

ERIE COUNTY GAMING AND REVENUE AUTHORITY

MIS 387 Student Review of the Website

Penn State Erie

Partnership Erie

Abstract

This report presents a comprehensive audit of the Erie County Gaming and Revenue Authority (ECGRA) website, conducted by students in MIS 387 at Penn State Erie in collaboration with Partnership Erie. The evaluation employed foundational website auditing techniques to assess the site's functionality, usability, accessibility, and alignment with its core purpose—facilitating grant applications for economic development in Erie County. Key strengths include intuitive navigation, strong visual branding, and functional grant application pathways. However, the analysis uncovered several areas for improvement, including accessibility compliance, outdated content, inconsistent mobile responsiveness, broken links, and underutilized SEO and call-to-action features. The report concludes with actionable recommendations to enhance user experience, accessibility, and the site's effectiveness in meeting its goals.

Introduction

Creating a seamless and well-functioning website is the foundation of well-structured company. Having a clean and easy to use website will allow visitors of the website to feel comfortable and allow them to find what they need very quickly. These aspects of a website come from the way that it was built and designed. Through this comprehensive analysis of the Erie County Gaming and Revenue Authority website, features, functionality, usability, and many other aspects will be explored to ensure it caters to those who will be using the website for its main function, applying for funding.

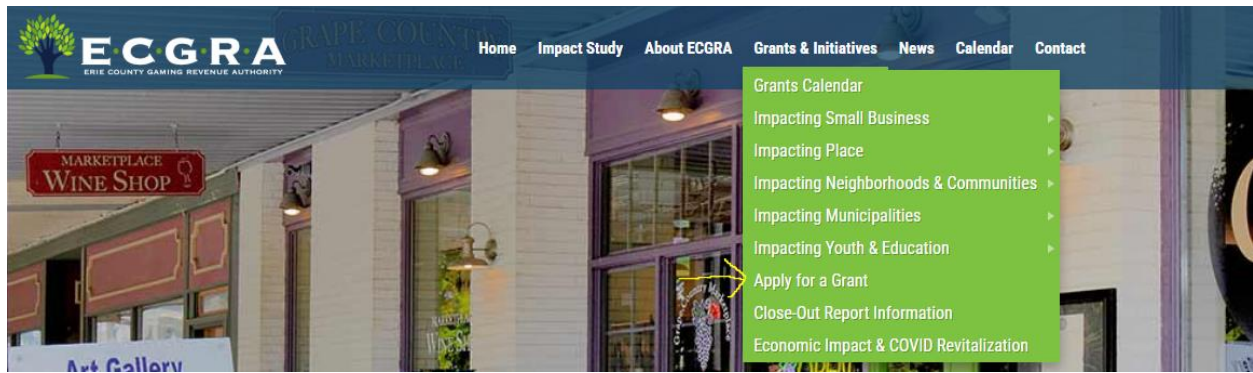
Functionality

The Erie County Gaming and Revenue Authority is a website that focuses on deploying grants to small businesses to help with economic growth in Erie County. With a such an expansive mission, it is crucial that the website they operate from is functional and user friendly. One thing that is evident that is not wanted on a website is errors or broken links. Going through the website and testing the menus, links, and page navigation, there are no visible errors or broken links except one page. While analyzing the website on an iPad there is a section called “Call to Action” that when clicked takes you to a page that reads “Page Not Found”

Looking at the grant aspect of the website, when navigating to the menu and selecting “Apply



for a Grant”, that takes the user to a separate window which is not on the previous website. Access to all grant details is functional and does not have delays and the link that takes you to the application works well.



A critical aspect of website functionality is page load performance. Following a thorough review of each page and its features, it was determined that the majority of the site functions properly and loads efficiently. However, several dead links were identified on the Mission page, including the following:

