

How to build a community website

Publishing a website is a great way to share news and information with your community

Overview

This guide will show you how to use free software to create a showcase of your community stories, that could be used to play them back to your community members but also to key stakeholders, and public audiences.

We will look at how to use [WordPress](#) to set up a basic site, and how to combine short community stories and free graphics for the platform.

In this guide we will walk you through how to:

- Set up your WordPress website with a custom sub-domain
- Install a free theme to layout your content clearly for users
- Start creating your pages and blog posts
- Include key features to make your community site a success
- Onboard and guide users to make the most of the site

Tools and Resources

- Email address
- Content for your website
- Design parts, such as images, photos, or videos you want to use
- A way to share your website with your community.

Step-by-Step

Step 1 – Make a Plan

Ahead of launching your site, make a plan for the content and the features you want to include. WordPress is very flexible in offering lots of features. Some important areas to think about would be:

- Site Name and tag-lines
- Content for the Homepage
- Articles and blog content – such as Stories
- Contact forms and sign-up pages to stay connected with your community
- Links to any reporting lines or community groups you manage

Step 2 – Setting up your site

WordPress has a simple set-up process for new users to get started. Head to [WordPress](#) to sign up for a free account. You will be prompted to register and enter some basic information on your site including your site name and description.

[Link to the WordPress set-up page](#)

When choosing your domain name, be aware that there are free and paid options. For free sites, the domain name you choose would be suffixed with 'WordPress.com', for example: talk-kit.wordpress.com.

Once you've registered and set up your site you will be at the dashboard, the primary screen where you work on your blog. This is where you manage your website's pages, media content, comments, plugins, and other customisations.

At this stage, the site is in a draft mode and has not been published online. We'll keep it in draft until we're ready to push live.

Step 3 – The Dashboard – Managing Content

Here we'll cover the key steps to start adding content and get your site up with the key features you need.

The Dashboard is the overview of the site for you as the admin. The key areas to use are:

- My Home – an overview of the site
- Site – where you control your pages, posts, user feedback, and image files
- Design – where you can manage the look and visuals for the site

There are lots of other options and areas, but let's focus on the checklist below to begin.

- Give your site a Title and Tagline – for example: ‘My Community Site’ – creating connected communities.
- Confirm your email – The email will have been sent to the email address you registered with, you will need to confirm it.
- Edit the homepage – we will cover content and design in the next selection, but for now please familiarise yourself with how the WordPress page editor works for changing images and text.

Step 4 – Basic Design Guide

WordPress is full of opportunities for great design for your site. We’ll go through the basics here. With many options available, we recommend a simple layout that will be easy for your community to read through.

A reminder that the site is still in Draft, you should only use the Publish button on pages once you are ready to push the website live.

Themes

Themes are pre-made templates which affect the whole look and feel of your website including the layout, font, and colours. Instead of having to change every part of the site yourself, a theme can do it all at once.

For the community site, we recommend a layout like Alves or Hever which will present your content really well for your community. Select the site with the option to use the themes homepage content which will change how your homepage looks. With the theme installed, let’s edit the site in more detail.

Editing pages

While the theme changes the look, you can still change the images and text on pages to change the content and layout. WordPress gives lots of pre-made options to add to your theme..You can use these to add essential features to your page for your community.

On the navigation bar of the page editor you can select the + sign to add either Blocks or Patterns.

Blocks allow you to add smaller parts like images, text, or email forms. Patterns allow you to add pre-built sections which can be styled and edited after.

You can add and edit these features to build the pages you need. We’ll cover the important features to add in the next sections, but now make sure you are familiar with the editor and all the different ways of adding elements to the page.

Step 5 – Adding Content – Posts and Pages

WordPress is primarily a blogging platform. It's perfect for keeping your community updated with news. The two main ways to do this are through adding posts and pages. We'll cover these below:

Adding & editing posts

Posts are articles for your community to read. They can contain formatted text, images, videos, and links to other webpages. You can edit your homepage to link to your recent posts or highlight featured posts. There is also a dedicated Blog page which shows all of your sites.

You can access your Posts on the Site tab. There are three default posts, which you can delete or edit. Just like the homepage editor, you can select elements to add to the post like videos, and images. Once ready, you can hit publish to make your post live on the site. Once published you can still edit everything.

Adding & editing pages

A page in WordPress usually refers to the page post type. It is one of the default pre-defined WordPress post types. Pages allow users to create static pages that were not part of their blog posts. For example, an about page, contact page, legal info, etc. They can be edited in the same way as posts and the homepage.

Just as posts need to be displayed on the home or blog pages, Pages need to be added to the home page or Navigation menu to be accessible.

Step 6 – Key Features and practices to make your community site successful

Now that you are comfortable editing the site and adding content, let's look at the key features you need to make the site a success. These can be added easily to the site and including them will make your site a great hub for resources, tools, and staying connected to your community.

- **A clear site structure** – Start with a strong introduction to the site, then focus on content.
- **Instructions to new users** – on the homepage, you should include a welcome message and some instructions for how people can use the site, including all the features.

- **Calls to action** – if there are specific actions you want users to make, such as submitting a report, signing up to a reporting line.
- **Make communication easy** – make it easy to find your contact details and stay connected with your community. You can add contact forms, sign-up surveys or invitations to Whatsapp or Signal groups to encourage people to sign up.

Step 7 – Going Live

Once your site goes live, you can still make changes – though before launching follow these checks below:

- Check how it looks on mobile and tablet view
- Test all interactive features, like contact forms or feedback
- Test for accessibility – does it work with screen-readers, text to speech, magnifiers or keyboard-only navigation?
- Have a friend or colleague read-through the site for errors
- Share the launch on your channels and relevant community groups on Facebook
- Keep a list of improvements to make in the future