



# Citywide Linking Policy

**Final 1.4 - PUBLIC**

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City of New York

Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications

Business Solutions Delivery Division, Office of Web Strategy and Operations

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# Citywide Linking Policy

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## 1.0 Overview

### 1.1 Introduction

Many official New York City websites are within the .gov top-level domain (“.gov TLD”). The .gov TLD is operated by the U.S. General Services Administration (“GSA”). The GSA has promulgated Domain Requirements to identify permissible and prohibited practices for linking from the .gov TLD. The GSA Domain Requirements are located at <https://home.dotgov.gov/registration/requirements/>.

The GSA Domain Requirements state that a website in the .gov TLD may not include links that imply in any manner that the government endorses or favors any specific commercial product, commodity, or service. Additionally, there can be no links to political candidates, political campaign committees, or political parties.

This Citywide Linking Policy (“Policy”) incorporates the GSA Domain Requirements and explains how they apply to City of New York (“City”) websites in the .gov TLD and websites hosted by DoITT but not on the .gov TLD. In doing so, this Policy establishes the protocol for linking to external websites from New York City websites within the .gov TLD or outside the .gov TLD but hosted by DoITT.

### 1.2 Scope

This Policy applies to all websites representing the City of New York that are in the .gov domain. This Policy also applies (in the same manner) to any public-facing website hosted by DoITT, including those outside of the .gov TLD.

Collectively, these two classes of websites will be referred to as “Official City Websites.”

For all other sites representing the City (i.e., websites that are outside the .gov TLD and not hosted by DoITT), the linking rules documented below are highly recommended.

### 1.3 Audience

The audience for this Policy is the web content managers who oversee Official City Websites, affiliate sites, or public-facing applications, and anyone who has a role in generating content for publication on such sites and applications.

### 1.4 Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to ensure that Official City Websites link to relevant and appropriate external websites and conform to the GSA Domain Requirements.

## **2.0 Policy**

### **2.1 Policy Statement**

All Official City Websites are permitted to link to certain types of websites, while other types of websites are prohibited. Official City Websites may not be used to advertise or show preference for any private entity or suggest preference for any commercial product, commodity, or service, or to identify or show favor to any political candidate, campaign committee, or political party.

To comply with the GSA Domain Requirements, all City entities should carefully evaluate the use of links to sites outside the .gov TLD, and ensure that all links comply with the additional City principles set forth in Sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 below.

#### **2.1.1 Allowed Links**

Official City Websites may link to other governmental websites, as well as to non-governmental websites that represent or facilitate City business or further a City purpose, providing added benefit to users and supporting City functions.

##### **2.1.1.1 Social Media**

Official City Websites may link to City government social media pages that are registered through CityShare. Information about registering social media pages is available on CityShare.

##### **2.1.1.2 Essential Services**

Official City Websites may link to non-City sites if the link provides access to relevant information or support for users in furtherance of a City purpose, thus constituting official City business.

Examples:

- Utilities
- Communications Franchises

##### **2.1.1.3 Essential Services – Social Media**

Official City Websites may link to social media pages of essential service providers such as those described above if the social media pages facilitate users' access to critical information about services.

Examples:

- Utilities providers during a blackout
- Communications franchises during a weather emergency

##### **2.1.1.4 Sanctioned Vendors**

Official City Websites may link to non-City sites if the link provides access to the services of authorized vendors of the City, such as City franchisees and concessionaires, in such cases as the link facilitates

access to: (i) essential services that the City itself doesn't provide; or (ii) entities that are providing services on City property.

Examples:

- Foster care providers
- Concessionaires located on City property and providing amenities in public facilities

#### **2.1.1.5 City-Affiliated Entities**

The City works closely with many City-affiliated entities that are not City agencies but have official relationships to the City, often through the presence of City officials or appointees of City officials on the entity's board and the provision of services to the City under contract. Official City Websites may link to websites representing such City-affiliated entities, even when they are outside the .gov TLD.

