

2010 AFMS Web Site Contest—Score Sheet Guidelines

The club Web site serves several functions. Three of the major functions of the Web site are:

- (1) **Attract new members**
- (2) **Provide member information**
- (3) **Public advertising of club activities such as shows.** This item is a subset of the higher and more important question of "Does the Web site assist in fulfilling the mission of the club?" Advertising is only one of the many functional capabilities to be assigned to the Web site. Most clubs have the mission of educating the public, and they find that providing educational materials and links to educational sites for geologic and Earth Science information is a good use for the Web site.

Therefore most of the items in this contest are emphasizing these items. *This contest attempts to determine the effectiveness of the club's Web site in providing information for these goals, not to determine the quality or capabilities of the club.* An effective Web site can be created without requiring weekly or even monthly updates. However, a Web site that is updated frequently might score more points in the Outstanding Features category. This contest does not demand that Web sites be formatted to a specific format or template, but it does try to give as much latitude as possible for freedom of expression. Hopefully in the future as we share more information, we will learn how and why some things work better for some Web sites, and we will learn from the efforts of our fellow clubs. The Internet is constantly evolving, and the contest is not intended to limit this process.

A major contest goal is to provide support to the webmaster in balancing the content of the Web pages between internal club administrative data and the data necessary to make the site useful to the visitor. The organization of the Web site should separate general interest data (data useful to a visitor) from data that is of interest to a current club member of the club. Club member data should be in the background.

These guidelines attempt to give a better explanation of each item being judged. The guidelines should also give the judges better uniformity as they score the Web sites.

DISQUALIFICATION OF A WEB SITE FROM BEING JUDGED occurs if the items identified in A. and B. ARE NOT PRESENT or if an apparent copyright violation has occurred. Should one or more of these occur, the Web site will not be judged further. A truly functional Web site requires that the named items be present and easily found and that the Web site has not violated any copyright.

Required on Home Page

A. Club Name

The club's name should be displayed prominently at the top of the home page.

B. Club City and State

The city and state of the club should be obvious to visitors and be displayed along with the club name at the top of the home page. Simply listing the city or regional description for the location of the club without also identifying the state is not acceptable. Some clubs service several states (which should be listed), and some clubs represent a county instead of a city. This fact also should be listed. The country might be listed too, but that is not a requirement.

Required on the Home Page, Contact Us, About Us, or similar page

Contact information of at least an e-mail address or a submit form

The presence of contact information or the use of a submit form is essential. If the contact information is not on the Home Page, then it should be on a page easily accessed from the Home Page such a Contact Us, About Us page, or something similar. There should be at least one e-mail address available or a submit form (a form that the user can type data into and then click on a

button to send it to the webmaster or a main club member) plus either a telephone number (complete with area code) or mailing address for the use of those who do not have Internet access. The persons desiring to contact the club may not have personal Internet or e-mail capability, so they need a way to contact the club. These requirements should be easy to fulfill and yet allow club members to maintain their privacy.

A work-around for providing the information while not giving Web crawlers an opportunity to extract information from your Web site is to create a word-processed document containing the desired information. The printed document can be scanned directly into a jpeg graphic. (Be sure to crop the graphic tightly so the page margins don't take up extra space on your Web site.) Or the document can be exported from your word processor to a PDF document, and that in turn can be saved as a jpeg graphic. Use the graphic on your Contact Us page.

Most Web hosts provide to their customers the feature of "pseudo" e-mail addresses. This feature allows you to develop descriptive e-mail addresses for each of the major activities or officers in your club, such as President@myclub.org, [Show@myclub.org](mailto>Show@myclub.org), FieldTrips@myclub.org. Set these pseudo addresses up so they are forwarded by your Web host to the actual e-mail addresses of each activity or officer. This is very handy in that you don't need to disclose personal e-mail addresses on the Web site, and as different people take over the various positions, the destination address for a pseudo e-mail address merely needs to be updated on your Web host's site. A listing of the various pseudo e-mail addresses can be made available on the Contact Us jpeg mentioned in the previous paragraph.

