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### Creating a Unified Brand Identity for United Way Chapters in New York

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**RIT**

**Creating a Unified Brand Identity for United Way Chapters in New York**

By

**Sarah DeJoy**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Master of Science in Communication

School/Department of Communication

College of Liberal Arts

Rochester Institute of Technology

Rochester, NY

May 2024

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## **Abstract**

Consistent and effective web design plays a role in enhancing the online presence and supporting the mission of nonprofit organizations (NPOs), which utilize online spaces to provide information to their constituents and the general public. This study centers on the web presence of United Way, presenting an analysis of the official websites of chapters in New York State. Visual rhetoric was used as the conceptual framework orienting the analysis, considering websites typically include written and visual texts intended to appeal to various audiences. The Brand Standards & Guidelines provided by United Way Worldwide were utilized to identify various website characteristics. The analysis was informed by existing literature regarding web design principles, branding strategies, and the importance of web design consistency. A qualitative coding sheet was developed and utilized to record observations on all the websites, considering aspects such as use of logos and brandmarks, taglines, color, imagery, typography, layout, information hierarchy, and navigation. The findings suggest that many chapters in New York State do not closely follow the guidelines provided by United Way Worldwide, showing evidence of inconsistency in the layout and formatting of the websites. Considering that consistency in web design can help enhance public awareness of United Way branding, therefore supporting the NPOs growth and outreach, a set of practical recommendations for unifying the United Way chapters' websites is presented. Sample designs were developed as part of this project to illustrate these recommendations.

*Keywords:* Nonprofit organizations, brand identity, web design, visual design, visual analysis, visual rhetoric, qualitative methods

## **Creating a Unified Brand Identity for United Way Chapters in New York State**

### **Introduction**

In an increasingly digital world, web presence is vital to the success of nonprofit organizations (NPOs). NPOs are groups organized for a specific purpose on the basis of providing some kind of product/service for no cost (Legal Information Institute, n.d.). The Internet can serve as a powerful tool for NPOs, creating a convenient space for them to connect with their audiences, raise awareness for various causes, and ultimately drive donations and volunteer engagement. This thesis project was born from the premise that consistent and effective web design plays a role in enhancing the online presence and supporting the mission of NPOs like United Way. This study utilizes principles of visual rhetoric and the Brand Standards & Guidelines (2019) provided by United Way Worldwide as a framework for visual analysis. The methodology involves visual analysis of the websites belonging to various New York State chapters of United Way, in addition to an investigation of existing literature regarding web design principles, branding strategies, and the importance of web design consistency. The project will further include recommendations and example mockups of how chapters can utilize the information and design elements that are currently on their websites to create more user-friendly sites that better align with the United Way brand.

Elements such as color, typography, imagery, and overall layout can significantly impact a website's effectiveness, as well as a user's experience on the site. Given that online spaces play a role in contemporary social and economic contexts, NPOs need to establish a presence on the web and also consider aspects such as user experience. In recent years, web design tools have become increasingly accessible, making it more feasible for people with a wide range of skills to create effective and user-friendly websites. Still, many websites may not display evidence of good

design practices. For example, dark text over a dark background will be hard to read, while misaligned images and text boxes cause disruptions to the flow of information, and inconsistent colors may cause confusion among users (Kang & Satterfield, 2010). [Click here to enter text.](#) Consideration of various design factors is necessary to ensure the design of United Way websites accurately reflects the NPO's goals.

The following sections of this thesis project will delve into a comprehensive visual analysis of the websites belonging to various chapters in New York state. By applying principles of visual rhetoric and utilizing the Brand Standards & Guidelines provided by United Way Worldwide, this project will identify areas for improvement and provide recommendations for creating a unified brand identity. Through the provided recommendations in addition to example mockups, this project aims to provide methods for United Way chapters to enhance their online impact and fulfill their mission of serving communities.

### **Background**

United Way is a worldwide NPO with chapters spanning 37 countries and over 1,100 communities, all operating to bring people together to serve others (UWW, n.d.-a). Established in 1887 in Denver, Colorado, United Way was born when a group of individuals recognized a need and decided to work together to make their community a better place to live (UWW, n.d.-b). This movement continued to evolve and expand over the next few decades, leading to the creation of local community chests in the early 1920s. Community chests were collections of funds raised and allocated to local participating NPOs, a precursor for today's United Way (UWM, n.d.). United Way's mission today is to improve upon the communities it works in; it does so by continuously forging new partnerships and collaborating with local organizations to mobilize resources and inspire people to "join the fight against their community's most daunting social crises"



(Guidelines, 2019, p. 6). United Way works to achieve its goals by utilizing these support networks that aid in volunteer efforts, advocacy, public policy engagement, and giving (UWW, n.d.-b).

Some of the work United Way does involves funding local charities, coordinating relief efforts, providing counseling and referrals to partnering agencies, and making emergency assistance grants to clients with special cases (UWW, n.d.-b). United Way also offers a variety of financial and tax assistance programs, such as FamilyWize, 211, and VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance). FamilyWize is a company that has partnered with United Way to provide discounts on prescription medicine (UWNYS, n.d.). 211 is a universal “health and human services information hotline,” which works to connect people with local agencies offering various resources and services, as well as providing disaster/crisis-related resources and information (UWW, n.d.-c; UWW, n.d.-a). Lastly, VITA is a free program where people can get help filing their taxes.

This analysis of United Way websites will allow for a greater understanding of how web design impacts the online presence and effectiveness of NPOs. Furthermore, conducting a visual analysis of United Way websites makes it possible to identify areas of improvement regarding user experience, brand consistency, and the overall effectiveness in conveying the NPO’s mission and impact. This analysis aims to highlight the significance of web design consistency and user experience, as well as provide practical insights for improving the online impact of NPOs like United Way.

## **Literature Review**

### **NPO Challenges in the Digital Age**

Modern technological advances have highlighted the need for NPOs to increase their participation on web-based platforms to reach wider audiences and fulfill their social missions. However, NPOs today face numerous challenges that often get in the way of them fulfilling those

missions, such as limited government backing, increased demand for programs and resources, a lack of technological expertise/motivation, creative fuel, and time from employees (Lee & Bhattacharjee, 2011; Schnieder, 2003). These challenges are further impacted by the competitive landscape in which NPOs operate.

There are over 1.8 million registered NPOs in the United States alone, and these organizations fulfill a range of needs in communities of various sizes (Woodroof et al., 2021). In the current climate, NPOs and other charitable organizations may face challenges that have the potential to impact their ability to secure funding and fulfill their missions. NPOs may compete for volunteers, donors, and patrons to grow and enhance the organization, all while NPO leaders take on entrepreneurial roles to generate surplus revenues and expand the NPO's social impact on their own dime (Larsen et al., 2015; Lee & Bhattacharjee, 2011; Levine & Zahradnik, 2012; Stafford et al., 2012; Walker, 2005).

### **Web Presence for NPOs**

There continues to be a need for NPOs to build on their communications teams to amplify the work they do for the community. A study conducted by Powell et al. (2016) found that there was a clear desire from both audiences and administrators “for websites to take on active roles in the organization, rather than being merely informational” (Powell et al., 2016, pg. 114). These websites should provide an active way for users to interact with the NPO, such as providing a way to make donations online, access to information on upcoming events/drives, digital applications for NPOs seeking funding, and a way to contact the NPO with questions.

Rapid technological change has led to some experts suggesting that internet presence would “transform nonprofit communications and fundraising in profound ways,” yet by now, it is clear that technology needs to be harnessed as a strategic resource to support the NPO's mission

(Krueger et al., 2015; Mansfield, 2014, pg. 3; Nahrkhalaji et al., 2018). A study conducted by Lee & Bhattacharjee (2011) found that NPO leaders were slow to adopt digital marketing trends when they first came about, and until a few years ago, there were still many NPOs that had yet to enter the digital space altogether (Krueger et al., 2015; Kang & Satterfield, 2010).

Lack of a web presence has been detrimental to NPOs in the past, costing them opportunities to connect with certain audiences (Levine & Zahradnik, 2012). There continues to be a need for NPOs to adapt to current digital marketing trends or they could “see lost opportunities as competition advances and evolves with these market opportunities” (Krueger et al., 2015, pg. 1). That said, not all NPOs have been granted the same opportunities due to insufficient budgets, lack of personnel, lack of organizational knowledge, and limited resources. As a result, many NPOs developed a “do more with less” mindset (Levine & Zahradnik, 2012). Poor content creation was found to have a further impact on an NPOs chance to connect with and engage its audience, receive funding, and recruit volunteers (Powell et al., 2016, pg. 107). Though outdated at this point, numerous studies have highlighted ways in which NPOs can enhance their social missions by utilizing the web, such as branding (Bryson, 2004; Hackler & Saxton, 2007; Lee & Bhattacharjee, 2011; Saxton & Guo, 2009).

Branding is crucial to the success of any NPO. *Branding* refers to the consistent application of a predetermined look, feel, and voice chosen to represent the brand (Kang & Satterfield, 2010; Larsen et al., 2015). A good brand should be unique, authentic, and consistent while also aligning its image with its values (Farwell & Garecht, 2014; Kylander & Stone, 2012; Larsen et al., 2015; Kang & Satterfield, 2010). Strong brands get greater recognition than weak ones, which overall means greater brand exposure. Greater exposure can lead to greater access to resources and funding. Furthermore, a strong brand can aid NPOs in attracting new partnerships and

opportunities, donor support, talent, and increased engagement, and further helps an NPO appear more credible (Krueger et al., 2015; Kylander & Stone, 2012).

Branding is responsible for building psychological associations in the minds of those interacting with the brand by employing design elements, such as colors, imagery, and typography, that are not just visually appealing but also recognizable and representative of the brand's character (Haig and Harper, 1997; Kylander & Stone, 2012; Larsen et al., 2015; Kang & Satterfield, 2010). Proper branding for NPOs teaches people what the NPO does, who they are designed to help, and why they should support the cause (Kotler & Keller, 2005; Larsen et al., 2015; Mirzaei et al., 2021). It is vital for NPOs to maintain their identity through strong and consistent visual communications online to provide web users with a feeling of unity and trust (Hankinson, 2000; Kang & Satterfield, 2010; Khrouf et al., 2023; Kylander & Stone, 2012; Larsen et al., 2015; Mirzaei et al., 2021).

### **Visual Design on the Web**

The visual design of a website is one of the first things a user notices upon arrival and has the power to determine how long the user stays on the site and whether or not that user decides to revisit the site (Kang & Satterfield, 2010; Weirauch, 2022). Websites that are incongruent, poorly designed, and difficult to navigate will not encourage users to continue on the site, often resulting in a high “bounce rate” — created when people enter a website and then quickly exit the site, an increase in suspicion, and a decrease in trust (Garett et al., 2016; Kang et al., 2010; Krouf et al. 2023). Incongruence may further suggest that a chapter may be attempting to distance itself from the organization it represents. On the other hand, “a regularly updated webpage may indicate an organization that seeks to be alive online” (Powell et al. 2016, pg. 117) and can further indicate the kind of work done by the NPO offline.

Numerous studies have been conducted to determine the most important visual design elements on the web. Dozens of factors have been identified regarding web success, the most commonly mentioned being usability, information hierarchy, logos/brandmarks, typography, grid structures, imagery, graphic style, navigation, security, simplicity, information quality, visual appearance, accessibility, readability, consistency/reliability and color among several other features deemed irrelevant to this study (Flavian, 2009; Garrett et al., 2016; Kang & Satterfield, 2010; Kimball, 2013; Norman, 2004; Park & Gretzel, 2007; Kang & Satterfield, 2010). Relevant design elements are key factors that contribute to a brand's web strategy and can influence a user's experience (Kang & Satterfield, 2010).

### **Literature Review Pt. 2: Framework of Analysis**

This study employs the Brand Standards & Guidelines (2019) provided by United Way Worldwide for use by United Way employees (Appendix 1). These guidelines include brand standards and best practices for essential design elements. The visual design factors identified in the guidelines include the strategic use of logos/brandmarks, taglines, color, imagery, typography, layout, information hierarchy, and navigation. Design elements “need to be organized in a unified system to maintain website identity. The system has to be strict enough to maintain visual consistency and flexible enough to manage the web's dynamic characteristics” (Kang & Satterfield, 2010, p. 4). This project applies principles of visual rhetoric to NPO web design as a framework for maintaining a unified and user-friendly brand identity for New York State chapters of United Way.

Visual rhetoric refers to the analysis of patterns that show “the communicative and persuasive power of visual artifacts” (Reyes García, 2021, para. 1; Tseronis, 2021); researchers in this field tend to search for patterns among visual artifacts, which can be assigned different

meanings based on research. Visual rhetoric was used as the conceptual framework guiding this project analysis because it provides principles for analyzing how the various New York State chapters of United Way orient their websites to appeal to Ethos (appeal to credibility and moral standards), Logos (appeal to logic and reason), and Pathos (appeal to emotions). In the case of web design, Ethos is established through consistent and effective use of design elements that align with brand standards, such as logos and a consistent layout across the website. Logos is established through the implementation of logical, functional, and easy-to-interpret content, information hierarchy, and navigation. Pathos is established through the use of imagery as a way to evoke desired emotions and page layout, which, when designed well, can help create an aesthetically pleasing website and user-friendly experience (Pflaeging and Stöckl, 2021).

