



Using Data to Inform Your Website: Questions and Answers from the “Ask Me Anything” Webinar

This document answers common state and territory questions about Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) consumer education website requirements and innovative practices for website design. A strong understanding of these requirements and practices will help you provide high-quality consumer education information to families.

This document was prepared in response to questions from webinar participants who attended the July 11, 2019, webinar [“Using Data to Inform Your Website.”](#) Experts from ICF’s User Experience Team helped the [Child Care State Capacity Building Center](#) (SCBC) prepare this document.

Web Engagement

Why is it important to track web traffic and engagement data on your consumer education website?

- ◆ Web traffic and engagement data help you understand what people are coming to your website to do and where they are spending their time. It’s often referred to as “digital analytics.” This information can help you understand the opportunities to optimize user experience, generate better outcomes that align with your goals, and determine whether your consumer education website is having the desired effects. You want stakeholders to be able to come to your consumer education website and get what they need from it, quickly and easily. Your consumer education website’s digital analytics can help you determine if this is happening and identify opportunities to improve user experience.

Additional Questions?

If you have questions about whether your planned website enhancements meet CCDF requirements, please consult with your [Office of Child Care regional office](#) for guidance.

If you would like additional technical assistance on developing and enhancing your consumer education website, contact the State Capacity Building Center (CapacityBuildingCenter@icf.com).

How do I set goals for my consumer education website?

- ◆ Setting goals for your website is important because it helps you define what you should measure to confirm your website is successful. If you do not know where to start, ask yourself what you want to know about who



uses your website and how they use it. Visualize a funnel and start small and work up to larger ideas. For example, think about the resources and content you want families or stakeholders to find and use on your website. Then, identify the steps they need to follow to access this information.

- ◆ A sample goal for a consumer education website could be users downloading certain resources or using specific tools, such as a downloading a new resource or using the child care search tool. Once you identify the goal, determine the steps the user must take to achieve that goal. For example, in order for a user to access a new resource, they must land on the homepage, click on the resources button, select the resource, and download the document. Understanding these steps helps you define a successful visit to your website. Remember, it's not just about getting users to your website, but helping users accomplish what you want them to accomplish once they find your website.

How can digital analytics help me reach those goals and improve my site?

- ◆ Digital analytics allows you to take an evidence-based approach to understanding your website's user experience, using the data from actual user behaviors. You can use this analysis to accomplish several key goals, including the following:
 - Identify successes and failures.
 - Inform design and development.
 - Validate design decisions and test new ideas.
 - Spend resources smartly and appropriately.
 - Make continuous improvements that benefit the organization and its users.
- ◆ Web managers should focus on three important questions that analytics can help answer:
 - Where are opportunities to optimize user experience?
 - Where are opportunities to generate better outcomes that align with our goals?
 - Did our work-to-date have the desired effects?

Some of this web engagement information is technical, and I'm not the person who does the backend work on the consumer education website. What are the top questions I should ask my information technology (IT) department or data analyst to ensure we are tracking web traffic effectively?

- ◆ The [Guide for Measuring Web Traffic and Engagement](#) provides tips on how to create a digital analytics process. One of the first steps is to define what you would like to measure. Your metrics should align with the goals of your consumer education website. You may want to begin with tracking traffic to the key aspects of your consumer education website, such as your child care search tool, online inspection reports, and pages that provide information on child care health and safety requirements and how to choose quality child care. You may want to meet with your stakeholders to discuss what might be helpful to track.
- ◆ Second, ask your IT department or data analyst if analytics software (such as Google Analytics) is installed to track web engagement for the consumer education website. If it's already installed, allow time for data collection to occur. Usually, one month's worth of data is enough to get started.
- ◆ Third, make sure you receive ongoing (at least monthly) reports highlighting metrics that align with your web engagement goals. Talk with your IT department or data analyst to determine how you can use these metrics to improve the consumer education website. Some things you may want to consider tracking include traffic sources (how are people coming into the website?), overall traffic by page (where are people going once they are on the website?), search engine terms, goals and events triggered, and user paths (what do people do



once they are on the website?). If you include key metrics in automated reporting, you can spend more time on analysis.

- ◆ Finally, use your data to inform content development for your site, and create more content that reflects what your users are seeking. Use data to inform outreach strategies that drive traffic to aspects of your site that do not currently have high traffic.