C. Any apparent copyright violations occurring anywhere on the Web site

Information taken from another Web site or from a publication should always be acknowledged and credited. In many cases permission must first be granted by the owner or originator before such material can be included on a Web site. Failure to do so can expose the Web site (and thus the Club) to the possibility of a lawsuit.

The remaining items award points for their presence. The Score Sheet lists the maximum possible points for each item. A good Web site should be awarded most of the maximum possible points. A few items require a judgment to determine the actual points awarded, and this may have a huge determination on which sites receive the most points. In some cases, partial points may be used when necessary. The score sheet has a field for any point deductions. The listed items should be found in reasonable areas of the Web site. **Listed items that are found only in newsletters or similar types of articles are not considered to be in a valid location for the information; therefore these locations do not count as having the information on the Web site.**

1. Regional Federation Information

A. Affiliation Mentioned

Mentioning the club's affiliation with the Federations not only builds the Federations but also provides visitors with some basic information about the club.

B. Regional Federation Name Listed

The full name of the Federation should be listed rather than just listing an acronym or abbreviated name; for instance SFMS and Eastern Federation are not acceptable. Visitors may have no knowledge of the Federations.

C. Regional Federation Logo

Federation logos are readily available, and their use provides visual name recognition. To receive credit, the logos MUST be large enough to be readable.

D. Regional Federation Link

A link to the regional Federation should be included, and it should function. Links are an important part of building a Web site's ranking with the search engines.

2. American Federation Information

The guidelines for the American Federation information are the same as for the *Regional Federation Information—A. through D.*

3. Vital Information

A. Club Mission or purpose statement

This information helps visitors learn quickly what the club is about, and it is considered a highly important component of the Web site. This usually includes information such as not-for-profit status, educational organization, areas of interest, etc.

B. Regular meeting(s) date, time, and location

This information should not be more than a single click away from the home page. A specific date is not required as long as it is clear on which day of the month the club meets. The location should be a specific address which includes the city and state. If the meeting is in some facility such as a school, directions to the meeting room should be provided. A map and pictures are a big plus, but no points should be deducted if they are not included. If not all the meeting information (date, time, location) is provided, then a visitor will be unable to attend the meeting without getting the missing information from other sources. Therefore no points should be awarded. Small points could be subtracted if obvious information such as meeting room is not given in obvious situations where it would be needed (schools, etc). Points may also be subtracted for information that is not clear or is incomplete.

C. Statement concerning whether visitors are welcome at meetings

Even though most if not all of our clubs encourage visitors to attend meetings, some may not operate this way. Therefore it should be stated that visitors are welcome at the meetings. If visitors are not welcome, then it should be obvious to the potential visitor that nonmembers are not allowed. The Contest Entry Form can be referenced to determine whether visitors are allowed at the club's meetings.

D. Youth programs or youth participation

Most if not all of our clubs encourage youth to attend meetings. It is also possible that the club has activities designed just for kids. The goal of this item is to allow visitors to easily determine whether children can participate in club activities and whether there are activities designed specifically for kids. The two points allowed on the score sheet represents a very minimal program. For a very active youth program, additional points can be awarded in **7. Outstanding features...**

E. Webmaster contact information (Including functional e-mailing capability)

Web site users need to be able to contact the webmaster for any concerns about the Web site. An e-mail address or a submit form (i.e. Web page where the information is typed on the page and then submitted by pressing a button on the page) is the most desirable medium for this type of contact. An e-mail address does not need to be in the form of a working link. With all the problems of spider programs harvesting e-mail address from Web sites, it is perfectly fine to defeat these spiders through various means (see pages 1 & 2) as long as the e-mail address can be easily determined or contact is available via a submit form. Contacting the webmaster should be tested. Deduct 1 point if a response is not received by 10 days. No points should be awarded if the contact is not functional (the e-mail bounces, or there is no response after 2 weeks).