By employing principles of visual rhetoric in web design, NPOs like United Way can effectively communicate their goals and values, inspire action among web users, and create meaningful relationships with their online audience. Visual rhetoric will play a role in analyzing how the chapters observed in this study can use design elements to engage their audiences better. However, the following proposed framework for visual analysis is based mainly on the design elements deemed most important by the United Way Guidelines (2019), which will instruct the observations made in this study to ensure the resulting recommendations and project align with the United Way brand standards.

### **Logos/Brandmarks**

A logo consists of symbols and text that represent a brand, while a brandmark is often a single component from the logo that does not include text. Haig & Harper (1997, p. 1) classify logos as a rudimentary element of branding (Kang & Satterfield, 2010). A well-designed logo should include elements that are representative of what the NPO does. The more visually

descriptive the logo, the easier it will be for people to recognize and interpret (Daw & Cone, 2010). For example, an NPO that builds houses might have a landmark depicting a person building a house, while a food pantry could use imagery of fruits and vegetables to decorate its logo. Daw & Cone (2010) emphasize the importance of color as part of a logo due to its ability to express meaning and evoke emotions while also suggesting the importance of having a non-color version of the logo that can be used where a color logo would not be appropriate.

Logos are also known as site identifiers and play a role in navigation. Their consistent placement in the top left corner or center of a website lets users know they are still on the same website despite having navigated to a different page. “Flexibility in the design allows users to identify different web pages within the same website.” At the same time, “a consistent layout and visual style will give users a unified feeling” (Kang & Satterfield, 2010, p. 4). The guidelines provide further insight into specific usage of the United Way logos and landmarks.

There have been several evolutions of the United Way logo throughout the NPO’s history. Elements of the current logo were introduced in 1972, including “the rainbow of hope, the hand of support, and the person as a symbol of humanity” (1000logos.net, 2023; Guidelines, 2019, p. 15). The guidelines clearly communicate the rules regarding logo/landmark usage. It details proper measurements for the logo, the white border surrounding the logo, as well as spacing between logos and other content, color-optimized logos for different mediums — CMYK for print and RGB for web — and several one-color versions of the logo that should only be used when the color logo is unavailable. However, the guidelines do specify that the one-color logos should never be used on United Way websites.

Moreover, logos should always appear as they do in the guidelines. The addition of other graphic elements, changing the color of the logo, or extracting the logo’s individual elements is a

violation of the United Way brand standards; the rainbow, hand, and person must always appear together. However, the circle and square brandmark can be used exclusively for social media profiles. Finally, the brandmark should always include the registered trademark symbol (®) to protect the NPO's legal rights. NPO websites that display inconsistent and incorrectly applied logos could potentially lead web users to believe that it is a fake website set up by scammers to look like a real NPO website to trick people into donating to the NPO (Wash, 2020; Norris & Brookes, 2021)

### **Taglines**

Taglines are essential to NPOs because they can give users an idea of what the NPO offers (Nielsen & Tahir, 2001). It is common and encouraged for an NPO to align itself with its brand using correct logos, as well as appropriate imagery and graphics. However, it is just as common for the same NPOs to neglect to include any description of who they are or what they do. A strong tagline can give new users an idea of who the NPO is and what kind of work they do, especially when the NPO's name and logo do not provide clues as to the work it does (Daw & Cone, 2010; Lynch & Horton, 2009; Warwick, 1998). Taglines are often mistaken for mission statements. A mission statement describes how the NPO plans to achieve its vision by clearly stating its objectives, while a tagline is a short statement describing what the NPO does/who it fights for in only a few words (Guidelines, 2019).

The Brand Standards & Guidelines (2019, p. 35) section on taglines only references the phrase "LIVE UNITED," which is no longer a required element of the United Way logo but remains to be used as a rallying cry. The phrase must be written in all caps for chapters that choose to continue to use the LIVE UNITED tagline. However, the guidelines contain other suggestions that can be applied to the development of new taglines that are subjective to each chapter's



personal goals. For example, “the letter “U” in the word “United” should be capitalized when used in any written context, other than a proper noun (e.g., “United States”) or as part of ‘LIVE UNITED’” (p. 13).

## **Color**

The strategic use of color can be used to convey meaning and evoke emotions while also helping to differentiate brands from one another, represent the kind of work they do, and ultimately influence brand perception (Cogan, 2001; Hoffman, 1986; Huang, 1998; Krouf et al., 2023; Singh, 2006; Yu et al., 2020). When congruent with branding, color has been found to have a strong influence on users’ trust in a brand, as well as the users’ perception of the website’s architecture and navigation (Kareklas et al., 2019; Khrouf et al., 2023; Sasidharan, 2010). Moreover, a study conducted by Purplebox (2016) found that 85% of web users identified color as the most influential element in the decision to purchase or, in this case, make a donation.

A study conducted by Khattak et al. (2021) found that using warm colors in emotional appeals, such as red, yellow, and orange, arouses positive emotions, including happiness, excitement, and cheer, more so than cooler colors, like blue and purple, which could explain United Ways choice in color scheme. However, the effects of color are not universal, and cultural, social, and personal factors can also influence the interpretation of color. Therefore, it is essential for marketers to understand the meaning and context of colors in different cultures and societies and tailor their strategies accordingly.

The Brand Standards & Guidelines (2019) explain that the primary United Way color palette comprises the colors that make up the United Way logo. This color palette includes several colors, reserving blue and white as the primary colors and red, yellow, and light blue as accent colors. The guidelines also include web-accessible versions of these colors to support persons with

disabilities or impairments, in addition to a color palette consisting of several shades of gray, which are intended to be used to support the primary color palette but should be used sparingly. The United Way Brand Standards & Guidelines (2019, p. 38) clearly state that:

*It is important that United Way local member organizations maintain a consistent appearance of the landmark and all visual communications across various media types and materials. Using colors consistently in all communications will strengthen brand recognition, create impact, and differentiate our programs.*

### **Imagery**

Photography/imagery is an essential element of web design because it appeals to human emotions and enhances brand image (Norman, 2004; Kang & Satterfield, 2010). It is common for donation-based organizations to have imagery of smiling faces to help convey a warm and friendly demeanor. Imagery containing people can also represent the demographics the NPO wishes to reach (Powell et al., 2016). While graphic design elements can help display important information or make a webpage look more appealing, Nielsen and Tahir (2001) suggest using real imagery over graphic images for decoration, though the two work better in combination.

Imagery serves the important purpose of eliciting emotional responses from viewers (Huang, 1998). Imagery can undoubtedly tell a story and, when used alongside information, can serve to enhance a written story. A study conducted by Aaker, Stayman, and Vezina (1988) found that there exists a “hierarchical relation among feelings and emotions precipitated by advertising,” meaning that appealing to more favorable emotions over others will likely result in more favorable results (Huang, 1998, p. 27). More favorable emotions include happiness, pride, gratitude, inspiration, nostalgia, etc.; in the case of NPOs, imagery of smiling people and volunteers will help to evoke these emotions among web users. On the other hand, negative

emotions could include shame or fear. The guilt appeal, seen in commercials that show sad, unadopted dogs, is one of the most employed methods in NPO marketing (Chang, 2011). NPOs who do not take advantage of the power of imagery are potentially missing out on opportunities to get their audiences' attention.

One benefit of modern technology, such as the Internet, is that it allows web designers to upload high-quality colored images with ease that can be accessed by people worldwide (Kang & Satterfield, 2010). The downside is that certain image qualities, such as brightness and saturation, can vary depending on the program used to upload and edit the images (Khrouf & Frikha, 2016; Khrouf et al., 2023). Images can further be used to enhance navigation features, such as how a logo/brandmark could double as a button to send the user back to the home page.

The Brand Standards & Guidelines (2019, p. 44) suggest that imagery should be “journalistic and authentic” and play a role in communicating the stories and challenges communities face. United Way “Fight” imagery includes showcasing images in black and white that might be difficult to look at but should invoke emotion to spark change and action. United Way “Win” imagery should be bright in combination with imagery that depicts moments of impact and the faces of those involved. Imagery should also be clear and easy to read if it contains text.

## **Typography**

“Typography is the balance and interplay of letterforms on the page,” an essential aspect of visual and verbal communication (Lynch & Horton, 2009, p. 205). Typography has long served as an important aspect of brand identity, as it can help create associations in people's minds that distinguish brands from one another (Lelis et al., 2022). Furthermore, strategic use of typography can aid in readability and legibility; this aspect of typography applies to both web and print materials. Choice of typeface, font, size, and capitalization, as well as the color of the text

displayed, have a significant impact on a user's ability to understand the page content. For example, choosing a font color too close to the background color can result in insufficient contrast, making it difficult to read (Lynch & Horton, 2009). Furthermore, the typeface's size and color can support the information hierarchy, such as how headlines are typically presented in a larger size and different font and color than the subheading and body copy. Without these features, users may get confused regarding the importance of information (Kang & Satterfield, 2010).

The strategic use of typography also includes the implementation of margins, white space, justification, formatting, grid systems, and text alignment. If misused, these elements could make a website appear chaotic and mismanaged. A website containing excessive negative white space, multiple text alignment settings, and unnecessary capitalization will result in a decrease in users revisiting the site. An NPO's manual/guidelines need to detail the specific rules regarding all aspects of typography to maintain consistency and visual appearance (Kang & Lee, 2003; Lynch & Horton, 2009; Kang & Satterfield, 2010).

The guidelines detail the standardized typefaces selected to satisfy a consistent brand identity, including League Gothic, Roboto, and Roboto Condensed, allowing weight alteration. League Gothic typeface is the designated headline font, though Roboto Bold is an acceptable substitute for smaller headlines and subheadings. Headlines written in League Gothic typeface should be displayed in all caps. The body copy should use Roboto Regular typeface. However, if League Gothic and Roboto typefaces are unavailable, Impact is an appropriate substitute for League Gothic, while Arial is acceptable as a replacement for subheadings and body copy. The Brand Standards & Guidelines (2019, p. 40) explain that:

*Each of the fonts have been selected for their visual compatibility with the United Way brandmark, and for their ability to convey a personality that is consistent with the brand.*

## **Layout**

Layout refers to the overall visual appearance of a website; more specifically, it refers to how graphic elements are arranged on a two-dimensional page (Pflaeging and Stöckl, 2021). A website's layout comprises several factors, including information hierarchy, navigation, usability, menu categorization, headers, footers, logos, icons, etc. (Garett et al., 2016; Kang & Satterfield, 2010). A team of employees should plan the layout of each webpage before creating a physical website to ensure the design is consistent with brand standards across all pages. The visual appearance of a website, alongside the strategic use of imagery, can impact user perceptions of the NPO, such as whether the NPO appears legitimate and trustworthy (Kang & Satterfield, 2010). It is important to note that overusing design elements can have a negative effect. Crowded web pages will cause confusion among users who are not sure where to look. Further, "elements that are close to each other are perceived as more related than elements that lie farther apart" (Lynch & Horton, 2009, p. 180), which is why it is important to leave an appropriate amount of space between elements and "put the most important information at the beginning of the page" (p. 174); this is known as information architecture.

The Brand Standards & Guidelines (2019) include four examples of acceptable home page layouts that should include a logo as a site identifier at the top of the page, preferably a localized horizontal logo, though a localized vertical logo may also be acceptable. The layout should also include the primary fight message located front and center, a [fixed] donate button to encourage donating at any point during the site visit, and clear and simple navigation, which is "the key to a

user-friendly experience that encourages extended site interaction” (p. 48). The layout should also be mobile-responsive if possible, meaning the website should appear visually unified while displayed on both web and mobile devices.

### **Information Hierarchy**

Information hierarchy, also known as website hierarchy, is fundamental for designing an effective website. Due to subjective interpretation of the various aspects it can represent, the term information hierarchy lacks a universal definition. However, it can be used in this case to refer to the strategic organization of information and design elements, such as headings, font size, color, used to denote certain information as being more important than others. Making the dominant information visually apparent, such as placing the most important information at the top of the website, is evident so as not to confuse users (Djonov, 2007; Kang & Satterfield, 2010). The order in which information is presented will affect the user’s understanding of the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the NPO (Powell et al., 2016). Users should also be able to easily understand how to navigate a website from its layout and information hierarchy, as well as how the website is programmed to respond (Winn & Beck, 2002; Kang & Satterfield, 2010).

The guidelines suggest an information hierarchy that prioritizes what the NPO is fighting for, which may vary from chapter to chapter; this section could also include statistics to support the case. The next section of the website should include a short description explaining what the NPO is doing to solve the problem they are fighting for; supporting statistics could also be included in this section if relevant. The final section of body content should include success stories from NPOs and community members. The website should contain call to action (CTA) buttons that communicate a clear and straightforward desired action and are emphasized through color. Examples of CTAs include DONATE, LEARN MORE, and CLICK HERE.

## **Navigation**

Navigation consists of functional design elements that contribute to the site's overall usability. Garrett et al. (2016, p.4) defined navigation as the “presence of salient and consistent menu/navigation bars, aids for navigation (e.g., visible links), search features, and easy access to pages.” Most navigation features are found in a website's header and footer. Smaller chapters of an NPO may have fewer drop-down menus since they may not be able to perform as many activities as larger chapters. “The site's organization chart, often found toward the bottom of the home page, provides a listing of links to pages within the organization's website” (Powell et al., 2016, p. 112).

