

Government Web Strategy

2016

Visual Aids Guide

Communications Nova Scotia



Overview

The Province of Nova Scotia launched its web strategy and beta website in April 2016. This guide is one of seven content-related tools designed to support the strategy:

- Content Criteria Guide
- French Translation Guide
- Online Writing Guide
- **Visual Aids Guide**
- Measurement Scorecard
- Google Analytics
- User testing and feedback tools

Government's new website will focus on three key content areas: convey what the Province of Nova Scotia is doing and why; provide clearer and easier access to government programs and services; and share information that visitors are seeking that can only be provided by our provincial government.

In keeping with the rollout of government's one-brand approach, the new website has moved away from the old department-by-department model.

Development of the new website is supported by a publishing model (roles and workflow), content criteria, content types, content templates, content lifecycles, and metadata (to improve search capabilities). Content, once posted, will be measured and evaluated on an ongoing basis.

Informed by government's web strategy, the new website is designed to work well for the variety of ways visitors want to access the site: by Google search, by department/office, by topic, by using global navigation, or by conducting an internal search. The new website will only contain relevant and accessible content that is both user-centered and sustainable over time. Lastly, the new website is entirely housed under government's one brand.

Content Readiness Process

The web strategy outlines a content review process with several preparation checkpoints to assess if content should be developed for novascotia.ca and to help prepare content to meet user needs and provide a consistent user experience on the new website. Deciding if the content meets the web strategy's content criteria is the first step. The second step is to decide if the content should be simultaneously posted in English and French. The third step is to develop the content, referring to the Online Writing Guide as required. The fourth and final step for content development is deciding if a visual aid is required to support the content.

About this guide

The Nova Scotia government brand presents the spirit of what the province and its government stand for in a way that will resonate with Nova Scotians. Government's brand is much more than a name and symbol. The brand is the essence or promise of what will be delivered or experienced. It presents the essence of Nova Scotia's unique story – an authentic story that shows Nova Scotia igniting the sparks of new ideas and new opportunities.

All successful brands depend on the consistent application of visual aids standards. As part of online content development, visual aids will be applied consistently to support and enhance the brand.

Quality of communications affects how that communication is perceived. Maintaining professional quality in all government communications is part of the responsibility given to CNS. The brand requires that design, photography, video, and illustration are of a professional quality and produced by professionals specializing in these areas.

CNS manages a database with a large selection of professional photographs that are used by all government departments. CNS also has designers, photographers, and videographers on staff to produce graphics and illustrations, and to help collect new images and produce videos that meet the needs of specific projects.

The visual aids are designed to help deliver a clear message, promote credibility, motivate the intended audience, and encourage brand loyalty.

This guide applies to all content published on novascotia.ca. Visual aids topics have been arranged alphabetically, for ease of use.

Audio

Transcripts are required for all audio. The information presented in audio should also be available in other formats (when possible).

When including an audio file on novascotia.ca, the file is embedded directly into the page and displays an embedded audio player.

Buttons

Use buttons to start a transaction or interaction. Only one button should be used per page.

Button text should be short and describe the action.

Launch a transactional service with a "Start now" button.

Use a "Download" button for downloading a document.



Charts

For research-intensive content, data visuals help highlight the points you're making throughout your content. Keep charts simple, cutting down on unnecessary items and jargon. Start by asking

- Who is your audience?
- How much detail do they need?
- What story does the data tell?
- Do you need a chart?

Supported chart formats include column chart, bar chart, line chart, pie chart, and scatter chart. The site also lets the user switch between a chart and a table view.

