Methodology

WEBSITE AWARDS

Developing the Criteria

Since 2001, CMF has conducted extensive research into what constitutes an effective congressional website, including: focus groups with constituents; interviews with Members of Congress and with managerial, legislative, administrative, support, and technical staff from the House and Senate; reviews of industry research; interviews with technology experts and representatives of social media companies; surveys of political reporters and advocacy groups; and in-depth evaluations of past and present congressional websites.

Using this research, CMF has developed extensive criteria for our website evaluations, and prior to each award year, the criteria are updated and refined to reflect current and evolving technology and practice standards. For the 113th Congress Awards, CMF used 74 criteria in 10 categories for Member websites, and up to 61 criteria in six categories for committee websites. These criteria are discussed in detail in "Characteristics of Effective Member Websites" (page 30) and "Characteristics of Effective Committee Websites" (page 50).

Conducting the Evaluations

After identifying the criteria for the evaluations, CMF organized the criteria into rounds that prioritized the most critical criteria. Member websites were evaluated in three rounds, whereas committee websites were evaluated in two rounds. For both Members and committees, the first round of evaluation placed greater emphasis on transparency and accountability. Websites that met the criteria for the first round advanced to the next round, until the evaluations were complete and ready for scoring.

To ensure fairness and accuracy, CMF researchers were trained extensively for each round to ensure that they assessed the website and judged each criterion reliably—especially the qualitative ones. The training included everything from ensuring that all evaluators used the same browser to ensuring that all evaluators consistently judged the difference between a "4" rating and a "5" rating. For every round, each researcher

received a randomly generated list of websites and evaluated them in that order. Evaluators used customized forms for each round that included detailed descriptions of the criteria in that round and guidance on how to evaluate the criteria consistently. Qualitative criteria—those that rated how well the website did something—were coded on a "1" (low) to "5" (high) scale. Quantitative criteria—those that noted whether or not a website had a particular feature or specific content (such as a list of co-sponsorships)— were coded as either present ("1") or absent ("0"). For quality assurance, their work was reviewed by senior CMF staff.

Member Websites

Round 1. For their first round, Member websites were required to meet a minimum threshold for accountability and transparency, as well as for constituent service. For transparency and accountability, a website was judged on the extent to which it provided information on major national issues and whether it included information on the Member's voting record or explanations of the Member's votes on key pieces of legislation. In other words: to what extent could a constituent visiting the website determine the Member's position, activity, and record on major national issues? For constituent service, Member websites were judged on the extent to which the websites helped constituents get answers to their questions and help with problems regarding federal agencies (also known as casework). Of the 537 Member websites[7], 58% (312) were eliminated from contention in the first round, and 42% (225) advanced to the second round.
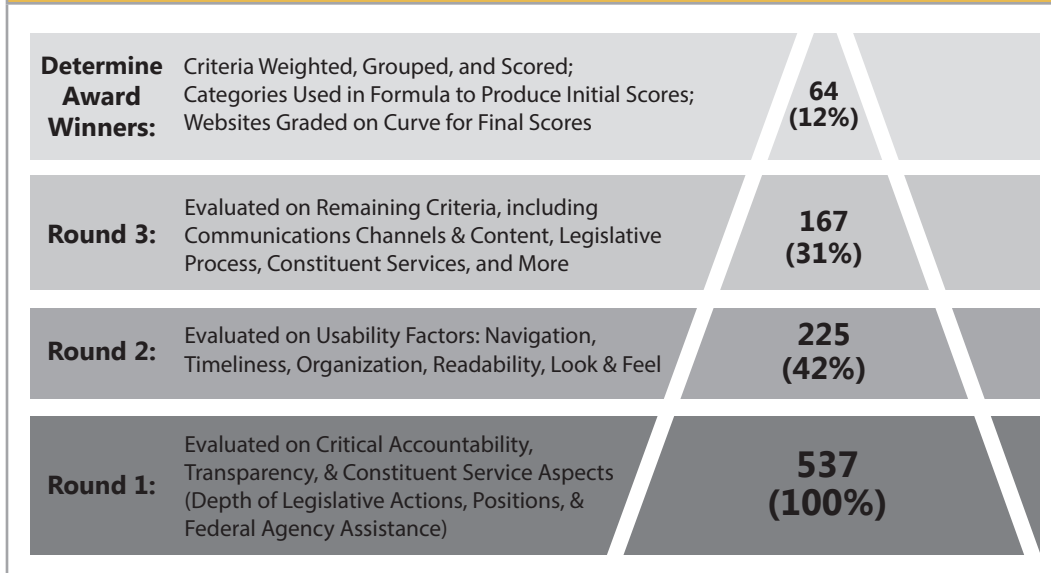
Round 2. The second round of Member website evaluations focused on usability. Websites were scored from "1" (low) to "5" (high) on their navigation, organization, look and feel, readability, and timeliness. To ensure that websites with older, but more comprehensive information were given a fair evaluation, usability averages were calculated with and without the timeliness score. Any website scoring above average (higher than a "3.00") on either score proceeded to the third and final round for evaluation. Of the 225 websites evaluated in the second round, 26% (58) were eliminated from contention, and 74% (167) advanced to the third round. These 167 websites represent 31% of all Member websites.

