

Prepared for:

WLA Continuing Education Committee

Web content strategy and information architecture project

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Content Strategy and Implementation Plan

The Continuing Education Committee can choose from a range of implementation strategies to meet the content needs identified in the Stakeholder Analysis document. Options will entail varying levels of commitment in the form of:

- configuration changes in the WordPress platform for WLA.org
- manual updates by those who maintain CE content
- expertise required of content maintainers and WordPress

The CE Committee's project must work within the overall WLA web content management platform, so any implementation options for the current project must limit configuration changes. None of these implementation options will consider any customizations of core WordPress code, because those sorts of changes would entail some risk of affecting other content on WLA.org. Core customizations also would impose a burden of ongoing technical maintenance across version upgrades. Changes like these would strain WLA's current technology and staffing capabilities, so they should not be considered.

Some implementation options may, however, include addition of standard plug-in features to the WLA WordPress platform. This is a common strategy for WordPress users, and a strength of that platform is its active community of developers creating easy-to-install, low-maintenance plug-ins that add useful functionality. Any such plug-in would be installed and configured once as part of the project and require no ongoing maintenance beyond routine version updates. Plug-ins would be considered where they reduce or simplify the work of maintaining CE content without imposing additional site management burdens.

All options would have the end goal of developing a catalog of CE resources within that part of the site. The same content inventory would be developed for any of the options. They differ only in how they go about implementing the content changes within the WordPress platform.

CE Catalog Content

The CE Committee does not envision creating its own instructional content to meet needs for continuing education in a direct way. The catalog is planned as a portal linking learners to selections appropriate to their needs. The level of aggregation in the CE catalog has important effects on the success of that goal. The current [Training Links](#) page aggregates resources at a very high level, linking users to many providers of continuing education and requiring users to navigate within those sites to the desired content.

Many of those links are now non-functional, because the destination sites have changed their URLs over time. Broken links are a significant risk for any portal resource, and all options available to the CE

Committee must involve regular checks to remove and update links that no longer reach the desired destinations. This subject will be addressed more fully in the Content Maintenance Plan to be produced later in this project. The implementation strategy can mitigate this risk, however, by consciously choosing destinations that are well-supported by authoritative providers of instruction and configuring links to those sites for the URLs least likely to change over time.

This project has identified a taxonomy of learner needs based on extensive data from the committee's 2011 survey. Destination sites will organize content individually according to their own local taxonomies, each one likely differing from all the others. This implementation recommendation strongly urges the CE Committee to maximize service to learners by creating portal pages linking to individual course information rather than the top levels of provider catalogs where they must then navigate for themselves. The effort to understand user needs suggests a structure of portal pages, organized by the committee's own taxonomy, that aggregate links to CE provider resources targeted to those needs.

Another option might involve linking learners to spots within provider catalogs where they can forage for courses that meet training needs. Such a strategy could add value by helping to improve and standardize organization of links to continuing education materials. It would require learners to navigate on their own once they reach provider sites, though, each of which is organized according to a different set of principles. Links to individual courses would further improve learner access by organizing links according to the WLA Continuing Education taxonomy. This benefit would come at a cost of increased effort to maintain the CE Catalog, since information about individual courses would become outdated more frequently than would information about providers' categories of training options.

The CE Committee can respond to the maintenance challenge in several ways. The first recommendation is to distribute responsibility for sections of the taxonomy to be updated among volunteer content managers from the committee. That workforce may be supplemented, if needed, by additional effort from WLA volunteers outside the CE Committee and by student volunteers, especially MLIS students from the directed fieldwork program within the University of Washington iSchool. Those students relish exposure to real-world tasks within the library profession, and the iSchool strongly encourages such involvement. The fieldwork program does require that student work span a realistic range of tasks, so projects to update the CE Catalog would have to incorporate aspects of library work beyond web content updates, such as instructional modeling or metadata development. Both of those topics are implicated in ongoing review of the CE Catalog content.

Other methods for managing the maintenance workload include selection of the best available course offerings on a topic across providers. Inclusion of only a selection of high-quality courses would increase value for learners, based on the informed judgment and expertise of content managers, especially committee members working in the field of continuing education. This guideline would also help to define a manageable scope for content update efforts, which could not possibly encompass the entire enormous range of available training opportunities.

The workload for content updates also can be controlled by setting expiration dates on course listings when they are created. Upon expiration, those items would automatically cease appearing in the CE

Catalog display without additional updates by content managers. Automated expiration functionality would require addition of a free WordPress plug-in to the WLA.org platform, but it would ensure that the site omits stale content.

In addition to taxonomy-based navigation to course listings, the catalog landing page may offer static links to providers' own catalogs. This element would meet needs for high-level overview of continuing education opportunities by managers and planners, while individual learners could use the taxonomy navigation to link directly to specific courses and other instructional resources. The static links might also incorporate degree or certificate programs, since library schools and other providers would have their own requirements for those credentials, and learners would have to consider those programs as a whole rather than course-by-course.

Implementation Options

The CE Committee can choose among several options for executing a strategy of creating portal pages under WLA's existing WordPress installation. The following lists describe those options, including their benefits and drawbacks.