F. Working e-mail to main club contact with reasonable response time

There normally should be a contact for club information. If there is no specific contact listed for the club information, then use the following list—in order—for a contact: President, Vice President(s), Editor, Past President, Secretary, Treasurer, Webmaster, others. The main contact for club information should normally be fairly responsive. Since it is not normally the job of the officers to answer club questions from the Web site, it is recommended to try two different people. Deduct 1 point if there is no response from either within 5 days. Deduct 3 points if there is no response within 10 days. No points should be awarded if the contacts are not functional (the e-mail bounces or no response after two weeks)

4. Membership

A. Membership application

A membership application form should be available. Complete costs and a full mailing address should be included on the form. If information is provided to apply for membership but there is no application form, allow a maximum of 50% of the available points.

B. Membership benefits

The Web site should list in one location the benefits the club provides to its membership. The benefits of membership need to be encapsulated, itemized, and bulleted on either the home page or a comprehensive membership page detailing membership requirements, benefits, costs, etc. The site should function as a solicitation for new members and as a vehicle and instrument for promoting club membership. The benefits of membership can be elaborated on in many ways on other informational pages but should be presented in a short, concise form as a benefits list on a prominent page. Points are based upon the information provided, not on the quality or number of benefits available to members.

C. Information for Members (shop information, newsletters, etc)

In many cases, information can be considered information for visitors such as meeting dates and times. This item gives a range of freedom for the information actually provided. For instance, many clubs prohibit publication of newsletters, recent newsletters, field trip locations, etc. Some clubs might provide a private section on the Web site for members only or another site such as Yahoo Groups for members only. Club newsletters are increasingly making their way online at club web sites where they can be both outstanding features and functional instruments in serving the needs of the club members and site users. The goal of this item is that there should be a reason why members would visit the Web site. Some examples include newsletters, shop information, constitution and bylaws, board and committee listing, information on upcoming meeting programs, a members only section or site, library listing, ordering of club materials such as vests, name badges, etc.

5. Functionality

A. Web site menu links all function properly

There should be some type of menu system to navigate between pages on the Web site. Navigating the Web site should not end up at a dead end with no navigation to other pages unless it is a PDF document or similar. All links to other pages on the club's Web site should function. Broken links on the club Web site should be penalized and scored down much more heavily than broken external links.

B. Web site is keyword searchable

There are freely available third party solutions through Google and others for adding search capability to Web sites that do not require knowledge beyond HTML to implement. (See <http://www.google.com/coop/cse/>.) While the search results returned by the Google widget are not as comprehensive or up-to-date as those returned by custom software, they are returned several orders of magnitude faster. And one doesn't have to spend time developing and maintaining his or her own site-wide search software.

C. Keywords are part of the HTML source code helping the Web site to be found by search engines.)

The ease with which a club Web site can be searched for on the Internet is directly proportional to the list of keywords included in the HTML code of the home page. The most successful lists will result in the site being included on the first or second page of the results returned by the search engine used (Google and Yahoo are popular). Include in the list the terms that serve to identify your club: your club name, the initial letters of your club's name, the major activities pursued by your club (lapidary, field trips, etc.) Don't overdo it—repetition tends to kill the effect you want. Look at the source code of a successful club Web site. The list will be located somewhere between <head> and </head> and after <title> and </title>. The code will start with <meta

name="keywords" content="put your list here">. Information on how to include keywords in your code should be easily found in any HTML manual.

D. Ease of navigating Web site

How to navigate the Web site should be relatively obvious. Finding most of the information required for this contest also should be relatively easy. Navigation should allow the visitors to navigate back to the home page in a reasonable manner.

E. In case of broken link, webmaster's e-mail or a submit form is available on the Links page

Webmaster contact information (e-mail) or a submit form should be easily found for the reporting of such problems. People finding the broken link probably won't go to the trouble of searching the Web site for the webmaster's contact information, and a broken link is something that should be addressed immediately.

F. Links to relevant Web sites (other clubs; gem, mineral, and fossil-related sites)

People visiting your club's Web site will likely also be interested in seeing the sites of other clubs as well as the Web sites of gem, mineral, and fossil-related interests.

