

Measuring Your Government Agency's Website Performance



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Who is Mighty Citizen?

Mighty Citizen transforms mission-driven organizations through branding, marketing, and digital communications. We help associations, nonprofits, governments, and universities increase their impact and revenue by creating deeper connections with their audiences. We marry data with human-centered design to craft brands, build websites, and launch marketing campaigns that improve the world.

What This Guide Covers

Companies measure online leads and sales. Nonprofits measure online donations. But government websites are more difficult to evaluate. This guide details how government agencies can use Google Analytics and search engine optimization (SEO) to determine whether their website is supporting their goals.

BY USING THIS GUIDE YOU WILL BE ABLE TO:

- Set up Google Analytics for success
- Measure homepage engagement
- Explore where your traffic is coming from
- Optimize your website for search engines



How do I measure my
government agency's website
performance accurately?

Set Up Google Analytics for Success

If you're going to measure your website performance accurately, the first thing you need to do is set up Google Analytics (GA).

This guide assumes you already have Google Analytics connected to your main website. If not, please first visit <http://bit.ly/2R3MdKI> to get started.

1. Connect Google Analytics to Third-Party Web Platforms

Most government agencies employ third-party platforms to do things like manage online forms, process payments, complete event registrations, and allow users to log in to an account.

Because these third-party platforms are separate website domains, **you must add your Google Analytics tracking code to every page of your third-party platforms.** This way, Google Analytics treats them as if they are part of your website—empowering you to see how users move from your website to the third-party platform and what they do along the way. Without including your GA tracking code on these external pages, you'll have no insight into the full user experience.

Contact your third-party platform vendors. Ask if they integrate with Google Analytics. Most do. If yours don't, consider switching to platforms that do.

Finding Your GA Tracking Code

You can find your GA tracking code in Google Analytics by going to:

Admin > Tracking Info > Tracking Code

Many third-party platforms simply need your Google Analytics property ID—which looks something like “UA-12345678-01.”

For example: If you're using Eventbrite to manage event sign-ups, search Google for “Eventbrite Google Analytics integration” and follow the instructions. If you don't find anything on Google, contact the platform vendor directly and ask if they integrate with Google Analytics.

ADD YOUR GA TRACKING CODE

Adding your GA tracking code to *every* page of your third-party platforms could reveal insights like:

- Whether promoting your upcoming Citywide Volunteer Day on your homepage generates sign-ups
- How many people read your article about how to apply for benefits
- Where in the process of filling out a contact form users drop off

If a platform does not automatically connect to Google Analytics, this same tracking code can be manually included on every page of the platform. To learn more, watch this Google video (<https://bit.ly/2JD3R2H>).



Google Tag Manager

Consider using Google Tag Manager (GTM) to manage all tracking codes—e.g., Google Analytics, Google Ads, Facebook Ads, etc.

- Install one set of GTM tracking codes on your website and all third-party platforms. Then manage all other tracking codes using the GTM interface.
- Many platforms requiring tracking codes provide instructions for GTM.
- Test your changes before pushing live.

GTM is free, but you'll want to involve your web development team because setting it up requires technical know-how.

2. Set up Tracking for Email Campaigns

Next, connect Google Analytics to your email marketing platform. This will allow GA to deliver a complete picture of your email efforts—including what users do on your website after they click a link in one of your emails.

Website traffic from email is normally registered in Google Analytics as “direct” traffic. However, you want Google Analytics to track your email traffic as its own channel.

See: **Acquisition > All Traffic > Channels**

Unfortunately, the Google Analytics tracking solution for GovDelivery is very labor intensive and probably not worth the hassle. However, if you use a popular platform like MailChimp, search Google for “Mailchimp Google Analytics” and you should find the instructions to integrate with your Google Analytics account. If you can't find these instructions online, contact your provider and request them.

3. Create Conversion Goals in Google Analytics

To know whether users are doing what you want them to do on your site, you must first create conversion goals in Google Analytics. **Conversion goals are completed actions on your website**—e.g., submitting a form, signing up for an event, logging into an account, etc.