Charts need to be

- clear
- factual
- scaled accurately
- labelled clearly

Published charts need to include

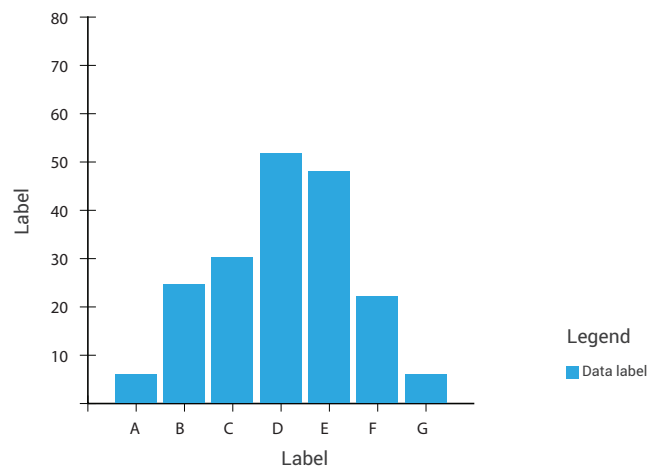
- a title that accurately describes the data in the chart
- labels for the x-axis and y-axis

Column chart

Use for comparing items or a small number of time periods.

Column Chart Title

Description explaining what the column chart represents.

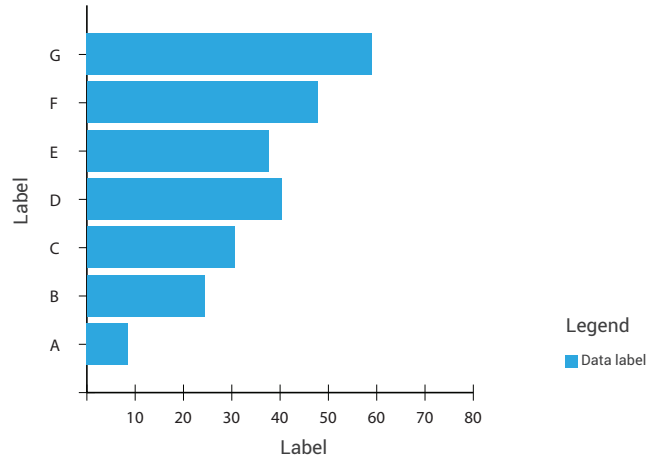


Bar chart

You can show numeric data as a simple bar chart. Use for comparing items, especially if they have long names or many items.

Bar Chart Title

Description explaining what the bar chart represents.

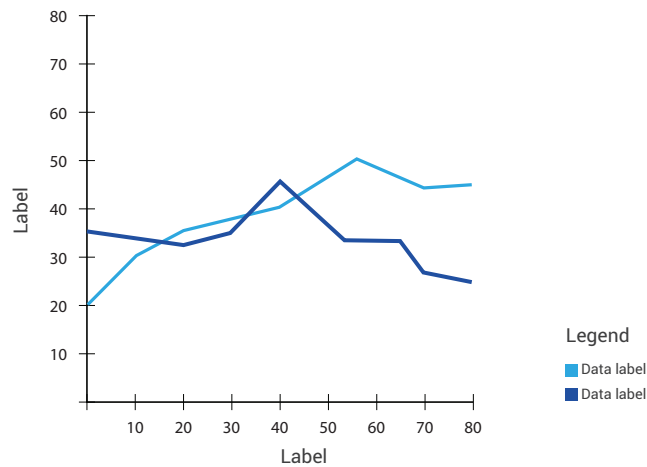


Line chart

Use for comparing over time or between variables for a single item (site traffic vs site performance).

Line Chart Title

Description explaining what the line chart represents.

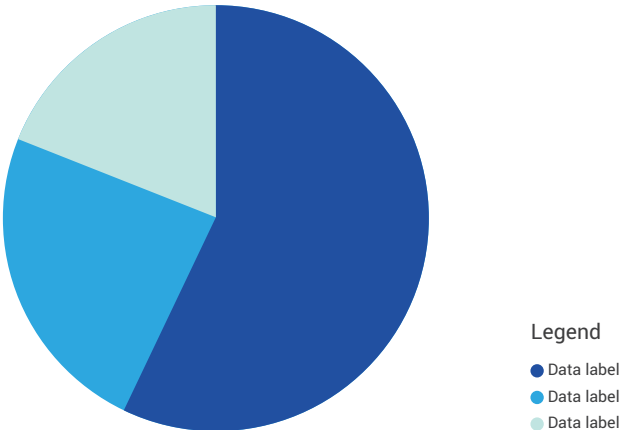


Pie chart

Use to show a simple share of total. Use with caution as column or bar charts are often easier to understand. Limit to 2–3 segments to avoid confusion.

