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Club and Region Website Guidelines

A website is often a person's first point of entry into an organization. Every organization needs one. In today's every-changing world of accessible technology, not only are websites a source of information for the visitor, but also a tool for an organization to generate publicity.

Organizations want people to visit their sites time and time again. They can increase the number of repeat visitors by making their sites as interesting and fresh as possible. These guidelines provide clubs and regions with ideas on how to create an engaging website that fosters the Soroptimist brand and promotes the mission by employing a professional look and tone. SIA developed a set of website templates to make the web design process easier for clubs/regions. There is no requirement to use the templates, but there are many benefits to using them:

- The template files were created using Drupal, an open source software program that allows anyone to easily publish, manage and organize content on a website.
- Clubs/regions can use the templates with any web hosting service (SIA recommends using Dreamhost, which is free for those with 501(c)(3) designation).
- Web design experience is not necessary.
- Clubs can choose from a set of three designs. Regions can choose from a different set of three designs to help differentiate club websites from region sites.
- Once club/regions download the template files, they will already have a legitimate website that contains information about Soroptimist, the Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Awards and the Live Your Dream Campaign. Clubs/regions would only need to update the Contact Us page.
- Clubs/regions have the ability to customize navigation bars, as well as add and remove pages, blogs, events, photos, calendars, etc. There is also an option to add a password protected members-only area.
- Clubs/regions can link directly to their social media sites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter.
- Clubs/regions will help solidify a consistent brand identity throughout the federation.

To download the template files and instruction manual, clubs should visit <http://www.soroptimist.org/clubweb> and regions should visit <http://www.soroptimist.org/regionweb>. Contact SIA to obtain the username and password needed to access these pages.

Getting Started

Before developing a website, clubs/regions should determine the following (whether using the templates or not):

- Who will design/implement the site
- Who will oversee the content and look of the site
- Who will be responsible for changes and updates to the site

Most likely, the public relations chair will handle one or all of these tasks because the site is a promotional tool that shares information and fosters an image for the club/region. If there is a public relations committee, the committee could divide the responsibilities and have everyone report to an overall “webmaster” (a similar job to that of the club/region newsletter editor).

Clubs/regions, especially those with no web design expertise, are encouraged to use the SIA templates. However, clubs/regions that want to design their own website could hire a local web company to design the site and implement changes and updates. Perhaps a company or public relations/advertising agency would be willing to offer this service for free. Another alternative may be contacting the graphic arts, communications, and/or web development department at a nearby college for assistance.

Before designing, find a place to “house” the site. Soroptimists can take advantage of community websites that often list local volunteer organizations and provide them with free websites. Or, clubs/regions can contract with an Internet service provider (ISP) to host the website. As stated above, SIA recommends using Dreamhost.

Once site responsibilities are covered, the club/region should have a plan for carrying out the development of this powerful communications tool. A simple written plan should include the site’s objective and target audiences, as well as an explanation and overview of why the site is needed. Club/region sites should cultivate an identity in line with SIA, with regard to both content and look. Clubs/regions must remember they are apart of a larger organization. In addition, all club/region sites must adhere to SIA’s bylaws and procedures, which address such issues as logo use, cross-solicitation, position statements, etc.

Domain Name

Clubs/regions must register a domain name with a name registration site found on the Internet. Many of these sites exist and clubs/regions should shop around for the best price.

- Clubs/regions should try to use a domain name that ends in an *.org*, which is available for charitable organizations.
- When registering a name, pick one that is relevant to the club/region, such as www.atlantasoroptimist.org or www.soroptimistnortheasternregion.org. This works much better than an obscure name that may be confusing or misleading.
- Note that domain names have no spaces between words. It is preferable that names do not contain dashes or underscores.

Homepage

The homepage is the point of entry into the website and gives a first impression of the organization. It is the first page a visitor sees upon visiting a site. It is probably the most important page of the site (and also gets the most hits). The homepage communicates a lot to the visitor. A visitor can determine within seconds, whether the site offers useful information, the organization is reputable and worthwhile, and/or the site is worth a return visit. As the virtual face of Soroptimist, the homepage should:

- Prominently display Soroptimist logo at the top of the page. This is already done in the templates. **Please note:** The homepage should not include the Soroptimist International emblem, which SIA no longer uses.
- Contain the mission statement.
- Be appealing and inviting.
- Be visually easy to understand.
- Contain a navigation menu that lists the sections found throughout the site.