Round 3. The websites that made it to the third and final round were subjected to all the remaining criteria. Of the 167 websites evaluated in the third round, 62% (103) were eliminated from contention following the final scoring (detailed in the next section), and 38% (64) were recognized with Gold, Silver, or Bronze Mouse Awards. These 64 websites represent 12% of all Member websites.

Timeframe. Member websites were evaluated between September 30 and December 20, 2013.

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[7] 100 Senate Member websites and 437 House Member websites. There were four vacancies in the House of Representatives at the time of our evaluations.

FIGURE 13. ELIMINATION OF MEMBER WEBSITES THROUGH EVALUATION ROUNDS AND SCORING

Determine Award Winners:	Criteria Weighted, Grouped, and Scored; Categories Used in Formula to Produce Initial Scores; Websites Graded on Curve for Final Scores	**64 (12%)**
Round 3:	Evaluated on Remaining Criteria, including Communications Channels & Content, Legislative Process, Constituent Services, and More	**167 (31%)**
Round 2:	Evaluated on Usability Factors: Navigation, Timeliness, Organization, Readability, Look & Feel	**225 (42%)**
Round 1:	Evaluated on Critical Accountability, Transparency, & Constituent Service Aspects (Depth of Legislative Actions, Positions, & Federal Agency Assistance)	**537 (100%)**

Committee Websites

For the 113th Congress, CMF did not evaluate minority committee websites. Previously, minority committee websites were evaluated using the same criteria as majority websites, but weighting them differently in the final scoring formula. This year CMF modified the evaluation process for all websites to place greater emphasis on accountability and transparency. In doing so, it became clear that because the minority is not responsible by law, rules, or statutes to produce any specific official documents, it is more difficult to apply this modified emphasis to minority websites independently of the majority websites.

Round 1. All standing committees were evaluated in Round 1, using the links provided via House.gov and Senate.gov. For committees that maintain separate majority and minority websites, only the majority website was evaluated. In Round 1, committee websites were judged on key aspects of committee accountability and transparency, focusing primarily on hearings and legislation. Could a visitor to the website access the legislation that had been assigned to the committee, as well as information about upcoming and past hearings? All committees that provided either a complete list of the bills assigned to the committee or hearing transcripts within one month of the hearing, as well as all committees that do not consider legislation and/or conduct hearings, were advanced to Round 2. Of the 43 committee websites evaluated, 15 went on to Round 2.

Round 2. The websites that made it to the second round were subjected to all remaining criteria. Of the 15 evaluated in the second round, nine were eliminated from contention following the final scoring (detailed in the next section) and six were awarded Gold, Silver, or Bronze Mouse Awards.

Timeframe. Committee websites were evaluated between January 22 and February 10, 2014.

