Activate Iowa

Digital Infrastructure Assessment of the Iowa Democratic Party
November 11, 2020

1) County party organizations

In Iowa 51 Democratic County party organizations have no website. Most of these use Facebook as the primary means of communication. Four county party organizations have neither a website nor a Facebook page. (Of course, having a FB page is important. However, there are obvious risks involved with having the primary means of communication be through FB - in that case FB owns the information the IDP does not, and people who don't want to be on FB are left out.

Since 2017 seven county Democratic organizations have added new websites. However in that same time, seven other counties have lost websites that were working in 2017 - those are now non-functioning URLs and those counties are back to using only Facebook.

Of the websites that do exist for IDP county organizations - most are very poor either in design, in information or else they have so many technical problems as to be not functional. There are about 5 county party organizations that have good quality websites.

It is clear to me as a web designer that these sites are difficult to maintain for the local parties. I can tell this by the disjointed designs, incomplete information, technical problems, etc., found on most of the sites. Local parties need a way to easily update information and make their sites a real tool for organizing - not just an expensive hassle or an afterthought. It is unrealistic to think that all of these localities will have the people power to accomplish this. Please see below…

2) The IDP site

There is a tremendous issue at the local level but the IDP site is also problematic. In 2017 or thereabouts it was revamped and it is much better than before. The site is now graphically strong. However the information is thin. The site still has an overall feeling of being centered around fundraising. In addition, there are technical glitches that cause the user to get stuck on a page (https://www.mobilize.us/iowa/)

The Voting information section while OK was not as complete or clear as the one we put together for Activate Iowa. In our view the site needs to be a place that people want to go - volunteers should be highlighted, grassroots style events should be championed. In general the IDP site should feel like home for Iowa Dems rather than just another fundraising tool for the IDP.

Also, it seems to us that the IDP needs to communicate on its website exactly how the party itself functions. How and when do people get elected within the party. What can regular democrats do

and why should they care, etc. Right now a lot of people - especially young people see the party as a monolithic money machine. That needs to change. We don't need everyone to be a party activist - but everyone needs to be able to easily understand the wonderful people, real principles and democratic rules that create the system called the IDP.

3) Campaign support

It is our impression that state legislative campaigns were each expected to come up with their own digital marketing plan. Some did this very well - others not so much. Each campaign had to go out and recruit web designers, video people, etc., on their own. This process is time consuming and expensive for campaigns. As a web designer I know how small organizations - such as a campaign for state house - can end up paying too much money for a site that ends up being poorly designed and is difficult or for the campaign to actually update. If the party offered a bank of digital services (see below) it would save money and time for campaigns.

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Activate Iowa past efforts to be of assistance:

Activate Iowa approached the party in 2017-2018 about these matters and we were regularly in touch with the communications director, Tess Seger, at that time. We offered our ideas freely and without charge. We also offered our services to the party at a minimal cost - but instead there was a young staffer hired from DC to handle the web and social media - his salary was about $50K. Of course I could well be missing something - but honestly there was very little actual change between 2017 and now in terms of creating the digital infrastructure necessary for the state.

Our Suggestions:

Digital Support Team
At this point I would suggest creating a Digital Support Team of 5-12 people that can recruit volunteers with web design, social media, graphic design, and copywriting experience to help with the effort. I would have at least a majority of this team be located in Iowa and be recruited from Iowa. This support team would create the sites for each of the counties which currently do not have them. In addition, the support team would train IDP members at the local level via zoom on how to make basic changes to the site. If the county organization does not have anyone able to take this on the Digital Support Team would make those changes.

County Party Website Development:
In an ideal world all county party organizations would have a functioning website. Again, ideally, these websites would all be powered by the same content management system such as Wordpress. In addition, I would suggest that all the counties eventually utilize the same Wordpress theme. A flexible theme, like Divi, would allow each site to look different - but the backend would function in the same way from site to site.   This would accomplish several things. First, the Digital Support Team would be able to easily learn and understand all of the aspects of the theme and edits would be much easier. Second, and most importantly - if a majority of the county sites were using the same theme then information, - such as information on voting and voting updates, could be added across the state to every site using that theme. It

takes about 5-10 minutes to pass along data from one site to another in this way. I did exactly this in Iowa City this cycle by swapping important information back and forth between our [Activate Iowa](#) site and the [Potluck Insurgency](#) site that I also created.

Digital Support for Campaigns:
A Digital Support Team could offer campaigns a menu of items including - web design and hosting, social media integration, logo design and training.   Campaigns could choose to use the IDP support team or not. If a campaign did decide to use the Support Team services then the same content management system and theme could be utilized so that information could be exchanged among campaigns where and when necessary.

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