



GEF IW:LEARN

Website Guidelines

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In partnership with



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IW:LEARN Website Guidelines

One of the best ways to promote your project and help us, IW: LEARN, amplify your outreach efforts is to have a **functional and useful IW project website**.

As a GEF IW-funded project, there's some guidelines you need to comply with and these **IW:LEARN website guidelines** are here to:

- ✓ help you understand what you need to do
- ✓ give you some key outlines to build a modern website

Your IW project website should:

- Establish credibility and professionalism
- Be an accessible, central hub for project updates, reports, and key information
- Serve as a communication tool to engage audiences and foster collaboration
- Ensure long-term visibility beyond the project's active phase

Remember, your project website is a dynamic communication tool that helps you drive engagement, reach your objectives, and share useful information with relevant stakeholders.

These guidelines have been designed as a practical and living resource that provides you with tangible and easy-to-follow steps to create a project website that are clear, inclusive, informative, and easy to use.

By following them, you can strengthen your outreach efforts and ensure your website serves as a valuable point of reference for project partners, stakeholders, and the international community.

The IW:LEARN Website Guidelines were jointly developed by the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River (ICPDR).and IW:LEARN in April 2025.

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What is IW:LEARN

IW:LEARN stands for the **GEF's International Waters Learning Exchange and Resource Network**. It is a **global knowledge sharing platform** dedicated to collecting, curating and disseminating best practices, lessons learned, and innovative solutions across the GEF IW portfolio.

Beyond knowledge exchange, IW:LEARN develops practical **guidance, methodologies, and capacity-development tools** to help projects translate knowledge into tangible results with positive impact on the ground.

As a **central hub for collaboration**, IW:LEARN connects projects, practitioners, and regions, through a diverse range of activities that provide **targeted support for improved management of shared transboundary water systems**.

Additionally, it **links the GEF International Waters (GEF IW) projects to global processes and frameworks**, and key regional and basin-level partners, ensuring they remain connected to broader international efforts.



Figure 1 GEF IW:LEARN Story map

Your Project Website: What IW:LEARN Can Do For You

IW:LEARN offers two main resources: **guidelines** and a **toolkit**.

- **Guidelines:** These guidelines outline the essential features and best practices for creating your project website. They ensure compliance with GEF IW requirements while also guiding you in building a functional, user-friendly, and up-to-date online presence.
- **Toolkit:** In addition to these guidelines, IW:LEARN offers a [website toolkit](#), a practical service to assist you in building your project website. This involves filling out a [straightforward form](#) to initiate the website creation process. IW:LEARN staff will then provide support in setting up your site and ensuring it's automatically integrated with IW:LEARN's International Waters Information Management System. Information on managing your website's Content Management System (CMS) after it has been created is available within the website toolkit.

Websites created with the toolkit adhere to usability, accessibility, and metadata standards, and they are connected through IW: LEARN. This network enhances access to high-quality data and promotes information sharing among a wider community of stakeholders.

GEF IW Project Website Mandatory Requirements

Keep in mind that all websites, including GEF IW project websites, should clearly communicate your mission, provide essential information, and encourage engagement. The following are the mandatory requirements for your project website.

Item	Description
Funding Acknowledgment	Logos: Prominent and clear display of the following logos: IW project (if available), GEF, Implementing Agencies (UNEP, UNDP), Executing Agencies (UNESCO-IOC) and project partners.
	Funding Statement: GEF replenishment period and grant
Structure	<p>Menu: ideal menu structure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ About: Project title, ID, Partners, Objectives, Project Description, Team ✓ Project Activities: Depending on the project's planned work, we may refer to strengthening partnerships, establishment of monitoring networks, etc. specific reports, capacity building activities, publications and any other relevant activities. ✓ News & Events: Workshops, training courses, meetings, consultations, conferences, etc.; project news; calendar of events; newsletter. This section is dynamic and should be regularly updated. ✓ Resources: key documents, such as the Project Document, TDA/SAP, Experience and Results Notes, other knowledge management products and reports on project results, outputs, and outcomes, mid-Term Review Evaluation Report, and Terminal Evaluation Report. All resources should be downloadable in accessible formats (e.g., PDF). ✓ Contact information: Easy ways for visitors to connect with you or your project team
	Engaging Homepage: The homepage is the entry point to your project. It should immediately communicate your project's purpose and impact and be shaped in an appealing and informative design.
Functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Search Function: Easy access to key project documents. ✓ Social Media Integration: Direct link to project social media channels. ✓ Multimedia Richness: Include high-quality images, videos and infographics. ✓ Responsive Design: Ensuring compatibility across all devices. ✓ Browser Compatibility: Ensure the website functions smoothly across major browsers (e.g., Chrome, Firefox, Safari, Edge). ✓ Accessibility: Adheres to key WCAG 2.2 guidelines, such as keyboard navigation, Alt text on images and colour contrast.
Performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Fast Loading Time: Optimize the website for quick loading. ✓ Link Integrity: Ensure there are no broken links on the website.
Security and Privacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Secure Browsing: Implement HTTPS for secure data transmission. ✓ Data Privacy: Comply with GDPR and other relevant data privacy regulations.