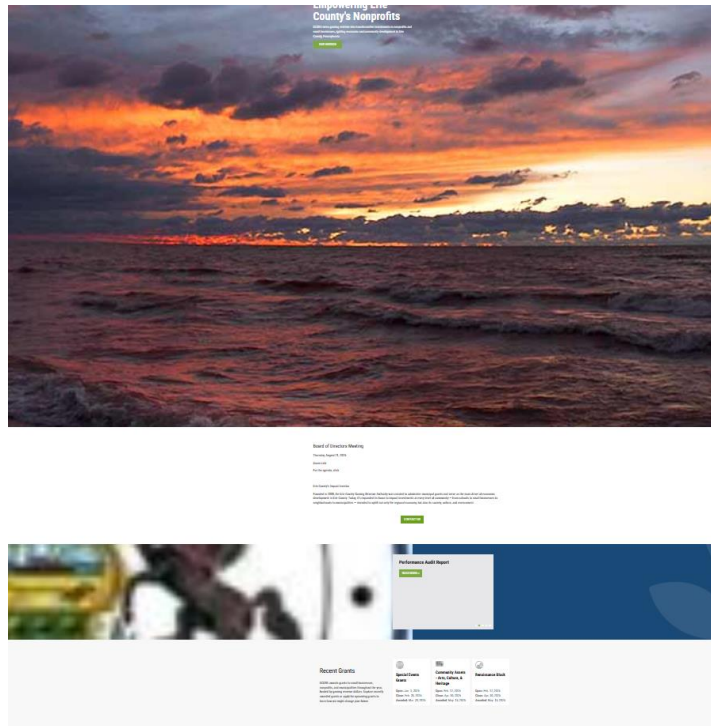
- <https://cnp.benfranklin.org/techcelerator-at-state-college/>
- <https://www.eriesd.org/adulteducation>
- <https://www.careerstreeterie.org/summer-jam-erie>
- <https://www.empowererie.org/erie-pa-community-college-plan>

The Erie County Gaming and Revenue Authority website generally provides users with prompt feedback, and there are no notable delays that would disrupt the user experience or prompt users to abandon the site.

Interactive features are fully operational. For instance, selecting “Apply for a Grant” directs users to an external application portal without any loading issues or errors. Additionally, the homepage includes an embedded YouTube video that functions seamlessly—users can watch it directly on the site or open it in a new browser tab or the YouTube app on mobile devices. However, the grant application process would benefit from increased clarity in several areas. It is not evident whether applicants have the ability to save their progress and return at a later time, or if the overall process is designed to be intuitive and user-friendly. Enhancing transparency and providing clearer guidance in these aspects would significantly improve the user experience.

The website is semi mobile friendly. Using different devices such as an iPhone and iPad, the user can see that some of the images are not the same as they are on a computer screen. For

functionality, the links still work properly, and the website functions as normal. The website meets the standards for mobile users to access the necessary information for grants, and to even apply for a grant via mobile device.



User Experience (UX) and Intuitiveness

Good navigation is essential for an effective website. The ECGRA allows for that. It has an easy-to-follow navigation menu that allows the user to get to where they need to be with no confusion. On a computer it is set up on the top right with all the main categories, with some having drop down menus with subcategories.

Looking at mobile navigation, it is set up as "Site Menu" that drops down and gives the user a multitude of options to select from, which functions seamlessly. An area for potential improvement is providing a guide to assist new users in locating where to start the grant application process and understanding the steps involved.

A note regarding the social media link section at the bottom of the home page is that the logo for X, formerly known as Twitter, currently uses the previous bluebird design. To maintain a cohesive modern look, we recommend updating the new logo pictured here:



First time users would have a very easy time finding relevant information regarding funding applications. The navigation menu includes a “Grants and Initiatives” section with a dropdown option to “Apply for a Grant,” which links directly to the application page. That section also includes their mission and the impact that they have had on the community.

Having deadlines, contact information, and requirements easily accessible for these types of websites are very important. On the ECGRA website, in the same menu where the user will apply for a grant, there is also an option for a “Grant Calendar” which allows the user to explore the different grants that are offered, along with deadlines. To further look at required details, the user will need to access the “MORE ABOUT THIS GRANT” page which is listed under each grant. This gives more details on requirements. To make it easier, they could add in the requirements below the small description they give on the main page to make the search for a grant easier for the user. They do have a separate contact page that has their address, and a link to google maps. Names, phone numbers, and emails are also displayed clearly for the user to see when the contact page is open.

The website is logically structured to guide users towards their goals. The website gives a simple and clear path to apply for a grant and gives good details regarding the grants themselves. To make things easier for those looking to get a grant, there could be approaching deadline notifications for those interested, or there could be a FAQ page that has questions that can help users successfully find and fill out the application if there is any struggle throughout their time on the website.

Effectiveness in Meeting Its Purpose

Upon accessing the ECGRA website, users are immediately presented with a brief overview of the organization's history and mission. A prominently placed **"Our Mission"** button directs visitors to a dedicated page that provides a comprehensive explanation, offering users a clear understanding of ECGRA's purpose and values.

One notable omission, however, is the lack of information on how to apply for a loan directly from the homepage. Including a visible link or section guiding users through the loan application process would enhance accessibility and improve overall user experience.

The website's key purpose is to deliver information quickly. A direct prompt like "Start your application now" that leads users to the grant list is highly effective.