The guidelines provide layout rules that specifically apply to a website's header and footer. The header should include the logo/brandmark in the top left-hand corner, displaying either the “localized horizontal right logo” or the “localized vertical logo” (Guidelines, 2019, p. 53). The header should contain the most important categories including, but not limited to, Our Impact/Our Work, Get Involved, About, News, Donate, and Search. Meanwhile, the website's footer should contain links to “things that are important but not crucial to a user's experience on the website,” including, but not limited to, Our History, Our Mission, Leadership, Social Media, Public Reporting, and FAQs (p. 53).

## **Research Questions**

The overarching research question for this project is: How do the various New York State chapters of United Way align themselves with the United Way brand through the visual design elements present on their websites?

In connection to that larger question, the following specific research questions were formulated:

RQ1: How do the various New York State chapters of United Way adhere to the Brand Standards & Guidelines regarding logos/brandmarks?

RQ2: How do the various New York State chapters of United Way adhere to the Brand Standards & Guidelines regarding taglines?

RQ3: How do the various New York State chapters of United Way adhere to the Brand Standards & Guidelines regarding color?

RQ4: How do the various New York State chapters of United Way adhere to the Brand Standards & Guidelines regarding imagery?

RQ5: How do the various New York State chapters of United Way adhere to the Brand Standards & Guidelines regarding typography?

RQ6: How do the various New York State chapters of United Way adhere to the Brand Standards & Guidelines regarding layout?

RQ7: How do the various New York State chapters of United Way adhere to the Brand Standards & Guidelines regarding information hierarchy?

RQ8: How do the various New York State chapters of United Way adhere to the Brand Standards & Guidelines regarding navigation?

### **Methodology**

This thesis project focuses on the crucial role of consistent and effective web design in enhancing the online impact of NPOs like United Way. Utilizing United Way's Brand Standards & Guidelines (2019) as a framework for visual analysis, the study conducts a qualitative visual analysis on the websites of various New York State chapters of United Way. I chose to analyze the United Way chapters specifically from New York State, because it is the state that I am most familiar with: I worked for a chapter of the United Way in the past and I am a resident of New



York State, so my experiences as a community member and an employee inform my analysis. New York State is also a place in which many NPOs play a crucial role serving underprivileged communities, as it is one of the states in which there is steep economic inequality (Gowder, 2024). By analyzing visual design elements such as color, typography, imagery, and layout, this study highlights the importance of web design consistency in driving donations, volunteer engagement, and overall organizational success in an increasingly digital world.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This study was conducted using visual rhetoric to analyze and explore the design elements that play a significant role in web branding for all the New York state chapters of United Way. This visual analysis examines the websites with regard to specific design elements, utilizing a rhetorical perspective that takes into account that NPO websites are designed to attract multiple audiences, such as donors, stakeholders, volunteers, and community members. Communication should appeal to three key elements: Ethos (credibility and moral standards), Logos (logic and reason), and Pathos (emotions) (Kjeldsen, 1999; Lefsrud et al., 2015; Pflaeging and Stöckl, 2021). In the context of this study, Ethos can be considered as referring to the credibility and reputation of the NPO and whether or not it is able to establish a trusting relationship with its audience. Logos may refer to the NPOs ability to present its message and supporting materials in a logical, clear, and reasonable way that makes sense to the audience. Pathos may refer to the NPOs ability to evoke emotions in an effort to create a more meaningful connection with its audience, such as how use of imagery depicting community members engaging in actions that may evoke feelings of empathy, happiness, or pity. A well-designed website that addresses these key elements will have a better chance of engaging its audience and developing trusting relationships, which, in turn, will help the NPO advance further in its field. Alternatively, a poorly designed website can make an

NPO appear less respectable and lack credibility, leading to decreased audience engagement and funding for the NPO.

**Data Collection**

This study specifically centers on the websites of 34 United Way chapters located in New York State, which were accessed between December 2023 and March 2024. Visual observations of each chapter’s website were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet that considered all the visual elements listed in the framework of analysis explained above. The aspects that were observed and analyzed were identified based on the United Way brand guidelines documents and a review of previous studies discussing elements of effective website design. A completed list of the United Way chapter names, locations, and their URLs can be found in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: New York State chapters of United Way, locations, and URLs**

Chapter	Location	Web URL
Allegany County United Way	Wellsville	N/A
United Way of Schuyler County	Watkins Glen	<a href="https://www.unitedwayschuyler.org/">https://www.unitedwayschuyler.org/</a>
Tioga United Way	Owego	<a href="https://tiogaunitedway.com/">https://tiogaunitedway.com/</a>
Tri-County United Way	Glens Falls	<a href="https://www.tricountyunitedway.org/">https://www.tricountyunitedway.org/</a>
United Way for Cortland County	Cortland	<a href="https://www.cortlandunitedway.org/">https://www.cortlandunitedway.org/</a>
United Way of Broome County	Binghamton	<a href="https://www.uwbroome.org/">https://www.uwbroome.org/</a>
United Way of Buffalo & Erie County	Buffalo	<a href="https://www.uwbec.org/">https://www.uwbec.org/</a>
United Way of Cattaraugus County	Olean	N/A
United Way of Cayuga County	Auburn	<a href="https://www.unitedwayofcayugacounty.org/">https://www.unitedwayofcayugacounty.org/</a>
United Way of Central New York	Syracuse	<a href="https://unitedway-cny.org/">https://unitedway-cny.org/</a>
United Way of Fulton County	Gloversville	<a href="https://www.uwfultoncounty.org/">https://www.uwfultoncounty.org/</a>

BRAND IDENTITY FOR UNITED WAY

United Way of Greater Niagara	Sanborn	<a href="https://uwgn.org/">https://uwgn.org/</a>
United Way of Greater Oswego County	Fulton	<a href="https://oswegounitedway.org/">https://oswegounitedway.org/</a>
United Way of Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes	Rochester	<a href="https://unitedwayroclx.org/">https://unitedwayroclx.org/</a>
United Way of Long Island	Deer Park	<a href="https://www.unitedwayli.org/">https://www.unitedwayli.org/</a>
United Way of Mid Rural New York	Norwich	<a href="https://www.uwmrny.org/">https://www.uwmrny.org/</a>
United Way of New York City	New York	<a href="https://unitedwaynyc.org/">https://unitedwaynyc.org/</a>
United Way of New York State	Latham	<a href="https://uwnys.org/">https://uwnys.org/</a>
United Way of North Yates County	Penn Yan	N/A
United Way of Northern Chautauqua County	Dunkirk	<a href="https://unitedwayncc.org/">https://unitedwayncc.org/</a>
United Way of Northern New York	Watertown	<a href="https://www.unitedway-nny.org/">https://www.unitedway-nny.org/</a>
United Way of Orleans County	Medina	<a href="https://orleansunitedway.org/">https://orleansunitedway.org/</a>
United Way of Rockland County	Nyack	<a href="https://www.uwrc.org/">https://www.uwrc.org/</a>
United Way of Seneca County	Seneca Falls	<a href="https://www.uwseneca.org">https://www.uwseneca.org</a>
Sidney United Way	Sidney	<a href="http://sidneyunitedway.org/">http://sidneyunitedway.org/</a>
United Way of Southern Chautauqua	Jamestown	<a href="https://www.uwayscc.org/">https://www.uwayscc.org/</a>
United Way of Sullivan County	Monticello	<a href="https://unitedwaysullivancounty.org/">https://unitedwaysullivancounty.org/</a>
United Way of the Adirondack Region	Plattsburgh	<a href="https://www.unitedwayadk.org/">https://www.unitedwayadk.org/</a>
United Way of the Dutchess-Orange Region	Poughkeepsie	<a href="https://www.uwdor.org/">https://www.uwdor.org/</a>
United Way of the Greater Capital Region	Albany	<a href="https://www.unitedwaygcr.org/">https://www.unitedwaygcr.org/</a>
United Way of Mohawk Valley	Utica	<a href="https://www.unitedwaymv.org/">https://www.unitedwaymv.org/</a>
United Way of the Southern Tier	Corning	<a href="https://www.uwst.org/">https://www.uwst.org/</a>
United Way of Tompkins County	Ithaca	<a href="https://www.uwtc.org/">https://www.uwtc.org/</a>
United Way of Ulster County	Kingston	<a href="https://www.ulsterunitedway.org/">https://www.ulsterunitedway.org/</a>
United Way of Westchester and Putnam	White Plains	<a href="https://www.uwwp.org/">https://www.uwwp.org/</a>

BRAND IDENTITY FOR UNITED WAY

United Way of Cattaraugus & Allegany Counties	Olean	<a href="https://www.uwcac.org/">https://www.uwcac.org/</a>
United Way Worldwide	Alexandria, VA	<a href="https://www.unitedway.org">https://www.unitedway.org</a>

Links to all websites were copied into separate rows of an Excel spreadsheet, which included columns containing relevant information related to each chapter, such as the division name and location (county). The spreadsheet also included eight additional columns, each containing a different visual design element to analyze. The design elements included logos, colors, imagery, typography, layout, information hierarchy, and navigation. The Excel spreadsheet also includes columns that contain screenshots of the logos/brandmarks used on each website and a web capture of each chapter’s home page. Figure 2 shows the layout of the Excel spreadsheet prior to observations.

**Figure 2: Excel spreadsheet used to collect observations**

Division	Location	URL	Logos	Tagline	Colors	Imagery	Typography	Layout	Information Hierarchy	Navigation	Logo Image	Web Capture
United Way of Schuyler County												
Tioga United Way												
Tri-county United Way												
United Way for Cortland County												
United Way of Broome County												
United Way of Buffalo & Erie County												
United Way of Cattaraugus & Allegany Counties												
United Way of Cayuga County												
United Way of Central New York												
United Way of Fulton County												
United Way of Greater Niagara												
United Way of Greater Oswego County												
United Way of Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes												
United Way of Long Island												
United Way of Mid Rural New York												
United Way of New York City												
United Way of New York State												
United Way of North Yates County												
United Way of Northern Chautauqua County												
United Way of Northern New York												
United Way of Orleans County												
United Way of Rockland County												
United Way of Seneca County												
Sidney United Way												
United Way of Southern Chautauqua County												
United Way of Sullivan County												
United Way of the Adirondack Region												
United Way of the Dutchess-Orange Region												
United Way of the Greater Capital Region												
United Way of the Mohawk Valley												
United Way of the Southern Tier												
United Way of Tompkins County												
United Way of Ulster County												
United Way of Westchester and Putnam												

Each chapter's website was observed multiple times to ensure that the collected data was accurate and reflected the most up-to-date version of each website at the time this study was conducted. Utilizing previous knowledge from literature in combination with the United Way Brand Standards & Guidelines (2019), I was able to interpret the collected data and group observations together by identifying commonalities between various chapters.

### **Data-Informed Recommendations**

Based on the analysis of the websites, a set of recommendations was drafted with the intention of supporting the web presence of United Way chapters in New York State. This project includes a set of web page mockups designed in Adobe Illustrator to provide examples of how United Way chapters in New York state can recycle information currently presented on their websites, while simultaneously altering the appearance of the web design to represent a more visually unified and appealing brand.

United Way for Cortland County was chosen as the chapter to receive a website makeover. Though other chapters may appear less visually representative of United Way, this specific chapter consists of the largest number of visual issues among all the chapters analyzed in this study. This project consists of five mockups of web pages belonging to United Way for Cortland County, including redesigned pages for the general home page, About Us, Our Mission, FamilyWize, Volunteer, and Contact. These specific pages were redesigned based on the information currently available on United Way for Cortland County's website, with minimal information from the guidelines used to enhance what is already there; these pages were redesigned as a result of the findings from this study.

## **Findings and Analysis**

### **Introduction of Key Findings**

The results of this study detail several issues found within each design element. Regarding the use of logos and brandmarks on United Way websites, the key findings describe issues such as logo quality stifled by screen capturing, uneven spacing/alignment between brandmarks and local identifiers, color consistency/inconsistency, color variation, improper use of one-color logos, altered logo violations, and trademark symbols or a lack thereof. The next section details findings concerning the interchangeable use of taglines and mission statements, taglines considered to be on-brand vs. not, chapters using excessive taglines or lacking taglines altogether, and the creation of taglines specific to a particular chapter's goals. Following the findings on taglines is a section outlining key findings related to color use, including an incorrect shade of purple, multiple shades of colors inconsistent with United Way brand standards, use of color to represent information hierarchy, and websites using limited colors from the United Way color palette. The findings portion dedicated to imagery lists the image styles most commonly found across all of the chapters observed in this study. This section also discusses the difference between "Fight" and "Win" imagery, in addition to several image-related issues, including heavy use of stock photos, websites lacking imagery, blurry images, and imagery that is questionable regarding its execution.

The last few sections discuss the key findings on layout, information hierarchy, and navigation. These design elements consist of layovers in what they specifically address. However, I chose to analyze them separately for the purpose of keeping the study clear while maintaining a descriptive nature. The section of findings discussing website layout addresses notable issues, including using pop-up techniques, perspective issues such as pages appearing zoomed in, having elements cut off or elements displayed unevenly, unusual and unexplainable features that are the

result of design errors, and home pages that are either too busy or underdeveloped. The findings on information hierarchy revealed several concerns regarding the presence and placement of donation buttons, use and phrasing of opening statements, or other statements used in its place, imagery/graphics used in a website's central image carousel, inclusion of statistics, listing of programs and services, utilization of video content, and links to newsletter subscription features and news/stories. The final section refers mainly to issues regarding navigation features found in the headers and footers on many chapters' websites, including tricky pull-down menus, excessively complex menus, menu options that reload the current page or direct users to blank/unrelated pages, site identifiers that do not link back to the home page, missing contact information, and the inclusion and placement of social media links.