Do you know how people are engaging with your content?

Form completions are among the most popular conversion goals. Most form completions can be tracked as a type of conversion goal known as a destination goal. **Destination goals allow you to record where on your website your users go.**

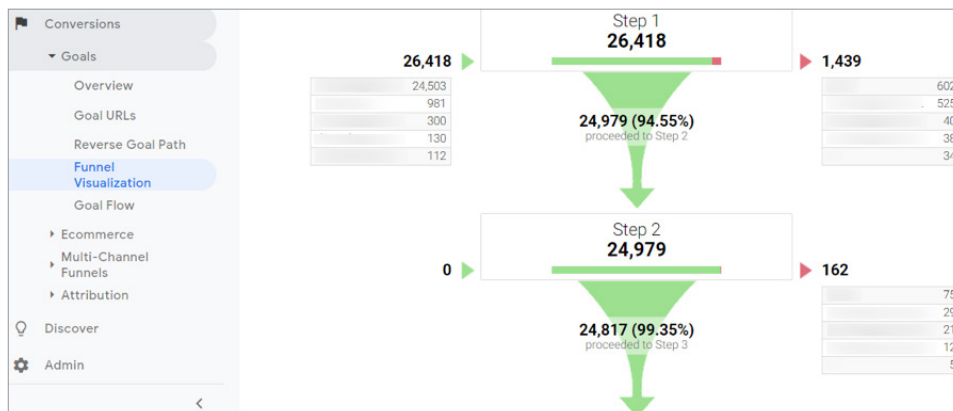
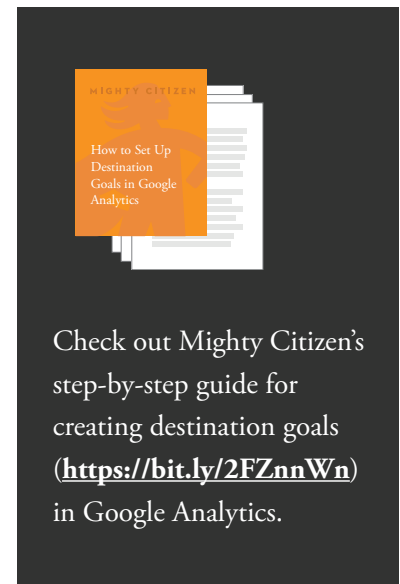
For example: When a user completes a form and is then automatically taken to a “Thank you for contacting us!” confirmation page, that confirmation page is a destination.

Multi-Step Forms

If a form spans multiple web pages (i.e., unique URLs), it may become more likely that people will abandon the form before completing it.

The “Funnel Visualization report” in GA (**Conversions > Goals > Funnel Visualization**) shows how users move from page to page in the form. You can discover where in the form process users are dropping off so you can make content and architecture changes.

It is especially important to track completions of long forms on mobile devices because donors may give up if the process is too lengthy or complex. Simple changes—such as reducing the number of fields or removing a field requiring information that is difficult to obtain—can increase your conversion rate and improve user experience.



We can see that only 94.55% of users moved from Step 1 to Step 2. This suggests that something in Step 1 is causing 5.45% of users to abandon the form. With this in mind, we can test some tactics for increasing conversion.

Six Popular Forms Used by Government Agencies

All of these form types can be tracked as destination goals in Google Analytics.

General Forms

Reporting crimes, applying for jobs, etc.
Are your efforts to increase submissions and applications paying off?

Requests for Services

Are your efforts to get people to register online (instead of by mail or in person) working?

Payment

Paying fees or fines or dues. Are your efforts to get people to pay online (instead of by mail or in person) working?

Internal Website Search

Providing information about services or resources.
Is the success of your site determined by its ability to help people find what they're looking for?

Event Registration

Are your promotional efforts leading to increased conference, seminar, or training registrations?

Contact Us

This common, catch-all form is used by different people for different reasons, so it often doesn't provide a very meaningful metric for performance.