Pie Chart Title

Description explaining what the pie chart represents.

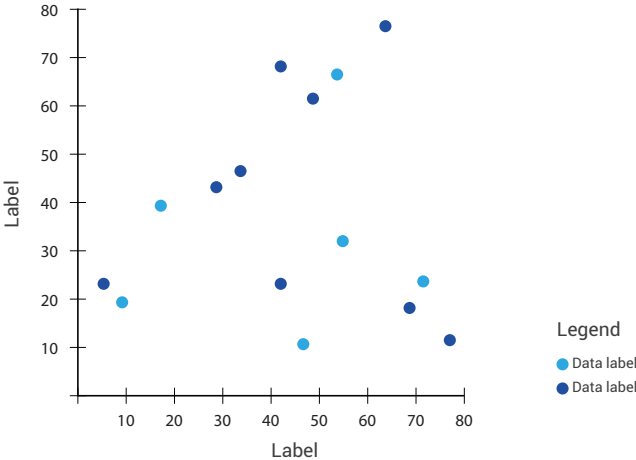


Scatter chart

Use to show relationships between variables when there are many items (volume vs cost for numerous transactions).

Scatter Chart Title

Description explaining what the scatter chart represents.



Choosing an image

CNS will help find and select images that work with your content. All images are selected from the CNS Image Library or are sourced by CNS. This ensures that images meet professional standards, support government's brand, and meet permissions and copyright requirements. Image selection also takes into account the sensitivities around photography of children (and permissions).

Images are only used when they give useful additional context or information. Strong imagery helps communicate information, engages users and encourages them to explore further. Strong imagery can help users see what a story is about.

Images need to be focused on how users will see and interpret the images. Users interpret visuals based on their own experiences and knowledge. Images should clearly show what the story is about, not who is telling the story or making the announcement.

Images must be factually representative of the editorial content they are being displayed with. Consider the tone the image needs to convey. The mood of the image must reflect the content. The brand's voice also needs to be reflected in our image choices – credible, clear, accessible, and helpful.

A selected image must be able to stand on its own, but also accompany a feature story as well be included on a listings page. Images may also be featured on the government homepage and on our Twitter and Facebook pages.

When an image is uploaded, a series of crops are saved for each image. These crops ensure that the image displays properly on different devices and screens sizes, and that the context of the image remains clear.

Data visualization

Use data visualizations only if they make the story easier to understand. In many cases, a good table or words may communicate better than a visualization.

Data is recommended as an alternative to using images. For screen readers, ensure that the data value appears first so it makes sense when read aloud.

Example

100
\$ million

100
\$ million

50/100
\$ million

Icons

Our icons can be used to illustrate action and status. Icons need to be clear, simple, and accompanied by relevant text. We don't hide functionality under icons. Icons are used consistently throughout the site so that users can easily identify important information and know what they can interact with.

Use an exclamation circle if there are legal or failure-to-comply consequences: for example, a fine or disqualification from a funding program.

Example



You can be fined \$250 if you don't register.

Supported icons include



Alert/Warning



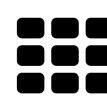
Calendar



Download



External Links



Grid View



Help



Important/
Legal



Information



List View



List View
(text & thumbs)



Locator



Next



Pointer



Previous



Quote



Search



Social Media



Steps

Image alt text

Alternative text (Alt text) is a way to label images and is especially important for people who can't see the images. Alt text should describe the image in a brief sentence or two. Don't always make the alt text a literal description of the image: think about what point the image is making.