### **Logos/Brandmarks (RQ1)**

A logo is a combination of symbols and text that represents a brand, designed to visually communicate what the organization does. Though many of the chapters observed in this study used appropriate logos, it is visually apparent from uneven or nonexistent borders that the logos used on several websites are the result of screen capture images that were cropped and used in place of an actual brandmark file. For example, the site identifier for United Way for Cortland County's website has the top edge of the border cut off (Appendix B); this does not affect its appearance on the page as the border blends in with the white background; however, this is not always the case. The site identifier for United Way of New York State has all of its borders cut off with the logo over a blue background, which is different from the shade of blue in the logo (Appendix C). Cutting off the borders makes the logos challenging to read because the words are lined up right along the edge of the logo. Further, several of the logos have improper spacing between the brandmark and the local identifier, some offering too much space, making the elements feel disconnected, and

others offering very little space, making the logo appear cluttered. For example, United Way of Orleans County and United Way of Rockland County both use improperly spaced horizontal logos as their site identifiers. However, United Way of Orleans County's logo has very little space between the brandmark and the local identifier, while United Way of Rockland County's logo has too much space between the brandmark and the local identifier (Appendix D & E). Appropriate spacing is recommended to ensure that the brandmark and local identifier are both clearly defined, but still close enough in proximity that the elements will be perceived as two parts of a whole.

More than half of the websites observed in this study use RGB (Red, Green, Blue) and CMYK (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, Black) logos interchangeably, which is not up to brand standards. RGB is a color mode explicitly designed for digital communication purposes, while CMYK is a color mode designed for reproducing colors through print, but they look different side by side. Commercial printers do not always have the correct inks to replicate the desired RGB color, so CMYK versions are created to be easily reproduced while appearing visually consistent across all print media. Many of the websites use CMYK logos where they should be using RGB logos, distorting color consistency on the page. For example, both RGB and CMYK versions of the logo can be observed on United Way of Southern Chautauqua's website, which uses the proper RGB logo in the top left corner as its site identifier. However, there also appears to be a CMYK version of the logo right below the RGB logo in one of the main carousel images on the website's home page, which appears inconsistent.

Another commonly observed issue with the colored logos is the mysterious existence of a purple version of the United Way logo. Certain specific colors were carefully chosen to represent the United Way brand, and yet several chapters, such as United Way of Fulton County and United Way of Ulster County, are using logos that appear questionably purple-tinted (Appendix F &



G). Since several chapters use the same purple logo, it may be an outdated version of the logo used prior to modern web applications such as Chrome, Firefox, and Microsoft Edge, but this is not confirmed.

One-color logos were used on a few chapters' websites as the site identifier despite these logos only being designed for use in print applications. For example, United Way of Broome County uses a white one-color logo, as well as two different shades of blue one-color logos (Appendix H). Meanwhile, United Way of Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes uses a black one-color logo that can be seen on its website, which is linked in Figure 1. The use of these logos on the web takes away from the United Way color scheme and diminishes brand identity. One-color logos used on the web need to be replaced with full-color logos to ensure the brand is fully and accurately represented whenever possible.

Altered logos do not seem to be the biggest issue among New York state chapters of United Way other than the occasional logo with an altered typeface for the local identifier, such as those belonging to United Way of Greater Oswego County and Sidney United Way (Appendix I & J). However, United Way for Cortland County did decide to create a custom logo for its campaign that contains an incorrect shade of light blue, an altered font for the local identifier as well as additional graphic elements. This logo further does not contain a registered trademark symbol, which represents a departure from the United Way brand standards (Appendix B).

It is apparent that multiple chapters actively have logos displayed on their sites that lack a trademark symbol, including United Way for Cortland County and Tioga United Way, which can be assumed to have lost their trademark symbols when the backgrounds of the images were altered (Appendix B & K). Further, nearly a third of the chapters use logos with the incorrect trademark symbol, displaying <sup>TM</sup> rather than ®, as the guidelines indicate in bright red font; an example of

this can be observed in the site identifier belonging to United Way of New York State found in Appendix C.

### **Taglines (RQ2)**

Several of the websites observed in this study use mission statements and other promotional materials in place of a tagline. A tagline is a brief, memorable statement that describes what an organization does and/or who it serves. For example, United Way of Central New York uses the tagline “United, We Do More.”, which incorporates the word “United” and tells people that the NPO works to bring people together to perform tasks. Mission statements, on the other hand, are meant to inform users about the NPO’s goals and how they plan to achieve them. For example, United Way of the Adirondack Region put its mission statement front and center on its home page. United Way of New York City’s home page also does not have a tagline but instead has an image carousel showing various events and programs offered by the chapter. Links to both of these sites can be found in Figure 1.

Though roughly a third of the sites lacked a tagline, most of the chapters that did have a tagline feature one that is on brand for United Way. On-brand taglines for United Way consist of specific language, typically including either the word “United” or the phrase “LIVE UNITED” as part of a larger statement. Nearly every chapter that used an on-brand tagline also used the correct capitalization of these phrases. However, Tioga United Way uses its community impact statement, where one would typically include a tagline. In this statement, the chapter used incorrect capitalization of “LIVE UNITED,” which must always be fully capitalized. Instead, the phrase was written with only the first letter of each word capitalized (Appendix K). While this may not seem like a significant issue, the “LIVE UNITED” phrase is meant to act as “both a messaging component and a visual piece” (Guidelines, 2019, p. 35). Not capitalizing the complete phrase

takes away the visual aspect. In contrast to those websites that lacked a tagline, United Way of Greater Oswego County had at least four different taglines on its home page, which made the website appear busy (Appendix I).

A few websites feature personalized taglines that suggest something more unique, such as United Way of Sullivan County's tagline, "Be the Difference," or United Way of Buffalo & Erie County's tagline, "Find Your Way." This could be considered acceptable because the taglines still convey messages of care and effort to better communities. Further, though it does not contain United Way-specific language, the tagline "Closing Gaps. Creating Opportunities," developed by United Way of Cattaraugus & Allegany Counties, is a perfect example of how chapters can utilize a tagline to represent what kind of work the NPO does.

### **Color (RQ3)**

Color is a strategic tool in branding that conveys meaning, evokes emotions, differentiates brands, represents their work and influences brand perceptions. However, many of the websites observed used color incorrectly. For example, consistent with the incorrect purple version of the United Way logo, a couple of the sites, including United Way of Broome County and United Way of Orleans County, use the same purple color to adorn their home pages (Appendix H & D). Another instance of inconsistent colors was observed on one of the web pages belonging to United Way of Greater Niagara; This page included green, pink, orange, tan, purple-gray, teal, navy blue, and various incorrect shades of United Way colors that are noticeable by the naked eye. Roughly a third of the chapters observed in this study used color on their websites to represent hierarchical elements such as buttons, links, and menu categories. For example, United Way of Schuyler County's home page exclusively uses the United Way yellow color to emphasize buttons, making them easier to see (Appendix L). Some chapters used color sparingly for hierarchical purposes and

occasionally only for decorative purposes, which can make it difficult to interpret information hierarchy. A few chapters focused primarily on using the white and darker blue United Way colors on their websites, using the United Way red, yellow, and light blue sparingly, and sometimes not at all. For example, United Way of Broome County's home page is mainly white and blue/purple and uses red to highlight its donation button, as well as a few small links (Appendix H). United Way of Rockland County's home page) uses colors similarly but uses yellow instead of red to emphasize a sign-up button as well as a few small links (Appendix E). Using a variety of colors can help make the website appear more visually appealing and on brand.

### **Imagery (RQ4)**

Imagery in web design involves the strategic use of pictures to evoke emotions, enhance brand image, and appeal to users. In no distinct order, the most frequently observed imagery across all of the websites analyzed includes:

1. Smiling faces of babies, children, and adults;
2. People performing various activities such as volunteering, wearing masks, using phones/computers, filing taxes, wearing United Way apparel, shaking hands, holding large checks, and making donations such as backpacks, baby supplies, and other care products;
3. Children reading, playing, smiling, and wearing United Way apparel;
4. Imagery from sport-related events, kickoffs, award ceremonies, and days of giving;
5. Table set-ups for various drives and community baby showers;
6. Food pantry shelves and volunteers serving meals at soup kitchens;
7. Employees, donors, and board members in various locations;
8. Parents with children, primarily mother and child;
9. Helping hands, raised hands, and outstretched arms;

10. Local scenery and location maps.

All of these images are meant to be representative of the work United Way does for communities: these images fall under the “Win” category and are all positive representations of such. However, there is a lack of “Fight” imagery, with only a few websites depicting people in distress, such as United Way of New York State and United Way of Westchester and Putnam. Furthermore, United Way of Rockland County’s website was the only one found to have imagery depicting homelessness (Appendix E). It should be noted that this type of imagery can be hard to obtain, as people facing homelessness may not be willing to consent to having their photo taken. Stock photos have been and can be used in place of this hard-to-obtain imagery when necessary. That said, most of these chapters neglected to alter the brightness of the photos as the guidelines suggest when placing “Fight” and “Win” imagery next to each other.

Other issues observed among imagery were websites that exclusively contained stock photos and websites that contained very few or no photos at all. For example, United Way of New York State’s home page can be found in Appendix C. The home page contains an image carousel that appears to only contain stock photos. Alternatively, Tri-County United Way and United Way of the Adirondack Region’s websites contain little to no photos; links to these websites can be found in Figure 1. Several chapters had blurry pictures as the main images on their home pages, such as United Way of Ulster County, whose main image appears to be that of a blurry rock formation, followed by three additional low-quality images (Appendix G). Another issue encountered was that Sidney United Way’s website had no photos but had a page with links to folders containing images from annual meetings dating back to 2008 and other events from the past several years. It is unnecessary for Sidney United Way to have such outdated information on its website, and some of these images could be dispersed across several web pages to add imagery.

One of the strangest observations made throughout this study was found on the United Way of Rockland County website, which has a page dedicated solely to donations made to the NPO. This page is questionable because the background is an up-close image of a football lying on a field, with no other context to explain its use on this page. This chapter's website focuses primarily on emergency aid and disaster relief. It does not appear to be aligned with any campaign or event related to sports, so its purpose on this page is unknown.

### **Typography (RQ5)**

Typography is the art and technique of arranging letterforms on a page to enhance visual and verbal communication, aid readability and legibility, and support brand identity. Nearly all the websites used United Way-approved fonts and defined information hierarchy using bold and enlarged fonts. That said, it seems that nearly a fourth of the chapter's websites observed in this study, such as those belonging to United Way of Sullivan County and United Way of Mid Rural New York, were likely using design applications that may not have the capability of reproducing the recommended League Gothic typeface. Most of these chapters correctly utilized the recommended backup typeface Impact for headlines. However, a few websites, such as Sidney United Way, feature other typefaces (Appendix J). It is understandable that the League Gothic typeface may not be available on every necessary application used by United Way chapters; however, the typeface is available to download and should be used whenever possible; a download link is provided in the guidelines.

The final issue observed regarding typography in this study is websites utilizing unapproved typeface styles. For example, the website of United Way of Greater Niagara (Figure 1) has incorrectly applied serif typefaces to its websites, while the website of United Way of Greater Oswego County's website contains many curly fonts used in fliers (Appendix I). However,

it should be noted that these rules do not always apply to specific campaign and event materials such as fliers and social media posts but should always be followed regarding web design.

### **Layout (RQ6)**

Layout refers to the overall visual arrangement of graphic elements on a webpage, encompassing factors such as information hierarchy, navigation, usability, menu categorization, headers, footers, logos, and icons, which collectively impact user perceptions and effectiveness of the website as a whole. The vast majority of websites analyzed included proper layouts and had minimal issues. However, a select number of websites evidenced various problems. Several websites struggled with perspective issues. For example, the web pages belonging to United Way of Cayuga County and United Way for Cortland County are zoomed in upon first entry, resulting in elements appearing cut off (Appendix B). United Way of Cayuga County has since fixed the issue. However, while the observations were being made for this study, the website seemed to be affected only on the right edge of the screen, where the main images and VOLUNTEER button appeared to be cut off. The page got progressively more cut off when the window was partially minimized. Websites are meant to adapt to screens when partially minimized, meaning the page gets smaller as the window gets smaller. In this case, the website appears to stay the same size while the window gets smaller around it, cutting off the edges of the website. United Way for Cortland County's website presents similar issues but to a greater extent; the home page is zoomed in on all sides, cutting off the logo, social media links, and images on the home screen. The site's footer is right-leaning due to being zoomed in, and the page gets progressively more cut off when partially minimized. United Way for Cortland County's website further experiences perspective issues on all pages of its site, including graphic elements that cover content, content being cut off,

and blurry imagery. This level of perspective issues can cause severe problems for web users, particularly those who need to access the information being covered.

Further perspective issues like unevenly displayed elements, including images, text boxes, and buttons, were observed on various websites belonging to several chapters. Examples of such can be seen on the websites of United Way for Cortland County and United Way of Schuyler County's home pages, which can be found in Appendices B and L. One unusual finding made during this study was that United Way of Fulton County's website appeared to have a strange line overlaying the main image when the page was in full-screen mode (Appendix F). However, when the window was reduced in size, text boxes would appear containing three phrases linking to the same pages that the images below were linked to when the page was in full-screen mode. The text box contains the phrases "Zaragna," "Morbi consequat," and "Dagnar," which, unfortunately, did not produce any meaningful results when searched on Google. Despite the recent absorption of United Way of Fulton County, these issues were present for several months before the website was taken down.

