

 SEPTEMBER 2023

# Discovery Brief & Strategic Recommendations

PREPARED FOR

**Texas General  
Land Office**

Commissioner Buckingham’s administration partnered with Mighty Citizen to design a more compelling brand, consolidate the agency’s websites, and give Texans an elegant, useful, and world-class online experience.

This document details how it will all happen—and why.

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# Discovery

The Discovery Phase of the project, which lasted about three months, was dedicated to learning everything necessary to craft a plan for the upcoming phase, Implementation.

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## *Discovery Methods*

Starting in June 2023, MC embarked on a diverse collection of research methods:

- conducted interviews with internal stakeholders
  - built and distributed an agency-wide survey to understand what each department needs and wants in a reimagined website
  - audited the current website's content and user experience
  - facilitated a branding workshop to gauge internal attitudes about the agency's visual presence
  - reviewed the agency's technical architecture and capabilities
  - moderated discovery meetings with Texas GLO leadership and staff to assess fundamental questions about the agency's purpose, audiences, and communication efforts
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## *Stakeholder Interviews: Top Findings*

Mighty Citizen interviewed 18 agency staff members from seven departments and programs. Here are the most important themes we discovered:

### **Awareness of the GLO is low.**

Most Texans, even those who interact with the agency, don't know about the agency. And those who have heard of it often don't appreciate the agency's scope, strengths, or service.

**Some program areas worry about this website “consolidation.”**

Specifically, we heard concerns that their program won’t, on a new website, be able to meet their users’ needs or maintain the brand equity they’ve worked to build.

**The creation, management, and evaluation of website content is fragmented.**

Each program has built its own particular manner of publishing content and ensuring its accuracy.

**The GLO isn’t promoting the Permanent School Fund enough.**

Program areas often reported that GLO is about serving Texans and serving them well. They rarely mentioned the benefits of the Permanent School Fund.

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***Staff Survey Results***

We surveyed GLO staff with a focus on understanding audiences and programs. Over the course of one week, 228 responses were delivered. Here are the most notable survey results:

**Website navigation is inconsistent.**

Some program areas report a better system of content navigation and user experience than others. For example: Coastal Protection, CDR, and Heritage had distinct impressions of their websites’ usability.

**Website effectiveness isn’t being measured as much as it should be.**

Half of respondents said they didn’t measure the effectiveness of their website/pages.

**The new GLO homepage and program area homepages should provide certain features.**

Specifically: quick access to key documents and forms; notable space for news and announcements; and a search bar that delivers relevant results.

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## **Website Content Audit: Themes**

MC reviewed much of the top-level website content, including for program areas. We compared what we found against the GLO’s goals, sound practices in user experience design (UX), and understanding of key audiences’ needs. Here is what we found:

### **Too few images, graphics, or illustrations.**

There is much to the GLO’s story, and much of it lends itself to arresting and informative imagery; but there isn’t enough of it being used right now online.

### **Page layouts are limited and constraining.**

You share lots of diverse content in many forms, and yet page layouts and content modules are too limiting. This results in forcing content into forms that don’t make the most of it. And *that* likely results in frustration for the content creators and confusion by website users.

### **Site architecture and taxonomy often doesn’t match user needs or expectations.**

Consider: Many website visitors come to GLO-managed websites to apply for a payment or make a payment, and yet they have a tough time finding the right form, completing payments, or understanding what’s expected of them. This applies to many of the GLO websites.

### **The GLO undersells how important their work for the Permanent School Fund is.**

Considering how *critical* the PSF is to Texas, it’s surprising this story isn’t being told in more places and in more compelling ways online. It’s easy to overlook.

### **It’s hard for users to read and understand your content.**

Many webpages are just (mostly) uninterrupted blocks of text. Much of that text is written at too high a grade level for readability. This contributes to lowering user interest and reading comprehension.

### **Expected actions aren’t clear and the site isn’t especially “dynamic.”**

It’s not often obvious what the website wants a user to do *next*. Expectations aren’t clear. There aren’t enough internal links—i.e., from one page to another.

