

How We Evaluated The Web Sites

Since 1998, the Congressional Management Foundation has assessed the quality of congressional Web sites to determine how Members of Congress can use the Internet to more effectively communicate with and serve citizens.

The Gold Mouse Project seeks to improve Member, committee, and leadership Web sites by identifying best and innovative practices that can be more widely adopted by House & Senate offices.



What Did We Do?

In 2009, CMF, with the assistance of our research partners at Harvard Kennedy School, Northeastern University, University of California–Riverside, and the Ohio State University, conducted an extensive evaluation of all congressional Web sites in the 111th Congress.

439	House Member Web sites ¹
99	Senate Member Web sites ²
68	House & Senate Committee Web sites (majority and minority)
+14	House & Senate Leadership Web sites

620

¹ Includes 433 Representatives (there were two vacancies at the time of our evaluations), 5 delegates, and 1 resident commissioner.

² There was one vacancy in the Senate at the time of our evaluations.



What We Did Not Do (A Disclaimer of Sorts)

Our evaluations focused solely on the official Web sites of Congress and the experience and expectations of a typical end-user. We did not review or assess the following, which were outside the scope of this project:

- Politics, policies, or positions.
- Intranet, institutional, support, or Member or staff organization Web sites.
- Adherence to accessibility standards and the rules of their respective chambers.
- Back-end design or technical components of the Web site.
- Congress's online presence independent of their official Web sites.

How Our Criteria Were Developed

We identified what users expect from congressional Web sites using a variety of sources. Using this research, we determined that successful Web sites follow 5 core principles, which we then used to develop specific criteria.

- Focus groups with citizens.
 - Interviews with Members and management, legislative, administrative, support, and technical staff from the House and Senate.
 - Surveys of reporters and advocates.
 - Research on industry best practices and usability.
- 1. Know your audience(s).**
 - 2. Provide timely and targeted content that meets their needs.**
 - 3. Make the site easy to use.**
 - 4. Foster interaction both on and offline.**
 - 5. Add value through innovation.**



What Were Our Criteria?

Member Web sites were judged on 93 criteria in the following broad categories. The 61 committee criteria and 49 leadership criteria fell into most of these categories as well, but were adjusted to reflect their unique roles.



*Denotes categories that were eligible for extra credit

How We Made The Process Fair & Accurate

Prior to each evaluation year, the criteria are updated and refined to reflect current and evolving technology and practice standards.

All evaluators went through several rounds of training to ensure that each criterion was applied the same way regardless of the evaluator, within a reasonable margin of error.

“To what extent does the site provide information about major national issues?”


“Does the site have a THOMAS search box?”

Member sites were evaluated June–August 2009; committee and leadership sites were evaluated September–December 2009.



How We Scored The Web Sites

- **Criteria were weighted** according to importance and factored into a formula that resulted in an overall numerical score for the site.
- **Scores were sorted** within each category — Senate Member, House Member, Committee, and Leadership — standardized, and translated into letter grades.
- **A Mouse Award was given** to the 135 sites that scored an A- or higher. There was no pre-set number of awards. The top-ranked site in each category was recognized with the first-ever Platinum Mouse Award.

MOUSE AWARD		LETTER GRADE	
	platinum	→	#1 site
	gold	→	A+
	silver	→	A
	bronze	→	A-
			B
			C
			D
			F



Want To Know More?

ADDITIONAL SLIDESHOWS & INFORMATION

- [Overview of the Gold Mouse Project](#)
- [Detailed Methodology](#)
- [Findings](#)
- [Mouse Award Winners](#)

ABOUT THE PARTNERSHIP

The Partnership For A More Perfect Union envisions a United States where Members of Congress and citizens have a vibrant, active, and engaged relationship characterized by mutual respect, a sense of shared purpose, and a dedication to the tenets of representative democracy.

We seek to further our nation's progress toward "a more perfect union" by fostering the genuine and effective exchange of ideas between Members of Congress and citizens. The Partnership seeks to accomplish this mission by conducting research and education, promoting best practices, and creating innovative tools for everyone with a stake in our government.

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