

Guide to Building a Fire/EMS Website That Serves Your Community and Strengthens Your Department

A fire/EMS department website should be more than an online brochure. These 20 essential features can make it a useful home for residents, recruits, members and community partners.

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IN SHORT

A detailed guide to planning a modern fire/EMS department website for recruitment, fundraising, public information, community services, events and long-term management.

A fire/EMS department website should be one of the organization's most useful public-facing tools.

It should help a prospective member understand how to join, give a resident the right contact information, promote an upcoming event, support fundraising and preserve important information that would otherwise disappear in a social media feed.

I have been creating and managing fire/EMS websites for about 30 years. I began with my own fire department's website in the mid-1990s, when very few departments had any presence online. The tools available today are dramatically better, but the basic challenge remains the same: build the site around what people actually need from the organization.

Social media now carries much of the daily news that department websites once published. That is not a reason to abandon the website. It is a reason to give the website a clearer job.

Social media can handle frequent photos, short updates, incident activity and reminders. The website should be the department's permanent digital home for recruitment, services, fundraising, public documents, major announcements, events and community information.

The following 20 features provide a practical framework. Not every fire, EMS or combined organization needs every feature at launch, but each one should be considered intentionally.

Begin With Audiences and Actions

Before choosing colors, page layouts or software, identify the people the website must serve.

Common audiences include:

- Residents seeking help or information
- Prospective volunteers or employees
- Current members and their families
- Donors and community partners
- Event attendees
- Hall renters
- Reporters and public officials
- Businesses, schools and community organizations

For each audience, identify the action the website should make easier. A visitor may need to apply, donate, register, request a service, locate a station, download a document or contact the right person.

These actions should shape the navigation, homepage and content priorities. The department's internal organizational structure should not force visitors to understand where information sits on an agency chart.

1 Clear Emergency and Non-Emergency Information

Visitors should immediately understand that the website is not monitored for emergency requests and that emergencies require a call to 911.

Provide a clearly labeled non-emergency telephone number, administrative contact information and guidance for common requests. If dispatch, police, fire prevention and general administration use different numbers, explain when to use each one.

Make telephone numbers tappable on mobile devices. Include operating hours where relevant and explain that response times for web forms or email are not immediate.

Avoid placing emergency instructions only in a footer or contact page. A simple, visible statement can prevent a visitor from using the wrong channel when time matters.

2 A Complete Recruitment Hub

Recruitment deserves more than a paragraph and a generic contact form.

Create a dedicated section that explains:

- Available operational and support roles
- Minimum qualifications
- Age and residency requirements
- Training provided
- Typical time commitments
- Duty, staffing or participation expectations
- Benefits and incentive programs
- Application and selection steps
- What happens after an inquiry

Use plain language for visitors who do not already understand the fire service. Explain the difference between firefighter, EMT, administrative, auxiliary, junior and other opportunities.

Show what membership is actually like. Include training, station life, community service and the commitment involved, not only dramatic incident footage.

Connect every inquiry to a tracked follow-up process. The website can create interest, but timely and persistent personal follow-up determines whether that interest becomes membership.

3 News and Official Department Announcements

Do not try to duplicate every social media post on the website.

Use social platforms for day-to-day activity, quick photos, routine reminders and conversational updates. Use the website for news that has lasting value or should remain easy to find.

Examples include:

- Major department announcements
- Awards and recognitions
- Leadership changes
- Major incident statements
- Significant grants or apparatus purchases
- New community programs
- Annual reports
- Important policy or service changes
- Detailed event information

Link social posts to the full website announcement when more context is available. This creates an authoritative source instead of allowing important information to disappear into a timeline.

Maintain a reasonable publishing standard. An active department does not need to post daily, but a news section should not feature years-old information as current.

4 Social Media Connections

Make it easy for visitors to find the department's official social accounts. Use recognizable links and identify which platforms are actively maintained.

Social feeds can be embedded selectively, but test them carefully. Third-party feeds can load slowly, break when platforms change their rules or create accessibility problems.

A better approach may be to feature a small number of recent posts or provide clear links while keeping important content on the website itself.

The department should control its social accounts just as carefully as its website. Use department-owned email addresses, multifactor authentication, multiple

authorized administrators and documented recovery procedures.

5 Community Event Calendar and Event Pages

A calendar should do more than list dates.

Create individual landing pages for significant events such as open houses, fundraisers, public education programs, training opportunities, recruitment nights and community meetings.

Include:

- Date and time
- Location and directions
- Cost or registration requirements
- Parking information
- Accessibility details
- Intended audience
- Contact information
- Weather or cancellation policies
- Registration, ticketing or donation links

Allow visitors to add events to personal calendars. Remove or archive expired events promptly.