# Strategic Recommendations

Combining everything we learned about the GLO during Discovery with our expertise and experience working with state and municipal agencies, here are our recommendations for what the GLO should do now. We've divided our recommendations into three groups: Website, Branding, and Technology.

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## *Website Recommendations*

### ***Recommendation 1: Consolidate all GLO-managed website properties onto a single, shared platform.***

#### **Currently:**

You require users to become familiar with a wide range of interfaces—many of them slightly confusing—in order to engage with GLO. This fragmented structure undermines your brand because users have confusing or frustrating interactions.

#### **Why this recommendation?**

Bringing together program area websites under a shared system of navigation, taxonomy, website management, and (to some degree) branding, will increase how Texans feel about the agency. They'll see that the GLO cares deeply about serving them as well as possible, especially online. This simplification and shared digital purpose might also boost staff collaboration and internal knowledge transfer.

#### **Specifics:**

- **Third-Party Search Tool**

The new website should use a third-party search platform, not the native Drupal database search tool, because users need search methods that only a third-party solution can offer. This would let users easily filter search results and let web managers customize things like page rankings, synonyms, and PDF indexing, etc.

- **List of Webpage Layouts**

Right now, these are the unique page layouts we recommend MC design for the new GLO website. Note that this list is likely to change once website design begins during the Implementation Phase.

Homepage	Resource Library
General Layout (with approx. six unique content “modules” available)	Audience Page, with “Basic” and “Advanced” versions
Listing of News/Blogs	“Your Commissioner”
News/Blog Detail Page	Public Information Requests
Listing of Events	Listing of Properties/Lands Grants (filterable and sortable, likely)
Events Detail Page	Properties/Land Grants Detail Page
Donate	CDR Page
Contact Us	

■ **Site Navigation Categories**

This is how MC currently imagines how, on the new website, content can be grouped and labeled.

This is likely to shift during the design phase. Note that the specific website URLs listed under some categories do not represent *all* the pages/content in that section; but how program areas with standalone sites might be consolidated with the new GLO website.

**Land** (tasks: leasing, permits, etc.)

**Coast** (tasks: leasing, permits, etc.)

- Txcoasts.com
- Cleancoast.texas.gov
- Texasadoptabeach.org

**Veterans** (tasks: apply for loan, pay fees, home admission, etc.)

- VoicesofVeterans.org
- vlb.texas.gov

**Energy** (tasks: leasing, royalty reporting, etc.)

- GLO Energy Business

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**Disaster Recovery** (tasks: Application for relief, forms, etc.)

- [Recovery.texas.gov](http://Recovery.texas.gov)

**Texas Heritage & Education** (tasks: purchase a map, get a lesson plan, etc.)

- Permanent School Fund
- Alamo
- [savetexashistory.org](http://savetexashistory.org)
- [historictexasmaps.org](http://historictexasmaps.org)

■ **Website Launch Promotion**

The new GLO website will be gorgeous, inviting, accessible and extremely user-friendly. So the GLO should announce the launch of the new website to as many people as possible—especially to other state agencies and partners.

Details to come once we get closer to launch, but the “Launch Promotion Plan” will likely:

- include a combination of promotional channels—e.g., email, ads, pre-launch landing page, social media, video, direct mail, news media, etc.
- define measurable goals for a successful website launch promotion
- list the primary audiences for the website launch promotion
- include a detailed calendar before, during, and after the launch with relevant tactics, messages, and channels
- recommend a budget dedicated to website launch promotion

■ **Community Development & Revitalization (CDR)**

To ensure compliance with HUD regulations, GLO must adhere to CDR's guidelines. Add a link that directs users to CDR's section of the site (which, we recommend, has a unique page layout).

■ **Crisis Communications**

The new website must be able to communicate alerts about crises—e.g., storms, beach closures, etc.

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- **Geographic Information Systems (GIS)**

GIS content is currently scattered across multiple websites. Consolidate it in one location.

