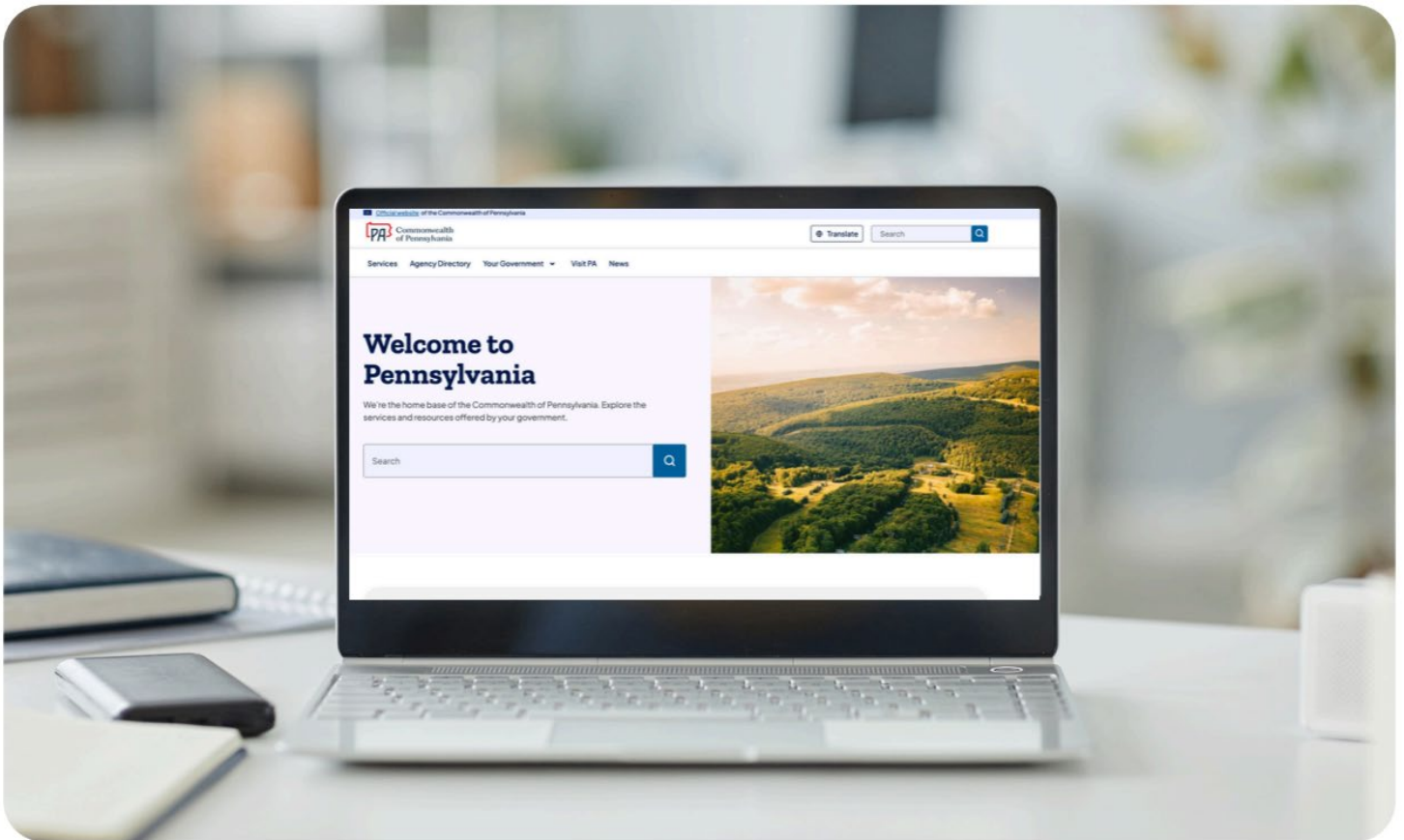




PA.gov: Creating a Cohesive Digital Experience Through Content Optimization

State: Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Agency: Commonwealth Office of Digital Experience
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Contact: Bry Pardoe, CIO, cio@pa.gov



Commonwealth of Pennsylvania



Executive summary

After completing a modernization of the PA.gov platform in January 2025, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania identified a critical next challenge: while the platform created a unified and accessible digital front door, the quality and consistency of content across more than 60 agencies and 30,000 pages remained inconsistent. Without a structured approach, content debt would continue to grow, limiting the platform's long-term value and leaving residents to navigate complex, duplicative, or unclear information.

To address this, Pennsylvania developed and piloted a scalable content optimization model. Through a repeatable framework combining plain language, data-driven prioritization, and embedded collaboration, the team improved high-impact content while building lasting capability within agencies. The result is a measurable improvement in clarity, usability, and site structure across the pages that matter most to residents. By targeting a small percentage of high-traffic content, Pennsylvania demonstrated how to deliver outsized impact efficiently while establishing a foundation to scale this work across agencies over time.