A few websites include a pop-up used to advertise various events. For example, Tioga United Way's website greets you with a pop-up to buy tickets for the upcoming United with Voices event. United Way of Greater Niagara's website renders a pop-up with information regarding United Way's 211 programs, which could be helpful for web users who might be interested but would otherwise be unaware of these initiatives. In another instance, United Way of New York State's website has a prominent tab on the side of the page that says "insider" and links to a pop-up with a prompt to enter your email for the Cureo app (Appendix C). There is no further indication of what Cureo is or what you would be subscribing to by entering your email, which might confuse



users. Chapters need to keep their websites clear and up-to-date to avoid confusing or irritating web users.

Other issues observed included websites with either too much or too few design elements, such as United Way of Greater Oswego, whose website home page appears overly busy (Appendix I). In contrast, the United Way of New York State and Sidney United Way websites are underdeveloped, containing little to no images across the sites and lacking visual alignment with the United Way brand (Appendix C & J). In fact, Sidney United Way's website does not appear remotely related to the United Way brand aside from the logo and the design seem very old, even though information updates are being performed, as changes were observed in the information presented on the home page.

### **Information Hierarchy (RQ7)**

Information hierarchy refers to the strategic organization of information and design elements, such as headings, font size, and color, to indicate the relative importance of content on a webpage. For NPOs, information related to their mission should be prioritized on the home page. What each chapter fights for varies based on the most prominent issues facing its community. Health, education, and financial stability/mobility are the main issues addressed by United Way, though some chapters focus on other issues. For example, United Way of Rockland County focuses primarily on emergency aid programs and disaster relief. Different issues will impact the type of information that is included on a website. Though information hierarchy varied drastically among chapters observed in this study, many of the chapter's websites contributed useful data, suggesting the best and worst practices regarding information hierarchy.

All the websites are expected to have a donate button, which appears most frequently in the top right corner of websites, such as how it is positioned on United Way of Schuyler County's

website (Appendix L). However, the various chapters in this study use different phrases for their top right corner CTA, including DONATE, GIVE, ADVOCATE, VOLUNTEER, LEARN MORE, STAY INFORMED, IMPACT, GET HELP, TAKE ACTION, and APPLY. CTAs are used to encourage further user engagement. Positioning the donate button in the top right corner is pertinent so that the button remains visible in the header across all site pages. Some sites, such as Tioga United Way, use different phrasing for their donate button, which instead says GIVE; this is meant to coincide with the United Ways campaign from a few years ago that used the phrase “Give. Advocate. Volunteer” (Appendix K).

Proceeding the header, a website’s home page should display a central image or image carousel. Nearly all of the sites had a central image/image carousel front and center on their home page that cycled through around three to five images/graphics. These images typically depict people involved with the NPO, such as children, volunteers, and stakeholders. However, many of the sites opted to use this space to advertise various events/programs they would be hosting in the future or campaigns they are currently running. For example, United Way of Westchester and Putnam’s website opens with an image of children showing off their planet Earth coloring projects (Appendix M). In contrast, United Way of Northern New York’s website previously opened with a banner image with information about a luncheon event they were hosting. The guidelines do not state any specific kind of imagery to use in this section of the website, though it is recommended for chapters to use imagery that coincides with the central theme and message on the page.

The following hierarchical element that all United Way websites should have is an opening statement that describes what challenges the NPO is fighting for in its community. Different chapters have interpreted this to mean different things. For example, United Way of Broome

County used its mission and vision in place of an opening statement, whereas Tioga United Way used a community impact statement to introduce itself (Figure 1; Appendix H). Many chapters also used mission statements in place of taglines. Taglines are the recommended form of opening statement, which can be further supported with statistics.

Several chapters chose to display statistics related to their work on their home pages. Though statistics are not mandatory, the guidelines claim they are a valuable way to enhance the stories presented by various chapters. For example, United Way of Schuyler County has statistics on its home page that communicate the number of local agencies supported, the number of years the chapter has been serving the community and the fact that the chapter is 100% volunteer-run (Appendix L). These statistics enhance the chapter's credibility because they provide users with specific cases of community impact. Different chapters may share statistics detailing different aspects of the NPO. For instance, while United Way of Schuyler County's statistics address its operations, United Way of Greater Niagara's statistics detail the needs of its community, including the percentages of people who receive free or reduced-priced lunch and the percentage who receive supplemental assistance (Figure 1). One of the statistics on this page says "21% in cities living in poverty," which could generally mean that 21% of the people they serve live in poverty in cities. However, the lack of specification regarding what the 21% refers to is confusing. Chapters using statistics should ensure they are straightforward and easy to understand.

Most of the websites observed in this study include a list of the programs/services they offer, such as Tioga United Way, which has linked images addressing the various agencies they support, FamilyWize counseling services, and the 211 helplines (Appendix K). Other websites, such as the one from United Way of Broome County, have images linked to volunteer opportunities, the Emerging Leaders Society, and the partners they fund (Appendix H). Some

chapters have also taken this a step further, such as how United Way for Cortland County's website has linked images addressing its programs, including Education & Job Training, Mentoring & Counseling, Kindergarten Readiness, and Basic Needs (Appendix B). Having this information on the home page can give web users an idea about the kind of work the NPO does and give them a reason to seek additional information.

In addition to imagery and information, there are also campaign videos featured on the websites. For Example, United Way of Greater Oswego County has several YouTube videos linked on its home page related to the work it does in its community (Appendix I). The inclusion of videos is not necessary but can play an important role in enhancing the chapter's storytelling.

The last important element to be addressed is the United Way newsletter/email subscription. The official guidelines say very little about these features, yet they can be observed on nearly every New York State chapter's website. These features allow people interacting with the NPO to stay up-to-date on what they are working on at any given time, as well as upcoming events and campaigns. Nearly half of the websites involved in this study featured a section on their home page containing links to current events and news stories. For example, United Way of Long Island's home page has a section labeled The Latest, which contains linked YouTube videos that discuss the chapter's latest efforts in its Net Zero project (Appendix N). Alternatively, United Way of Westchester and Putnam have a section towards the bottom of its home page labeled Featured News, containing news stories from the last few months on various topics such as "United Way Announces Grant Opportunity for Westchester Nonprofits" and "United Way Distributes Toys for Toys for Tots 'Unplug and Play'" (Appendix M). Many chapters will follow this news section with a link to sign up for email updates. Nearly a third of chapters included a form/button toward the bottom of the page where users can subscribe to receive emails from the chapter. Alternatively,

another third of the websites included a small pop-up bar at the top of the page where users could click a link to sign up for emails.

### **Navigation (RQ8)**

Navigation refers to the functional design elements, such as menu bars, search features, visible links, and buttons that contribute to a website's usability. Many of the websites observed in this study performed well in terms of navigation. However, most of the navigation issues found come from inefficiently designed headers and footers. Several chapter's websites contained poorly functioning pull-down menus in their headers. For example, a drop-down menu would appear when a user hovers over the menu option. However, when clicked, the primary menu option does nothing but reload either the home page, such as how it does on the website belonging to United Way of Buffalo & Erie County, or it will reload the page you are currently on, such as how it does on Tioga United Way's website. A high functioning menu bar may include a general page about the menu option, as well as provide a drop-down menu for more specific subcategories.

A few websites displayed various categories and subcategories in their menu bars, making them appear busy. For example, United Way of Long Island had a well-organized menu bar, but the drop-down menu for OUR WORK contains nearly two dozen subcategories, which could be further condensed. Another issue observed across multiple websites was menu options that send you either back to the home page or an unrelated page. For example, Tioga United Way has a menu option called CAMPAIGN that redirects you to a pledge form. United Way for Cortland County has menu options that lead to blank pages, and United Way of Cayuga County has an ANNUAL EVENTS tab that brings you back to the home page. Returning to a website's home page is usually a job assigned to the site identifier. However, Sidney United Way and United Way of Greater Niagara both had site identifiers on their pages that did nothing.

Another menu-related issue observed on a few websites was menus containing unnecessary categories, such as Northern Chautauqua County's menu bar, which previously had a menu option for an Indoor Golf Outing, which could have been a subheading under a menu option labeled Events. Another example of this is found on Sidney United Way's website, where the menu contains the option Director Sign-in, which is irrelevant to web users (Appendix J). Furthermore, many of the websites included a feature that would underline or change the color of the menu categories when hovered over, which looked fine for the most part, with the only noticeable exception being United Way of Westchester and Putnam's website, where the menu subcategories change to a dark color when hovered over, making them difficult to see over the dark background; a link to this website can be found in Figure 1.

While most navigation issues were found in the website headers, the footers for several websites were also problematic. Nearly all of the chapters had the appropriate information in the footer of their websites. However, several chapters, such as United Way of Greater Oswego County, did not include an address or contact information in their website's footer (Appendix I). This is not a requirement based on the guidelines but seems to be a common trend among the websites observed in this study. These elements could be helpful to include in the footer so they remain constant across all pages of the site, and people will not have to go searching for them. This also applies to social media links, which should be included in the footer because social media is the fastest and easiest way to get people to engage further with the NPO by regularly showing them who the NPO is and what it does. However, on several websites, including those of United Way for Cortland County and United Way of Long Island, the social media links appear above the header, but they should be moved to the footer since that information is not the most crucial but still important to a user's experience on the site (Appendix B & N). Some chapters such

as United Way of Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes and United Way of New York State do not have their social media profiles linked on their website.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are suggested for United Way chapters in New York State to create a unified brand identity:

**Logo Quality:** Ensure logos are high-quality digital files with even borders and proper spacing. Do not use a logo on the website that results from a screenshot. The guidelines indicate that .eps is the preferred file type for logos. It is recommended that chapters keep logo files conveniently stored in a safe digital space that all employees can easily access. It is also essential that chapters ensure they use the most up-to-date logos. NPOs should want their websites to represent their brands as being high functioning and well-organized, which is why using accurate and high-quality logos is recommended to boost an NPOs online credibility.

**Logo Color:** Color is one of the most significant and obvious elements of visual design, which is why it is important for web designers to maintain proper use of color logos according to brand standards, including RGB, CMYK, and one-color versions of the logo. RGB and CMYK versions of the United Way logo were developed for different applications. Figure 3 shows an example of an RGB logo made for United Way for Cortland County. United Way employees need to ensure they are using the correct logos appropriately. The RGB logo is meant for use on

Figure 3. United Way for Cortland County logo mockup



**United Way  
for Cortland County**

digital applications such as on the web and social media, while the CMYK logo is designed for use in print applications such as billboards, fliers, and pamphlets. United Way full-color logos should be used whenever possible, and one-color logos should only be used in applications where the full-color logo is not available. One-color logos were designed mainly for printing on merchandise such as shirts, plastic, signage, etc. Using logos designed for print on websites could result in users thinking the website is a potential scam, leading to a high bounce rate. Ensuring the correct use of logos for specific mediums can also increase an NPO's credibility.

**Logo Alterations:** Elements of the United Way brandmark and local identifier must be applied consistently and correctly. The logo should always appear as it does in the guidelines; several styles exist based on preference and size needed. Logos should never be tilted, distorted, or rearranged, and the elements in the brandmark should never be altered in color or typography. Logos should never include added words, phrases, or symbols, and the graphic elements should never be extracted and used separately from the brandmark. Lastly, brandmarks should always contain the proper trademark symbol ®, rather than ™, which is incorrect and inconsistent with brand standards. Logo alterations risk putting the reputation of the United Way brand at stake, making it crucial for chapters to be certain they are using logos that are up to brand standards.

**Tagline Creation:** Taglines are a simple and effective way to quickly introduce an NPO upon entering its website. Taglines should be clear and concise but also descriptive. A well-written tagline can give web users an idea of the kind of work the NPO does and help to establish greater trust among users. A simple formula for creating a successful tagline could use the phrase "United for..." followed by what the NPO works hardest to accomplish. The first letter of United should always be capitalized when used in this context. For example, a United Way chapter focusing primarily on childhood education might adopt the tagline "United for Childhood Education;" this



tells web users that the NPO aims to bring people together to face the challenges associated with childhood education in their community. However, chapters are allowed to choose a tagline that does not follow this formula as long as the tagline still represents the chapter somehow. For example, United Way for Cortland County came up with the tagline “ROOTED IN COMMUNITY. UNITED IN PURPOSE.” This tagline appears in the United Way for Cortland County home page mockup found in Figure 4.

Figure 4. United Way for Cortland County home page mockup

The mockup features a dark blue header with the United Way logo and navigation links: ABOUT, OUR IMPACT, GET INVOLVED, CONTACT, and a magnifying glass icon, followed by a prominent orange DONATE button. The main content area has a light blue background with a large circular graphic of a tree and the text 'ROOTED IN COMMUNITY'. Below this is the slogan 'UNITED IN PURPOSE'. A section titled 'UNITED WE ARE...' contains four cards with images and descriptions of services: helping people finish education, supporting school-aged children, helping families find quality childcare, and helping seniors meet basic needs. A 'CAMPAIGN VIDEO' section displays the United Way logo. A sign-up form for updates includes fields for Email, Name, and Zipcode, and a 'JOIN THE FIGHT' button. The footer contains the United Way logo, contact information (Address: 50 Clinton Ave, Cortland, NY 13045, 607.756.5639), social media icons for Facebook and Instagram, and a copyright notice for 2024 United Way for Cortland County.

United Way  
United Way for Cortland County

ABOUT OUR IMPACT GET INVOLVED CONTACT DONATE

UNITED IN PURPOSE

UNITED WE ARE...

Helping people finish their education and train for good jobs [LEARN MORE](#)

Supporting school-aged children with mentoring and counseling [LEARN MORE](#)

Helping families find afford quality childcare for kindergarten readiness [LEARN MORE](#)

Helping seniors meet their basic needs by supporting local food pantries [LEARN MORE](#)

CAMPAIGN VIDEO

United Way  
United Way for Cortland County

Sign up for updates.

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ Zipcode \_\_\_\_\_ [JOIN THE FIGHT](#)

United Way  
United Way for Cortland County

About  
Our History  
Our Partners  
Mission & Vision  
Our Leadership

Connect  
Volunteer  
211 Helpline  
Careers  
Newsletter

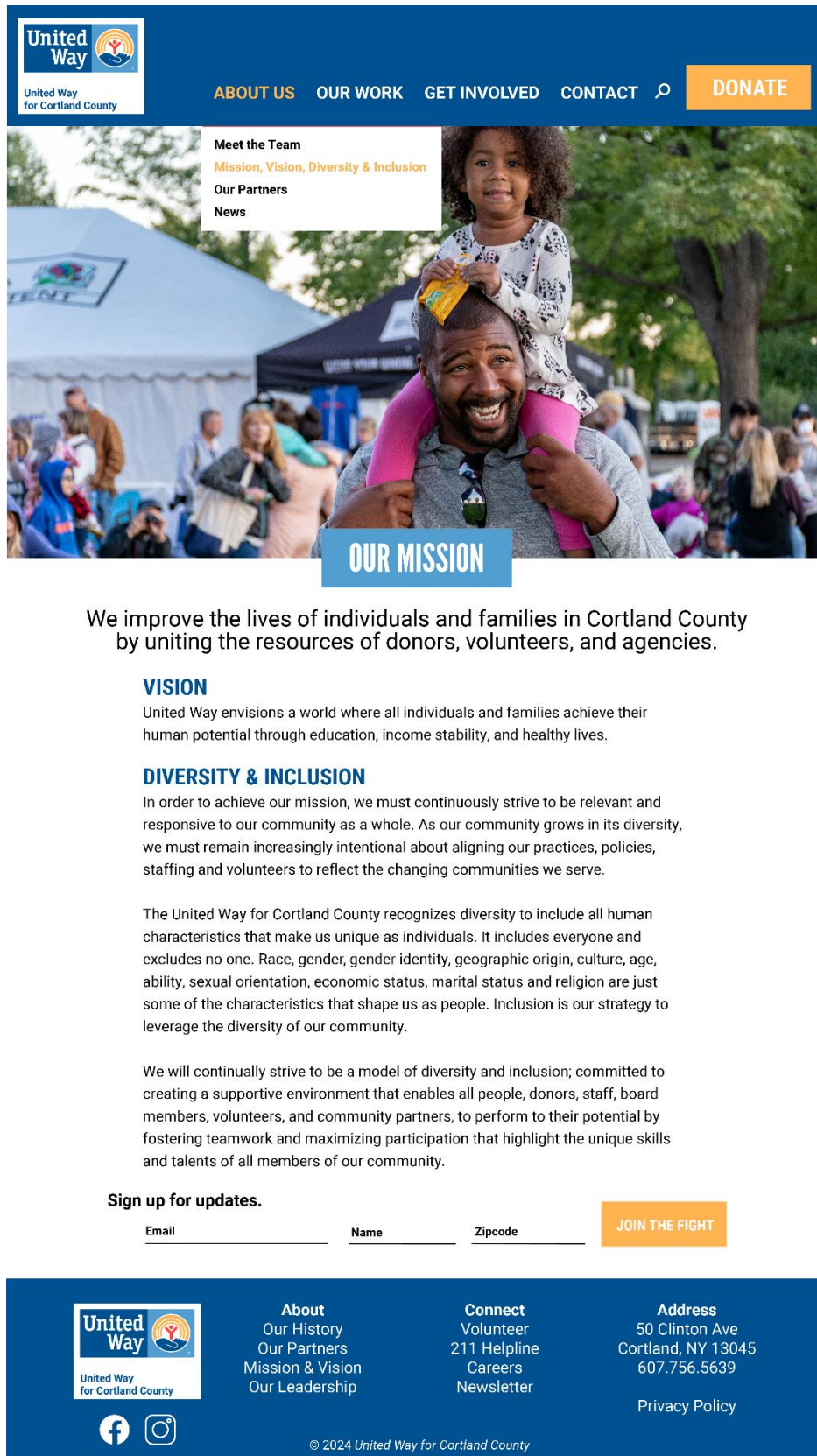
Address  
50 Clinton Ave  
Cortland, NY 13045  
607.756.5639  
Privacy Policy

© 2024 United Way for Cortland County

**Taglines vs. Mission Statements:** A mission statement, especially when used in place of a tagline on a website's home page, should be clearly labeled as the chapter's mission statement. An example of this can be seen in the United Way for Cortland County OUR MISSION page mockup in Figure 5. This is mainly so it is easy for web users to identify the statement as being the NPOs mission. A mission statement should be more descriptive than a tagline and should describe how the NPO plans to achieve its vision, clearly stating its objectives. The Brand Standards & Guidelines (2019, p. 6) provide the example: "Our mission is 'to improve lives by mobilizing the caring power of communities around the world.'" Logical placement and appropriate recognition of a mission statement are important for chapters that want to clearly define their goals to users.

**Colors:** Maintain consistency in color usage across the website, adhering to the United Way color palette. The United Way color palette is derived from the colors used in the United Way landmark and was carefully chosen to represent the brand. Accurate and consistent representation of color plays a significant role in brand recognition among web users and differentiates the NPO from its competitors. Chapters using shades of purple on their websites should remove all purple elements and any other non-United Way colors from their websites and replace them with correctly colored elements. Incorrect use of colors could further increase suspicion of a fraudulent website among users, adding to a high bounce rate. Specific formulas for replication of United Way colors for all mediums can be found in the guidelines.

Figure 5. United Way for Cortland County OUR MISSION page mockup



**Imagery That Represents:** Ensure the use of diverse and appropriate imagery, including both positive (Win) and challenging (Fight) aspects of community life. Examples of the positive aspects of community life include imagery of people wearing United Way apparel, imagery of people smiling, volunteer events, etc. Examples of the challenging aspects of community life could include imagery depicting homelessness, natural disasters, and people looking distressed. When used correctly, imagery can elevate a website's content and evoke various emotions among viewers, so it should be relevant to the web page on which it is presented. Examples of proper use can be observed in the project mockups, where the main image on each page is relevant to the page's subject matter. For example, the United Way for Cortland County FAMILYWIZE page mockup found in Figure 6 contains an image of a pharmacist and an example of what the FamilyWize pharmacy discount card looks like, which is relevant to the page, as it details information regarding FamilyWize.

**Real Imagery:** Use of authentic imagery is recommended. Most United Way chapters are responsible for hosting various events/drives and should have the opportunity to collect imagery from these events for use on websites and social media. Chapters should avoid relying solely on stock photos or using irrelevant imagery. While stock photos can effectively be utilized to represent United Way's work, real images taken in one's own community can have a greater emotional impact on the viewer and should be utilized whenever possible. Examples of this can be seen on many of the websites from the chapters observed in this study.

Figure 6. United Way for Cortland County FAMILYWIZE page mockup



[ABOUT US](#)
[OUR WORK](#)
[GET INVOLVED](#)
[CONTACT](#)

DONATE



**FAMILYWIZE**



Get your free prescription discount card by downloading the FamilyWize app  
OR  
Visit <https://familywize.org/free-prescription-discount-card>

### Pharmacy Discount Card

United Way partners with FamilyWize for discounts on prescription medicines. The prescription savings card is free for everyone and there is no enrollment required. You can even share it with your friends, neighbors, family or coworkers. Plus there is a drug look-up tool to see exactly how much your medicine will cost at different pharmacies.

- Unlimited use
- Use with or without insurance
- Accepted at pharmacies nationwide
- Visit [familywize.org](https://familywize.org) to learn more

Click [here](#) to find participating pharmacies near you.

**Sign up for updates.**

JOIN THE FIGHT






**About**  
Our History  
Our Partners  
Mission & Vision  
Our Leadership

**Connect**  
Volunteer  
211 Helpline  
Careers  
Newsletter

**Address**  
50 Clinton Ave  
Cortland, NY 13045  
607.756.5639

[Privacy Policy](#)

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**Typography:** Typography plays an important role in brand identity; therefore, correct use can affect brand credibility. However, typography can be a challenge depending on the graphic design program used, as not all programs, such as Canva, contain the recommended United Way fonts, such as League Gothic, which is suggested for headlines. The guidelines demonstrate proper use of all United Way-approved fonts, such as recommended font sizes and use of different fonts and weights to represent the information hierarchy. For example, the United Way for Cortland County VOLUNTEER page mockup in Figure 7 displays the page titles in League Gothic and it is the most prominent text on the page, but other important text still holds weight. Roboto Bold can also be used for headlines to improve readability at smaller sizes. Roboto Condensed – Bold is used for headings to indicate a new section. Sub headlines can be identified using Roboto Bold, while the body copy should use Roboto – Regular. If, for whatever reason, these fonts are not available, the recommended substitute fonts Impact, Arial, and Arial Bold can be used as replacements. The guidelines provide a link to download the United Way-approved typefaces for free on Google and they are also available for use on Adobe programs. Other font styles like serif and curly typefaces are not United Way-approved and should never be used on websites outside of campaign materials.

**Responsive Design:** Site optimization for various screen sizes (i.e., smartphones, computers, tablets, etc.) and web platforms (i.e., Internet Explorer, Safari, Microsoft Edge, etc.) is recommended to prevent design elements perspective issues such as pages that appear zoomed in or cut off. Furthermore, a website that appears vastly different on a smartphone than on a computer could confuse users as to whether they are on the correct website. A grid system could be utilized to ensure all elements are correctly aligned and centered as needed. Web designers should also check their website’s appearance on multiple devices and web platforms, and further observe the

website's response to the window being partially minimized before publishing the site to ensure it is as user-friendly as possible.

Figure 7. United Way for Cortland County VOLUNTEER page mockup

**United Way**  
United Way for Cortland County

ABOUT US OUR WORK GET INVOLVED CONTACT **DONATE**

Ways to Give  
Volunteer  
Events  
Careers

**VOLUNTEER**

**By volunteering through United Way, you're joining 1.5 million people who give back so others can get ahead. Join our global community of game changers and make a difference where you live or work.**

Want to get involved? Help at a special event, join a committee, be an advocate. You truly can make a difference!

Click [here](#) to find volunteer opportunities in your area.

**Are you an organization in need of volunteers?**

Fill out the project request form below and someone from our team will get back to you as soon as possible to get more information!

Company Name\*

Brief description of project\*

**Point of Contact**

First Name\* Last Name\*

Email\* Phone\*

**Sign up for updates.**

Email Name Zipcode **JOIN THE FIGHT**

**United Way**  
United Way for Cortland County

**About**  
Our History  
Our Partners  
Mission & Vision  
Our Leadership

**Connect**  
Volunteer  
211 Helpline  
Careers  
Newsletter

**Address**  
50 Clinton Ave  
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Privacy Policy

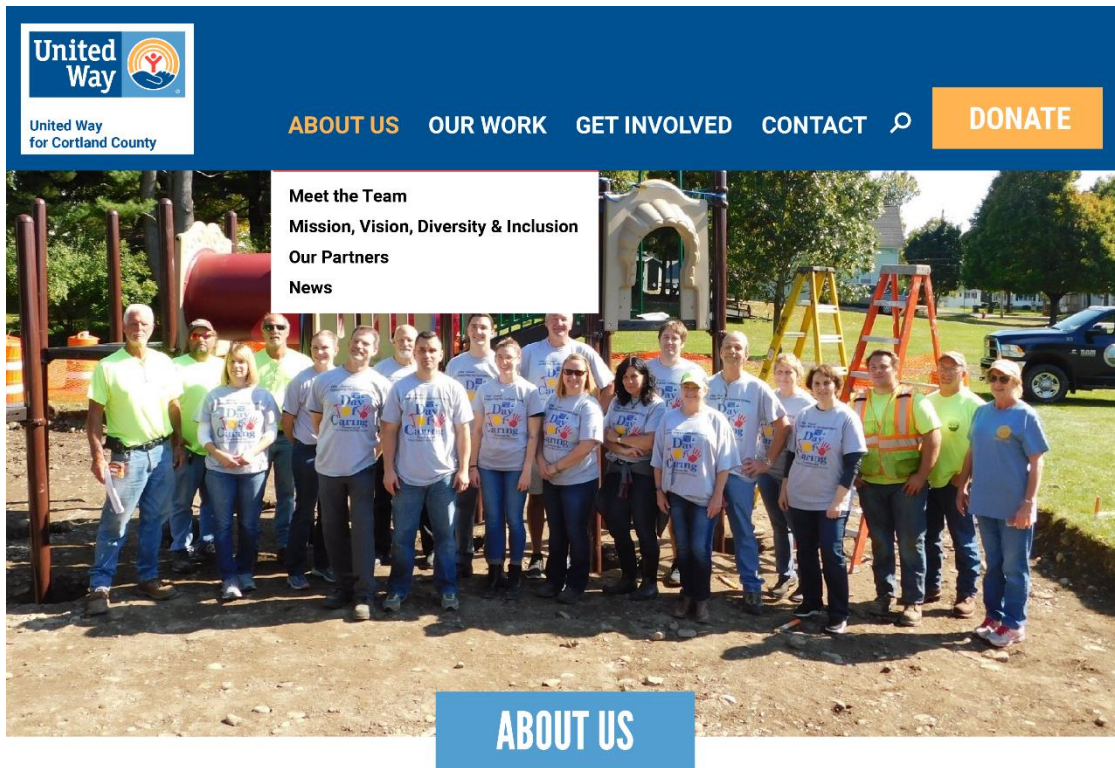
© 2024 United Way for Cortland County



**Home Page Design:** While it is important for NPOs to include graphics on their websites, it is easy to get carried away when deciding which design elements to prioritize for use on the home page. A user-friendly home page is meant to entice users to interact further with the NPO, not overwhelm them with excessive graphics and event fliers or bore them with a lack thereof. Web pages should be simple but still reflect the United Way brand, such as how it is in the United Way for Cortland County home page mockup in Figure 4. Web page content should include relevant imagery, typography, and color; however, these elements should be used sparingly to not overwhelm web users. This recommendation further includes the use of pop-ups, which are not recommended, as users may find them annoying. However, if a chapter wishes to utilize pop-ups, it must ensure that it provides relevant and precise information, as well as a link to a page containing more information.