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***Recommendation 2: Better share the commissioner's vision and bring the agency's accomplishments and services to life online—with a special focus on the Permanent School Fund.***

**Currently:**

The Texas GLO website does not properly showcase the agency's many successes; the ones that *are* mentioned are usually lacking in narrative, imagery, or connection to the commissioner's larger vision. This is especially true for the Permanent School Fund, which is treated on the current website as just another purpose the agency serves (meanwhile, it's literally *critical* to the state's functioning).

**Why this recommendation?**

The public doesn't know what the GLO does nor how incredible the many stories in the agency are. Your brand depends on how deeply (and how many) Texans feel they know and trust your agency. One critical step to bolstering that awareness and trust is to properly tell your stories online, with a focus on the people you serve and the people who do the service. Bring the PSF front and center and position it as one of the GLO's most relevant and mission-critical purposes.

**Specifics:**

This goal—to make your content more engaging, visually interesting, and aligned with the agency's goals—begins with revisiting the fundamentals of the agency's messaging. MC recommends the GLO work with us to craft a new **Messaging Platform**, which is a document that contains communication elements such as mission, vision, values, audiences, brand voice, etc.

**Measured by:**

Clicks; Bounce Rate; Time on Site; Time on Page

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**Recommendation 3: Prioritize helping users complete tasks and find critical information.**

**Currently:**

The website has relegated essential user functions to a secondary role, preferring the hosting of policies over helping users find key information and complete important tasks. Users can't find what they need, and when they do, they often get confused. The brand suffers as a result.

**Why this recommendation?**

It was best said by someone MC interviewed during the Discovery Phase: "When people visit the GLO site they are there to complete a task. They need to get [to that task] efficiently."

Your website is, first and foremost, a portal to service—a way to help Texans do and learn important things that can help improve their lives. All other website content, features, and designs are secondary to this purpose.

**Measured by:** Visits to "Service" Pages; Form Submissions; Call Center Data; Task Abandonment Rate; Backtracks; Time to Complete Forms/Tasks

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**Recommendation 4: Write and adhere to a website content strategy and workflow protocol that keeps all website content accurate and user-focused.**

**Currently:**

Too much website content is outdated, incomplete, and inaccurate. This isn't just damaging to the GLO brand; it potentially creates real headaches for real Texans.

**Why this recommendation?**

To better serve the Texans who depend on the GLO as a source of up-to-date information. To save users time and to avoid misleading or misinforming them. Maybe nothing says it better than this quotation from the stakeholder interviews: "I couldn't tell you today who I should email to get the website updated."

**Specifics:**

- **Content Governance**

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In addition to the nuts and bolts of an ongoing content strategy—e.g., workflows, roles, brand standards, storytelling, voice and tone—we recommend the GLO create a **Content Governance Plan** that details *how* the agency will oversee and enhance its website *strategy* over time.

**Measured by:** User Feedback; Call Center Data; Time Spent on Website Management; Compliance with Content Governance; Internal Survey Results

***Recommendation 5: Implement a website analytics strategy that informs internal stakeholders how the website is performing.***

**Currently:**

Very few staff members know how the website is performing. Decisions about website content are, therefore, based on instinct and experience more than evidence and data. The GLO cannot easily identify nor respond to user needs and audience segmentation.

**Why this recommendation?**

Make decisions about the website using real proof of how actual Texans interact with it. Resolve website issues more quickly. As one interviewee pointed out, “We have no mechanism for tracking website analytics.” By setting up Google Analytics properly, making it usable and easily digestible, and implementing simple methods for reporting on website performance, the GLO can ensure the website remains beautiful, relevant, and usable for many years to come (and avoid another major overhaul in three years).

**Specifics:**

GLO should capture, view, analyze, and share the following website metrics—especially over time in order to identify trends quarter over quarter, year over year. During website design and development, we may suggest changes to this list.

- **Site Visitors** — i.e., total number of unique individuals who visit to any page on the site
- **Bounce Rate** — i.e., percentage of people who leave the site without visiting a second page
- **Scroll Depth** — i.e., how far down the page the user goes
- **Pages Per Session** — i.e., unique pages a person opens when they visit the site
- **Time on Page** — i.e., for each page, how much time (seconds, minutes) users spend there

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- **Time on Site** — same as above but for the entire website
- **Call Center Usage** — i.e., does the new site reduce calls from users?
- **Contact Form Submissions** — i.e., are more forms filled out (and accurately)?