4. Event Tracking

Events is how Google Analytics tracks user interactions that *don't* involve moving to a new webpage. Unless your agency has added tracking code to your website to track these events, there is likely no data available in: **Behavior > Events > Top Events**.

You'll need the help of a website developer to implement tracking code for file downloads, outbound links, and video views. This code is easier to implement and test if you are using Google Tag Manager.

Here are three of the most common types of events tracked in Google Analytics:

File Downloads

Many government agencies provide content in PDF and MS Word formats. Tracking downloads of these documents is important to understanding how people engage with your content.

Outbound Links

It's helpful to know the number of people who exited your website to specific pages on third-party platforms. This data isn't as valuable as form completion data—because we don't know how many of these clicked links resulted in completed actions—but it's definitely better than nothing.

Video Views

Know how people are engaging with your video content, including the number of users who play and then watch 25%, 50%, 75%, and 100% of the video. Some platforms even track the number of users who submit their email address after watching. Google Tag Manager has a built-in trigger that allows you to track YouTube videos easily, and other platforms like Vimeo provide GTM implementation instructions.

Behavior	Event Category ?	Total Events ?
Overview		80,372 % of Total: 100.00% (80,372)
Behavior Flow		
▸ Site Content	☐ 1. Video Views	26,798 (33.34%)
▸ Site Speed	☐ 2. Outbound Link	25,126 (31.26%)
▸ Site Search	☐ 3. File Download	23,794 (29.60%)
▼ Events	☐ 4. Email	3,809 (4.74%)
Overview	☐ 5. Calculator	845 (1.05%)
Top Events		

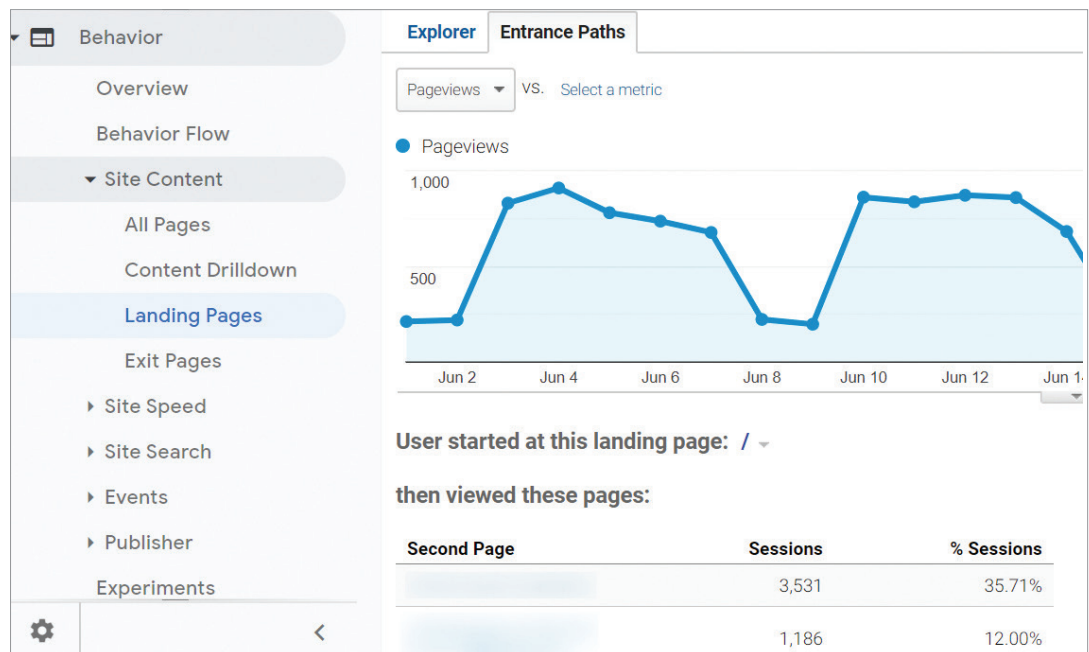
Measuring Homepage Engagement

When people arrive at your homepage, do they simply see links to a bunch of things you do? Or are you clearly and immediately demonstrating the value you offer?

