes with the operations and security of any Legislative Assembly IT hardware or software, the LAO will take immediate action to ensure that any threat to the operation/security of the Assembly information technology infrastructure is eliminated.

Appeals

If any question arises with respect to the application of these guidelines, the question shall be decided in the first instance by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, subject to appeal to the Members' Services Committee. If a question arises to the application of these guidelines in relation to the Speaker, the question shall be decided by the Members' Services Committee.

NOTES







LAO CONTACTS:

Human Resource Services: 780.427.1364
Information Technology Services: 780.422.1680
Financial Management and Administrative Services: 780.427.2477
Parliamentary Counsel: 780.422.4837
Communications Services: 780.427.1653
Hansard: 780.427.1875

Publications Available and Referenced on Our House (<http://ourhouse>):

- Website Guidelines for Members of the Legislative Assembly, Constituency Offices and Caucus Offices
 - Expenditure Guidelines for Members of the Legislative Assembly
 - Expenditure Guidelines for Caucus
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Publications Available and Referenced on Legislative Assembly of Alberta website (www.assembly.ab.ca):

- Guidelines on Dissolution of the Alberta Legislative Assembly
 - Consolidated Members' Services Committee Orders
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Effective: April 2012

Printed under the authority of the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta