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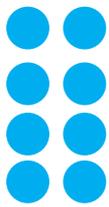
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INTRODUCTION

1.1

Background

India, the largest democracy in the world, is set to emerge as an ICT Superpower in this millennium. Realising the recognition of 'electronic governance' as an important goal by Governments world over, Indian Government has also laid a lot of emphasis on anytime, anywhere delivery of Government services. As of today, there are over five thousand Government websites in India. A close look at these websites, belonging to both Central and State Government reveals that most of the important Government entities have already made headway in establishing their presence on the Net and others are in the process of doing so. Every other day, there is a new Government website, be it of a Department of a Ministry, Taskforces set-up by the Government, new project, citizen service initiative, State Government Department or even a remote district of India. Awareness about the fast changing ICT world and keenness to keep pace with the latest has ensured that almost all the State Governments in India already have their websites up and running. In fact each state has multiple websites belonging to different Departments.

However, these websites follow different Technology Standards, Design Layouts, Navigation Architecture, or, in simple terms, different look and feel as well as functionality. This invariably requires a common citizen to familiarise himself/herself with the functionality of each individual website which results in a lot of inconvenience, thus defeating the very purpose of these initiatives.

The need for standardisation and uniformity in websites belonging to the Government cannot be stressed enough, in today scenario. Ideally, properly audited technical 'Standards' should form the foundation of the web efforts of any Country's Government but it shall take some time for any Country, no matter how developed and advanced it is in terms of ICT levels to reach that stage of maturity. It is therefore imperative that a 'phased approach' adopted to bring out a set of recommended guidelines and policies based on common knowledge and accepted National and International norms. As a first step, it is suggested that the Indian Government websites adhere to certain common minimum standards which have been derived, in the form of guidelines discussed in this document, as prerequisites for a Government website to fulfill its primary objective of being a citizen centric source of information & service delivery. These guidelines could eventually form the basis for establishment of the desired standards.



1.2

Scope & Objective

This document recommends policies and guidelines for Indian Government websites and Portals, at any organisational level and belonging to both Central Government as well as State/UT Governments (including District Administrations to Village Panchayats) for making Indian Government websites citizen centric and visitor friendly. Compliance to these guidelines will ensure a high degree of consistency and uniformity in the content coverage and presentation and further promote excellence in Indian Government Web space.

These guidelines address common policy issues and practical challenges that Government Departments face during development and management of their websites. The guidelines aim to assist the Departments in ensuring that their website conform to a consistently high standard. This is expected to enhance the trust level of the citizens while accessing Government information and availing services online.

1.3

Universal Accessibility

The term 'Universal Accessibility' refers to making a website accessible to ALL irrespective of technology, platforms, devices or disabilities of any kind. In other words, Departments should consider the needs of a broad spectrum of visitors, including general public, specialised audiences, people with disabilities, those without access to advanced technologies, and those with limited English proficiency. Guidelines to address the above needs have been given in various sections of this document.

Most pertinent guidelines have been placed in the mandatory category while others have been made advisory or voluntary. Following the mandatory guidelines shall insure compliance to W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (Level A)

1.4

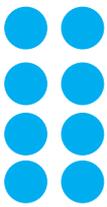
Definitions & Conventions

Visitors:

Throughout this document, the broad term 'visitors' encompasses all those who visit and use the Indian Government websites for their needs with regards to government information and services.

Departments:

All Government entities owning a website, including Ministries, Departments,



Administrations, Organisations, Corporations *et.al.* shall be commonly addressed as 'Departments' or 'Entities' in this document for the purpose of simplicity.

1.5

Compliance to Guidelines

These Guidelines have been framed with an objective to make the Indian Government Websites conform to the essential pre-requisites of UUU trilogy i.e. Usable, User-Centric and Universally Accessible. They also form the basis for obtaining Website Quality Certification from STQC (Standardisation Testing Quality Certification) an organisation of Department of Information Technology, Government of India.

These Guidelines are based on International Standards including ISO 23026, W3C's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, Disability Act of India as well as Information Technology Act of India. Further, the longstanding experience of the authors in design, development and management of Government Websites as well as their knowledge of the ground realities and challenges faced by the Government Departments in developing and managing their websites have helped significantly in drafting these Guidelines.

These guidelines are being circulated amongst all Indian Government Departments at all levels (Central, State, District). These should be followed and implemented on priority basis so that the overall aim of making all Indian Government websites citizen focused and visitor friendly may be realised.

1.6

How to use these Guidelines

Departments are expected to read, understand and implement these guidelines on all of their web-based initiatives. In other words, all the websites set up and owned by the Departments must comply with these guidelines. Though not mandated, it is advised that even Intranet applications of the Departments, which are mostly browser based, may follow these guidelines. The Departments may draw their short term and long term timelines, depending upon their specific requirements, for compliance with these guidelines.

1.7

Mandatory, Advisory and Voluntary

Guidelines are divided into three categories *viz.* mandatory, advisory and voluntary. Explanation and requirement of each of these categories is given as follows .



- **Mandatory:** The usage of term ‘MUST’ signifies requirements which can be objectively assessed and which the Departments are supposed to mandatorily comply with. It is anticipated that there will be no exceptions for a Department not complying with these. In the case of any Department, these guidelines shall apply to all the WebPages/websites under the ownership of that Department. The websites will be checked against these guidelines when audits for compliance are undertaken or for the purpose of quality certification. It is the responsibility of each Department to address and bring into compliance, any non-compliant issues found in any website under their ownership.
- **Advisory:** The usage of term ‘should’ refers to recommended practices or advisories that are considered highly important and desirable but for their wide scope and a degree of subjectivity these guidelines would have otherwise qualified to be mandatory. Departments are, however, expected to comply with these advisories.
- **Voluntary:** The usage of the term ‘may’ refers to voluntary practice, which can be adopted by a Department if deemed suitable. These have been drawn from good practices and conventions that have proved successful and can help a Department achieve high quality benchmarks for their web endeavours.



1.8

Feedback & Suggestions

Feedback & Suggestions on the guidelines are welcome. We will try to include as many suggestions/feedbacks as possible in the future versions. It will help in enhancing/refining the guidelines further thus making them more comprehensive and relevant.

Feedback, Suggestions, Clarifications and Queries on this document may be sent at :

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