Entrance Path

To learn the top webpages clicked to *from* your homepage, follow these steps in Google Analytics:

1. Go to: **Behavior > Site Content > Landing Pages**
2. Select your homepage (often represented as /)
3. Select **Entrance Paths** in the sub-navigation
4. The **Second Page** metric will display the top pages clicked from the homepage



Check which pages have a conspicuously high or low number of clicks.

This is an easy, helpful way to start exploring your site's effectiveness. If what you see is unexpected, remember that users value things differently; they may not understand what information is provided on each of the subsequent pages or they may have trouble finding what they're searching for from the homepage.

Site Search

When users can't quickly find what they are looking for from your homepage, they will often use your site's search feature. If your website has site search that reports to Google Analytics, see which terms are getting a lot of search.

Go to: **Behavior > Site Search > Search Terms**. What you learn here may reveal important changes you should make to your homepage architecture so users can find what they need more quickly.

For example: If you have a lot of search for a phrase like "list of services" you may want to make sure you have a clear link to such a page on your homepage.

About Comparing Dates

Comparing data during specific time periods can be tricky. Consider seasonality when measuring website activity.

For example: It's common for agencies to see less website engagement during late December and early summer. That's why, in order to evaluate website performance over time, you should consider running reports that compare activity during one period to the *same period the previous year*. In the example below, notice that the date ranges are identical but one year apart.

The screenshot shows the Google Analytics date range selector interface. At the top, it displays the selected date range: "Jan 1, 2019 - Apr 30, 2019" and the comparison range: "Compare to: Jan 1, 2018 - Apr 30, 2018". Below this, there are three calendar views for February 2019, March 2019, and April 2019. The February 2019 calendar shows dates 1 through 28. The March 2019 calendar shows dates 1 through 31. The April 2019 calendar shows dates 1 through 30. To the right of the calendars, there is a "Date Range:" dropdown menu set to "Custom". Below this, there are two input fields for the date range: "Jan 1, 2019" and "Apr 30, 2019". Below these fields, there is a checked checkbox for "Compare to:" followed by a dropdown menu set to "Custom". Below this, there are two input fields for the comparison date range: "Jan 1, 2018" and "Apr 30, 2018". At the bottom right, there are "Apply" and "cancel" buttons.

Bounce Rate

Google Analytics defines bounce rate as “the percentage of single-page sessions in which there was no interaction with the page.” While it can be useful to know how often people arrive on a webpage and then bounce off the site, we recommend looking more closely to determine the *reasons* for the bounce rate.

For example:

- Is new homepage content affecting your bounce rate? You may find a temporary improvement after promoting a link to a popular event or news article, which will then return to normal when that link is less relevant or removed.
- Does your homepage bounce rate fluctuate at certain times of the year due to traffic seasonality?

Consider Usability Testing

Every site has usability issues, but it's difficult to identify these issues or how severe they are unless an independent researcher walks through your website with real users to recognize strengths as well as opportunities for improvement. Usability testing can help you understand how well you are communicating with your constituents.

- Is your homepage communicating the value you provide to your audiences?
- Is your website leading users to take the actions you hope they take?
- Can all of your audiences find the content they need?

There is a real, potentially massive cost to poor website usability, and the process of testing your site with users is an easy way to listen and learn from them.



Where Traffic Comes From

Organic Search

Organic search refers to users who visit your website by using a search engine and clicking on an ordinary search result (instead of an ad). To view your organic traffic:

1. Go to your Channels report: **Acquisition > All Traffic > Channels**
2. Click on: **Organic Search**
3. Click on: **Landing Page** (in the sub-navigation)
4. Select the appropriate goal in the **Conversions** drop-down menu (on the right)

Which pages are generating the most organic search traffic? Which are best at leading people to complete your forms? Which new pages should you create to attract more relevant search traffic?

Referral

Click on **Referral** from the **Channels** report to see the top websites referring traffic to your website.

What content on other websites leads to form completions on your site?

For example: If you find that a link on a media outlet website is generating a lot of form completions on your site, can you do additional promotion with that media outlet or develop relationships with other outlets that would link to your site?

Click on **Landing Page** in the sub-navigation of the Referral page to see the most popular pages on your site to referrers. Can you create and promote similar content to increase additional relevant referral traffic?

Social Media

To discover the top social media networks driving traffic to your site (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.) go to: **Acquisition > Social > Overview**.

See how people engage with your website after clicking links to your content in social networks in: **Acquisition > Social > Landing Pages**.

If you are promoting your content on social media, consider using the following metrics:

Average Session Duration

What types of social media content keep people on your website longest?

Pages Per Session

What types of social content influence people to explore other pages? Can anything be done on your article pages to introduce site visitors to other content so they won't exit too quickly? (This is especially relevant for mobile users, who tend to bounce more often.)

Which articles did you post to social networks that are successfully leading to log-ins or form completions? Could you write additional articles about similar subjects?

Email

If your email marketing platform is reporting to Google Analytics, go to: **Acquisition > Campaigns > All Campaigns**. There, you will find the top performing email campaigns. This report is particularly helpful in understanding the effectiveness of emails, like the following examples:

- Job announcements, resulting in a completed application
- Event announcements, resulting in a completed registration
- Reminder to reapply for license, resulting in a completed application
- Reminder to reapply for services, resulting in a completed application

If you find emails that drove an unusually high number of form completions, what about those emails made them so successful? Was it the content? The subject line? The time/date you sent? The audience who received the email?

Mobile Traffic

Go to: **Audience > Mobile > Overview**.

Device	Sessions	RFI Form	Conv. Rate
1. Mobile	278,844 (58.23%)	5,925 (46.07%)	2.12%
2. Desktop	174,159 (36.37%)	6,211 (48.29%)	3.57%
3. Tablet	25,852 (5.40%)	726 (5.64%)	2.81%

If the percentage of overall website traffic from mobile devices (i.e., smartphones) is significant compared to desktop visitors, consider investing further in the mobile user experience.

In the Conversions drop-down menu, select a goal. If your conversion rate for form completions is much lower on mobile than desktop, for example, that's a clue you need to improve your mobile user experience.

SEO for Government Agencies

Should government agencies worry about being visible to search engines? After all, if someone searches on Google for “Pawnee Parks and Recreation Department,” the relevant website is normally in the top search results. But people search in diverse ways, and your ability to answer their questions affects the way the public interacts with your agency.

Searchers often don't know which agency is responsible for their issue.

Most people know that they should check with some government office before digging a hole in their front yard, but they rarely know which. If they can quickly find your website and learn that your agency will come inspect their property for free, they're less likely to cut a gas line.

Searchers often don't know where to find the answer to their question on your site.

People know they can call the police to complain about noisy neighbors, but they will be less likely to make unnecessary 9-1-1 calls if they can easily find the page on the police department website about registering neighborhood complaints.

Searchers often find others answering their question.

When a person is irritated about something, they sometimes gravitate to other irritated voices on the Internet. It is less likely that their complaint will escalate if they can easily find your content addressing their concern.

Note: Now that more people are using mobile devices to get answers to their questions, it is less likely that searchers will have the patience to click through multiple websites or use the search feature on your website—especially if your site is not mobile responsive.

How SEO Can Help Serve the Public

Help People Find the Right Page

Most government agencies want people to call them when they truly need assistance from a human, but they would prefer their users take action themselves whenever feasible.

Ask your switchboard to give you a list of the Top 20 issues people call about. Then, do searches on Google for these topics and see if your website ranks in Google's first three search results. Then, review the webpage itself. Does it provide the best content they could hope for, with clear communication about what they should do, or is it inadequate and outdated?

Hundreds of factors constitute Google's search ranking algorithm, but focusing on these two factors will improve the findability of your website.

Create Dedicated Webpages

Google has an almost limitless supply of pages to choose from when selecting the top results for a search, and it is important that your website has excellent content in order to rank highly.

Instead of including a single page titled "Building Permits" on your city government site—with paragraphs about commercial and residential permits—include separate pages for commercial and residential because people search for each of these uniquely.

Even if local services are provided by non-governmental partner organizations, you can create pages listing all "Austin senior activity centers" so people will know the services available to them.

Links

Google sees webpages as more authoritative when other websites link to them.

Government websites already have online authority because they are government websites, but it is important that your most important content can be found easily. If you have three lackluster pages about a specific topic, redirect other pages to one page with the "best content on the internet" for your location, and link to it consistently across your site. Also, link to the page in your news/blog/

press releases so the public will know that it is the best page about the subject (and hopefully link to it, too).

Do not bury key pages deep in your website hierarchy. They should be findable within two clicks from the homepage.

Help People Find Your Office Locations

Google is making it easier for people to find information without clicking through to your website. If someone does a Google search on their mobile device for “DPS near me,” they may very well click the Google “Directions” button or the “Call” button without ever visiting the DPS site.

If your location, phone number, or hours of operation are outdated in Google, the searcher will probably be frustrated if they call the wrong number or arrive at the wrong location or arrive at the correct location after office hours. Here are some things you can do to prevent this from happening.

Create Dedicated Pages for Multiple Office Locations

It is common for government agencies to list all of their local offices on a single page, or include all offices within a search tool. For example, you can find information about the Austin Northwest and Austin South DPS offices in the Texas DPS Search Tool, but you can't link to either office because the search tool doesn't give either location a unique URL.

Even if your website provides a search tool, give every office location its own page and unique URL, and provide an overview page with direct links to each office. If you provide a direct path of links to the page (for example, Home > Location Overview > North Austin office), Google can link to this page within their map results.

If you have multiple offices in a city, consider creating additional pages listing all offices in that city, because people often search using city names (“Austin DPS offices”) and Google will direct searchers to these pages.

Update Google My Business

You can update your details in Google for your main office and other office locations within Google My Business (GMB).

Google wants to make sure you are authorized to make changes, so if your agency hasn't claimed ownership of your GMB profile (or nobody knows who did it originally), Google will send a postcard to your office location with a verification code. This website (<http://bit.ly/2IsXT4m>) will help you request access to all your office locations within a single GMB account. Complete as much information as you can for each location, and make sure to update the profile as quickly as possible if something changes (like holiday hours, new services available, etc.).

GMB “business categories” help to define what you are to searchers. When selecting a category from Google's setlist, be as specific as possible. If you are a city employment center located at City Hall, include “City Employment Department” as the category instead of “City Hall.” Even though you have the same address as City Hall, your phone number, hours of operation, and other details may be different, so your GMB profile should be separate from the City Hall profile.

Own the Issue

For example, if there is a problem in your community around stray pets, it is better that searchers find your content about how to take action instead of finding online forums encouraging the public to take matters into their own hands.

Get Some Mighty Data

This guide should provide the foundation you need to measure the performance of your website, but don't be afraid to ask for help! Mighty Citizen is a full-service marketing agency specializing in government agencies.

Learn more online at www.mightycitizen.com.

Our certified experts and strategists can help you with:



Google Analytics Consulting, including:

- Selecting the most relevant reports for your agency and including them in a performance dashboard that can be shared with your internal stakeholders
- Tracking your main website with third-party software platforms
- Creating conversion goals
- Activating event tracking for file downloads, outbound links, and video views
- Integrating your site search platform with Google Analytics



Branding



Marketing Strategy



Website redesign



User Research



Search Engine Optimization (SEO), including:

- Keyword research
- Search engine ranking reports
- Advanced optimization consulting



Advertising, including:

- Google Ad Grants campaigns
- Display and retargeting ads



Access free tools and training related to SEO, Google Analytics, content strategy, user research, copywriting, campaigns, and more at www.mightycitizen.com/insights.

Is your government agency's website doing all it can?

We'll make sure it does.

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