Use the event page as the authoritative destination for social promotion. If a detail changes, the department updates one page instead of correcting multiple posts and flyers.

6 Member Profiles, Testimonials and Stories

People are one of the department's strongest recruitment, fundraising and trust-building assets.

Feature members with different ages, backgrounds, roles and lengths of service. Ask why they joined, what surprised them, what they have learned and what keeps them involved.

Profiles do not need to be long. A photograph, short introduction and a few honest answers can be more convincing than a polished recruiting slogan.

Member stories also help the public understand the work behind the calls. Highlight instructors, mentors, fundraisers, EMTs, junior members, administrative volunteers, apparatus drivers and others who contribute in different ways.

Obtain permission before publishing personal information. Avoid details that create unnecessary privacy or security concerns.

7 Fundraising, Donations and Sponsorships

For volunteer and nonprofit departments, the website should make it easy to understand why support is needed and how funds will be used.

A strong fundraising section includes:

- The purpose of the campaign
- Specific community impact
- Secure donation options
- Recurring giving, when appropriate
- Mailing or in-person alternatives
- Tax-deductibility information
- Sponsorship opportunities
- Donor privacy information

- Contact information

Use stories and results, not guilt. Explain what donations made possible, whether that was equipment, training, community programs or facility improvements.

Ensure payment tools are trustworthy, mobile-friendly and controlled by the organization. Confirm where receipts go, who reconciles transactions and how access is removed when responsibilities change.

Fire Prevention and Public Education Resources

Fire and life safety information is a core public service, not filler content.

Organize resources around common community needs:

- Smoke and carbon monoxide alarms
- Home escape planning
- Cooking and heating safety
- Seasonal safety
- Lithium-ion battery safety
- Child and older-adult safety
- Business inspections
- Knox Box information
- Open burning requirements
- School and community presentations
- CPR or first-aid programs

Use locally accurate information. Link to state or national resources when they add depth, but explain which rules and services apply in the department's jurisdiction.

Provide clear next steps for requesting an inspection, presentation, alarm installation or other program.

9

Online Service Requests and Contact Forms

Well-designed forms can reduce telephone tag and route requests to the right person.

Possible forms include:

- General contact
- Public education request
- Station tour request
- Smoke alarm request
- Inspection inquiry
- Incident report request
- Recruitment inquiry
- Hall rental inquiry
- Event registration
- Donation or sponsorship interest
- Website correction

Ask only for information needed to respond. Explain how the information will be used and protected. Do not collect highly sensitive data through an ordinary website form.

Every form needs an owner, confirmation message and expected response time. Test submissions regularly. A form that sends to an inactive email address is worse than publishing a working telephone number.

10

Station Locations, Coverage and Directions

Provide complete station information in a consistent format:

- Station name and number
- Street address

- Map and directions
- Non-emergency phone number
- Public hours, if applicable
- Services or units based there
- Accessibility or visitor instructions

If the department serves multiple municipalities, districts or stations, explain the coverage area in terms the public understands.

Be cautious about publishing information that affects operational security. The public needs location and service information, not detailed staffing patterns, access codes or equipment vulnerabilities.

11 Leadership, Governance and Organizational Information

Residents and prospective members should be able to understand how the department is organized and governed.

Depending on the agency, include:

- Fire chief and command staff
- Elected or appointed corporate officers
- Board members or commissioners
- Department structure
- Mission and values
- Jurisdiction and authority
- Contact pathways
- Meeting information

Keep leadership pages current. Outdated names and titles undermine confidence and can send important messages to the wrong person.

Volunteer corporations, municipal departments, fire districts and nonprofit organizations have different governance responsibilities. Present information that reflects the department's actual structure instead of copying another agency's page.

12 Public Documents, Reports and Policies

Create a searchable, organized home for documents the public needs or the department is required to publish.

Examples may include:

- Annual reports
- Budgets and financial reports
- Meeting agendas and minutes
- Strategic plans
- Public notices
- Relevant policies
- Fee schedules
- Forms and applications
- Accreditation or rating information
- Records-request instructions

Use descriptive titles and dates. “2026 Annual Report” is more useful than “final-report-v7.pdf.”

Provide accessible web content when possible instead of relying entirely on scanned PDFs. When documents must be posted, confirm that they are readable, correctly labeled and free of information that should have been redacted.

13 Hall or Facility Rental Information

If the department rents a hall, meeting room, pavilion or other facility, treat it as a real service rather than a buried PDF.

Show:

- Current photographs
- Capacity
- Available rooms and layouts
- Kitchen or catering information
- Tables, chairs and included equipment
- Accessibility
- Parking
- Rules and restrictions
- Pricing or how estimates are provided
- Availability and inquiry process
- Deposit, insurance or security requirements

Use a dedicated inquiry form that collects the event date, type, attendance and contact information. Explain when the renter should expect a response.