Ideally, the homepage should also display photos of club and/or region projects that show members in action.

Content and Navigation

Club/region websites should help market Soroptimist to the public. Provide information that informs, educates and persuades. The content should appeal to both internal and external audiences. Because the external audience may know very little about the club/region, it is best to include interesting and informative content that fosters an understanding of the organization to an outside audience.

- Organize information in different sections that can be accessed through the homepage with a navigation bar or menu.
- Sections on programs, membership and events should constitute the bulk of the site because this information serves all site visitors. This information should be accurate and consistent with that of SIA.
- Although the federation website should be used as a guide for content and wording, external visitors to club/region sites are probably interested in local projects, news and activities. Those seeking more in-depth information about Soroptimist International of the Americas and Soroptimist International should be directed (via links) to those websites.
- Information on meetings, committees and other details will probably only interest members, so place in a members-only area.
- Include a “Contact Us” section that provides site visitors with a way to get in touch with the club/region. The templates that SIA provides already include a contact page that can be customized.
- Make navigating the site easy. Avoid hiding items deep within subsections of the main sections. Provide a home button on all pages that easily allows visitors to return to the homepage.

Writing

Writing for the web should be short and to the point. It is more difficult for readers to read words on a screen than to read print materials. Not everyone visiting the site will understand what Soroptimist stands for or what a federation is. Avoid using acronyms or Soroptimist language that only members understand. Write as if visitors have no idea what Soroptimist is or what it does. Read the Graphic Identity & Style Guide, available from the SIA website, for more information on writing for internal and external audiences.

Design

The design of the website is just as important as its content. The overall look speaks volumes about the professionalism of the club/region and its commitment to volunteering. Colors, graphics, photos, fonts and other elements should be selected carefully to ensure a clean and readable presentation. Most design principles used for printed materials do not apply to web pages because the eye views computer monitors and paper differently. SIA’s templates already have a design and style sheets for font types and sizes built in. If a club/region wants to develop its own site, follow these rules:

- Avoid a black background or a light one with a pattern. These backgrounds make reading text and printing pages from the site difficult. Opt for a white background or a solid, light-colored one.
- The official Soroptimist blue (Pantone 659) used for print materials can be created for the site by converting it to RGB (Red–Green–Blue) mode. This color should be used with the “S” logo and other design elements.
- Use a sans serif font such as **Arial**, **Tahoma** or **Verdana** (specifically created for the web) because it is easier to read on the screen. An individual’s computer must have the designated font in order to read the site. Therefore, stick with these three fonts or select ones that come with most computers. Some people configure their browsers to override the site’s fonts with ones they selected. One way to gain control is by creating words with a certain font, then saving this as a graphic. This is particularly useful for section headings and subheads in the text. Keep in mind, however, that any words saved as images won’t be able to be translated through programs such as Google Translate.
- Organize text in small paragraphs or as bullets. Studies show that people read 25 percent slower on the web than they do print. Because people navigate through websites so quickly, they comprehend less, so

it's best to display information in small, digestible portions. Also, avoid displaying text in ALL CAPS because it's difficult to read and it is perceived as shouting to the reader.

- Photos and graphics should be placed on the site in JPEG (Joint Photographic Experts Group) or GIF (Graphics Interchange Format) file formats, which enable people to view high-quality images at minimal download time. A JPEG format works best with photographs or scanned images. A GIF format works best with clipart. A graphic or photo only needs to be 72 dpi. Read SIA's Photo Guide, available on the SIA website, for more information on saving photos for the web.
- Since everything on a computer screen is made up of square pixels, rounded edges will appear slightly jagged.
- Use only the special effects that enhance communication on the site. Flashing and flip-flopping graphics, sound and video capabilities, and other high-tech features can either appear tacky or creative, depending on their context and use.