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## ***Branding Recommendations***

You don't control your brand. No organization controls their brand. Because of the many definitions of "brand," trust is key. Your brand, in other words, is your reputation—the degree to which the people you exist to serve know you, trust you, and come to expect something from you. Your audiences control your brand.

*Branding*, meanwhile, you can control. Branding is the work of *influencing* your brand.

Every interaction with your agency—online and offline, major and minor—contributes to your brand. But here, we are mostly concerned with the visual elements that constitute how you look and feel online.

***Recommendation 6: Enhance the top-level branding—namely, the logo—of GLO program areas so that they are more obviously connected to the GLO and they retain as much of their brand equity as possible.***

### **Currently:**

Many of GLO's programs have a unique look—logos, colors, typography, etc. But most of these programs aren't *obviously* connected to the GLO or they are connected in fragmented and outdated ways (or both).

### **Why this recommendation?**

On one hand, GLO rightly wants Texans to know they're interacting with the GLO. On the other hand, each program has its own brand that shouldn't be abandoned.

Design is the solution to this balancing act. The solution must do three things.

- First, it should maintain the bulk of the program's look and feels.

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- Second, it should bring the program’s logo in line with both the GLO’s new branding and with the other programs.
- Third, the solution should include the name and title of the commissioner.

**Important Note:**

If the GLO decides to pursue this recommendation, it will consume a healthy chunk of work hours. MC can provide an estimate of how many of the project’s hours we anticipate needing to complete this effort. It can also be saved for a “phase II” of this engagement.

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**Recommendation 7: Refresh both logos.**

**Currently:**

You have two logos: the official seal and the “casual bison.”

The seal stands out. It tells a story. But it was designed for a time before digital content dominated, before instant recognition matters. And because the seal tells a story, it’s also quite busy: bison, water, grass, star, beams of light, mesa, and sky. As the seal shrinks, its lines and shapes become a mess. Its impact is lost. (There is a full-color version of the logo, which provides a better understanding.)

The casual bison logo also appears in multiple forms, colors, and stylings. But the primary version of the logo as seen on the current GLO website doesn’t *fully* embody the variety, reach, and sheer power of the GLO. It is too flat and simplistic.

**Why this recommendation?**

The GLO has an innovative vision for the state; your logos should match that boldness. GLO should refresh both logos. Not redesign; refresh. Keep most elements of both logos, but spruce them up and make them more noticeable. Make both logos modern-but-not-fancy, and make them usable online everywhere.

Additionally, we recommend creating a horizontal version of your causal logo that communicates the name of the agency and the commissioner more effectively—i.e., a sort of wordmark.

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## **Recommendation 8: Create more lively, engaging, exciting content.**

### **Currently:**

Online, the GLO’s brand voice tends to come across as lackluster, generic, and mired in an old-school formality that likely alienates, confuses, or even bores many users.

### **Why this recommendation:**

When Texas became a state, the GLO was one of the first things the founders created. This longevity means a lot. But for most people under (say) 45 years old, it’s probably not especially important. Unless the agency *makes* it important.

Adopting spaces where the agency can tell more stories—and do so with more imagery, video, and narrative pizzazz—will make it more interesting. More visitors will come to the website, and when they arrive, they’ll stay longer, explore more, and learn plenty along the way.

### **Specifics:**

- Marry a demonstration of the agency’s wisdom (which comes with age) with how most people interact with you: through a smartphone or computer.
- What it means to “embrace your fun side” is to be determined. But you’ve already demonstrated you have plenty of humor. (See: the “Take Your Kid to Work Day” ad featuring the most adorable baby bison.)
- There should be a single person (or maybe two) who is given the executive power over the agency’s public-facing personality online. This person must have a brand guide, messaging platform, and content governance plan to guide their decisions. This person knows when to be stoic and serious, and when (and how) to be cutting-edge and intriguing. One person (or maybe two) should be able to say yes, no, and try again.
- Experiment. Experiment with new platforms that are a little daunting at first, email subject lines that force people to open the message, imagery that provokes attention, etc. Do more of what’s been done in the past. But do it consistently, intentionally, and with the agency’s goals in mind.