Example

Yes: Julia Kuhn of Halifax receives the Youth Volunteer Award from Lt.-Gov. J.J. Grant and Premier Stephen McNeil

No: Two men and a girl stand with a framed volunteer award

No: Lt.-Gov. J.J. Grant (left) and Premier Stephen McNeil (right) present the Youth Volunteer Award to Julia Kuhn of Halifax during the ceremony.

Most images must have “alt text” describing the image. Additionally, any text that appears in the image must also appear in the alt text. If an image isn't essential to understanding the content, alt text is not needed. For example, don't tell users there's a picture of a document cover on a document overview page.

Limit alt text to 150 characters. Anything longer should be placed in the content of the page.

Image captions

Use a caption to describe what's happening in an image, not to summarise the story.

When captioning an image, the goal is to add additional context and information. Don't simply state what the reader is able to see by looking at the photo itself. Captions should increase depth of understanding. For images, captions are optional. If you don't need one, don't include it.

Infographics

Infographics help tell a story by showing key statistics, facts, and short-form text in a visual format. They can be also be helpful to illustrate a complex concept or process.

Infographics need to be

- clear
- factual
- scaled accurately
- legible at different screen sizes
- labelled clearly

Photo Essay

A photo essay can create impact and illustrate a story. It displays a slide show on the page to show the story (for example, 3–5 images) and should only be used if the images are different and illustrate different aspects of the story.

Logo

The proper use of the provincial logo is essential to ensure a consistent identity. The logo helps build trust in novascotia.ca as the single source of official government information, programs, and services so that users are more confident when interacting with the government online.

Tables

Tables are used to present data. A good table is clear and uncluttered. The data should be easy to read and display information consistently.

A table may not always be the best way to present your content. A simple table can often be replaced with a bulleted list or a series of bulleted lists.

Video

YouTube was chosen as the delivery platform for government video in 2008. It is the primary server for all government online video with the NSGOV channel being managed by CNS. Only videos published to the NSGOV YouTube channel can be used on novascotia.ca. When displaying a video on novascotia.ca, the video is embedded directly into the page and displays a standard media player.

Ustream is the main delivery platform for government live streaming video. Only live streaming through the NSGov Ustream channel can be used on novascotia.ca. When displaying a live channel Ustream player on novascotia.ca, the streaming video is embedded directly into the page and displays a standard media player.

Videos should meet a level of quality consistent with industry accepted professional standards for visual communications, visual storytelling, camera work, editing, and government branding. A standards committee at CNS will make final decisions on acceptable videos for novascotia.ca.

Video captions

Captioning is encouraged for all videos. The information presented in videos should also be available in other formats when possible.

A closed caption file or transcript is required to ensure proper captioning. YouTube's automatic captioning is not used to caption videos.

Captioning is mandatory if failure to caption may compromise the health, safety, or security of citizens.

Departments may request captioning. CNS will then provide captioning within 72 hours after the video is published, and any associated cost will be passed on to the department.

Visuals to avoid

The following visuals should not be used:

- collages – can be overwhelming and confusing for users; one strong photograph to tell the story is the preferred way to support the brand
- clipart – does not represent authentic Nova Scotia imagery
- stock photography – too easily used by others to represent many different, even conflicting, stories
- personal photos – unlikely to meet professional photography standards and to have necessary written permissions for use from the subjects photographed
- images of marketing material containing a lot of text – instead, use the main image from the marketing material and put the relevant text in the story title and description so text is legible

- generic images that don't represent the content well – only use images when they give useful additional context or information
- visuals for which CNS does not have written copyright permission

Where images can be added

Images can be added to the following content types:

- story
- case study
- note to editors
- program
- consultation
- event
- topical event page
- campaign
- biography
- featured content
- photo essay

Authority

Amendments to the Public Service Act were passed in December 2013 that require Communications Nova Scotia (CNS) to provide a centralized delivery of communication services, including strategic internet planning and design, on behalf of the province. The Internet Strategy unit at CNS has been tasked with providing this service, which includes implementation of the Province of Nova Scotia's Web Strategy.