

National Aeronautics and
Space Administration

Headquarters

Washington, DC 20546-0001



Reply to Attn of: **Office of the Chief Information Officer**

TO: Distribution

FROM: Chief Information Officer
Assistant Administrator of Public Affairs

SUBJECT: NASA Web Site Linking Policy

Enclosed is the revised NASA Web Site Linking Policy which complies with the E-Government Act of 2002, the Privacy Act of 1974, the Federal Information Security Management Act of 2002, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act, and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memoranda M-03-22, and M-05-04, "Policies for Federal Agency Public Web sites," dated December 17, 2004.

All NASA public-facing web sites must comply with the following requirements:

- The linking policy must "appropriately limit external linking to information or services necessary for the proper performance of an agency function."
- Though hyperlinks are specifically excluded from OMB's Information Quality guidelines, when agencies determine that external links are necessary, "they must take reasonable steps to ensure the presentation is accurate, relevant, timely and complete."
- Agencies must "reasonably assure suitable information and service quality."
Reasonable steps include:
 - a. Identify clearly the possibility of errors, degree of reliability and validity of the information being linked to;
 - b. take reasonable steps to remove the limitations inherent in the information;
 - c. review links to the information or services.
- "Agency links to commercial organizations or interest groups present special challenges and thus must be used judiciously."

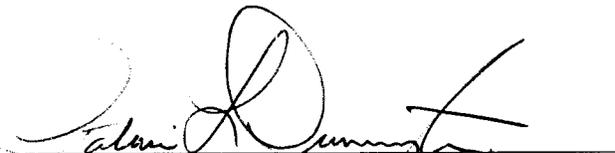
In addition, the following mandatory links are required from the principal Agency website and "any known major entry points:"

- a. NASA's strategic plan and annual performance plans
- b. Organizational structure, mission and statutory authority
- c. Freedom of Information Act
- d. Website privacy policy
- e. FirstGov.gov
- f. No Fear Act of 2002
- g. Point of contact for small businesses
- h. "Other cross-government portals or links required by law or policy"

NASA considers www.nasa.gov and the center main public pages as the "major entry points" to NASA's web space.

The attached NASA Linking Policy is immediately applicable to all NASA sites operated using NASA funding. A NASA Information Technology Requirement (NITR) is being prepared and will follow shortly.

Any questions regarding this memorandum should be directed to Dr. Nitin S. Naik (202-358-1519 or nitin.naik@nasa.gov) or Brian Dunbar (202-358-0873 or brian.dunbar@nasa.gov).



Patricia L. Dunnington
Chief Information Officer



David R. Mould
Assistant Administrator
Office of Public Affairs

Enclosure

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NASA Linking Policy

NASA Web sites must provide information and services to their audiences while adhering to the standards of objectivity, accuracy and relevance required of any federal agency. Linking from NASA websites to external websites (sites not in the *nasa.gov* domain) can help NASA fulfill its obligations to its various constituencies, but it must be done so as not to reflect poorly on the agency.

By its very nature, linking to an external site gives a minimal endorsement to the external site. Therefore NASA webmasters must -- as stated in the OMB guidelines -- take reasonable steps to ensure the information being linked to supports the agency's mission and is authoritative, accurate and likely to continue to be available.

While it is impossible to provide blanket approvals or prohibitions for links to external sites, some standard operating procedures are given below:

Linking to external websites is acceptable when

- the content on the site was created under a grant, contract or other formal arrangement with NASA, or by a government, whether federal, state, local or international;
 - the site provides authoritative information or services that support or enhance NASA Web content;
 - the external link is explicitly indicated;
- AND,
- the site does not violate any of the provisions below.

Linking to an external website is generally prohibited if the site;

- promotes or advertises alcohol or tobacco;
- encourages or facilitates illegal activities;
- contains pornography or content that encourages discrimination against particular groups of people
- uses the link from NASA to collect information on visitors in a way that violates NASA's privacy policy;
- would give the appearance that NASA is violating the legal prohibition against lobbying Congress;
- takes overt, partisan political positions;
- cannot be established as authoritative regarding the content it provides;
- provides no substantial support or enhancement to NASA programs or outreach efforts;

OR

- would give the appearance that NASA is endorsing goods or services provided on the site.

Linking to an external Web site that is primarily commercial in nature should be limited to those few cases where there is a clear, definable benefit to NASA and its Web users, and where it can be made clear that NASA is not endorsing any goods or services. NASA Webmasters must remember that links from NASA Web sites can have a commercial value to the owner of the site being linked to. NASA practice is to see if some equal benefit to NASA can be gained in exchange for the link. The Office of Public Affairs' Strategic Alliances group is responsible for conducting such negotiations and can offer advice on whether to pursue such an exchange of value.

Other considerations

NASA web site "Responsible Officials" and webmasters are responsible for knowing the general character and kinds of content offered by the sites they link to. This is especially important if the content to which the web manager would like to link is only a small portion of the external site's content. It may be that the majority of content on an external site may make it inappropriate to link to the NASA-related content on that site.

Similarly, NASA webmasters who want to link to a site are responsible for knowing it well enough to establish that the external site does not contain, or link to, prohibited material outlined above.

NASA webmasters are responsible for preventing "link rot" on NASA sites. Before linking to external content, the webmaster should note how likely it is that the content will move to another URL, or that the content will be replaced on the target URL. NASA websites should be reviewed to ensure that the content linked to hasn't changed significantly and edited accordingly.

Labeling External Links

Links to external sites must be clear to the user, either through explicit labeling in the link itself, or through a visual cue, such as opening a new Web browser window.

The use of intermediate "exit pages" is permitted only if the intermediate page indicates the user is leaving NASA's web space and provides the user the option of coming back. If the intermediate page contains no information that will help the user and only serve to slow him or her down then it must be removed or modified to achieve the above stated permission.

Responsibility

The civil servant listed as the Responsible NASA Official on a site has the responsibility for implementing and enforcing this policy on that site.

References

OMB Policy:

http://www.firstgov.gov/webcontent/policies_and_implementation.shtml

NPD 2800:

http://nodis3.gsfc.nasa.gov/displayDir.cfm?Internal_ID=N_PR_2800_0001_&page_name=main

webcontent.gov: <http://www.firstgov.gov/webcontent/index.shtml>

NASA Privacy Policy:

http://www.nasa.gov/about/highlights/HP_Privacy.html