

WATER PORTAL OF THE AMERICAS
GUIDELINES FOR EDITORS AND REVIEWERS
OF NOMINATED WEB SITES

The role of the Water Portal of the Americas Quality Control Group (QCG) is to provide peer review of the sources of information incorporated into the Water Portal of the Americas by screening nominations of web sites. The QCG will review web sites on the Water Ring, the Water Links Database, and most importantly, the web sites nominated by participants in previous Water Information Summits, Inter-American Water Resources Network (IWRN) and International Hydrological Programme (IHP) focal points, and representatives of other national and international organizations interested in the water resources of the Americas and make recommendations as to how these sites should be used in the portal site. A small group of “metadata specialists” will work with the portal site design team to assign metadata to the sites and incorporate them into the portal structure and design after screening by the QCG.

Objective of Screening Process: The objective of the screening process is to identify and evaluate a few good sites that contribute to the understanding of a water resources issue or topic. By doing so, the portal builders hope to improve access to high quality information and reduce the time required by users to find it.

Screening Process: Contributors will be asked to submit to the WaterWeb Consortium, the URL of web sites they operate and those they use to answer questions and to acquire information on a day-to-day basis in their countries. Of particular interest to the designers of the portal are the sites that users currently find most useful and why. For each site submitted, the contributor will be asked to indicate very briefly what specific information they get from site and why they find the site useful. They will also be asked what information they want but do not find on the web.

The QCG will (a) review the content of the web sites, (b) recommend the topical category (ies) that the site best supports in terms of information content, (c) subjectively rate the quality of information contained in them, and (d) recommend whether or not the site should be considered by the design team and the information role(s) the site should play in the portal. The preliminary list of topics/categories is the World Water Assessment Program’s list of issues.

Quality of Information and Relevance to Topics

- (1) **Primary sources of information** for a particular topic/category. These sites would include the very best (outstanding) information sources discovered for the topics and categories (formerly referred to as “super topics”) that are highlighted and addressed on the portal.

- (2) **Secondary sources of information** to be included in a list of annotated links (references) to support research on the topic/category. These sites have good quality information that is presented well but they may duplicate information that is better presented on the primary sites OR address peripheral issues that are not included in the “super topics.” In other words, these are useful links to information that we may want to include in a general water links database and perhaps use as primary sources of information at some future date, if the topic/categories are expanded or changed.
- (3) **Questionable sites** that have sufficient merit and good quality information to be reviewed again at a later time.
- (4) **Rejected sites.** Web sites that do not clearly do not meet the information quality criteria or that are not relevant to water issues in general. For example, a site might address sustainable development but not deal with water.
- (5) **Water or water-related organizational sites** are a special case of site that may be also found in any of the above categories. Organizational sites usually exist to give an organization or professional society “web presence.” Very often they only include descriptions of the purpose and mission of the organization, members of its board of directors, and a point of contact. This is useful to the directory (“who’s who”) function of the water portal but may not contain technically useful information. Often, however, such a site will contain “news” about the organization and its members and list meetings that the organization holds. These calendars are significant sources of information to the “events” component of the portal but not to the technical content. An exception to look for is an organization that is posting reports, articles, or issues of its journals that may be viewed or downloaded, sometimes for a price.

At times the classification of web sites into these five broad categories may be highly subjective: Is a site a “primary information source” if it has just one page of high quality, relevant information? That page might be a primary source if it has the best depiction ever of the hydrologic cycle – something unique. More likely, many other pages would also be relevant. A pipe manufacturer’s may have useful tables of information about pipe sizes, materials, and performance standards that would be useful in the design of water distribution systems or a missionary organization’s site may have a database of sources for hand pumps or construction plans for a rural community laundry.

Roles of Information

Each web site, or specific pages of a web site, plays a functional role in providing the user with information and understanding about a topic or category. The following list is not comprehensive but gives some clues as to how a mix of content types could be used in addressing a particular water resources problem or issue.

- (1) **Water resource assessments** – The nature of the issue or problem and some form of evaluation of its seriousness at various scales from local to global. Examples include a global analysis of the scarcity of water now and in the future or an assessment of water quality.
- (2) **Indicators** – interpretations of data, trends, mapping of parameters, etc. that indicate the magnitude of a problem or issues. Indicators are often used in making assessments.
- (3) **Case studies** – Usually reports that describe and illustrate specific approaches to problems and issues in each topic/category. Some of the best case studies show not only what worked but approaches that did not work.
- (4) **Best management practices** – Descriptions of specific “techniques,” such as land treatments, used to mitigate or reduce pollution, modify flows, manage aspects of a watershed, etc. Case studies may analyze the results of applying one or more best management practices.
- (5) **Models** – Computer models used to project or estimate the behavior of the hydrologic system or a component given changes in inputs and/or system management.
- (6) **Laws and regulations** – Information on legal frameworks and the rules for implementing laws that manage, protect, and allocate water resources and its use.
- (7) **Publications, reports, and journal articles** (electronic library) – Documents (including maps) that illuminate ones understanding of a particular topic or phenomena. They may describe assessments, case studies, the application of models, etc. The portal’s electronic library may be its most useful feature. Less useful, but still of possible interest, would be bibliographies to hard copy publications on a particular topic.
- (8) **Maps and GIS data** – Sources of information used in portraying the spatial distribution of water and assisting the user to visualize complex relationships and patterns hard to discern from tables of data. This is a very useful way to communicate with policy makers.
- (9) **Numerical data** – Usually only locally/nationally useful unless for research or for regional/global assessments. These include on line databases of streamflow, water quality, meteorological data, and other related environmental and socioeconomic data useful for assessing and evaluating water resources, its use, and the impact of human activities on land, water, and aquatic resources.
- (10) **Education** – These sites are instructional in nature. They teach a body of knowledge or understanding of a particular subject through self-study or through

a more formal distance learning experience that may require enrollment and payment of a fee. Such sites may be at the professional level, or they may be aimed at the general public or school children. They also may include educational materials for use by teachers in a schoolroom setting

- (11) **Events** – Sources of calendars of meetings and events about specific topic
- (12) **News** – Sources of information about people and events. Generally, news is time sensitive and loses its value after a while. This content includes new report announcements, reports of hazardous events such as floods, droughts, and pollution spills, recently passed legislation, scientific discoveries, and so on. Electronic newsletters of organizations, organization sites, and the wire services are potential sources of news.
- (13) **Who's Who in Water** – Sources of information on organizations and people such as directors of water organizations in a country.
- (14) **Communities** – This source of information deals with sites (or services) that try to bring together communities of practice. Groups of people that are striving to deal with similar issues and who may be able to benefit from one another's experiences and provide advice. The services may include list servers, electronic discussion groups (long term), electronic conferences (short-term events focused on a particular subject).
- (15) **Pictures and Images of water** – Sources of public domain pictures and images (artwork) dealing with water. Might use these on the portal itself and as a source of information for uses.

Reviewers should note the relative strength of each site in these supporting roles and recommend where they might be used in the portal structure.

Finally, because of the difficulty of translating entire sites into the four languages of the portal, consideration should be given to finding “alternate sources” of information in the appropriate language. Thus, the reviewers should attempt to identify primary information sites in each of the four languages for each topic and give high priority to multiple-language sites.