Examples:

- NYC Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC)
- Public libraries
- Cultural Institutions

#### **2.1.1.6 City Initiatives and Events**

The City often operates websites in support of specific initiatives and events that are organized by the City or for which the City is an official sponsor. Official City Websites may link to such sites, even when they are outside the .gov TLD.

Examples:

- NYC Marathon
- Million Trees NYC
- Mayor's Fund Programs

#### **2.1.1.7 Content Access Services**

The City recommends some web and other services to help users access and take advantage of official government content. Official City Websites may link to such sites, even when they are outside the .gov TLD.

Examples:

- Adobe PDF Reader
- Google Translate

#### **2.1.1.8 City-Related Press**

Where access to content available on a website other than an Official City Website would further a City purpose, but reproduction of that content on an Official City Website might constitute a copyright infringement, Official City Websites may link to that content. City entities may not link to the home page of a press outlet, but may link to specific City-related content.

Examples: News media articles

### **2.1.2 Prohibited Links**

Official City Websites may not link to:

1. Any content that supports or opposes candidates for office, political campaigns, political parties, referenda, or bills pending before legislatures unless the bill has been introduced, submitted, or formally supported or opposed by the City;
2. Any content that depicts or describes violence, nudity, or sexual activities in a way that would violate the NYS Penal Law;
3. Any content that includes hate speech or promotes discrimination based on religion, race, gender, national origin, or sexual orientation;
4. Any content that aids or incites crime;
5. Any content that would be perceived as an endorsement or advertisement for a commercial entity or product, provided that links to otherwise permissible websites that contain commercial advertisements shall not be prohibited; or
6. Any site whose primary content does not advance a City purpose.

### **2.1.3 Exit Notifications**

Each link to a website that is outside of the NYC.gov domain must utilize an exit notification informing users that they are leaving NYC.gov. This applies even if the link is to another City website that is not using the .gov TLD.

#### **2.1.3.1 Wording of NYC.gov Exit Notification**

For Official City Websites that are within NYC.gov the exit notification must read:

You are leaving the City of New York's website.

The City of New York does not imply approval of the listed destinations, warrant the accuracy of any information set out in those destinations, or endorse any opinions expressed therein. Like NYC.gov, all other websites operate under the auspices and at the direction of their respective owners who should be contacted directly with questions regarding the content of these sites.

You will be redirected within 5 seconds, assuming that the target server is available.

For Official City Websites that are not within NYC.gov, the exit notification must employ equivalent language to the exit notification above, adapted to the specific site.

#### **2.1.3.2 Exception to Exit Notification – Official City Social Media**

The only exception to the requirement for exit notifications in section 2.1.3 is for links to official New York City social media sites that are registered through the City's social media portal. An Official City Website may link to official City social media sites without an exit notification. Moreover, an Official City

Website may use framing to display content of official City social media sites within the view of the Official City Website.

### 2.1.4 Government Sites

To refer readers to information about a government entity, an Official City Website must link to the official federal, state, or local government site and not to a third-party website. For example, links meant to direct users to more information about federal or state taxes, business incorporation, or the federal Energy Star program should link to official government websites, rather than to third-party sites that provide information on the subject.

Links to official governmental websites that are not Official City Websites require exit notifications.

## 2.2 Power of Removal

DoITT and the NYC.gov team may remove links deemed to be in violation of this Policy.

## 3.0 Implementation

This Policy is effective as of July 1, 2014.

Contact DoITT Web Operations for assistance with compliance.

## 4.0 Authority

DoITT’s Web Strategy and Operations Unit serves as the central publishing unit for web content publishing on NYC.gov. Web Operations has the ability to issue and revoke license access to the City’s enterprise content management system (“CMS”), and the ability to publish and delete content for all Mayoral agency websites managed via the CMS. Web Operations can correct violations of this Policy by removing content and links, inserting exit messaging, or revoking publishing privileges, if warranted.

## 5.0 Ownership

This policy is owned by the DoITT Business Solutions Delivery division, Web Operations unit.

## 6.0 Change History

Version	Change Highlights	Date
1.1	First public draft	6/26/14
1.2	Annual review	7/14/2015
1.3	Annual review	9/20/2016
1.4	Updated GSA link	12/15/2017