

Case Study: Improving USA.gov's Federal Directory Usability and Maintenance

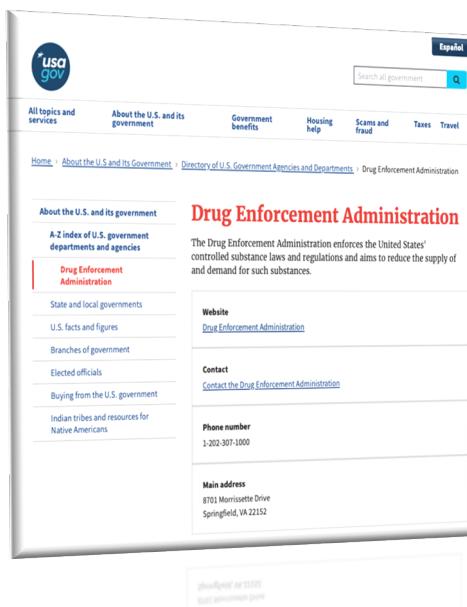
Situation:

USA.gov's Federal Directory is an essential online resource designed to help users find contact information, official websites, and details about the structure and responsibilities of U.S. federal agencies. The directory included around 1,000 records in English and 700 in Spanish, each listing the agency's name, a brief description, contact details (such as phone numbers, email addresses, and mailing addresses), websites, and links to specific offices or divisions within the agencies. However, many of these records had not been updated in several years due to competing content priorities and limited resources for content strategy. As a result, outdated information and missing contact details were negatively impacting the user experience, leading to low page helpfulness scores and an increased volume of calls to USAgov seeking accurate agency contact information, further straining USAgov's resources.



Task:

Provide a complete update to the Federal Directory and offer actionable recommendations to streamline future maintenance.



- Audit and identify records with outdated or inaccurate information, ensuring all content is current and accurate.
- Propose clear actions for removing or updating obsolete records to improve accuracy and relevance.
- Ensure that each record in both English and Spanish includes the correct agency name, a concise description, functional weblinks, and accurate contact information (phone numbers, emails, mailing addresses).
- Recommend strategies to reduce the ongoing effort required to maintain the directory, making it more efficient and sustainable over time.

Action:

1. Content Assessment and Review:

A thorough review of the directory revealed several key issues:

- Many phone numbers were disconnected or no longer in service.
- Several agencies listed were not federal entities but rather offices under parent agencies, non-profit organizations, or government programs.
- Some agencies no longer existed.

2. Data and User Behavior Analysis:

- Outdated and inaccurate information was negatively impacting user experience, as reflected in low page helpfulness scores.
- Data analysis indicated that users primarily searched for major parent agencies, rather than smaller offices or non-federal entities.
- Smaller offices or non-federal entities had minimal traffic, with many of their individual pages receiving few visits.
- Search behavior showed that users often searched by agency acronyms, but most records did not include this information.

3. Recommendations:

- Remove Non-Federal Agencies:** Delete records for non-federal agencies, offices under parent agencies, non-profit organizations, and government programs that were not relevant to the directory's purpose.
- Link Smaller Agencies to Parent Agencies:** For smaller or lesser-known agencies, add a contact link to the parent agency's main record to reduce the number of individual records and simplify future updates.
- Add Acronyms to Agency Records:** Given user search patterns, include agency acronyms in the directory content to make it easier for users to find agencies when searching by acronym.
- Content Reorganization:** The directory was organized alphabetically. While it was recommended to keep this structure for now, A/B testing was suggested to explore reorganizing the directory by topic (e.g., Health, Housing, Education, Financial Help) based on user search behavior. Data showed that many users were searching for agencies based on the type of support they needed.

Agencias federales

Obtenga información de contacto de departamentos y agencias del Gobierno federal de EE. UU. Encuentre direcciones de sitios web, correos electrónicos, números de teléfono, direcciones y más.

A B C D E F G I J L M
O P R S U V

P

Programa de Bonos de Ahorro del Tesoro de EE. UU.	+
Programa de Cupones para Alimentos	+
Programa de Inspección de Pescados y Mariscos	+
Programa de Intérpretes de las Cortes de EE. UU.	+
Programa de Viviendas Prefabricadas	+
Programa ENERGY STAR	+

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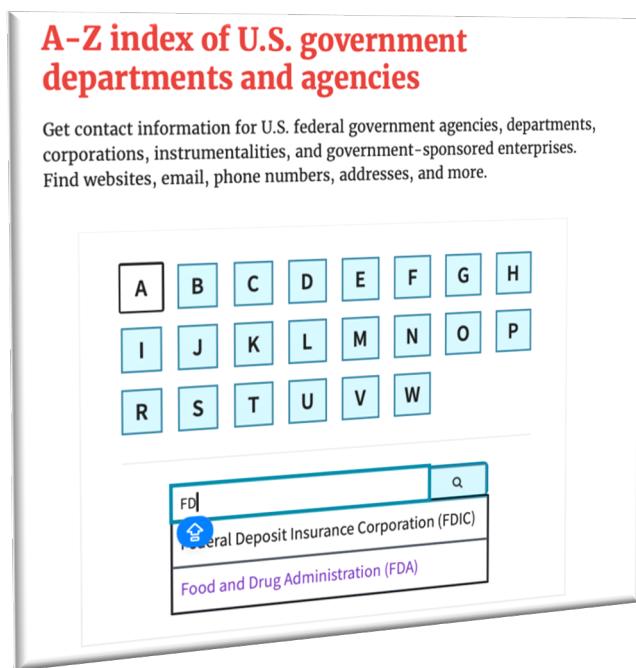
R

National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA)	
The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) explores space, and researches Earth systems, the solar system, and the universe.	
Website	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Contact	Contact the National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Phone number	1-202-358-0001
Find an office near you	NASA centers and facilities
Main address	NASA Headquarters 300 E St. SW Suite 5R30 Washington, DC 20546

Results:

A-Z index of U.S. government departments and agencies

Get contact information for U.S. federal government agencies, departments, corporations, instrumentalities, and government-sponsored enterprises. Find websites, email, phone numbers, addresses, and more.



- **Improved User Experience:** The updated directory allowed users to access accurate, up-to-date contact information more quickly, significantly enhancing their overall experience.
- **Increased Helpfulness Scores:** More accurate content and a streamlined organization led to an increase in the directory's helpfulness scores, which boosted user satisfaction.
- **Reduced Calls to USAgov:** By eliminating outdated or irrelevant listings and linking smaller agencies to parent agencies, the volume of calls to USAgov asking for accurate agency contact information decreased substantially.
- **Reduced Records by 40%:** The removal of outdated and irrelevant entries led to a nearly 40% reduction in the total number of records, both in English and Spanish.
- **Easier Maintenance:** The directory was simplified, reducing the number of records and enabling quicker, more efficient updates for easier ongoing maintenance.

This update not only improved the immediate user experience but also set the foundation for a more sustainable, easy-to-manage directory system moving forward. The A/B testing of different organizational structures will allow the client to further optimize the directory to meet user expectations and needs.

Rami Camarillo, January 2025