



State of Iowa Digital Experience Team

Digital Experience: Enterprise Solutions

Into the Weeds: Iowa's Content Gardening Project

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Executive Summary

In 2023, Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds directed a comprehensive assessment of Iowa's government structure, the first in nearly 40 years. The goal was to simplify operations, reduce costs, and improve service delivery to constituents by aligning agencies based on shared missions and functions.

This realignment was not only a structural overhaul that consolidated agencies, saved millions, and aimed to improve service delivery, but consolidated agency websites making it easier for constituents to find, apply for, and receive the information or services they were seeking.

New websites were created, often combining two or more agency websites into one. Under a deadline, new and old content was categorized and reorganized. A constituent-centered experience led to new menus and navigation created to make websites easier to use and help people find what they need. 51 new agency websites were created through this process on a new platform supported by the Drupal content management system.

In June 2025 Iowa launched a new initiative called the [Iowa Website Content Gardening Project](#) - the idea that a website and its content are things you plant, grow, and care for over time. Content Gardening was designed to support agencies in improving their websites through better content strategy, governance, and accessibility. This project followed a phased cohort model and involved collaborative training and improvement efforts alongside our vendor Lullabot, the Iowa Digital Experience Team, and stakeholders from each agency.

The results are websites that align with agency goals and meet the needs of their target audiences, delivering a more effective and impactful constituent experience.

IDEA

Constituent Empowerment

Constituents often needed help contacting the correct agency for their questions, applications, or other needs. This was more evident post state government alignment as agencies and services had been combined in many instances. Phone calls and emails were overwhelming for staff. Making Iowa agency websites easier to use would allow staff to make important information available online and empower constituents.

Staff Empowerment

By employing Content Gardening and content design practices, we could make content flow and organization more intentional and efficient for our constituents. This would support better decision-making, improve service delivery and accessibility, and establish a sustainable governance practice across agency websites.

More Than a Website Audit

The Iowa Website Content Gardening Project's goal wasn't just to edit text - it was to improve every aspect of creating and maintaining a website that works for both staff and constituents. That meant reviewing everything from server storage and broken links to plain language and ADA accessibility.

IMPLEMENTATION

Roadmap for Success

Many constituents use multiple Iowa agency websites to conduct business with the state - renewing a license, applying for benefits, or contacting their Representatives. Making that information available online saves time for constituents and money for the state through self-service.

Agencies were given the option to participate, and most were eager for guidance and help.

To begin, we partnered with Lullabot to identify four initiatives - Content Gardening, Accessibility, Document Management, and Search Improvement - and used a RACI model to clarify roles across Lullabot, the Iowa Digital Experience Team, and participating agencies.

Lullabot led kick-off meetings with the Iowa Digital Services Team and key stakeholders from each agency / cohort, explaining the process and what was expected of the stakeholders as well as the tasks Lullabot and the Iowa Digital Services Team would be responsible for. The agency stakeholders were assured that this upfront work would make their website content maintenance and auditing much easier in the future. Lullabot provided reports for each agency that included a content matrix, orphaned file reports of web pages and documents (PDFs, Excel sheets, PowerPoint presentations) living on the server but not being used or linked anywhere.

The Iowa Digital Experience Team was responsible for supplying website-centric reports from Google Analytics including the most visited pages, most used search terms, and pages not found reports. These reports helped to determine the most and least visited content, for example, guiding agency navigation changes and bringing the most searched content to the forefront. Each cohort met once a week for 3-4 weeks, so all parties had time to complete their various assignments.

Resources

The Content Gardening effort was funded by a grant from the American Rescue Plan (ARPA). Participating agencies varied greatly in staffing size. Agencies chose the pieces of the project that they could reasonably accomplish during their Content Gardening cohort. All agencies, regardless of size, were supplied with the same information, reports, and suggestions and asked what was most important to focus on within their cohort time. When their individual cohort was concluded, they had all the information they needed to continue at their own pace. The Iowa Digital Experience Team was always available to answer questions and offer help and suggestions.

The platform itself also played a key role in making this work sustainable. The state of Iowa chose to move to the Drupal Content Management System as the new platform, with consistency in look and feel so constituents would know they were still on a state of Iowa website. This also made it easier for agency staff managing website content. By using this platform with specific templates for each agency, stakeholders don't have to worry about servers, hosting access, or coding and can focus on their own agency content. Basic Drupal training ensures all staff can manage their sites confidently. Each agency has a consistent template with shared headers, footers, and basic layouts - key for agencies that don't have the budget for dedicated web or development staff.