If availability cannot be displayed live, do not imply that submitting the form reserves the date.

14 Incident Statistics, Annual Reports and Community Impact

Public safety agencies collect a great deal of information, but websites often present little evidence of the work being performed.

Share understandable measures such as:

- Total incidents
- Fire, EMS and service-call categories
- Overlapping calls
- Training hours
- Public education contacts
- Smoke alarms installed

- Volunteer hours
- Mutual-aid activity
- Grants received
- Major projects completed

Provide context. A large number alone does not explain whether call volume increased, which services are growing or how volunteers contribute.

Use charts sparingly and make the underlying meaning clear. Protect patient information, sensitive incident details and any data that could identify individuals improperly.

15 Apparatus, Equipment and Station Information

Apparatus pages remain popular, especially within the fire service, and can help residents understand department capabilities.

Include accurate photographs and a useful description of each unit's purpose. Avoid turning the page into a specification sheet that only apparatus enthusiasts can understand.

Explain how engines, trucks, rescues, ambulances, tankers, boats or specialized units support the jurisdiction. Highlight important safety or community benefits.

Keep fleet status current enough to avoid presenting long-retired apparatus as active. Historical apparatus can live in a clearly labeled archive.

Do not publish sensitive equipment details, response plans or information that creates avoidable security risks.

Frequently asked questions

First 30 Days

- Confirm control of the domain, hosting and administrative accounts.
- Correct emergency, non-emergency and leadership information.
- Remove expired content and broken links.
- Test every form and payment path.
- Review the site on common mobile devices.

Days 31 Through 60

- Strengthen recruitment and member stories.
- Improve navigation around public tasks.
- Create useful pages for events, fundraising and hall rentals.
- Organize public documents and prevention information.
- Address basic accessibility problems.

Days 61 Through 90

- Establish analytics and meaningful conversion tracking.
- Improve search visibility.
- Add subscriptions or online transactions where useful.

- Document ownership, publishing and recovery procedures.
- Establish quarterly and annual reviews.

The goal is not to add every possible feature. It is to create a reliable, useful website that the department can realistically maintain.

CHECKLIST

Fire/EMS Department Website Planning

Before launch or redesign, confirm that:

- | | |
|---|---|
| ☐ The website is organized around visitor needs. | ☐ Emergency and non-emergency contacts are clear. |
| ☐ Recruitment has a complete, trackable path. | ☐ The department's people are visible. |
| ☐ Important news remains findable. | ☐ Social media supports rather than replaces the site. |
| ☐ Events have complete landing pages. | ☐ Prevention resources are locally useful. |
| ☐ Online forms reach active owners. | ☐ Station and service information is current. |
| ☐ Leadership and governance information is accurate. | ☐ Public documents are organized and accessible. |
| ☐ Donations and payments are secure. | ☐ Hall rental information sets clear expectations. |
| ☐ Statistics explain community impact. | ☐ Apparatus information is accurate and appropriate. |
| ☐ FAQs reflect real questions. | ☐ Alerts can be published and removed quickly. |
| ☐ Subscription lists are managed responsibly. | ☐ The site works on phones and supports accessibility. |



More than one person controls critical accounts.



Content, security and analytics are reviewed regularly.

Frequently Asked Questions

Does a fire or EMS department still need a website if it is active on social media?

Yes. Social media is effective for frequent updates and conversation, but the website remains the department's controlled, permanent home for recruitment, public services, documents, fundraising, events and major announcements.

What should be on a fire or EMS department homepage?

The homepage should identify the department, provide clear paths to high-priority actions, feature current important information and show the department's people and community role. It should not attempt to display every available page or program.

What should a fire or EMS department recruitment page include?

Explain available roles, eligibility, training, time commitments, benefits, application steps and what happens after an inquiry. Include real member stories and connect submissions to a timely follow-up process.

How often should a fire or EMS department website be updated?

Update time-sensitive information whenever it changes. Review major sections quarterly and conduct a broader annual review of content, accessibility, security, performance and ownership.

Should social media posts automatically appear on the website?

They can, but automatic feeds should not control the website or replace permanent content. Embedded feeds may create performance, reliability and accessibility problems. Preserve meaningful announcements as normal website pages.

Who should own the fire or EMS department website?

The department should control the domain, hosting, administrative accounts, analytics and related services. More than one authorized person should have access, even when a vendor manages the site.

What should a volunteer fire or EMS department website prioritize?

Volunteer departments should give particular attention to recruitment, member stories, fundraising, events, hall rentals, community services and a sustainable process for keeping the site current.

For a candid assessment of the most common problems, read [Top 10 Reasons Your Fire Department Website Sucks and What You Can Do About It](#).

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