NOAC Web Site Training Syllabus
E-Scouting

Sessions by Sage Lichtenwalner
May 22, 2002
Revised June 18, 2002
Revised July 1-6, 2002

Session 6 – National OA Web Site (20 minutes)

Session 6 – The National OA Web Site

The Internet now plays an essential role as a major medium for communicating with today's Arrowmen. The national OA web site, as the established premiere reference source for national programs and policy of the OA, sets the example and standard for all other OA web sites. The site meets and exemplifies all guidelines set forth for OA web sites and maintains a long-term commitment to improving the function and usability of online material. The national OA web site inspires best-practice methods and creativity from local OA web sites. Ultimately, the site provides relevant resources and top-notch quality information that it has become charged with, expected of, and known for.

Pulling it All Together – A case study of the national OA web site
To wrap up the e-Scouting cell, each major subject area will be reviewed using a case study example – the national OA web site, www.oa-bsa.org. Major points will be reemphasized with a special focus on how OA web leaders can implement ideas and methods from the national site into their local sites.

1. **National OA Web Policies in Practice**
   - Review the national and OA guidelines and point out how the national OA web site conforms to each.
2. **Following Good OA Web Site Characteristics**
   - Mission and Goals – The site has an established mission, which it follows.
   - General Information – The site includes general information on both the Order of the Arrow and the site itself, describing the basic structure and leadership of each.
   - Current Information – All information on the site is updated on a regular basis. Almost all information sent from the national OA office to lodges appears on the site, including *National Bulletins.*
   - Historical Information – Historical information on past events is included to aid OA leaders in planning future events. Personal accounts of events and programs are used to provide inspiring stories to attract future participants. These areas are clearly marked as historical or are presented as timeless.
   - Audiences – Information is provided for Arrowmen, Non-Arrowmen Scouts and Scouters, and the General Public. However, our primary focus is on promoting national programs and providing resources to Arrowmen.
   - OA Web Site Competition Criteria – Review the criteria, and identify how the site exemplifies them.
3. **Producing and Maintaining the Web Site**
   - Established Purpose – Through its mission and goals, and by request of the national OA committee, the national OA web site is the "official" web site of the Order of the Arrow. Its leaders are charged with carrying out the mission of the site.
   - Web Staff Organization – The following organization structure is used to manage and produce content for the site.
     - Youth Coordinator and Adviser – Appointed by the National Committee (through a Vice Chair), they are responsible for achieving the mission of the site. They lead the web site team (assignments), set the direction of the site (storyboard), and interact with members of the national committee and national program staffs to insure all activities are adequately promoted.
     - Assistant Advisers – Appointed by the Site Adviser, they work with team members to produce the site's content. They also act as site editors.
     - Team Members – Due to the diversity of content on the national site, many Arrowmen are recruited to help create and develop content. Typically, team members fall into four categories:
       - Coders – Write HTML and convert national documents into web pages
       - Writers – Compose original content to feature national OA programs and events
       - Graphic Designers – Design new graphics and occasional site headers
       - Assistant Coordinators – Help the Youth Coordinator manage assignments

- National Liaisons – Include the Liaison to the National Committee who helps to gather information from other sources, and the Associate OA Director who acts as staff adviser.
- Professional Server – The national site uses a professional server company, which affords it the use of a high-bandwidth connection, and a 24/7 staff to maintain the system, perform maintenance and conduct routine backups. The national OA committee has made the commitment to ensure that the site is continuously operational and accessible. This allows the web staff to focus on the content of the site rather than the mechanics.
- Peer Review – All pages undergo a formal peer review before they are posted to the public site. This processes involves the entire team. Each member checks for typos, coding errors and insures that all new pages meet national policy standards. All pages are also reviewed by the national executive staff, through the national OA director, and by the national OA committee, through the committee's liaison. They insure that all pages meet expectations.
- Accountability – If there is ever a problem with material that is posted on the site, a process is in place to insure that changes can be made quickly and accurately. The same is true for information that is missing from the site, and must be disseminated quickly. The site leadership maintains close ties with the national OA committee and the national OA executive staff to insure their needs are met.
- Page Validation – As pages are created, they are regularly checked through the peer review process for coding mistakes. Whenever a new site design is proposed (very rarely) and otherwise periodically, pages are checked using several validation tools (HTML, CSS, WAI, etc.).