6. Completeness and quality

A. Main pages appear up-to-date, emphasis on rocks and minerals (not officer list or similar)

Such pages should place emphasis on items of current interest to members with an emphasis on rocks and minerals and other rockhound-type information and photos. Bureaucratic information such as a listing of officers should not be on a main page. Including historical information is perfectly valid, but if the information is presented as current data, it should appear to be current data. For example, a listing of officers should be for the current time period. A show page should be for the upcoming show if it has been more than three months since the last show. A certain period of time is required to change advertising from one year's show to the next, and three months should be more than enough time to make this change. Another example would be a listing of the next month's meeting agenda, not a listing for a meeting that has already happened. If the webmaster is updating the Web site often enough for this type of announcement, it should not be out of date. Again, a reasonable turnaround time is required for updating this information, and it should be updated within one week of the information becoming outdated. The maximum deduction should only be deducted for serious issues. Similar judging criteria should be used for other information on the Web site.

B. Use of club logo

The club logo should be displayed on the Web site. The logo is normally displayed on the home page, but that is not required. The logo at least should be on a prominent page.

C. Common information on pages (Club Name, URL, etc.)

Some types of identifying information should be available on all normal Web pages to identify the origin of the page. This could be the club logo, club name, URL, etc. Note: The Contact Us link may lead to a graphic of contact information (see pages 1 and 2 for more information), or it might lead to a submit form that the reader can fill in and submit with any questions. The contact information form is not an e-mail address, but if it works it should be considered sufficient. Many other items such as last updated, copyright, contact information, etc. are often also included on all pages, but these are not included in the judging.

D. Easy Readability (good contrast, consistency of font type and size, font size easy to read)

Text should be able to be read by the average person. Very low contrast between the text and its background, or bold and poor backgrounds generate common readability problems. The font type and size should be consistent throughout the Web site, and it should be easily read by the vast majority of viewers.

E. Good use of graphics (including size—overly large graphics load slowly)

Graphics can add more visual appeal to Web pages. The overuse of graphics not only causes visual issues, but their size can cause slowly loading pages. In general, most images should be less than 50 k. Very large images observed on Web pages may be considered an inappropriate use if the image size obviously should be reduced. Deductions for this item should be limited to

obvious problems. Note: Resolutions greater than 72 DPI are not rendered in the Web browser, and higher resolutions can cause excessively large file sizes.

F. Site Domain is registered and property of the club (www.ourclub.org)

Is the site a registered domain located on a major server, or is the Web site placed on a private party site subject to the owner's whims? The downside of registered domains is they are more expensive—registration fees are an ongoing expense, and registered domains are typically more expensive to host than a site hosted on a club member's free personal Web space:

www.soon_to_be_bankrupt_provider.com/~clubmember/myrockstuff/ourclub/, The upsides to registered domains are numerous, perhaps the most important being that registered domains are durable and can be independently owned as intellectual property of the club in perpetuity.

G. Information fulfills needs of Web site visitors

This is a very broad item. Information on the Web site should be of interest to visitors. This could include meeting information, local points of interest related to club activities, newsletters, articles of interest, etc. The judge should consider the question, "Would a visitor find anything of interest on the Web site?"

H. Overall appearance and attractiveness

This is a highly judgmental item, but even so, attention should be given to a consistent use of style and format. Remember that this item is judged as a deduction, so there should be a lot of freedom in the design of the Web site.

7. Outstanding features going above and beyond the norm

This item gives the opportunity for truly outstanding Web sites to rank above other Web sites that merely meet the stated requirements. The baseline for this item should be 0 points (10 points deducted), and points should be awarded for outstanding features of the Web site. Few if any of the Web sites should be awarded the maximum points for this item. Any points awarded should include a description of why the points were awarded. Possible examples are completeness of show information; community service; galleries; activities; club and/or area history; local collecting sites; local museums of interest; links to other local clubs (if any); links to external sites of interest to rockhounds, paleontologists, geologists, etc.