Idea

The initial PA.gov transformation unified dozens of agency websites into a single, integrated digital experience. However, the migration also revealed a deeper operational challenge: while agencies were now part of the same experience, they continued to operate with the mindset of separate, siloed websites.

In practice, legacy patterns persisted. Content was often duplicated across agencies, page titles were not unique or standardized, and components were used inconsistently. Even within a shared system, agencies structured content based on internal organization rather than user needs, resulting in a fragmented experience. Agencies retained ownership of their content, but that responsibility often sat with digital directors and communications staff balancing many priorities at once—including social media management, marketing and communications, graphic design, public relations, stakeholder coordination, and website publishing—without dedicated content strategy support.

This exposed a fundamental gap: a shared platform does not automatically create a shared experience.

The opportunity was to introduce cohesion across the system to align how agencies name, structure, and present content so PA.gov functions as a consistent, user-centered service.

Pennsylvania addressed this by building a content optimization model focused on consistency, clarity, and sustainability. This established stronger patterns for page structure, naming, and component usage.



Using a Pareto-based strategy, the team focused on the small percentage of pages that drive the majority of user traffic—delivering immediate improvements while creating a model that agencies can extend across their sites.

Rather than attempting to solve this across all content at once, Pennsylvania focused on developing and testing a repeatable approach that can scale across agencies over time.

Implementation

To improve and sustain content quality across agencies, Pennsylvania built a repeatable content optimization model that can be applied consistently while adapting to agency needs. In 2025, the Commonwealth Office of Digital Experience (CODE PA) hired content strategists and developed a repeatable framework.

Content optimization lifecycle

The optimization process follows a structured lifecycle from discovery and prioritization through content development, launch, and long-term governance. Each phase builds on the previous one, moving from analysis and prioritization to collaborative implementation and long-term sustainability.

Defining scope

CODE PA grounded our initial approach in the Pareto principle, focusing on the relatively small percentage of content driving the majority of user traffic. Early engagements typically targeted approximately 20% of an agency's pages—prioritizing high-traffic, high-impact content.

As the pilot progressed, we refined this approach. Scope was determined not just by page count, but by content complexity, information architecture dependencies, and agency capacity.

To define scope, we combined content inventories and audit findings with analytics, user feedback, and agency priorities to identify the highest-impact opportunities. We prioritized top tasks, core service pages, structural improvements, and a limited amount of agency-priority content, while excluding lower-impact or more complex work. This approach allowed us to right-size engagements based on agency context, rather than applying a one-size-fits-all model.

Audit and prioritization approach

Content strategists conducted structured audits using a standardized framework that combines quantitative and qualitative data. Each page was evaluated across five domains: information quality, plain language, structure and organization, component use, and metadata.



Pages were scored on a 1–5 scale and weighted based on priority—combining traffic, user need, and content quality. Audits also identified broader patterns such as duplication, inconsistent structures, and information architecture issues that informed recommendations beyond individual pages. These insights informed reusable content patterns across agencies.

Findings were synthesized into structured deliverables, including scorecards and templated audit decks that highlight key patterns, priority pages, and opportunities for improvement. These materials translated complex audit data into clear, actionable insights—helping agencies quickly align on scope and next steps.

Delivery and collaboration

Content development was delivered through a pair writing model, where CODE PA content strategists worked directly with agency digital directors and subject matter experts to co-create content. This approach enabled teams to resolve questions in real time, apply standards in context, and build shared understanding of effective content practices.

Adoption and scaling

Adoption was built into the process. Agencies learned by doing—receiving real-time feedback, guidance, and support using tools and analytics. This helped shift agency thinking from managing isolated websites to contributing to a unified platform experience.

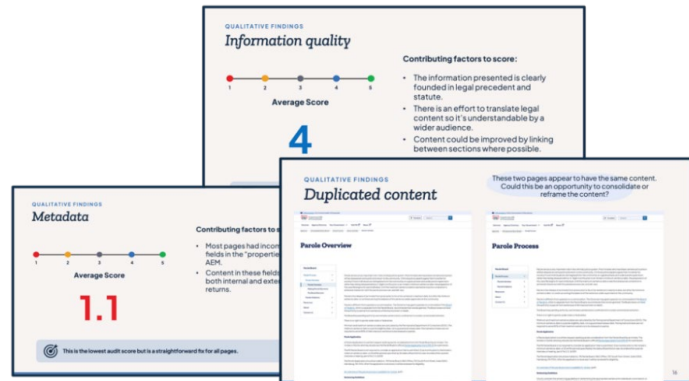
Pilot engagements were intentionally designed to validate and refine the model. By early 2026, multiple agencies had launched optimized content, demonstrating that the approach can be applied across different contexts while maintaining consistency.

Impact

The content optimization initiative improved the clarity, usability, and structure of PA.gov's most important content while establishing a foundation for greater consistency across agencies. This work improved how residents access and use government services by making information easier to find, understand, and act on.