The website provides sufficient information for potential grant information. There is some area for improvement on this front. For example, there could be a potential eligibility tracker that gives potential applicants a quick look into if they even qualify for a grant. This would save time for those who review grants, and those who want to apply.

Calls to action are not prominently featured on ECRGA. The only way to access the application is to go in the submenu of "Grants and Initiatives". This would be very effective to have on the home page. There are other calls to action on the homepage that include "Our Mission", "Contact Us" and "Read More". It would be helpful to have a button that reads "Apply for this Grant" next to each "More about this Grant" on the grants page that allows the user to be taken directly to an application for that specific grant.

To improve usability and engagement, it is recommended to feature a clearly visible **"Apply for a Grant"** button on the homepage. Additionally, on the grants page, placing an **"Apply for this Grant"** button next to each **"More about this Grant"** link would streamline the process by taking users directly to the relevant application form. This would not only reduce friction in the

user journey but also reinforce the site's primary purpose—connecting users with funding opportunities.

Upon review of the website, there appears to be no clear mechanism for applicants to track the status of their submitted applications. Once an application is submitted, users are left without visibility into its progress or which stage of the review process it is currently in. This lack of transparency can lead to uncertainty and frustration for applicants awaiting a decision.

For support, the website offers a “**Contact Us**” section that includes the names, phone numbers, fax numbers, and email addresses of three executive staff members. Additionally, a contact form is available at the bottom of the page, allowing users to submit their name, email address, phone number, and a message or question. Responses are provided via follow-up communication from the organization.

Implementing application tracking features—such as a secure login portal where users can check the real-time status of their application (e.g., "submitted," "under review," "decision pending")—would greatly enhance transparency and reduce the need for applicants to reach out directly for updates. Additionally, integrating an automated email notification system at key milestones in the process could further improve communication and user satisfaction.

Visual Appeal and Design Aesthetics

Ensuring a modern and professional look is well advised with websites, especially ones like ECRGA when offers like grants are involved. ECRGA's website does a great job of being professional and clean. It is well organized and gives the professional look and feel. When the user goes on to the website, they will feel confident they are in the correct area.

The use of color on the website is very consistent and follows a corresponding pattern on each page. There are no random colors that do not make any sense, nor are they hard on the eyes.

There could be more emphasis on contrast with things such as buttons, links, and other items that need to be more visible and clearly accessible for those with visual disabilities.

The design aligns with the organization's purpose and branding, featuring images of Erie to maintain a local focus. One thing that could be included to make the design more coherent is potential success stories that outline grant recipients' story and the process of getting a



grant. This would bring ease to those who may be potentially thinking about applying for a grant. It would also bring a more meaningful feeling to the Website.

ECGRA uses photos and videos effectively but could add more for depth. Some photos are also low quality. The images do give the local feel, but it would help the look of the website if the images were clearer. The video they have is placed well and serves as a good message for potential applicants. They could include images of the application process, or simply the application. A potential short video of the process of applying would help and provide clarity as well.

Content Clarity and Readability

The text on the Erie County Gaming and Revenue Authority (ECGRA) website is generally clear, concise, and easy to read. The site is well-organized, making it simple for users to locate important information quickly. The content is organized to support comprehension and usability. While much of the wording is direct, some terms like “municipalities” and “ECGRA Grant” may not be familiar to all users. The website addresses this by providing definitions and context for these terms as users navigate the site. Additionally, the website includes helpful features such as a Grant Calendar, which offers embedded links to learn more about the available grants,

making it easier for users to access detailed information even if they are unfamiliar with the terminology.



Headers and subheadings are effectively used to highlight key information, such as important deadlines and grant descriptions, making the content more

scannable and improving overall readability. Bolded text further emphasizes critical details like important dates and guidelines, ensuring that users can quickly point out key information. While the ECGRA website is generally well-organized and easy to navigate, there is a noticeable need for more timely content updates to maintain credibility and user trust. Several sections, such as the **Grant Calendar**, reference events and deadlines only through 2022. This outdated information may lead to confusion or discourage users who are seeking current opportunities. Additionally, the most recent news update on the site dates to **September 2021**, further reinforcing the perception that the site is not actively maintained. This lack of recent content can diminish the effectiveness of the site as a communication tool and may impact engagement with potential applicants or community partners.

Suggestions for Improvement:

- **Regularly update key sections** such as the Grant Calendar, News, and Events pages to reflect current opportunities, deadlines, and organizational announcements.
- Implement a **"Last Updated" timestamp** on pages with time-sensitive content to help users assess the relevance of the information.
- Establish a **content review schedule** (e.g., quarterly or bi-annually) to ensure all website materials remain accurate and up to date.
- Consider featuring **dynamic or rotating content** (e.g., latest news, upcoming deadlines, featured grantees) on the homepage to signal that the site is actively maintained and current.

