Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine

Website Development & Governance Policy

Policy Version: 6.2
Revision Of: Website Development Policy
Effective date: 8/01/2026

I. Purpose

The Feinberg Office of Communications ("Office of Communications") is charged with maintaining a consistent, compliant and accessible online presence across websites affiliated with Northwestern University ("NU") Feinberg School of Medicine ("FSM"). This policy defines the core requirements for website hosting, branding and regulatory alignment.

II. Audience

All FSM faculty, staff, students and trainees.

III. Policy Statement

FSM units must coordinate website hosting and development activities with the Office of Communications. All websites must:

- Be hosted on FSM-approved platforms.
- Adhere to FSM and NU branding and logo use standards.
- Comply with university, state and federal requirements (e.g., HIPAA, Institutional Review Board ("IRB"), accessibility).

Web applications are subject to this policy's branding and logo usage guidelines. All other technical and security requirements for web applications are governed separately under the FSM Web Application Policy.

IV. Definitions

- **Website:** A static or semi-static collection of public webpages intended to communicate information about FSM-related activities.
- **Web Application:** An interactive tool or system that requires user authentication, input and/or complex data handling.
- **Third-Party Website:** Any website affiliated with a Feinberg unit, faculty, or staff but developed or hosted outside of the NU-approved content management system, Cascade. See “Platforms & Hosting” for distinctions among third-party websites.

V. Policy Requirements

Core compliance expectations for FSM websites are outlined below. Detailed procedures are published in Appendix A: FSM Website Development Requirements & Implementation Procedures.

Hosting & Vendor Requirements

- Websites must be hosted on Cascade unless there is a document and approved exception granted by the Office of Communications and FSM IT. The Office of Communications supports the creation and maintenance of all FSM Cascade websites. Support is not offered for non-Cascade sites.
- To engage a third-party vendor for website development, content management, domain registration or hosting outside of Cascade, there must be documented approval from the Office of Communications and FSM Information Technology ("FSM IT").

Branding & Logo Usage

- All FSM-affiliated websites must follow FSM and NU branding standards.
- Proper use of logos and marks owned by FSM, NU and Northwestern Medicine ("NM") is built into the Cascade template; use of these marks on third-party websites is prohibited without documented permission from the designated approver: the Office of Communications, Northwestern University's Office for Global Marketing and Communications or Northwestern Medicine Marketing.

Content Compliance

- Content must follow NU's Digital Accessibility Policy.
- Protected Health Information ("PHI") and credit card data may not be collected, displayed or linked without explicit approval from the Office of Communications and FSM IT.
- See Clinical Content in Cascade below for policies related to clinical content, including clinical trials.

Ownership & Maintenance

- Units must assign either a faculty member or full-time or part-time FSM staff member to serve as the designated site owner.
- Students, temporary workers and contractors will not be granted Cascade access.
- Site owners must update their sites at least annually.
- Orphaned or outdated sites may be archived or removed.

VI. Compliance & Exceptions

Units found to be non-compliant must submit a remediation plan within 30 days of notice. Exceptions to this policy require written justification and approval from:

- The Office of Communications (branding and content)
- FSM IT (platforms, hosting and security)

Failure to comply with this policy may lead to sanctions, including but not limited to removal of web content, revocation of hosting privileges or escalation to the FSM Dean's Office.

VII. Policy Update Schedule

This policy will be assessed one year from its effective date; thereafter, reviews will be completed at least once every three years.

VIII. Revision History

06/02/2025 – This represents a complete revision of the previously published policy to align with current NU and FSM policies.

1/01/2026 – Policy updated to reflect new form policies and to clarify policies around clinical content and presentation of clinical trials.

08/01/2026 – Policy updated with new statements on domains and redirects and clarifying statements regarding clinical content and form usage.

IX. Relevant References & Contacts

- For Office of Communications approvals, contact medweb@northwestern.edu
- For FSM IT approvals, contact fsmhelp@northwestern.edu
- For FAO approvals, contact fao@northwestern.edu
- FSM Office of Communications Project Request Form (non-website communications requests): https://forms.cloud.microsoft/r/bJCN2idXcn
- FSM Website Project Request Form: https://forms.cloud.microsoft/r/DPjc3xidbt
- FSM Cascade Training & Support: https://www.feinberg.northwestern.edu/communications/websites-social/cascade-training.html