**Information Hierarchy:** Maintain a clear information hierarchy, prioritizing essential elements like donation buttons, intro statements, representative imagery, statistics, and links to get more information on some of the chapter's most sought-after programs. All websites should include a designated donation button in the header that remains constant across all site pages. Home pages should also contain at least one main image that is seen upon first arrival to the site; this image should connect to the intro statement, though this is up for interpretation. For example, the United Way for Cortland County home page mockup found in Figure 4 includes an image of a tree with deep roots, reminiscent of its tagline "ROOTED IN COMMUNITY. UNITED IN PURPOSE." Any statistics that follow should be easy to understand and should contain information relevant to the chapter's mission. Lastly, the home page should feature summarized information on the chapter's most important programs with links that lead to pages containing more information.

Figure 8. United Way for Cortland County ABOUT US page mockup



### WHO WE ARE

United Way for Cortland County has been helping people in the Cortland area since 1938. We support the work of numerous human service programs in addressing the needs of families in our Cortland Community.

### WHAT WE DO

UWCC works with local agencies to unite the resources of donors and volunteers with support programs in our community that strive to make an impact in the areas of health, financial stability, and family support. Currently we are supporting programs that improve physical and mental health, address immediate financial needs, and promote economic self-sufficiency and programs that create healthy and safe families.

### WHY SUPPORT UNITED WAY?

United Way knows that no single agency can solve the challenges in our community, which is why we work to unite the resources of donors, volunteers, and community leaders to improve the lives of all individuals and families in Cortland County. This means bringing people to the table to solve problems, rolling up our sleeves and getting to work. We invite you to join us.

#### Sign up for updates.

Email \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ Zipcode \_\_\_\_\_

JOIN THE FIGHT



**Content Quality:** All chapters should perform regular web content updates, ensuring that old and out-of-date content is removed as soon as it is no longer relevant. Pages that include fliers for events that have passed should remove the flier as soon as possible after the event has ended. This further applies to chapters that choose to feature news stories on their home page, which should be updated whenever recent news stories are available on the site. Regular content updates will keep the website relevant and help it appeal to new users.

**Navigation:** Navigation is crucial in making a user-friendly website. The header should include a site identifier linked to the website's home page, a menu bar, and a donate button attached to the header that is always present on any page of the website. Menu bars should be simple and only contain the most important menu options to make it easy for users to find relevant information. Non-essential menu options can be linked in the footer, along with the chapter's address, contact information, and links to its social media accounts. Chapters should ensure that all menu options lead to pages containing relevant information. Menu options should not contain too many subcategories. I would suggest no more than eight, but this depends on how much information a chapter has to present. Menu options containing drop-down menus should consist of a page that gives a general description of the menu options. Users can navigate to these general pages by clicking on the main menu option, illustrated in yellow in the United Way for Cortland County ABOUT US page mockup found in Figure 8. The submenu options should be linked to direct users to a page containing information specific to the submenu option; the United Way for Cortland County OUR MISSION page mockup in Figure 5 shows the submenu option as being highlighted in yellow.

## Discussion

The key finding emerging from the research presented here is that there is inconsistency in the use of various design elements across the numerous websites owned by chapters of the United Way in New York State. This inconsistency is detrimental because it undermines the strength of the image projected by a unified United Way brand. When examining the rhetorical elements of Ethos, Logos, and Pathos in relation to these findings, it becomes evident that maintaining a consistent and unified online presence is crucial for establishing Ethos (appeal to credibility and moral standards). A unified and professional online presence can enhance a brand's credibility, which is essential for NPOs seeking support and engagement from audiences. Logos (appeal to logic and reason) emphasizes the need for consistency in website design to effectively communicate the NPOs goals. A logically structured and visually appealing website contributes to the NPOs ability to convey its message and purpose to its audience. Lastly, Pathos (appeal to emotions) highlights the impact of a visually appealing and unified website in eliciting emotional connections and support from users.

During the time that data was being collected for this study, there was one merger and one dissolution of United Way chapters of the United Way in New York, and the lack of strength of the chapters in question was apparent in the quality of their websites. Allegany County United Way and United Way of Cattaraugus County merged to become United Way of Cattaraugus & Allegany Counties. When I began my observations, I labeled the websites for both chapters as underdeveloped and inconsistent with the United Way Brand. However, the website belonging to the resulting chapter post-merge is visually appealing and aligns well with the United Way brand. The chapter for United Way of Fulton County dissolved at the end of February 2024, though their website was observed to remain active through the beginning of March and has since been taken

down. United Way of Fulton County's remaining funds were divided amongst local partners post-dissolution. It is unclear as of now whether another chapter absorbed United Way of Fulton County or if it simply closed (McNeil, 2024). Regardless, findings related to United Way of Fulton County were still included in this study, as they could provide helpful feedback for existing New York Chapters of United Way looking to improve their web presence.

Although the findings from this study are based on the analysis of a relatively small number of websites limited to chapters of United Way in New York State, insights presented here may shed light on many areas that can be of importance to other chapters of United Way in the United States and around the world. Some chapters of United Way, as of other NPOs, may suffer from a lack of resources or lack of qualified staff to be able to maintain professional-looking websites, which then ends up visibly undermining their online presence. The problem areas identified here may deserve the attention of many people working within NPO communication teams. It is with great hope that these research findings and the recommendations put forth prompt people designing and maintaining websites for NPOs to pay greater attention to these areas in the future.

### **Limitations**

Limitations of this study include the exclusive focus on websites maintained by United Way chapters in New York State, which constituted a purposeful sample. So, the websites analyzed here do not constitute a representative sample of all United Way chapters nationally or globally. This study did not consider other forms of communication, such as social media, email, or print media. It did not include any testing regarding user experience, which could provide additional insights into the importance of consistent and effective web design.

## **Future Research**

This study focuses exclusively on United Way chapters located in New York State. A similar study could be conducted on United Way chapters in other states to compare the consistency of web design across the NPO. A further study could explore United Way chapters from other countries to compare web design consistency as well as cultural differences in the visual meaning assigned to various design elements. These studies could use a different method for data collection, perhaps including quantitative research methods.

The impact of consistent branding and web design on the public's perception of various United Way websites could also be researched in a future study including human participants to gain further insight on how web users perceive various websites.

Finally, a future study could investigate the role of consistency across other mediums used by United Way chapters, such as social media and print. United Way chapters can be found primarily on social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, X, YouTube, and LinkedIn, all of which contain different types of content that can be analyzed. Examination of print media could include pamphlets, fliers, and mailers.

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**Appendix A - United Way Brand Standards & Guidelines published in June 2019 by  
United Way Worldwide.**

*Guidelines available at*

<https://cdn2.hubspot.net/hubfs/542539/United%20Way%20Worldwide%20Brand%20Standards%20%26%20Guidelines%20-%20June%202019.pdf>



**BRAND STANDARDS  
& GUIDELINES**



United Way Brand Guidelines v2.0 | June 2019

**Appendix B - United Way for Cortland County home page web capture.**

Website available at <https://www.cortlandunitedway.org/>



## Appendix C - United Way of New York State home page web capture.

Website available at <https://uwnys.org/>

United Way  
United Way  
of New York State

Home Find a Local United Way What's New Public Policy ALICE Board of Directors Get to Know UWNYS FamilyWize Contact UWNYS

insider

GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.  
LIVE UNITED United Way

Donate

United Way NY COVID-19 NY Response

There are United Ways throughout the state, ready to help you. Check [our map](#) to find the one for your area.

United Way 2022 Ambassadorship Program Completed

UNITED FOR ALICE

2-1-1  
New York  
Get Connected. Get Help.™

Platinum  
Transparency  
2022  
Candid.

CSEA  
NEW YORK'S LEADING UNION

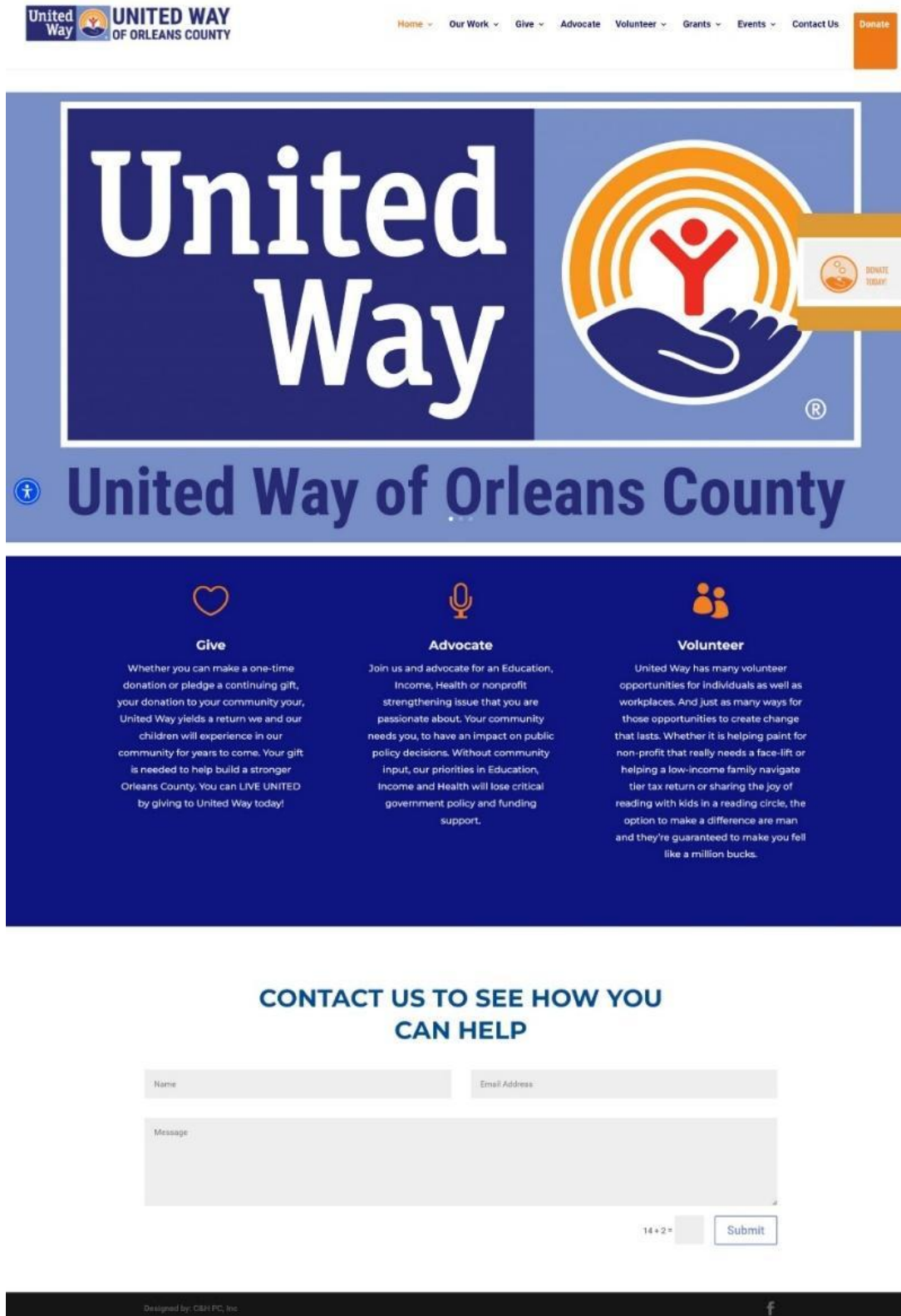
NBT BANK

© 2024 United Way of New York State | Powered by Charitypure Theme | Powered by Charitypure Theme