IMPACT

Improvements

This project was about making state of Iowa government information available to as many constituents as possible. By focusing on what constituents needed and making that content easy to find, the project delivered equal access, reduced legal exposure, and more equitable public service.

Goals

The Content Gardening Project had specific goals for website content:

- 90%+ of broken links redirected or resolved
- 83%+ Accessibility Score in Acquia Optimize
- 8th Grade or below average reading level
- All sites using the new content governance checklist

The following data shows how participating agencies performed against those goals.

Comparing Q1 2025 data with Q1 2026 data averaged for 13 participating agency websites:

83.4% decrease in broken links

7.3% increase in Accessibility Score in Acquia Optimize

26.2% increase in Website Quality Score in Acquia Optimize

Stats after Health and Human Services (HHS) Content Gardening Project

The Health and Human Services website offers a compelling example of what Content Gardening can achieve. In the week after HHS's new Medicaid pages launched, Google Analytics captured immediate results across several key metrics:

HEADLINE RESULTS



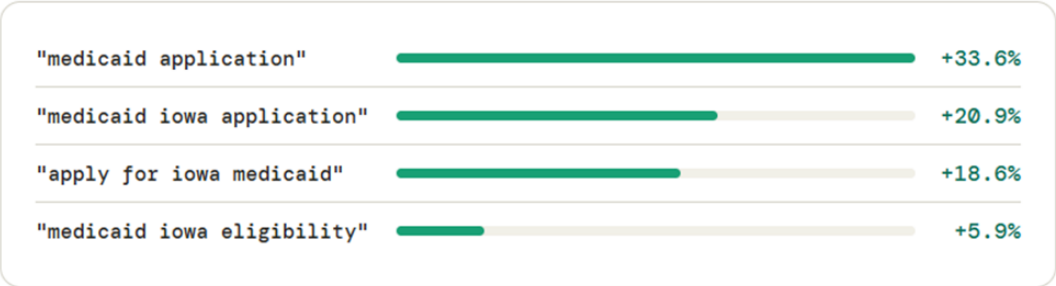
ENGAGEMENT



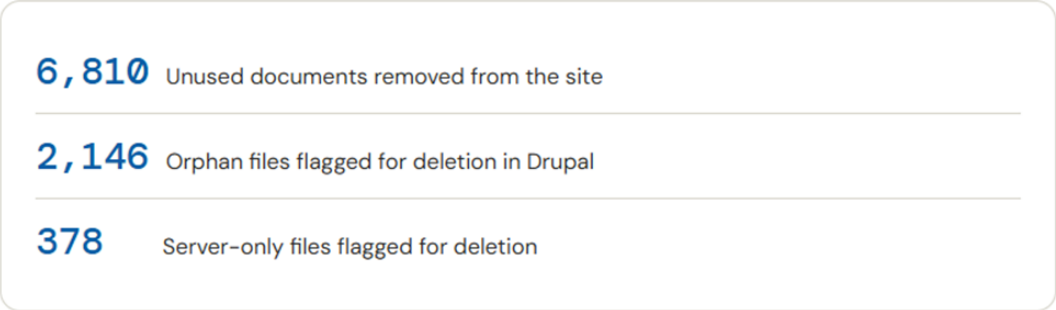
SEARCH CLICK-THROUGH RATE



SEARCH IMPRESSION GROWTH: NEW MEDICAID TERMS



DOCUMENT AUDIT & CLEANUP



Going Forward

At the completion of each cohort's Content Gardening session they were provided with the [Core Strategy Statement](#) that was developed with them during their cohort; a structure and content cleanup review; a goal and governance planning review; and a prioritization matrix to track future changes. Each agency was provided with a suggested timeline for future website content audits. Agency Content Managers can run several built-in reports for website maintenance and monitoring. By using the built-in reports, they can easily monitor and track various aspects of their website content going forward. Agency content managers also have access to our [Digital Experience Training site](#), a dedicated resource for ongoing training, guidance, and knowledge to support their continued work.

Now that the initial phase of the Iowa Content Gardening Project is completed, the work continues with every website edit every agency makes. Agencies use checklists to write accessible content, create remediating accessible PDFs, and use data from Google Analytics to determine their most accessed content, find broken links, most downloaded files, and more. The addition of Qualtrics Digital Experience Analytics (DXA) gives agencies deeper insight into how constituents interact with their websites - through heatmaps, session replays, and click tracking - to continuously improve the digital experience.

Investment in this project was essential in three areas:

1. Providing access for everyone to essential information for the state of Iowa
2. Reducing time and frustration for agencies and giving them the tools to manage their own content
3. Reducing costs for the state by selecting a universal platform that can be easily managed by less staff