

MARCH 2021

## GOOD PRACTICE BRIEF

# SUCCESSFUL WEBSITE MAINTENANCE

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

Creating high-quality, well-organized and relevant content helps continuously increase audience engagement with content throughout the site.

Providing clear calls-to-action to submit content and curating new special collections improves overall quality and accessibility of content.

Reviewing analytics and adjusting content structure, user journeys, and keywords across high-value areas of the site can improve access to website content.

### BACKGROUND

EducationLinks, launched in August 2018, is the Center for Education's (DDI/EDU) first public knowledge platform, which supports education practitioners in designing and managing more effective education programs. The site is designed to engage practitioners in exploring and using the latest learning, guidance, and evidence in the international education sector. EPIC developed the EducationLinks website and provided continued web development, maintenance, and management support for the site and its "spokes."

EducationLinks was designed to use a hub and spoke model, meaning there is a primary "hub" website at [edu-links.org](http://edu-links.org) as well as "spoke" microsites that share the same website platform and architecture and feed content to the hub website. While all the spokes share a common platform, they are managed by separate teams of USAID staff and partners.

### GOOD PRACTICE

Both USAID and EPIC treat EducationLinks as a dynamic, regularly updated website, and as the primary way to share knowledge with implementing partners and other donors. EPIC maintained an open dialogue across workstreams (professional development, organizational effectiveness, knowledge management, and communications) and with other contractors supporting DDI/EDU to help continually improve the site and its contents to better fit both its work and, most importantly, audience needs.

### UPDATING SITE FUNCTIONALITY

To better support audiences and project goals, EducationLinks functional fixes and improvements occurred both on a regular basis and as needs arose. Enhancements to EducationLinks included:

- Updating the search feature to reveal more relevant content from within PDFs;
- Developing podcast embed and photo gallery features;
- Creating a prominent content submission call-to-action on the site so implementing partners and networks are able to submit relevant content to contribute to the knowledge base; and
- Adding a “Special Collections” feature that allows learners to more easily find resources related to content that USAID wished to elevate.

EducationLinks pages are composed of content blocks that can be reordered or adapted without large amounts of website development or design work. This flexibility allowed EPIC to present content in creative and engaging ways. A few examples the website's flexibility include:

- A [COVID Landing page](#), providing curated resource collections and an online library for classroom-based interactive radio and audio instruction files to support distance learning.
- A series of [Global Education Learning Series \(GELS\) pages](#) hosting the schedule, learning themes, videos, and resources for this five-month learning series.
- A [Learning Agenda Landing page](#) hosting learning priorities that span the spectrum of USAID's education programming and [resource collections](#) organizing learning agenda evidence and guidance.

## IMPROVING USER EXPERIENCE

Search engine optimization, the process of improving the quality and quantity of traffic to a website from search engines, resulted in recommendations that helped increase traffic to pages through organic search (visitors coming from a search engine, such as Google, not including paid search ads). Specific techniques included:

- Creating more descriptive page titles, to ensure that they provide more context about what people can expect to see on the page.
- Ensuring the page is set up with styles that Google recognizes and is able to scan.
- Adding alt text header images, because Google places a fairly high value on image alt texts to figure out what is in the image and the subject of the text surrounding it.
- Curating content in featured and related content sections to drive users further into the site.
- Conducting keyword research to optimize pages for users entering the site via organic search.

## GOVERNANCE PLANS MAINTAIN GOOD PRACTICES

Governance plans were essential to orderly site maintenance and provided needed information to teams that manage [GRN](#) and [ECCN](#) spoke sites. The plans ensured there was no down time in management when these sites were handed off to a new team. Outlining how, why, and when the hub and spokes work together enabled teams from EducationLinks and spoke sites to work independently, coordinating when needed, to ensure content and features of all sites were maintained. These plans established a system for maintaining website content and a framework for making decisions regarding functional and content changes, and served as a reference for institutional knowledge. A well-documented and clearly communicated website governance process can improve workflow, increase efficiency, and improve staff knowledge and job satisfaction.

## OUTCOMES

The development, maintenance, and enhancement of EducationLinks and the spoke sites ensure that DDI/EDU staff, partners, and USAID Missions have regular access to the latest and most relevant education information, evidence, research, communication, and updates.

## INCREASED SITE AWARENESS AND AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

Overall, EPIC and USAID were able to continuously increase audience awareness and engagement with content throughout the site by creating high-quality, well-organized, relevant content. The number of total users who visited EducationLinks in 2020 was 144 percent higher than the number of users in 2019. As EducationLinks has become more established in search rankings and quality content has been posted to the site, organic search referrals increased by 150 percent in 2020. Pageviews on EducationLinks also increased by 132 percent from 2019 to 2020. The percentage of monthly engaged users now hovers in the high 80s, and has even reached 92 percent. The average time on page for 2020 was 2:56 minutes, compared to 2:16 minutes in 2019 and 1:13 in 2018.

## LESSONS LEARNED

### WEBSITE ANALYTICS LIMITATIONS

Google Analytics does not support feedback loops or two-way dialogue related to knowledge products created by the Center for Education and hosted on EducationLinks. For example, only downloads for PDFs can be tracked, which does not collect information on if the document was read, shared, republished, or applied. To gather feedback from key audiences, website teams should consider designing website functionality that captures content use and/or supplement website analytics with a periodic audience survey.

### AGILE APPROACH TO WEBSITE DEVELOPMENT TASKS

When development requests become frequent, an agile approach that brings continuous improvement and iteration at every stage should be used to manage the work. This agility works by breaking projects down into smaller tasks, prioritizing them, and then continuously delivering them. This approach offers reduced risk, continuous improvements, and improved project predictability.

In this approach, the project is implemented in “sprints,” a time period of 1-4 weeks (varies from project to project) within which the team has to complete a certain set of tasks. All tasks are broken down in detail before being worked on by website developers. At the end of each sprint, what was built is demoed with the stakeholder and feedback is received. This helps the team continuously improve the product throughout the duration of the project. These checkpoints also reduce project risk and help keep stakeholders engaged with development and informed of timeline and budget.

### HUB AND SPOKE LIMITATIONS

When working within a hub and spoke model, it works best when general content types (resources, blogs, events, etc.) on hubs and spokes match. If there are special features or content outside of the hub/spoke content model, the team should discuss time and site implications early on. These exceptions can create complications for technical and content management down the line.

*This brief was created by Education Performance Improvement, Communications, and Knowledge (EPIC), a five-year activity (2015-2021) of support services to the Center of Education (DDI/EDU). EPIC consisted of activities in four key areas that were implemented simultaneously: performance improvement through organizational effectiveness; professional development, training, and learning for all staff; knowledge management, generation, brokering, uptake, and use; and internal and external communications, engagement, and partnerships.*