Option 1: Purely Static Page Content

- Create pages using base WordPress functions according to the CE content taxonomy
- Include manually inserted links to other taxonomy elements
- Benefit: Zero WP configuration change; would work with current version (2.8.6)
- Drawback: Lots and lots of manual work to make any updates and especially modifications to the taxonomy or page structure; would be an obstacle to updates, increasing the risk of stale content.

Option 2: Static Page Content with Taxonomy Plug-in

- Define taxonomy as base WP categories
- Install a free WP plug-in Map Categories to Pages [\[1\]](#) to enhance base functionality with ability to list pages by category. (Default WP does that only for blog posts.)
- Create pages with categories assigned and include manually created navigation linking to categories.
- Benefit: Would work with WP 2.8.6 and require very small WP configuration changes to adopt a stable plug-in; would reduce the work needed to update CE content navigation links by taking advantage of category functionality. Would NOT affect current use of the WP category function for blog posts.
- Drawback: Still entails manual updates to each CE catalog page when the taxonomy changes.

Option 3: Option 2 Plus a New Page Template

- Install the plug-in from Option 2.
- Develop a page template that includes the category navigation display by copying and enhancing an existing page template. (This is an addition to the default WP templates and NOT a change to any core code; this option would not risk affecting other content on WLA.org.)
- Create pages with CE categories assigned and new page template designated.

- Benefit: Substantially reduces the content maintenance burden for those completing updates. Also reduces risk that manually inserted navigation code could be corrupted and would have to be repaired.
- Drawback: Would add one page template file to the WP site configuration which would have to be carried over in future upgrades; modifications to the page template would require basic HTML/PHP competence when the category taxonomy changes.

Option 4: Install a New Event Catalog Plug-in

- Instead of creating static pages with categories applied, create CE content items as entries under a new event catalog plug-in.
- Many free plug-ins exist with native functionality for categorizing items, then filtering display based on those categories [2, 3, 4, 5]. Many include mapping functionality to display location information along with ability to export listings to Outlook calendars, etc.
- Benefit: Smooth, easy item creation and updating with simple user navigation and enhancements like mapping and adding to calendar. With basic changes to the categories in WP, the plug-in could help with other WLA meeting needs such as executive committee and interest group meetings, including calendar displays, export to Outlook calendars, etc.
- Drawback: All such plug-ins require WP version 3.1+ (the most recent version is 3.3.2), so they would not work on WLA's current platform; upgrade from 2.8.6 is up for budget approval at the June 2012 board meeting, but with unknown timeline for implementation.

Recommendation

Overall, Option 3 looks the best right now. It represents a good use of project resources now to reduce ongoing maintenance work. That benefit is critical to promoting routine content changes that keep the site useful over time to its constituents. If too many updates require too much handwork, they won't be completed and dusty content will accumulate, forcing another large replacement effort in the future. The benefits of simplified maintenance outweigh the small drawback of bringing along one additional page template in the stock WLA WordPress environment.

This is a conservative recommendation. Option 4 would be the clear recommendation if the WordPress version upgrade timing were known and within the CE Committee's planning horizon. Mapping capabilities would be especially helpful to the constituents the committee wants to serve, and bigger benefits of event calendar functions to others within WLA might well justify the more ambitious option. If chosen, content items could be prepared in draft as text documents to be transferred to the new environment when it is established.

Conclusion

During the project meeting May 8, 2012, the committee agreed that Option 3, outlined above, represents the best choice for current conditions. Plans to upgrade WLA's WordPress install may lead to configuration of an event catalog plug-in and migration of page-based content into that environment. If so, Option 3 would represent preparation for the further build-out of this capability.

Implementation of Option 3 depends on finalization of the CE taxonomy. The May 8 meeting included discussion of the draft taxonomy, which continued in offline discussions between David Talley and Jennifer Wiseman. The resulting refinement of the draft will be offered for any additional commentary from the project team, then used as the basis for creation and organization of CE catalog content. The taxonomy includes three top-level categories each containing four to six mid-level subcategories. In addition, optional facets may be specified for instructional format, library type, and most popular, allowing learners to select subsets of courses across the subject taxonomy that meet their particular needs.

The CE catalog navigation links will include javascript to update Google Analytics logs and track user response to the taxonomy. The project maintenance plan will include a recommendation for periodic review and updating of the taxonomy, based in part on these traffic statistics.

The project team meeting on May 23, 2012 included extensive discussion of the level of detail appropriate to CE Catalog listings in light of the value added for learners and the maintenance effort required to provide that benefit. Those present decided to try linking catalog listings individually to selected high-value courses from a range of providers. Those listings will be reconsidered over time in a routine maintenance process, as described in the separate content maintenance plan [6]. In addition to updates to content items, the maintenance routine will include evaluation of and potentially modifications to the CE content taxonomy and the strategy of providing detailed listings of individual instructional resources.

Notes

[1] Map Categories to Pages plug-in for WordPress 2.6+ <http://amit.me/wp-plugins>

[2] Ajax Event Calendar plug-in for WordPress 3.1+ <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/ajax-event-calendar/download/>

[3] Event Organiser plug-in for WordPress 3.3+ <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/event-organiser/>

[4] Catablog plug-in for WordPress 3.3+ <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/catablog/>

[5] All-in-one Event Calendar plug-in for WordPress 3.1.3+ <http://wordpress.org/extend/plugins/all-in-one-event-calendar/>

[6] <http://www.preciserecall.com/lis/files/WLACE/WLAContentMaintenancePlan.pdf>