IW:LEARN Project Websites Best Practices

Project Name	Project Website	What We Like
Integrated Management of Water Resources of the Mira-Mataje and Carchi-Guaitara, Colombia–Ecuador Binational Basins	https://mmcg.iwlearn.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear menu • High-quality photos • Updated news
Towards Joint Integrated, Ecosystem-based Management of the Pacific Central American Coastal Large Marine Ecosystem (PACA)	https://pacificosostenible.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear menu with reference to activities • Prominent logos • Website structure in footer
Implementation of the Strategic Action Program of the Gulf of Mexico Large Marine Ecosystem	https://gulfmexico.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean visual approach • Appealing visuals and infographics • Clear reference to agencies
Global Coordination Project for the Common Oceans ABNJ Program	https://www.fao.org/in-action/commonoceans/en	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clean design • What We Do tab
Coral Reef Rescue: Resilient Coral Reefs, Resilient Communities	https://coralreefrescue.iwlearn.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well advertised resources
Integrated watershed management of the Putumayo-Içá river basin	https://cuencaputumayoica.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on the website • Easy navigation



Figure 2 Showcasing illustrations from [Gulf Mexico project](https://gulfmexico.org)

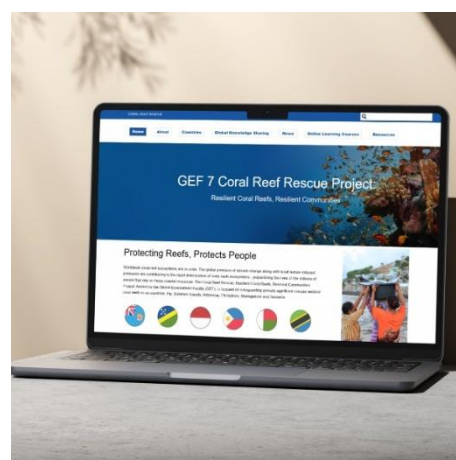


Figure 3 Showcasing clear menu [on Coral Reef Rescue Project](https://coralreefrescue.iwlearn.org)

General Website Guidelines & Recommendations

- **Make it user-friendly:** Simplicity is key. A clutter-free layout with intuitive navigation ensures a positive user experience. Content should be structured logically with headings, short paragraphs, and bullet points for readability.
- **Keep language and visual identity consistency:** Your website should follow the visual identity of your project (e.g. color palette, typography, fonts, etc.) and should be consistent on all pages.
- **Ensure accessibility:** By adhering to WCAG 2.2 and W3C standards, you will make your website usable for all visitors, including those with disabilities. Use alt text for images, provide high contrast color options, and allow font size adjustments. Implement compatibility with screen readers and ensure keyboard navigation functionality.
- **Optimize for mobile devices:** A significant portion of web traffic comes from mobile users. Ensure your website adapts seamlessly to different screen sizes, has touch-friendly navigation, and maintains readability across devices.
- **Compatible with multiple browsers:** Test website compatibility and consistency in appearance across all major browsers, including Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox, Safari, Microsoft Edge, and Opera.
- **Keep content fresh:** Schedule regular updates for news sections, project milestones, and reports and remove outdated information that may cause confusion.
- **Use clear calls to action (CTA):** Guide visitors on what to do next (e.g., “Download Report,” “Learn More”, “Join our Network” etc.). CTAs should be concise, visually distinct, and actionable.
- **Maintain a balance of visuals and text:** Use high-quality images, infographics, and videos to support your content and boost engagement, but avoid excessive visual elements that may reduce downloading speeds.
- **Ensure fast loading speeds:** Optimize images by compressing them without compromising quality. This will improve loading times, thus ranking better in search results. By taking those steps, and choosing energy-efficient hosting options, you’ll also be following green computing practices.

- **Fix broken links:** There are automated link-checking tools that can scan your websites for broken links, while you can also create user-friendly error pages in case link issues cannot be avoided.
- **Adopt an online language translator:** Integrating an online translation tool (such as Google Translate) enhances accessibility, allowing users to interact with the website in different languages.
- **Include social media integration:** Expand reach and engagement by linking your website to your social media channels. Add easy-to-use sharing buttons for content distribution across platforms like X, LinkedIn, Instagram and Facebook. Easy sharing and cross-promotion opportunities are your friend!

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- ⦿ **Overdoing it:** Avoid using too much text, or even too many images. It throws off the visual balance and can overwhelm the user. Aim to break text into sections with headers and visuals and use bullet points when possible.
- ⦿ **Complicated navigation:** A confusing menu or too many options can make it hard for visitors to find what they need. Keep structure simple and logical, ensuring key information is easily accessible. (Think about your own user experience and what you find helpful vs. what looks confusing.)
- ⦿ **Ignoring mobile users:** Many of your website's visitors will be accessing it via their mobile devices. If your website isn't mobile friendly, visitors may struggle with navigation, readability, and functionality.
- ⦿ **Inconsistency:** Using different languages, tones, spelling, typography, fonts, etc., is distracting harmony for users.
- ⦿ **Lack of updates:** A stagnant website with outdated information loses credibility and engagement. Try to regularly refresh content to reflect the latest developments in your project.
- ⦿ **Poor accessibility:** Websites should be usable by everyone, including individuals with disabilities. Ensure proper contrast, readable fonts, alternative text for images, and compatibility with screen readers.
- ⦿ **No clear way for users to take action:** Visitors should easily find how to reach you. Display contact information prominently, ideally in the header, footer, and a dedicated "Contact" page. You want it to be easy for your visitors to reach you!

Quick Website Audit: Is Your Website Meeting Best Practices?

- Homepage clearly states your project's purpose
- Navigation is simple and easy to use
- Content is updated and relevant
- Website loads quickly (under 3 seconds)
- Works well on mobile devices
- Uses strong calls to action (CTAs) like "Download" or "Sign Up"
- Visual identity and language are coherent
- Contact information is easy to find
- Multimedia (videos, images) enhances content without slowing down the site

If you answered "No" to any of these, use this guide to make improvements! 😊



Technical Annex

While this is most pertinent to web developers and website teams, is still helpful and practical information to have a general idea of:

- **Content Management System (CMS):** A CMS is the platform used to build and host your website's content without needing extensive coding skills. Some common CMS options are WordPress, Drupal, and WIX. Choosing the right CMS depends on the ease of use, flexibility, and maintenance needs of your IW project's site.
- **SEO best practices:** Search engine optimization (SEO) ensures that your project's website is easily discoverable through search engines like Google, Bing, Ecosia, etc. This includes using relevant keywords for your project, writing clear and descriptive page titles and content, optimizing images, and maintaining fast loading speeds. Good SEO increases visibility and reach for your IW project.
- **Security Measures:** Keeping a website secure is crucial to protect sensitive information and ensure reliability. Websites can use HTTPS (SSL encryption) for secure connections, regular backups to prevent data loss, and secure hosting providers that offer protection against cyber threats.
- **Integration Options:** Websites can be made more interactive and engaging by embedding maps, databases, and forms. For example, an interactive map can showcase your IW project sites, while a contact form allows users to easily reach out to your team. These integrations improve the user experience and provide more dynamic ways to present information.
- **Analytics & Monitoring:** Tracking website performance helps measure engagement and improve content strategy. Tools like Google Analytics provide insights into visitor demographics, page views, and user behaviour. Monitoring these metrics allows teams to optimize the site for better impact and usability.
- **Complies with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and data privacy regulations**
Ensure your website complies with GDPR and relevant data privacy regulations. This includes properly implementing cookie consent banners, privacy policies, and clear mechanisms for data collection disclosures and user opt-out options.
- **End-to-end encryption:** Implement encryption protocols for all data transmitted and stored, ensuring end-to-end encryption to protect user data from unauthorized access or breaches.

- **Role-based access control and MFA:** Ensure the implementation of role-based access control (RBAC) for managing permissions and multi-factor authentication (MFA) to secure access to sensitive data and services.
- **Core Web Vitals Optimization:** Follow Google's Core Web Vitals (LCP, FID, CLS) guidelines to optimize page load times, improve interactivity, and maintain visual stability for a smoother user experience.
- **Photo guidelines:** File size: Ideal max file size 300 KB, 500 KB for a large banner or hero image (max width 600px, max height 360px). Format: JPG for photos, while PG is better for graphics with transparency. File naming: use descriptive, lowercase, hyphenated names, e.g.: mangrove-planting-cambodia.jpg.

This publication was jointly developed by ICPDR and the IW:LEARN PCU in 2025.

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