By ensuring the website content remains fresh and relevant, ECGRA can better serve its users and reinforce its role as a reliable resource for funding information and community engagement.

Accessibility and Inclusivity

Overall, while the Erie County Gaming and Revenue Authority website has some accessible features, it does not fully comply with WCAG accessibility standards. The site was evaluated using an accessibility tool called WAVE, which identifies accessibility issues and how to correct them. The site fails some crucial WCAG AA requirements, including normal text contrast, and has multiple accessibility errors like missing alternative text and empty links. It does, however, pass WCAG AA for large text. The green text they use in normal size contrasts with the white background and may be difficult for some users with visual impairments to read, particularly because of its lighter color. Users navigating the site with screen readers can access the text, but embedded images lack alternative text, making it difficult for visually impaired users to fully understand the content. The WAVE tool also flagged 13 errors including missing alternative text for images, empty links, and very low contrast issues. Also, there were no videos on the site that I was able to find but if they were present, I would want to see captions so it could comply with accessibility guidelines. While the website's contact forms were very easy to find and navigate, several features such as empty links, low contrast text, and missing labels for forms should probably be addressed to improve the site's overall usability for individuals with disabilities. The website was able to be read by screen reader extensions, but alternative text was notably absent for some images. Improvements to these areas such as adding alternative text descriptions for images, addressing contrast issues, and providing form labels will help the site better meet WCAG standards. Making these adjustments would enhance the site's accessibility and inclusivity for a wider range of users, ensuring users with disabilities the ability to navigate.

Technical Performance

The Erie County Gaming and Revenue Authority website performs well in terms of speed and responsiveness. During testing, pages loaded efficiently and navigation between sections occurred without observable delays.

Page Not Found

Return to the homepage by clicking [here](#).

The page you are attempting to access cannot be found.

Please check the website address, and try again.

There was, however, an issue with the “Call to Action” dropdown, which resulted in a “Page Not Found” error. This broken link can negatively impact user experience and should be addressed.

The website uses HTTPS, which enables encrypted communication and provides basic protection for user data. This is indicated by the lock icon at the top of the browser and the URL beginning with ‘https://’. The site is hosted by epic WebStudios, a company recognized for its web development services and seems to be a reliable web hosting provider. While there are no immediate security vulnerabilities that I was able to detect, a more professional and thorough security walkthrough would be recommended to confirm that the site is fully protected against any potential threats. Overall, keeping the website updated with the latest security measures, fixing broken links, and maintaining up to date content will further enhance the website's technical performance and reliability.

Search Engine Optimization (SEO)

The ECGRA website demonstrates several effective search optimization (SEO) practices that enhance its visibility and usability, though there are some areas that could be improved for better search ranking performance. The website utilizes appropriate page titles and meta descriptions across its pages. These elements are there to describe the content of each page, making them highly relevant for search engines and users. The site also uses clean and descriptive URLs. Each URL is structured in a way that clearly reflects the content of the page, making it easier for both users and search engines to understand. The URL structure can help

improve indexing and enhance

user navigation by providing a



<https://www.ecgra.org/grant-calendar>

clear sense of what each page contains even before clicking the link.

Another important SEO factor is the website's heading hierarchy. Headings are inconsistent throughout the site, some of the pages lack headings entirely. The site uses proper header tags, H1, H2, H3, to organize content. H1 tags are reserved for the main page title and subheadings use H2 or H3 tags to break down the content into more easy-to-read sections. This improves content organization and helps search engines understand the structure of the page. When headings are clear and logical it allows search engines to index content more effectively, improving the overall user experience. Alt text descriptions for images are employed throughout the website, which is essential for both SEO and accessibility. ECGRA does use alt-text, but it lacks a good description of what the media is. These descriptions provide context to search engines about what the images depict, enhancing the site's search rankings for image-based queries. Additionally, alt-text benefits users who rely on screen readers, ensuring the content is accessible to all visitors.

In terms of navigation of the website, links are used in the different child pages but seem to be placed in an ad hoc manner. The website utilizes an internal linking strategy to help users and search engines find relevant content across the site. Internal links guide users to related pages, improving the overall user experience by allowing easy access to additional information. For search engines, internal links enable more efficient crawling and indexing, ensuring important pages are discovered and ranked appropriately. The internal linking structure also helps distribute page authority across the site, bringing up the overall search ranking of the site. The content on the website is optimized with relevant keywords such as "gaming revenue," "grants," and "economic development." These keywords are strategically placed throughout the text without overuse, maintaining a natural flow. Proper keyword optimization ensures that the website ranks well for terms that potential visitors are searching for, while avoiding keyword

stuffing, which can result in penalties from search engines. The content is both informative and optimized to enhance search performance, providing a balance between SEO and readability.

