Setting up your own website

Having a website will provide you and your stakeholders with a central place for key information. It's also important that when people hear about your group or project and want to find out more there is somewhere (e.g. a webpage) they can go to find more information.

You can often integrate social media channels, survey tools, newsletters, and other tools into your website. It is not necessary to employ a web developer or be a coding wiz to build a professional, attractive website. Online platforms such as Wix and Squarespace are trying to make building and designing websites easy and possible for anyone.
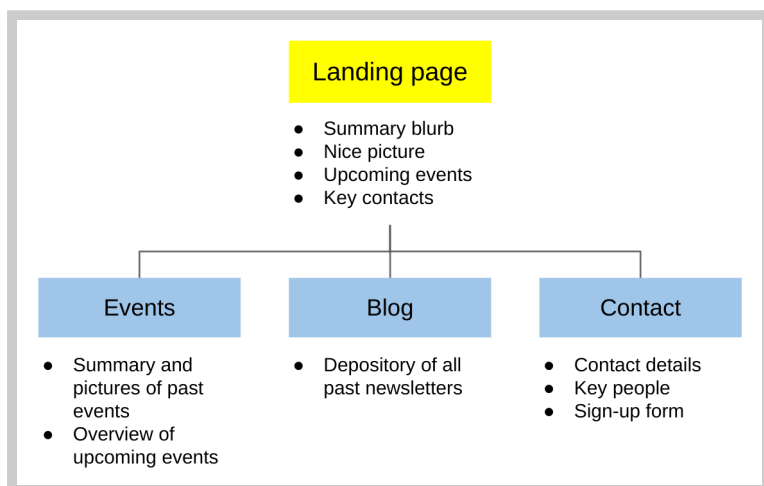
Content

Before deciding what platform you want to use for your website, you need to consider what sort of content you want to host online. It is worth spending some time mapping out the content, so you get an idea how many pages you need and if you need to set up any additional tools like calendars, blogs or maps.

Web content checklist:
- [ ] Type of content:
    - [ ] Contact information
    - [ ] Mission/vision of group (e.g. 'About us)
    - [ ] Outline of project
    - [ ] Newsletters
    - [ ] Upcoming or past events
    - [ ] Key people involved
- [ ] Pages:
    - [ ] Number of pages
    - [ ] Title of pages
- [ ] Type of tools:
    - [ ] Calendar (e.g. for events)
    - [ ] Booking system / online shop
    - [ ] Forms (for getting in touch, providing feedback or signing up)
    - [ ] Blog (e.g. for newsletters, articles written by members)
    - [ ] Social media plugins
    - [ ] Document storage
    - [ ] Videos and images
    - [ ] Other special tools (e.g. maps, dashboards)
- [ ] Navigation between pages and tools (e.g. menus and submenus)

Web content map (example):

Platform and tools

Now that you know what content you want to host, it will be easier to review the options you have. If you only need one page to host very basic information, it might be best just to add it to an existing website in your local community, like the parish council or an existing environmental group, rather than creating your own website.

If you decide you do want to create a new website, then free online platforms such as Wix and Squarespace are probably your best choice. Both these platforms provide everything that most small to medium organisations need in a website. They use a highly intuitive drag and drop approach and have a lot of add on options meaning you can link your site to your social media channels etc.

If you find that you do require more advanced functionalities, then speak to a local web developer for some initial advice. It might be worth getting professional help, but remember that serviced websites do not only require (paid) time to set up but may also cost you a regular fee in the long term. Make sure you have the necessary funds to cover this.

However, you might also find that you don't actually need a website at all but can host information or tools in other ways online. Please see the 'Other tools' section below for more information.

Website tools

You can find some suggestions for website tools below. It is worth thinking about, not only what sort of functionalities you require from your website, but also who will be looking after the site going forward. If you are paying a professional developer to do it they should be able to advise you on the best tool to use. You might also have one or two experienced volunteers who can help with a particular platform.

Wix is a website building platform that lets you create and edit websites without any coding knowledge. It is very clean and easy to understand – making it perfect for beginners. You'll be able to put together a professional website in no time.

WordPress is a very well known platform that many free and professional websites are based on. It's popularity means that it might be possible to find a volunteer who has worked with it before and can help with the administration of the site.

Squarespace is another well-known website building platform. It is often praised for its image editing, ecommerce, file storage space and Search Engine Optimisation (SEO).

Other tools

Forms can be used by themselves without creating a website. But you can also link to them or sometimes even plug them into your website. If all you want to do is gather some feedback or collect contact details, then maybe an online form is all you need.

Google Forms is a basic, straight forward tool to gather input from the public. You can view the responses on the Google Form site or transfer them into a spreadsheet (Google Sheet). You need a Google account to create and manage this form. You could consider creating an account for your organisation/group, as it also allows you to share diaries (see below), documents and other useful functions. Registered charities can be eligible for free access to the business suite.

Survey Monkey is the classic tool when it comes to surveys and forms. You can use a basic free version or sign up to a subscription if you need the advanced functionalities.

Similar to forms, **calendars and events** can be hosted online independently from or integrated into a website.

Google Calendar (similar to Google Forms) can be used with a Google account and shared publicly or with selected users. You could use a public calendar like this to share event details or manage venue bookings.

Eventbrite is an event booking platform. Basic functionalities are free and you can link your events to other services such as Zoom or Facebook. Eventbrite creates a basic webpage for your event and allows users to register or book tickets.

Some groups decide not to have a website but to use **social media**, e.g. a Facebook page, instead. This is an option, but be aware that not everyone uses these platforms. To be as inclusive as possible, make sure that your page is public, i.e. at least the basic information can be viewed without a login, including contact details (e.g. email address and contact number). This means that anyone without a login will still have a way to get in touch.