The time has come to
Update the MERA web site

Overview:

Over the past ten years the MERA web site (meraonline.org) has grown in design, content and function and has become a valuable tool to the organization -- a way to disseminate information to both its members and the public. During that period the web site has been updated/enhanced with software that was current in 2010 and has remained on a server put into operation at the same time.

Recently, when the County of Marin, which has graciously hosted the web site all these years, decided it was time to pull the plug it was alarming to MERA personnel but also served as a wake-up call. It is time to move the site and rebuild it with current, robust and user-friendly tools.

Because the County would like to shut down the old server as soon as possible, this is a good opportunity to go through the site and see what areas can remain as they look and function now, with relatively few changes, and what areas will need some work as the site migrates from an old version of Cold Fusion software to a modern product such as WordPress, Weebly, or Square Space.

Time is of the essence, and MERA is now looking for a new host site and for a developer to work with the Executive Officer and the Web Master to upgrade and move the site, its content, and its functionality seamlessly from 2010 technology to the present.

MERAOnline.org Overview:

The MERA web site has grown in scope, content and design over the years and most users find it easy to navigate and to find information quickly. Its basic design is consistent throughout the site (see next page) and should be fairly easy to replicate as a template in one of the current software packages. However some pages that are now fed information from a SQL database might need to be set up differently so users can add/edit the information directly and send it live only when the Executive Officer has reviewed and approved the changes.

Web site design

If you click on the image below, you will go to the MERA web site and see that it has been designed in template format – with the MERA banner at the top, a set of links displayed on the left side, and the main content of the page to the right. On the Home page (below) there is an additional set of Quick Links on the left side that are periodically updated.

Marin Emergency Radio Authority [MERA]

A COUNTYWIDE RADIO COMMUNICATION SYSTEM

Agendas and Minutes

Meeting Schedule

Governance

Organization

System and Facilities

Documents

Training

Contact Us

QUICK LINKS

Web Transparency Checklist

Low-Income Senior Exemption 2016-2017 Tax Year

Next Gen Project Newsletter

Our Mission
MERA is a collection of public agencies formed in partnership to provide and operate a public safety radio system. As such, MERA provides a crucial communications delivery system that is interoperable between public agencies in order to efficiently and effectively facilitate critical (emergency) communications.

Vision Statement
MERA provides essential communications between and among local and regional public entities that serve all facets of public safety including Fire, Police, Public Works, Special Districts, Transportation and other Emergency Responders, to facilitate the protection of lives and property and enhance the safety of citizens, workers and visitors.

Core Values
The service and operational attributes of these Values shall serve as MERA's organizational code of behavior:

Leadership: To set by example the standards we expect others to follow

Integrity: To maintain the highest ethical principles and act in a completely transparent manner that merits respect and confidence

Diversity: To respect the individual differences that provide a source of strength and enable a persistent team approach to identify and overcome obstacles

Empowerment: To encourage responsible decision-making at all levels

Continuous Quality Improvement: To continually strive to deliver the highest quality, responsive, timely, constantly improving public service to both internal and external clients

The existing site uses a style sheet that should help the new developer create a master template into which MERA and its staff can plug content, with results that resemble what currently appears on meraonline.org. Because of time restraints, MERA is not looking to have the web site totally redesigned, but rather, to develop a shell into which existing functions and content can be transferred.

There are, however, a few functions (as listed below) that will need to be addressed in detail as this transition occurs:

- Separating what the public sees from internal information that is being updated
- Uploading and displaying Meeting information: Agendas, Minutes and Staff Reports
- Keeping certain information private and accessible only to key personnel

Live versus In-Development Content Management

There are times when information in different areas of the site needs to be updated, revised and/or removed. This function – an ability to make changes that are not sent live until the Director has reviewed and approved them – is critical.

 In the current set-up we have a "Live" (in production) version of the site and a "Staging" (in development) version but are hoping that the new site will allow us to keep only one version active having the capacity for the web site manager to publish updates only when they are approved by the Executive Officer.

Agenda, Minutes and Staff Report Uploading

As this is a public Agency (JPA) web site, Agendas, Minutes and Staff Reports need to be posted in a timely manner and user-friendly manner.

As illustrated above, the current Menu allows staff to upload, reload or delete Agendas, Minutes and/or Staff Reports. Information about the document is stored in a SQL database NS the documents are stored in online folders to be retrieved by the user. (Click here to see Agenda & Minutes page as it exists now.)

As technology has evolved and many public agencies have asked for the capacity to upload such documents, we expect the new software used to rebuild the site will have an appropriate plugin application to address this issue.

Private Area

As its name implies, one of MERA's focal points is an emergency response capability. The site is now able to house documents that contain information accessible only to authorized personnel on the MERA Team. We will need the same capability in the new, enhanced version of the site.

Summary

It is the right time to upgrade the MERA web site infrastructure by rebuilding it with current and robust software and moving it to a new host that will support the site's flow and functions. The rebuild and move will need to be done fairly quickly. The current Web Master will be available to answer questions, transfer content and help test the final product, but MERA needs to quickly identify and engage a developer who can rebuild the site and move it to a new host.