To further support SEO, the website includes an XML sitemap, which is crucial for search engines to index the site's pages effectively. The sitemap helps search engine crawlers find and index important pages more efficiently, which aids in improving the site's visibility in search engine results. Additionally, the website's robots.txt file is configured correctly to manage how search engines interact with certain pages. It ensures that search engine bots can crawl and index essential content, while restricting access to less important pages or duplicate content that could negatively affect rankings. In line with Google's mobile-first indexing, the website is mobile-responsive, adjusting seamlessly to different screen sizes. This mobile optimization ensures that the site performs well on smartphones and tablets, providing a positive user experience regardless of device. Since Google prioritizes mobile-friendly websites in its rankings, this optimization is crucial for maintaining a competitive search position. Finally, the website benefits from backlinks from reputable and relevant sources. These backlinks serve as endorsements, signaling to search engines that the website is credible and authoritative. Backlinks are a key factor in boosting search engine rankings, as they demonstrate trustworthiness and relevance in the eyes of search engines. The mobile version is not up to standards as it scored a 43 on the "Google PageSpeed" which indicates slower performance on mobile platforms. The ECGRA site also lacks authoritative backlinks which will hamper its authority in a search ranking.

Overall, the Erie County Gaming and Revenue Authority website has implemented several essential SEO practices, including optimized titles, meta descriptions, a clear URL structure, proper heading use, and mobile optimization. While there are areas to refine further, such as expanding its backlink profile and regularly updating content with fresh keywords, the foundation for strong search engine optimization is solid.

Google's PageSpeed Insights - Mobile

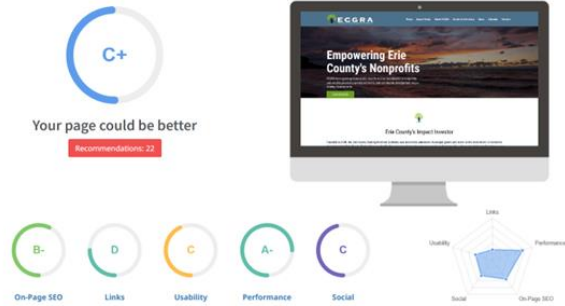
Google is indicating that your page is scoring poorly on their Mobile PageSpeed Insights evaluation.

Note that this evaluation is being performed from US servers and the results may differ slightly from an evaluation carried out from Google's PageSpeed Web Interface as that reporting localizes to the region in which you are running the report.

Google has indicated that the performance of a webpage is becoming more important from a user and subsequently ranking perspective.



Audit Results for staging.ecgra.org



Summary

The Erie County Gaming and Revenue Authority (ECGRA) website is well-structured and user-friendly, particularly for individuals seeking information about grant opportunities. Its intuitive navigation and clear layout contribute to a generally positive user experience.

However, several areas require attention to enhance the site's overall effectiveness:

- **Broken Links and Mobile Experience:**
There is a broken link in the **Call-to-Action** section when viewed on mobile devices, which disrupts user flow and should be promptly addressed.
- **Visual Design and Optimization:**
While the overall design is professional, some images are not optimized for web use, affecting load times and visual clarity. Improvements to image quality and color contrast would enhance both aesthetics and accessibility.
- **Calls to Action and Functionality:**
Increasing the visibility of key calls to action—such as **“Apply Now”** or **“Check Eligibility”**—would improve engagement. Adding tools like an **eligibility tracker** could help guide users more effectively through the application process.
- **Content Accuracy and Updates:**
Although most content is clearly written, outdated information in areas like event calendars and news updates could mislead users. Regular content reviews and updates are recommended to maintain relevance and trust.
- **Accessibility Compliance:**
The site exhibits accessibility issues, including missing alternative text for images and low text-to-background contrast. Addressing these gaps will improve usability for individuals with disabilities and help meet ADA compliance standards.
- **Performance and SEO:**
The site performs well in terms of speed and security. However, improvements in **heading structure, keyword usage, and consistent content updates** would strengthen its search engine optimization (SEO) and increase visibility.

Overall Recommendation:

While the ECGRA website is functional and informative, targeted improvements in accessibility,

visual presentation, content freshness, and SEO would significantly enhance its user experience, broaden its reach, and ensure it continues to serve as a reliable resource for the community.