How can I take steps to automate my web analytics reporting, so we can spend more time analyzing the data?

- ◆ The overall goal for automating your analytics is to ensure that you are reviewing the same data elements regularly, investigating the reasons behind data trends, and informing recommendations to address user issues and improve user experience.
- ◆ To ensure that your automated reporting supports your consumer education website goals and is reviewed to support its continuous improvement, you should ideally have a staff person responsible for data analytics work. This may be a challenge in states and territories that do not have a dedicated analyst for this purpose. However, even if you do not have a dedicated staff person to do this, distribute the responsibility among team members to ensure you can stay on top of the work.
- ◆ One way to automate web analytics is to create a simple dashboard that displays your key metrics (which align to the goals of your consumer education website). Use a free tool such as Google Data Studio to help you automate your reporting.
- ◆ Have members of your team review the data regularly and note any significant changes from month to month. If your overall site traffic increased, determine why that might be. You want to understand why traffic increased so that it can inform your web engagement strategies moving forward.
- ◆ Web traffic often increases as a result of certain outreach tactics. Perhaps you posted something on social media or sent out information in a newsletter or email that promoted something on the consumer education website. Perhaps the increase in traffic was due to referrals from a stakeholder or partner agency.
- ◆ If you observed an increase in traffic and determined why that happened, you can then make some recommendations on how to enhance your website. For example, if your data showed that your traffic increased on a certain page from a newsletter article, you may want to review the topic of that article and test different content ideas that may also drive traffic to the site.

What resources are available to help track web analytics?

- ◆ States and territories will need to decide which tools best fit their goals and resources. Free tools such as Google Analytics and other similar web metric tools are on the market. Google offers free products, such as Google Data Studio, Google Optimize, Google Search Console, and Google Tag Manager. Check out the [Guide for Measuring Web Traffic and Engagement](#) for more information.

Do each of these free Google tracking platforms require separate coding to be added to the website background? Or, is it like a suite where you can get all of these things at once?

- ◆ This is a great question, and the answer is yes and no. Google Tag Manager, Google Analytics, and Google Optimize are separate codes. However, the best option is leveraging Google Tag Manager to add your other tracking codes— since as a Google product, Google Tag Manager makes it very easy to add your Google Analytics and Google Optimize codes. This is the advantage of using Google Tag Manager, as this tagging repository helps you add and manage your codes without having to leverage your technical resources.



- ◆ For this method, you need to add only the Google Tag Manager code. Then you can add Google Optimize and Google Analytics tags from within the Tag Manager platform. This also makes doing custom Google Analytics Event tracking much easier!
- ◆ Google Search Console and Google Data Studio need no additional code. These are Google products you can use to connect your data. To learn more about those free products, go to <https://marketingplatform.google.com/about/small-business/>.

How can I use web analytics to determine whether different outreach methods, such as newsletters, social media posts, or other sources, drive people to the consumer education website?

- ◆ Understanding which outreach methods help drive people to your consumer education website is important. This will help you target your outreach and communications efforts more effectively. One way to do this is to use Urchin Tracking Module (UTM) codes. These codes allow you to track the performance of your digital outreach campaigns, such as newsletters and social media posts.
- ◆ UTMs are unique codes that separate traffic from tactics. Knowing that people are coming to your website (traffic) is important, but you also want to know which tactics (newsletters, social media, and so forth) drive them there. Knowing this information helps you better understand the behavior of your users and can help you optimize the content accordingly.
- ◆ There are the five different UTMs that you can use. When using UTMs, you must include a medium, source, and campaign.
 - **utm_medium**: the channel you are using (for example, email, social media, online).
 - **utm_source**: the tactic within the channel (for example, newsletter, Facebook post, webinar).
 - **utm_campaign**: the name of the campaign (for example, JulyEdNewsletter, SocialBlast072019, July2019ConsumerEd).
 - **utm_term**: (not required) a certain keyword included for a little more detail. In the example above, we used the utm_term to distinguish each publication (in other words, utm_term=webtraffic or utm_term=seo).
 - **utm_content**: (not required) content category you would like to highlight. In our example, we used utm_content to say playbook.
- ◆ Please note a few things about using UTMs:
 - If you have a new tactic, always use an underscore between words for easy identification. For example, utm_campaign=consumer_education_series.
 - Keep consistency in capitalization. Best practice is to use lowercase.
 - Use Secure Sockets Layer to ensure that your link is secure. In other words, start your link with https://, rather than http://.
 - Keep a spreadsheet of all generated URLs for reference, tracking, and reporting.
 - There are UTM builders to help you build a URL with the proper characters and spacing. This is an example of the one that Google publishes: [URL Builder](#).
- ◆ Here is an example of how to track the performance of the resource guides for this webinar:
 - https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/consumer-education-webinar-series?utm_source=webinar&utm_medium=online&utm_campaign=July2019ConsumerEd&utm_term=webtraffic&utm_content=playbook