***Recommendation 9: Enhance and expand your visual branding system.***

**Currently:**

The GLO’s visual branding is limited. The agency has a couple of hard-to-read fonts, a lackluster “casual” logo, and a primary color palette that might be labeled brown-green-yellow.

**Why this recommendation?**

Good branding is a system. There are rules and tools and goals for everything the organization puts out. But right now, the branding tools at the GLO’s disposal—the “sandbox” of visual elements the agency can play with—is limited.

We recommend adopting new fonts (with rules for when to use which), a diverse and interesting color palette (with rules for when to use which), and a handful of additional visual elements.

These elements might include:

- a custom designed set of icons
- a particular style of illustration that evokes feelings
- ways of “treating” photographs so they look special
- subtle animations that occur when users scroll and click around the new website
- a buffet of ways to style your text so you can build visually appealing webpages
- patterns and textures that are used to evoke a particular part of your agency’s work

Expanding the GLO’s branding will establish the agency as a vibrant, forward-thinking, innovative agency that truly exists to serve Texans. Whenever someone encounters the GLO, whether directly or through a program, they will understand they’re interacting with the very best of state government.

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***Recommendation 10: Create a new “Brand Guide” that details what can be used and what cannot, etc. Enforce the policies consistently.***

**Currently:**

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There are many styles of GLO branding floating around the Internet. The primary GLO website and program area websites don't follow consistent styles, looks, feels, etc.

**Why this recommendation?**

Consistency is key. Without it, the agency can't have a brand. We recommend creating a "Brand Guide" that details everything about your visual elements. Most digital content should filter through a single person (or two) who is familiar with the brand guide and enforces its standards fiercely. Every time something is added to the website, or placed onto a social media platform, or emailed to an audience, or designed for a presentation — someone must say "yes" or "not quite."

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***Technology Recommendation***

To redesign, build, launch, and manage your new website—and to ensure it has full, reliable functionality—Mighty Citizen's technology architects and leadership audited the current GLO tech stack. The goal of this audit was to understand the foundational systems being used by GLO. See the full tech review document for more detail.

There is more to be learned once the appropriate phases arrive during website design and development, but we have one critical recommendation in place already:

***Recommendation 11: Leverage Drupal and Acquia's technology stack to create and enforce streamlined, modernized workflows.***

**Currently:**

The website content management (CMS) experience is complicated and cumbersome. Making even a minor website update triggers entire content rebuild and publishing workflows (which often don't run to completion and have to be done all over again). There is no unified content management strategy/process.

**Why this recommendation?**

The GLO website is an ecosystem. It consists of multiple teams, program areas, and content types that are dynamic and need to be up to date, sometimes down to the minute. Any disruption to the publishing workflow interferes with the ability to provide timely information to visitors.

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To create a secure, stable, and easy-to-use platform, GLO should adopt modern tools and best practices when redeveloping their new website.

**Specifics:**

- Consolidate all sites in scope into a single website using the Drupal CMS.
- Consolidate all marketing and communications platforms (such as Marketo, Constant Contact, and Mailchimp) into the GovDelivery platform.
- Implement roles, permissions, and a content workflow that is aligned with GLO’s content strategy and governance plan. Include a scheduled publishing workflow that can automate scheduled publishing and unpublishing of content.
- Include a Form Builder tool that allows content editors to easily create and add forms to the website. Forms may include back-end integrations to select third party services such as GovDelivery and Salesforce, while retaining the consistency and front-end of the new GLO website.
- Strategically import select structured content types (such as Press Releases, Public Notices, Grants); revise and rewrite other content.
- Embed, recreate, or rebrand select GLO ColdFusion and GIS applications to match the new website.
- Utilize Acquia’s Build and Launch Tools (BLT) to provide developers with a standardized set of tools, streamline developer onboarding, and automate some test and build processes.