Scoring the Websites

Member Websites

Once the Member website evaluations were complete, the data for the 167 websites in the final round were scored. All 74 criteria were given weights from "1" (low) to "10" (high) that corresponded to their importance and level of difficulty. Criteria were then grouped into 10 broad categories and, using the assigned weights for each criterion, scores were calculated for each category. These category scores were then used to calculate a preliminary overall score, using a formula that placed greater emphasis on categories related to transparency and accountability. The 10 criteria categories and a condensed version of the scoring formula are shown in Figure 14. Final overall scores were then calculated by sorting the websites by chamber and scoring on a curve. Awards were given to websites scoring 80 or higher as shown in Figure 16.

FIGURE 14. CRITERIA CATEGORIES AND SCORING FORMULA FOR MEMBER WEBSITES	
35% =	Information on Issues
	Demonstrations of Accountability
	Information on the Legislative Process
25% =	Assistance with Federal Agencies/Casework
	Constituent Services
	District/State Information
25% =	Usability
	Timeliness
15% =	Diversity of Communications Channels
	Diversity of Communications Content

Committee Websites

Committee websites were subjected to a similar, but slightly different scoring process than the Member websites. Committee websites were divided into classes based on their primary audiences and scores were weighted based on the information their audiences would expect. Additionally, committee formulas were customized so that committee websites were scored only for criteria that applied to them. For example, for committees without subcommittees, criteria relating to subcommittee information were removed from their calculations.

To calculate the scores of the committee websites, first each criterion was weighted according to its importance and level of difficulty, from "1" (low) to "10" (high). Next, criteria were grouped into six categories, and scores were calculated for each category using the assigned weights for each criterion. These category scores were then used to calculate a preliminary overall score, using a formula that placed greater emphasis on categories relating to furthering transparency and accountability in government. The six criteria categories and their importance in the scoring formula is shown in Figure 15. As with the Member websites, preliminary scores were adjusted on a curve, and websites scoring 80 or higher received awards as shown in Figure 16.

FIGURE 15. CRITERIA CATEGORIES AND SCORING FORMULA FOR COMMITTEE WEBSITES	
30% =	Information about What the Committee Does and How it Works
20% =	Timeliness and Usability
15% =	Demonstrations of Accountability
15% =	Information Targeted to the Committee's Audiences
10% =	Interactivity
10% =	Diversity of Communications Channels

FIGURE 16. WEBSITE AWARD LEVELS BY FINAL SCORE	
Final Score	Award Level
93-100	Gold Mouse
87-92	Silver Mouse
80-86	Bronze Mouse

SOCIAL MEDIA AWARDS

Like the website awards, the Gold Mouse Awards for Social Media focus heavily on transparency, accountability, and constituent service. Rather than centering on the platforms Member are using—such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube—CMF's awards for social media emphasize *specific* practices, regardless of the platform used, that:

- Demonstrate an effort to be transparent and accountable;

- Focus on constituents and constituent service; and

- Attempt to keep constituents informed of, and engaged, in the work of the Members and of Congress.

The awards for social media do not necessarily go to the Senators and Representatives who are using the most social media platforms; have the most followers; are getting the most media attention; or are most prolific on social media.

With dozens of social media platforms available, and the volume of content Members are creating, it is nearly impossible to assess practices in a comprehensive manner. Therefore, CMF invited Member offices to nominate themselves to be considered for the 113th Congress Gold Mouse Social Media Awards. The nominating form asked Member offices about their innovative use of social media, its impact, and how their use of social media set them apart from their colleagues. Nominations were limited to Members' personal offices for social media use in the 113th Congress.

Nominations for social media awards were accepted between October 16 and December 2, 2013. CMF staff reviewed the 85 submissions received from House and Senate offices, and sent the 35 most innovative and congressionally-focused practices on to an expert panel review. The expert panel was comprised of former Democratic and Republican congressional staff and academics with expertise in social media and technology.

CMF used the ratings and input from the expert panelists to determine which finalists should receive awards for their efforts, focusing on Members whose practices follow the guidelines above. Biographies of the expert panelists are in alphabetical order below.