Search Engine Optimization

Help me understand search engine optimization (SEO). What kinds of questions should I ask my IT department or website manager about SEO?

- ◆ Many states and territories want to ensure that stakeholders can find the consumer education website. SEO increases the likelihood that target users will find web content through search engines. SEO works by affecting where content ranks in search engine results pages (SERPs). Most users click on content that is linked in the top few results on the first SERP. For most websites, the majority of visits come from organic search referrals (in other words, the user runs a search and follows the link directly to the site), most of which come from Google’s search engine.
- ◆ SEO is almost always the most effective way to increase web traffic. Beyond ranking higher in SERPs, many SEO improvements ultimately result in a better website experience for users.
- ◆ Ask your IT department or website managers on their tactics to increase the likelihood that families and child care providers can find the consumer education website. Ask if they’ve conducted an SEO audit; ask about mobile optimization and load time, and ask whether the URL structure is “clean.” Below are examples of “bad” and “good” URL structures:
 - Old Link: <http://example.com/products%20%26%services/index.jsp?category=lnl&id=0315>
 - New Link: <https://www.example.com/products/lawn-mowers>
- ◆ [Guide for Increasing Search Engine Optimization](#) can help you think about the types of questions to ask. Since this is a technical aspect of the consumer education website, you will want to work closely with your IT department or website managers on this. This guide may also be helpful to your technical team as they work to increase SEO on your consumer education website.

How can SEO help families find the consumer education website?

- ◆ SEO is the process of making it easier for search engines like Google and Bing to find your website. By taking measures to optimize content for the way these online platforms index it, you make it more likely for your content to appear in your target users’ online search results.

What is the most important element of SEO and why?

- ◆ *Content SEO*, or having useful, usable and relevant content that engages your target users is the most important aspect of SEO. However, good *technical SEO* is also important to ensure that you aren’t doing harm to your search ranking and user experience or losing users to other websites. Please see [Guide for Increasing Search Engine Optimization](#) for more detailed guidance on content and technical SEO.

Why is an audit of SEO important, and how can it help states and territories take action to improve their websites?

- ◆ Without assessing your site’s current SEO, you will not know how your users experience finding (or not finding) your content. The SEO audit process allows you to identify which aspects of SEO for your consumer education website you will need to improve to ensure your target users can find your site.



What can content creators do to improve the SEO of consumer education websites?

- ◆ This is a very important question, and the [Guide for Increasing Search Engine Optimization](#) gives more information on how to improve SEO. Keep in mind that SEO works best when the people who write the website content do the following:
 - Write titles, links, and headings that are accurate and descriptive.
 - For top-level or high-traffic pages, write clear descriptions that summarize the page’s content. Don’t rely on a search engine’s ability to pull this information automatically.
 - Always write for people, not search engines. The times of keyword stuffing are over, and trying to “game the system” with buzzword-laden metadata can harm a site’s performance in a search.
 - Use brief, clear URLs.
- ◆ Also, content creators need clear governance and workflow processes in place so that everyone follows a standard protocol for publishing content. This should include requirements related to metadata inputs for SEO purposes and other content development requirements (such as plain language guidelines and quality assurance processes).

SCBC Resources

- ◆ [Guide for Increasing Search Engine Optimization](#) (2019): This guide presents tools and resources you can use to make sure search engines can easily locate content that is relevant to users’ needs.
- ◆ [Guide for Measuring Web Traffic and Engagement](#) (2019): This guide offers best practices, strategies, and guidance for states and territories on the importance of digital analytics to IT teams and web or digital marketing vendors, and it includes approaches that experts from those types of teams can use.

The State Capacity Building Center (SCBC) works with state and territory leaders and their partners to create innovative early childhood systems and programs that improve results for children and families. The SCBC is funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Child Care.

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