- FSM Brand & Logos: https://www.feinberg.northwestern.edu/communications/branding/index.html
- FSM Web Application Policy: https://www.feinberg.northwestern.edu/it/docs/fsm-web-application-maintainability-policy.pdf
- NU Digital Accessibility Policy: https://policies.northwestern.edu/docs/digital-accessibility-policy-final.pdf
- NU Brand Tools: https://www.northwestern.edu/global-marketing-communications/resources/brand-tools.html
- NUsites: https://sites.northwestern.edu

X. Appendix A: FSM Website Development Requirements & Implementation Procedures

This appendix provides mandatory procedures, approved platforms, vendor requirements, content guidelines and branding standards for FSM websites, directly supporting the FSM Website Development Policy and the FSM Web Application Policy. Compliance with these requirements is required unless explicitly approved exceptions are granted as noted.

1. Initial Steps

Website Requests & Approvals

- Units must complete the Website Project Request Form to initiate a new FSM-affiliated website. The Office of Communications will contact you to determine the appropriate next steps.
- Websites for new academic or administrative units require approval from the FSM Dean. Units may not use the words “office,” “department” or “center” in their titles without approval from the FSM Dean and following appropriate steps as conveyed by the Office of Communications and the Faculty Affairs Office (“FAO”).Projects or programs within an existing unit do not qualify for standalone websites. Please reach out to the parent unit's designated site owner to determine appropriate placement within their existing website structure.
- Cores are not currently eligible for standalone websites. Please reach out to medweb@northwestern.edu with questions about or support for a core webpage.
- For questions prior to starting a project, contact:
    - Branding/content: medweb@northwestern.edu
    - Technical/platforms: fsmhelp@northwestern.edu

2. Platforms & Hosting

Approved Platforms & Vendor Usage

- Cascade is the primary FSM-supported platform for department, lab and administrative websites.
- FSM-affiliated individuals may not independently build Feinberg-affiliated websites on third-party platforms (e.g., Squarespace, Wix).
- Limited exceptions may be granted for instances such as multi-institutional research collaborations led by FSM faculty or grant-required data-sharing sites that require a neutral, non-branded platform. All exceptions must be approved by both the Office of Communications and FSM IT.
- Faculty, trainees, students and staff may not use FSM funds for costs affiliated with using a non-compliant or non-approved platform or hosting vendor and will not be reimbursed for unapproved purchases. All purchases must be approved and completed through FSM IT.FSM IT and the Office of Communications do not provide support for NUsites (NU's WordPress platform), but it may be used in circumstances with documented approval from either office. NUsites should not be used for lab sites; Cascade is the only approved platform. See "Existing Third-Party Sites" below for more details."

Domain Registration & URLs

- URL structure must follow FSM conventions:
  - Department/center sites: feinberg.northwestern.edu/sites/[NAME]
  - Lab sites: labs.feinberg.northwestern.edu/[NAME]
- Other domain names must be registered through FSM IT with approval. Units may not register independent domains. Domains with a year of inactivity may be archived or removed.
- Redirecting URLs *from* Cascade websites *to* external, non-Cascade websites is not permitted.
- Redirects, as approved by FSM IT and the Office of Communications, will automatically expire after six months. The designated content owners are responsible for updating links prior to the expiration date.Existing Third-Party Sites
- Legacy lab sites built on unsupported platforms (e.g., NUsites, Squarespace) should be migrated to Cascade by 2028.
- NUsites may not include clinical/patient-facing information or terms such as "department," "center," etc., without approval.
- The Office of Communications may request updates to ensure branding or messaging consistency.

- New FSM faculty with existing external sites must coordinate with the Office of Communications to migrate their content to an approved platform.
- See "Faculty Profiles & External Links" for information on linking to a third-party website from a Cascade site.
- When a faculty member departs or a project ends, the affiliated third-party website must be reassigned or removed. A three-month grace period allows for content transfer to SharePoint or FSMResFiles.

3. Ownership & Access

Website Ownership & Maintenance

- Units must assign either a faculty member or full-time or part-time FSM staff manager to serve as the designated site owner.
- Students, temporary workers and contractors will not be granted Cascade access.
- A maximum of five trained full-time or part-time staff or faculty members may have Cascade access per site. If a site owner leaves, website ownership must be reassigned. Sites without an active owner may be archived or removed.
- Access to Cascade may be revoked and content may be modified by the Office of Communications at any time to ensure compliance with institutional standards.
- Units may not alter previously approved site navigation or add new pages without explicit permission or support from the Office of Communications.

Intranets

- Internal faculty/staff-only content or sites must be hosted in NU SharePoint, rather than the external Cascade site.
- SharePoint owners are responsible for access management and content oversight.