Before this work, content was fragmented, duplicative, and difficult to understand. After optimization, content is more structured, accessible, and aligned to user needs.

Figure 1: Audit findings presentations





These improvements are reflected in measurable outcomes. Reading levels decreased across multiple agencies, even as teams added more detailed guidance. For example, Parole Board and Department of Corrections content improved from grade 10 to grade 8, while complex Historical & Museum Commission content saw reductions as large as grade 13 to grade 8.

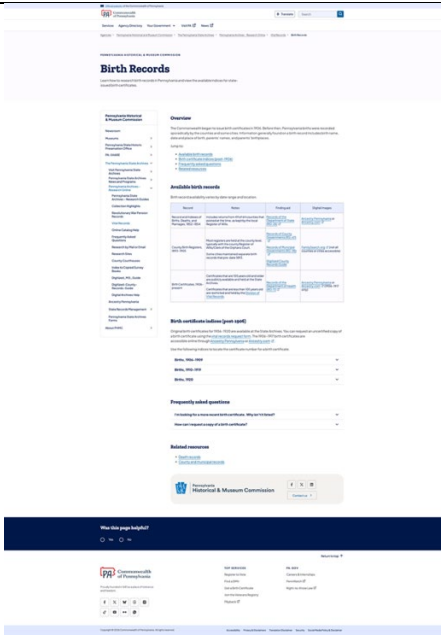
Figure 2: Percentage of traffic to agency site from optimized pages

Agency	Summary of site updates	Site size	% of pages optimized	% of traffic driven by the pages optimized
Department of General Services	Transforming a large, complex site by replacing jargon-heavy navigation with clear, user-centered pathways that make key services easier to find.	Medium <i>Between 151-500 pages</i>	16%*	57%
Department of Corrections	Reorganized content around user needs, introduced new service pathways, and reduced reading levels (10th → 8th grade) to significantly improve clarity and access to critical information.	Medium <i>Between 151-500 pages</i>	20%*	66%
Farm Show	Consolidated and restructured high-traffic content to make key information easier to find while maintaining a 7th grade reading level and reducing staff burden.	Small <i>Between 50-150 pages</i>	20%	75%
Parole Board	Streamlined parole content by reducing pages and lowering reading levels (10th → 8th grade), making complex processes easier to understand and navigate.	X-small <i>Under 50 pages</i>	31%	59%
Governor's Office of Homeland Security	Reduced site complexity by nearly 50% (24 → 13 pages) and improved readability (10th → 9th grade), enabling faster access to critical public safety information.	X-small <i>Under 50 pages</i>	42%	56%
Governor's Residence	Reimagined the digital experience by restructuring content, adding ~100 photos, and improving real-time visitor guidance based on direct user feedback.	X-small <i>Under 50 pages</i>	100%	100%
PA Historical & Museum Commission	Transformed complex research and service content by lowering reading levels (e.g., 13 → 8, 14 → 6) and consolidating high-traffic guides into clearer, self-service experiences.	Large <i>Between 501-3,000 pages</i>	15%*	63%



Agencies also reduced complexity by consolidating content. The Office of Homeland Security reduced their volume of pages by 46%, while other agencies combined high-traffic content into fewer, more effective pages.

Figure 3: Transforming unstructured archival content into a navigable experience

Before: 200+ individual links presented in a single, unstructured list.	After: Content grouped into clearly labeled sections with defined navigation pathways. This reduces the need to scan the entire page and helps users locate records more quickly.
	

These changes improved more than readability. They:

- Improved clarity and navigation
- Reduced duplication and inconsistency
- Reduced burden on agency staff
- Made content easier to maintain

These improvements changed how residents interact with government services. Information is easier to find, steps are clearer, and users can complete tasks without confusion. For agencies, this reduces repetitive inquiries and allows staff to focus on higher-value work.



The work also demonstrated a highly efficient model for improving service delivery. By focusing on approximately 20% to 30% of pages per agency—those driving the majority of traffic—the team improved between 56% and 75% of user interactions within participating agencies.

While these results reflect a targeted set of pilot agencies, they demonstrate the effectiveness of the model and its potential to scale.

Agency feedback reinforces the value of the approach:

“You took what felt like a daunting task and made it simple.”

Major Michaelann Andrusiak, Director, Office of Homeland Security

“They transformed complex, technical information into clear, thoughtful, and user-friendly content... making a noticeable difference in the final product.”

Janaki Theivakumaran, Special Assistant, Parole Board

Long-term value

The most significant impact is the establishment of a scalable system for continuous improvement. CODE PA will continue partnering with additional agencies to improve their highest-impact content while building the governance, standards, and support models needed to sustain quality across PA.gov over time. By combining data-driven prioritization, structured audits, and embedded collaboration, Pennsylvania has created a repeatable model to improve content quality, strengthen consistency across agencies, and continuously enhance how residents access and use government services.