Interactivity

For most organizations, interactivity is a major advantage of websites and key to bringing people back to the site. While clubs/regions may not be able to commit a lot of dollars to fancy, interactive sites, there are several ways of creating two-way communication:

- Add a blog where visitors can post thoughts and ideas on various topics.
- Set up a message board or chat room in the members area, where other club/regions and members can exchange ideas.
- Add interactive forms that enable visitors to submit a request for more information, or for members to sign up for a committee or submit a change to their address and/or phone number (best suited to a members-only section).

Updating

While some general information on a website may stay the same, clubs/regions should make regular updates to encourage members and other visitors to return to the site. Site updates can include important dates, event announcements, upcoming meeting information, details during and upon completion of club/region projects, fundraising progress, meeting or conference minutes, SIA news, short articles from members, etc. Include a date on the homepage that denotes the site's last update.

Linking

A popular feature of many websites is to connect visitors to other websites to provide more information or access to an affiliated organization. It is proper "netiquette" to request permission of another organization before linking to it.

- All clubs/regions should link to SIA at www.soroptimist.org and the Live Your Dream Website at www.LiveYourDreamCampaign.org. Clubs should provide a link to their region sites and regions can also link to club websites.
- Clubs/regions may choose to link with the websites of community partners. However, when providing links, use caution. Links give the perception that Soroptimist endorses the other entity's site. To protect from possible liabilities in associating with other sites, include the following disclaimer:

This website includes links providing direct access to other Internet sites. However, Soroptimist takes no responsibility for the content or information contained on other sites, nor does it imply endorsement or approval of products or information offered.

- Although it may be tempting to form a business relationship with corporations whereby they "advertise" on a club/region site and provide a percentage of revenue for all purchases made through that link,

clubs/regions should refrain from entering into such relationships. SIA and its U.S. clubs/regions are considered 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organizations and as such, may be subject to unrelated business income tax (UBIT) for these types of arrangements. It is important to contact headquarters before entering into any business arrangements to make certain that the reporting and expense ramifications of accepting such revenue is understood. At a minimum, such portals might appear to be an endorsement by Soroptimist of the product or service, which may not be desirable.

Protecting Information

Since anyone can access a website, certain information should be left off to protect the club/region and organization as a whole.

- Personal information—such as home and business phone numbers, social security numbers and birth dates—should never go on a site for security reasons. Meeting details should not be published for the same reason.
- While it may seem appropriate to list club/region members' professions, places of business and email addresses to illustrate Soroptimist's make-up of professional women, get each member's permission before adding this type of information, or list it in a secure password protected members area.
- Obtain written permission from non-members, such as Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Award recipients, before adding their name, town, place of business or photograph. Get written permission from the parent or guardian of a Soroptimist Violet Richardson Award honoree before adding her information or photo. Media consent forms are available in the public awareness section of www.soroptimist.org.
- Information on the site needs copyright protection. It is not necessary to actually register a copyright. It suffices to note the creation date next to the © symbol or the word "copyright" somewhere on the homepage. Use the following statement for additional protection:

All materials posted on this site are subject to copyrights owned by Soroptimist International of _____ and/or other individuals or entities. Any reproduction or retransmission of all or part of any document found on this site is expressly prohibited, unless Soroptimist International of _____ or the copyright owner of the material has granted its prior written consent. Copyright 2011—Soroptimist International of _____.

Publicizing the Site

Include the web address in all publicity materials and news releases. Members can also add it to their email signatures.

Quick Check List

If a club/region already has a website, answer the following questions to make sure it follows the guidelines:

- Is the Soroptimist logo and tagline visible from every page?
- Does the site include the Soroptimist mission statement?
- Does it encompass the Soroptimist brand with colors, look and feel?
- Are Soroptimist programs described?
- Does the site feature photographs of members doing women- and girl-focused projects?
- Does the navigation bar and home button appear on all pages?
- Does it have a members-only section where personal and secure information is kept?
- Does the site link to www.soroptimist.org and www.LiveYourDreamCampaign.org?
- Does the club website link to the region website?
- Is the content interesting, up-to-date, well-organized and easy to read?
- Has someone been appointed to regularly update the site?
- Is the club or region contact information easy to locate?