Adjunct, Emeritus and Departing Faculty Sites

- Adjunct or emeritus faculty must receive Office of Communications approval to maintain websites. They will not be granted new lab sites.
- Departing faculty must coordinate reassignment of any project websites, including migration of site content to an approved platform. If no successor is identified, the site will be removed when their NetID is deactivated. The Office of Communications is not responsible for maintenance and retention of unsupported legacy sites.

4. Content & Branding Standards

All content on Cascade websites is subject to review by the Office of Communications.

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Branding & Logos & External Sites

- Use of FSM, NU or NM logos on any website requires documented approval from the Office of Communications. The logos built into FSM Cascade template headers and footers are pre-approved. Using these logos online in any other way, including alongside other logos or as decorative elements, requires additional approval.
- Use of external or partner logos on your website also requires prior approval.
- In accordance with NU policy, FSM does not create, approve or support new logos for individual units.
- Unapproved branding may lead to removal of content.
- Brand standards are subject to change, and previously approved use may be revoked to meet updated guidelines.

Linking Within Cascade

- All links on Cascade websites and faculty profiles are subject to review by the Office of Communications.
- Pages may not link to commercial sites that advertise or sell products/services or accept sponsorships in exchange for links. Exceptions may be granted if links support NU's mission or provide an essential service. Endorsements or implied endorsements of third-party products or services are not allowed. Links out to commercial sites are implied endorsements.
- Where another University office or organization maintains the authoritative version of information, Cascade sites should link to that source rather than create an independent copy that may become outdated.
- No sites affiliated with an FSM unit should host content editable outside of NU (i.e., linking to Google Docs, Google Forms and wikis is prohibited).
- Faculty must receive approval from FAO before linking to any third-party sites from their faculty profile. To be approved, faculty profiles links must:
    - Be focused on research or education with a direct connection to NU or FSM
    - Not promote personal sales
    - Follow branding guidelines and logo use policies
    - Route donation links to Feinberg Giving

Faculty Listings Within Cascade

- Department, center and institute websites without sub-centers must include an A-Z listing of all active faculty based on FAO records.
- Chairs may request a "Core" or "Principal" list if the following conditions are met:
    - Status: Active
    - Appointment Type: Primary

  - Category: Regular
  - Basis: FT or PT-G (50 percent or more effort)
  - Rank: Instructor, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor or Professor
- Non-faculty should not be integrated into FSM faculty lists. Separate affiliate or partner faculty listings will be approved by the Office of Communications on a case-by-case basis. Clinical partners and affiliates should not be listed individually on Feinberg sites; see "Clinical Content in Cascade" below for more details.

Recruitment

- Units should not post their own job listings to Cascade, either as content on a webpage or as a document. Instead, link directly to NU's myHR Careers website. If the listing does not appear on myHR Careers, please consult medweb@northwestern.edu. The most up-to-date hiring language will be included on these links, ensuring current legal requirements/language related to recruitment are posted to Cascade.
- Links to these job postings must be deleted within 30 days of the position being filled.

Digital Accessibility

- All content must comply with NU's Digital Accessibility Policy.
- This includes websites, videos, audio content, documents and other digital assets.
- The Office of Communications may revise or remove non-compliant content.

Clinical Content in Cascade

- Clinically focused content may not appear in Cascade without prior written approval from the Feinberg Dean's Administration.
- Clinical research recruitment materials posted to the FSM website must use IRB-approved language. Current, publicly recruiting trials must appear via a feed from Study Tracker, with the notable exception of pediatric trials, which are not included on the FSM site and are managed via luriechildrens.org.

5. Data Collection & Security

Forms & Sensitive Data

- General forms must be built via Microsoft Forms. Research-related forms should use REDCap.
- Forms may be linked to but not embedded on Cascade websites.
- Websites may not display or collect PHI or link to any payment system unless explicitly approved by FSM IT or the Office of Communications.
- PHI must never be collected or listed in Microsoft Forms.

Data Collection & Compliance Requirements

- FSM websites may not collect, display or transmit PHI or student education records (as protected by the Family Educational Rights & Privacy Act, FERPA) unless explicitly approved by the Office of Communications and FSM IT.
- They must not collect, process or link to any system handling credit card payments unless approved by FSM IT and the Office of Communications.

6. Compliance Monitoring

Compliance & Legacy Review

- Sites created in Cascade prior to the current policy will be periodically reviewed.
- Non-compliant sites may require updates, migration, archiving or removal.