Jack Holt

Jack Holt is a recognized leader in successfully formulating, implementing, and managing communication programs for very large organizations including both the Department of Defense and the U.S. Federal Government. He created, developed, and produced the DoD Bloggers Roundtable and DoDLive web communication concept, co-authored the OSD policy memorandum DTM 09-026 for the Responsible and Effective Use of Internet-based Capabilities, and is co-founder of the DoD All Services Social Media Council.

Jack has more than 20 years communication policy development and application experience, teaches at the graduate level, consults, and collaborates on how to effectively use the new and emerging media in meeting business needs including improving customer relationships, implementing change management and developing innovative organizational environments. He has more than fifteen years direct experience as a leader, coach, teacher and mentor in policy analysis and development, communication and business strategy development, organizational design, knowledge management, and workforce training and development.

Currently, Jack is the Director for Policy Analysis for Blue Ridge Information Systems and adjunct lecturer at Georgetown University in the Master of Professional Studies in Technology Management Program. He has taught sessions on Communication, Journalism, and New Media strategies and tactics at the Defense Information School, the Navl Postgraduate School, and the NATO School.

Rob Pierson

Rob Pierson has been an integral force in driving innovation in Congress. As New Media Director for the House Democratic Caucus, he trained Members of Congress and their staff in social media best practices and helped develop an intranet to improve the coordination of Democratic messaging and outreach. In addition to the strategic role he's played, he also pushed the technology envelope in Congress, leading the development of the first public Drupal website within the House of Representatives, a project so successful that it led to Drupal being instituted as the default content management system for newly elected Members of Congress.

In addition to working in House Leadership, Rob has also worked for Congressman Mike Honda, who represents Silicon Valley. As Congressman Honda's Online Communication Director, Rob established several innovative practices that earned his office more Gold Mouse Awards than any other office in Congress. In addition, he also collaborated with the Sunlight Foundation to create a bipartisan, bicameral working group of staffers dedicated to improving political transparency and offering legislative data and APIs to provide the public.

Rob currently provides online marketing and data analysis services, and can be reached at @robpierson.

Nick Schaper

For over a decade, Nick Schaper has been driving innovation at the intersection of technology and public affairs. As the first-ever director of digital media for the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Nick led a team that the Tampa Bay Times and Politifact.com said "dominated Twitter, YouTube, and other social media in Congress." During his tenure, Nick's team earned a 111th Congress Gold Mouse Award for having one of the best leadership websites in Congress. In 2011, after four years with Speaker Boehner, Nick joined the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, and was named to Washingtonian Magazine's Tech Titans list of the most influential technology professionals in the nation's capital.

A graduate of the University of Central Florida, Nick joined Engage in 2013 and serves as Senior Vice President. At Engage, Nick draws on his extensive experience in government and corporate public affairs to deliver innovative solutions to challenges facing top advocacy organizations, Fortune 500 companies, and elected officials. He can be reached @nickschaper.

Scott Talan

Scott Talan is a full-time professor of Public Communication at American University, where he teaches social media. He started using social sites in class as early as 2006, with Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, and continues to incorporate the latest tools as makes sense for his teaching. Scott has worked in media, PR, and communications in four distinct fields: TV News, Politics, Nonprofits, and Higher Education. He worked at the United Nations, Harvard University, and the New Mexico Legislature, and recently served as the Director of Communications for the National Association of Schools of Public Affairs.

Scott has worked as a writer at ABC News Good Morning America. He's also reported on-air for local TV news stations in several states (Florida, New Mexico, California) covering politics including the 2000 presidential recount story. Before news, Scott was as an elected city council member and Mayor of Lafayette, California. His first career was in nonprofit communications working for the March of Dimes.

Scott received his Master in Public Administration from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, and studied broadcast journalism at Stanford after getting his BA from the University of California at Davis. Prior to joining American University, he was an adjunct faculty member at George Washington and Johns Hopkins. He can be reached @talan.