Are .gov Domains Coming to Special Districts?

Many districts do not currently use a .gov domain or are unaware that districts are eligible for a .gov domain. However, we are seeing a growing trend of more and more districts establishing their online presence with a .gov. Some states are even enacting legislation - such as AB 1637 in California – which could mandate the use of a .gov by districts.

Impacts of using a .gov website domain

- **Credibility:** A .gov domain is reserved for government agencies and organizations, and having a website with this domain can increase credibility and trustworthiness among visitors.
- **Trust:** Visitors to a .gov website are more likely to trust the information provided, as they know it has been vetted and approved by a government agency.
- **Authority:** A .gov website is considered an authoritative source of information, which can increase the visibility and ranking of the website in search engines.
- **Security:** The .gov domain is managed by the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA), which has strict security protocols to ensure the safety and protection of government information.
- **Accessibility:** Government websites with a .gov domain are required to comply with accessibility guidelines to ensure that all visitors, including those with disabilities, can access the information on the website.

Districts can even use their .gov as the primary email-sending domain, which also has many benefits, like:

- **Improved email deliverability:** Email providers may prioritize emails from .gov domains, which can improve the likelihood of messages being delivered to the intended recipients' inboxes.
- **Enhanced security:** .gov domains may have stricter security protocols in place, such as DMARC policies, which can help prevent email spoofing and phishing attacks.
- **Better branding:** Using a .gov domain can help reinforce the organization's brand and mission, particularly for government entities with a strong reputation.

Setting up a .gov domain can entail some paperwork, but the advantages it offers are numerous and make the process well worth the effort.

Streamline is the only website platform dedicated exclusively to special districts. If we can help your district with anything technology or compliance-related, reach out to us at (916)900-6619 or www.getstreamline.com.

Getting a .gov guide

Setting up a federal .gov domain can be a rigorous process that requires careful planning and attention to detail. It is essential to follow all of the GSA's guidelines and requirements to ensure the domain is set up correctly and maintained properly.

For the purposes of .gov registration, independent special districts are considered "Independent intrastate .gov domains."

The steps involved are:

1. **Verify Eligibility:** The first step is to ensure that the special district meets the eligibility requirements to register for a .gov domain. In the United States, .gov domains are reserved for government entities at the local, state, tribal, or federal level. Most districts we work with have had no issue with eligibility, as long as they provide adequate supporting documentation.

2. **Identify the Primary Contact:** Determine who will be the primary contact responsible for the domain registration process. This individual should have the authority to act on behalf of the district**.**

3. **Pick a domain name:** Independent intrastate domains must include their state two-letter abbreviation in the domain name (i.e., amceCA.gov or AbcFireCA.gov). To check if your desired domain is available, visit the [.gov registrar](#). If you are picking out a new name, we recommend picking something that is memorable and easy to say verbally.

4. **Determine your DNS (Domain Name System) hosting provider:** All DNS records are stored by a DNS hosting provider, most commonly provided by the domain name registrar used to make the purchase. To determine your DNS host, we recommend using [MXToolBox](#) – just type your website URL into the search bar.

5. **Submit an authorization letter:** In order to request a domain name, the GSA requires an "authorization letter" from your authorizing authority. This is generally the highest ranking or highest elected official in the district.
    a. Use the authorization [template](#) for *Independent intrastate .gov domains* to prepare an authorization letter:
        i. Copy the template text into a document editor, then add the names and contact info for the people who will be your domain contacts. The GSA requires an administrative and technical contact, and we recommend adding a security contact.
    b. Have your authorizing authority sign the document on official letterhead, and then send the signed authorization letter (in PDF) to registrar@dotgov.gov.

6. **Submit the online form:** Every contact listed in the authorization letter will receive an account for the .gov registrar website. Each domain contact must log in to establish their account, then any of these contacts can complete the online domain request form at the .gov registrar.

7. **Review and Approval:** The GSA will review the application and supporting materials to ensure compliance with the eligibility criteria. They may also conduct an additional verification or request further information if needed. This typically takes about 20 business days.

8. **Domain Activation:** Once the application is approved, the GSA will assign a .gov domain to the district. They will provide instructions on how to activate and manage the domain, including setting up DNS records.

9. **Domain Management:** The district is responsible for managing its .gov domain after activation. This includes regularly updating the domain's contact information, maintaining accurate records, and adhering to any policies or guidelines set by the GSA.

It's important to note that the registration process and specific requirements may vary slightly depending on the jurisdiction and policies in place. We recommend visiting the GSA Registration website for the most up-to-date and accurate information on registering a .gov domain for a special district in the United States.

.gov FAQ

What about my old domain?

- You can keep it! You will simply redirect all traffic to the new .gov domain. It can even be set up to ensure that old links do not break, including old documents and resources.
  - You will need to make sure that your website developer or web platform will use type-301 redirects. This is a certain type of permanent redirect that will cause Google and other search engines to automatically update your domain to point to your new .gov without losing your existing search engine ranking. All existing links to your site from search engines and social media will just magically update.
    - Streamline automatically serves type-301 redirects when you park a .gov domain, and our experts can help you ensure that you keep all existing links functioning properly. Click here to contact one of our team members.

What about my email?

- Most email providers will offer a way to add additional domains, including, but not limited to Office365 + Microsoft Outlook/Exhange, Google Workspace, Gmail, Rackspace, GoDaddy.
  - Instructions for IT personnel on how to add additional domains in Microsoft Office 365
  - We recommend setting the new .gov domain as the primary sending domain. This has the added benefit of
    - Improved email deliverability: Email providers may prioritize emails from .gov domains, which can enhance the likelihood of messages being delivered to the intended recipients' inboxes.
    - Enhanced security: .gov domains may have stricter security protocols in place, such as DMARC policies, which can help prevent email spoofing and phishing attacks.
    - Better branding: Using a .gov domain can help reinforce the organization's brand and mission, particularly for government entities with a strong reputation.

- To ensure email deliverability, make sure to configure your DMARC records correctly, which may include configuring DKIM or SPF records. Fortunately, this is easy to do in Office365 and Google. Your IT department may need to work with your DNS provider to configure this.
- For customers using Streamline domain concierge, full domain authentication and DMARC configuration services are included for your domain.
- To test your email configuration, check out mxtoolbox.com's DMARC testing tool. It's rather picky, but if you get all green lights in MX Toolbox, it is very unlikely that you will have any issues sending email or ended up in your community's spam folders. Having an authenticated .gov address is one of the best ways to ensure a secure email delivery experience.
- Make sure to add all the services that need to send email on your behalf to the DMARC record, including any support tools or services which do not have their own authentication set up.

Streamline is committed to ensuring districts have the online tools and resources needed to serve their communities. If we can help your district with anything technology or compliance related, reach out to us at (916)900-6619 or www.getstreamline.com.