

# Websites: The “Next Generation” Resource for Your PTA

Doesn't it just seem like everyone has a website these days? The Internet is an amazing resource that has revolutionized our ability to distribute and access information. This article will discuss how *your* PTA can take advantage of it.



## ***So, why does my PTA need a website?***

A website can tackle two communication goals simultaneously. **It is an excellent resource for your members**, where they could find out the latest info about upcoming events, agendas for meetings, important news from your PTA, and plenty more.



**Councils and districts can distribute forms and information about due dates.** If you have a newsletter, distributing an online version alongside a published version can save lots of paper, not to mention printing and postage charges.

Websites also do not have the physical limitations on how much content you can publish that you may have to deal with for a printed newsletter.

However, your website is also accessible from anywhere in the world, which means that it is a great way to promote your PTA to new people. **Take advantage of your website to share the great things that your unit does**, and possibly entice new members to join. A website is also available 24/7 and can be updated any time, so you can keep it updated much easier than just a newsletter alone. There are also many other ways that you can use a website to support your PTA.

## ***What do I need to have for a website?***

A website has two aspects: **the domain name** (your URL, e.g. [www.capta.org](http://www.capta.org)), and **the hosting** (where the files that make up your website content “sit”).

- Ask your school or school district if they have a website, and if they could provide hosting on their server for your PTA website. (In most cases, the URL would then be something like [www.myschooldistrict.k12.ca.us/pta/](http://www.myschooldistrict.k12.ca.us/pta/) or something.)
- If that is not an option, then you may need to budget an amount to purchase a domain name (usually \$5-10 per year, sometimes less) and/or web hosting (varies, but most falls between the \$40-80 per year range).

PTA does not have any recommended providers for these services, but an online search can turn up a number of options. Be sure to scrutinize providers offering free hosting, as many of these require you to display advertisements in exchange for the hosting. Avoid these. **It is a legitimate PTA expense to set aside funds for maintaining a website.**

## ***How do I learn how to make a website?***

If you're interested in learning how to write HTML (the language behind web pages), there are numerous tutorials online and in books that you can find. Alternatively, solicit a volunteer who is familiar with web design to be the Webmaster for your association. **A great idea is to search out students who are familiar with basic web design.** There are also a number of free online tools and low-cost applications that allow you to publish a website without knowledge of HTML.

### ***Are there any guidelines for designing a PTA website?***

Always remember that a PTA website is focused on content. Try to minimize the use of fancy images and designs and be sure that the content of the website is allowed to shine.

- Use standard, easy-to-read fonts and colors. When designing the website, remember that less is more.
- Link to the California State PTA website (<http://www.capta.org>) and the National PTA website (<http://www.pta.org>), as well as websites for any council or district PTA
- Councils (and districts) should list the units (and councils) that they represent, and their websites
- Link to information on these other websites if necessary; you do not always have to duplicate everything.

All material must be cleared with the PTA president (and school principal, if applicable) to ensure that it is accurate and appropriate, and fits with PTA policies and procedures.

**The privacy of your officers is important.** Avoid publishing personal information such as addresses and phone numbers. A good way to handle e-mail addresses is to use a “mailto:” link instead of printing the e-mail address directly on the page. At the same time, however, make sure that there is a place where people can find contact info for your association in general, including an address, phone number, and/or e-mail.

**Never present material critical of any individual or group** to prevent the possibility of a libel suit. Do not publish any personal info about students or adults (including photos with or without names) without written permission. Agendas and meeting announcements may be published.

**Similarly, bylaws and standing rules must NOT be distributed electronically at any time.** It’s a very good idea to ask an average member of your PTA to just check out the website and make sure they can find their way around--that ensures that you’ve got a navigable, easy-to-use website. The Website job description in the Toolkit has additional details.

Materials that are benefits of membership must not be posted to the website, e.g., bylaws, minutes and financial reports

### ***How do I make sure the website stays current?***

The webmaster’s position should be a full-time chairmanship. The webmaster should be responsible for soliciting and reminding board members to pass along news and other information to be posted on the website. If you have a newsletter, you can often reuse those newsletter articles as website content.

A webmaster who has a busy schedule should inform board members how often he/she is able to update and set deadlines for information to be received for a particular website update. Websites are a relatively new resource that more and more organizations are taking advantage of. Although it does require a bit of a transition and some investment, you will quickly find that there are significant benefits to having a website for your association and that it will help you better connect with your members.