4. **Design and Layout of the Web Site**
   - Content Areas – The national OA web site has defined content areas that drive the development of new pages. The navigation and layout for the site is already defined (see below) allowing team members to focus on the content of the pages.
     - Features – Regular stories supporting and promoting national programs, events and resources. These include, articles on the effective use of national resources/materials, promotional stories to attract participants to national programs, photo galleries, and "memories" pages preserving events for posterity and future referral.
     - Resources – Online versions of resource materials that come out of the national OA office, materials developed by the national OA committee for posting directly on the web site, and other independently developed resources that can be utilized by all lodges and Arrowmen.
     - National Communication – The web site acts as one of the fastest and easiest ways to disseminate information from the national OA office to Arrowmen. This includes, important news and updates, award announcements, copies of national resources and publications, and an outlet for the national officers to speak to Arrowmen at large.
   - Overall Navigation Scheme – The site's layout was carefully planned to make it as easy as possible to locate desired information, using a consistent organizational structure. Information is divided into the following areas: Programs, Events, Announcements, Resources, Background Info, Features and FAQ's. The site also includes pages for What's New, Search and Site Map.
   - Front Page Layout – Under the current design, the "front page" of the site consists of three areas.
     - Navigation Bar – On the left, contains all the major areas of the site.
     - Feature Area – Usually contains seven to ten items, usually the most recent or most important topics on the site. Each has a headline link to a page and a short description.
     - PDAs – On the right, they hold links to key pages often accessed or ones that need promotion.
   - Page Design – Certain elements are persisted throughout the entire web site. Each page contains a "toolbar" navigation menu on the left side, a title area at the top, and the actual page content (with ownership and copyright information) located on the bottom.
     - Text – The site uses Cascading Style Sheets to specify different styles for titles, body text, PDA elements, footers, etc. The CSS for the site can change text specifications globally.

- Navigation Toolbars – The toolbar changes to match the level and area of the site that a particular page is located in. This is accomplished using server-side includes (SSI).
- Graphics – All graphics used on pages are scaled to the appropriate size and the height and width tags are specified for faster rendering. Some pages also contain header graphics.
- Additional Items – Each page also contains a Revised Date and Author comment.
- Graphic and Color Choices – A clean two-color scheme with no background graphic is used for high legibility and quick load time.
- Dynamic Pages – The national OA web site does not regularly support dynamic pages, however special online versions of forms are sometimes used.
- Safeguarded Areas – To protect certain materials from widespread dissemination, certain pages and resources are located in password-protected areas. The site uses the htaccess validation scheme.
- Browser and Accessibility compatibility – The site is designed to be usable with as many browsers as can be practically supported. The site is also designed to work with older systems and slower modems. The audience includes not only those with the latest computer hardware and broadband connections but also those with older setups.

5. **Using Graphics and Images**
- Formats we use – Currently only jpg and non-animated gif files are used.
- Page Headers – Many of the top-level pages use a header graphic to define the theme of the page, and to liven the page up. Not all pages contain such a graphic.
- Thumbnails and Photo Galleries – In galleries, and occasionally on other pages, "thumbnails" are used to allow users to see all the images on a page that quickly loads. Then a user has the choice to download enlarged versions of a graphics of his choice.
- Multimedia – Very few instances of multimedia applications appear on the site, but some instances include: Flash presentations, document files in pdf (including form fields), and streaming video and audio clips.

The National OA Web Site – Today and Tomorrow

The national OA web site is dedicated to improving and enhancing the online experience Arrowmen by introducing additional features on national OA programs as well as supplemental inspirational material. The greater a resource the web site becomes, the greater Arrowmen will be able to fulfill the purpose of the Order of the Arrow.

1. Annual Storyboards and Quarterly Themes – Every year the Youth Coordinator sets the plan for the upcoming year. The storyboard contains a detailed promotion plan to insure all national programs and events are featured on the national OA web site at the appropriate times. Quarterly themes are used to drive the development of content to focus on the seasonal needs of local lodges and sections.
2. How to Join the Staff – The national Order of the Arrow web site is always looking for Arrowmen with OA and web experience who may wish to join the staff. The national OA web site staff includes Arrowmen from around the nation who each work a few hours a week to create the web site's pages. Team members have specific or general responsibilities depending on their position. Some work quickly creating web pages on announcements, new programs and resources. While others compose and develop feature stories or provide in-depth coverage for events. Different staff members code pages, design graphics, or write stories depending on their own personal skills. Staff members must be able to work well on their own and also be capable of working with a widespread and diverse team. Working on the national OA web site is no small commitment. Interested OA members who have both good web page skills and solid OA experience are invited to apply at any time to join the web site staff. Send an e-mail with background information to webmaster@oa-bsa.org.
3. Suggestions, Ideas, Feedback – This session provides an excellent time for the staff of the national OA web site to interact with users. **Get Feedback on the site and Record It!!!**

Summary
The national OA web site is dedicated to continuing its development of feature stories, additional resources, and national communications, providing Arrowmen the resources and inspiration to allow them to best serve their units and councils. We hope to continue to follow the kaleidoscopic nature of the Internet by insuring our staff is prepared to serve the needs of our order.