## Appendix D - United Way of Orleans County home page web capture.

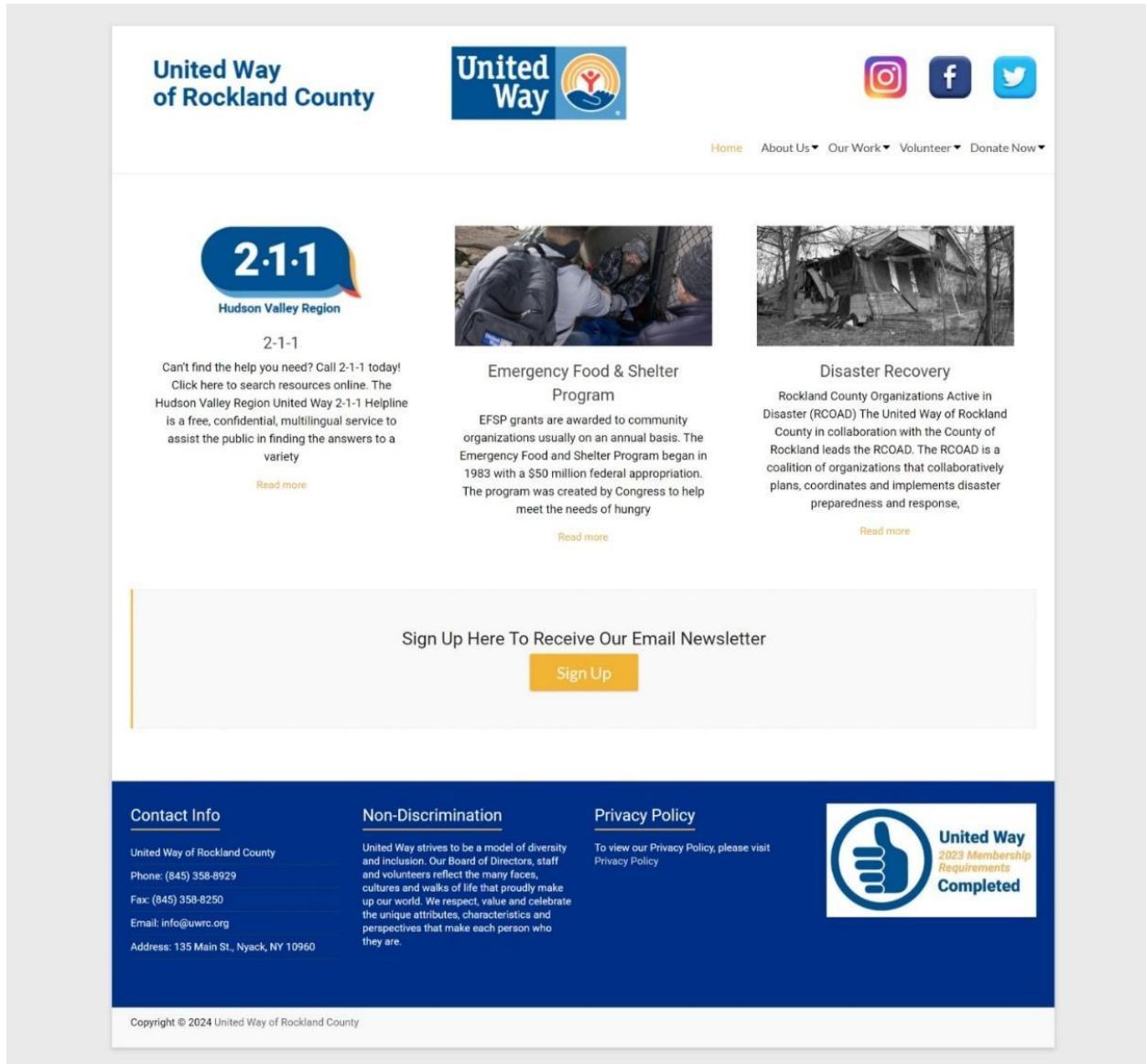
Website available at <https://orleansunitedway.org/>



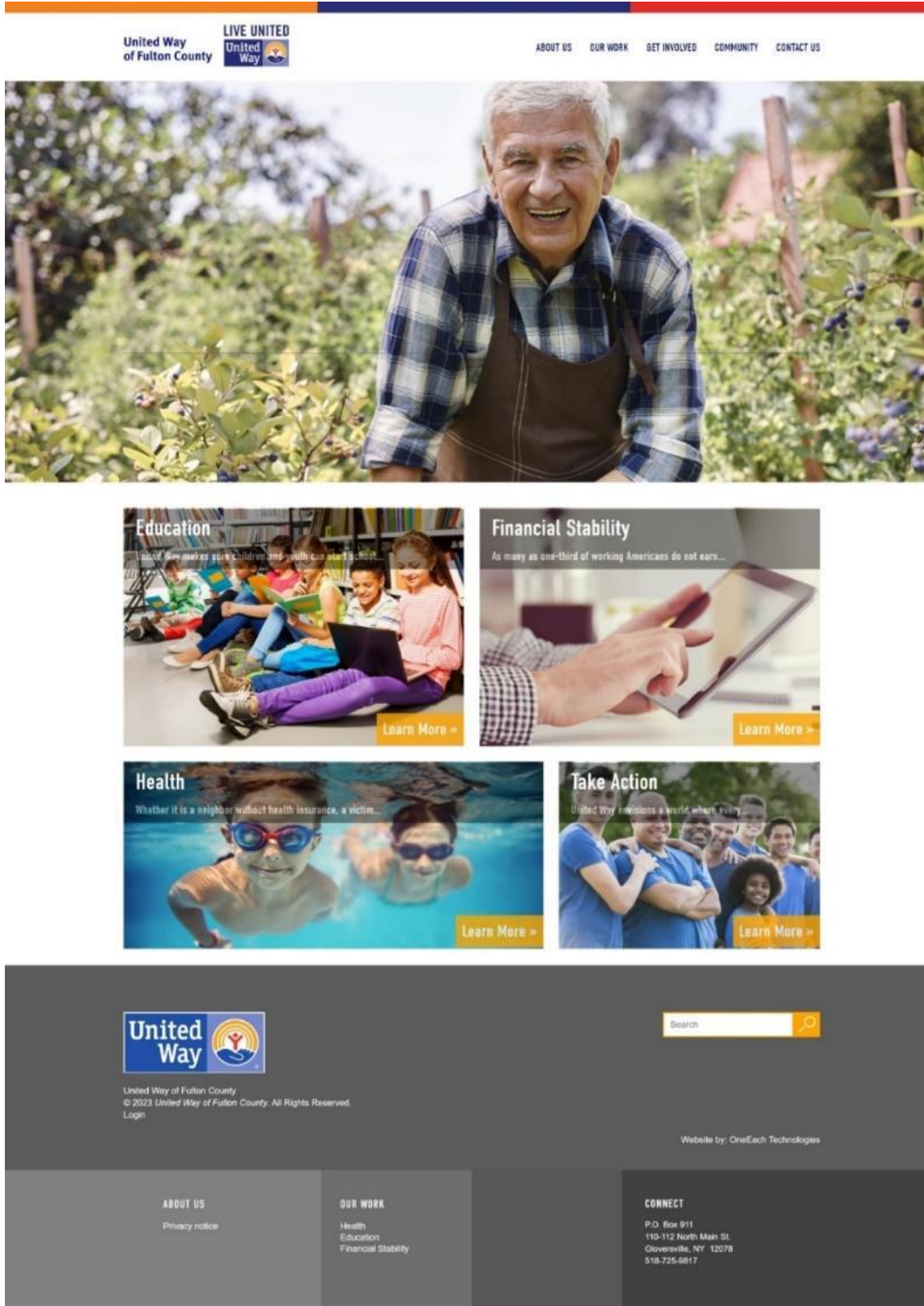
## Appendix E - United Way of Rockland County home page web capture.

Website available at

[https://www.uwrc.org/?gad\\_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCOjwudexBhDKARIsAI-GWYWuZiILFkpMRyXpa000xpc-QjUdDFMhMSig3UEEOKLqaKW3TImLXOwaAmplEALw\\_wcB](https://www.uwrc.org/?gad_source=1&gclid=Cj0KCOjwudexBhDKARIsAI-GWYWuZiILFkpMRyXpa000xpc-QjUdDFMhMSig3UEEOKLqaKW3TImLXOwaAmplEALw_wcB)



**Appendix F - United Way of Fulton County home page web capture.**  
*Website no longer available.*



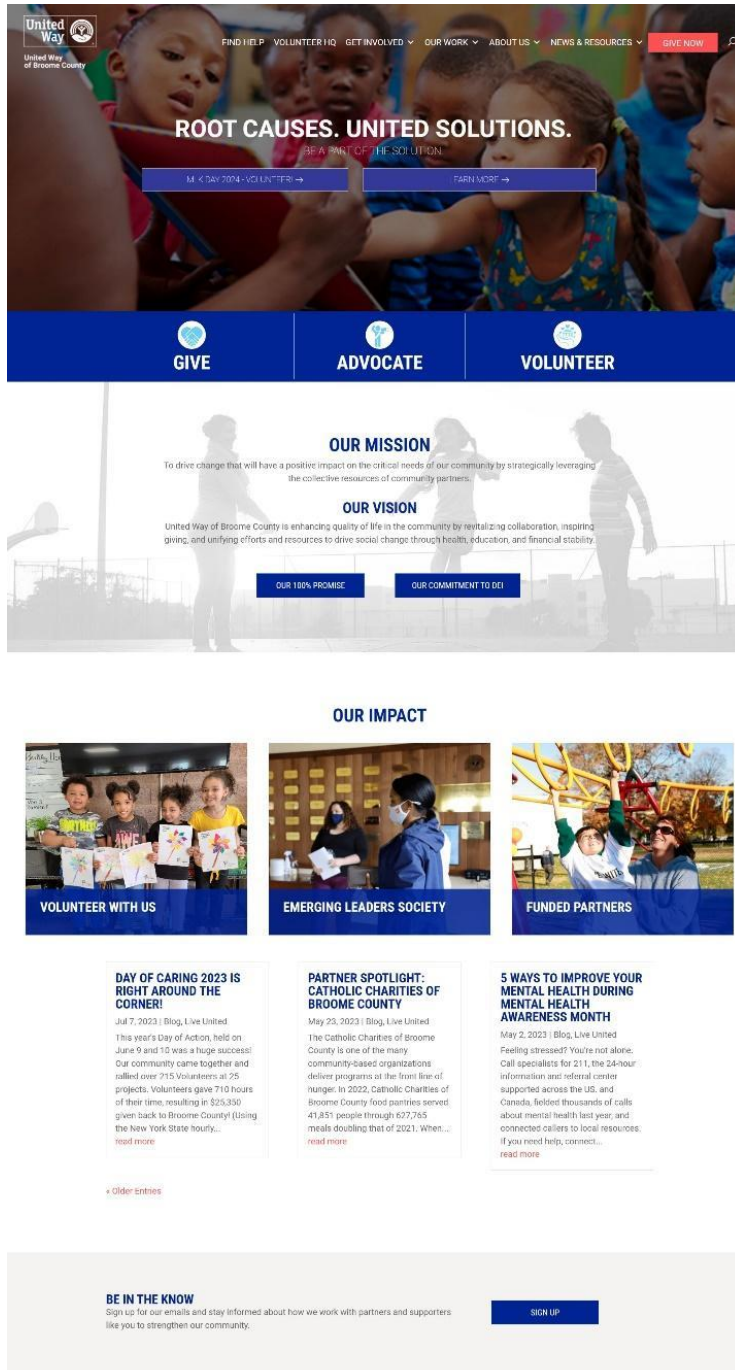
## Appendix G - United Way of Ulster County home page web capture.

Website available at <https://www.ulsterunitedway.org/>

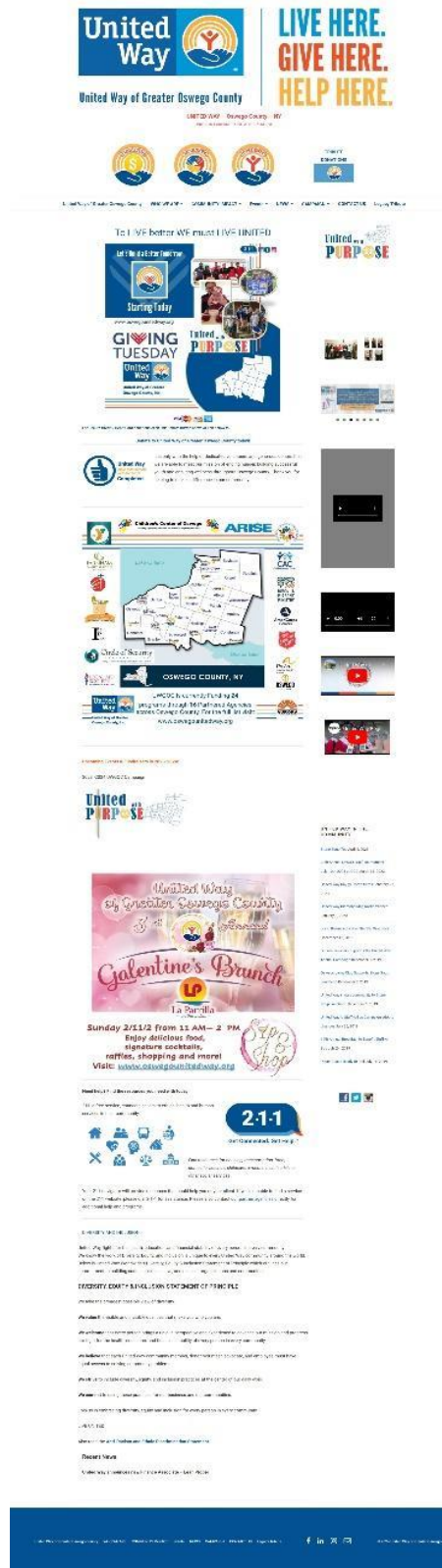


**Appendix H - United Way of Broome County home page web capture.**

Website available at <https://www.uwbroome.org/>

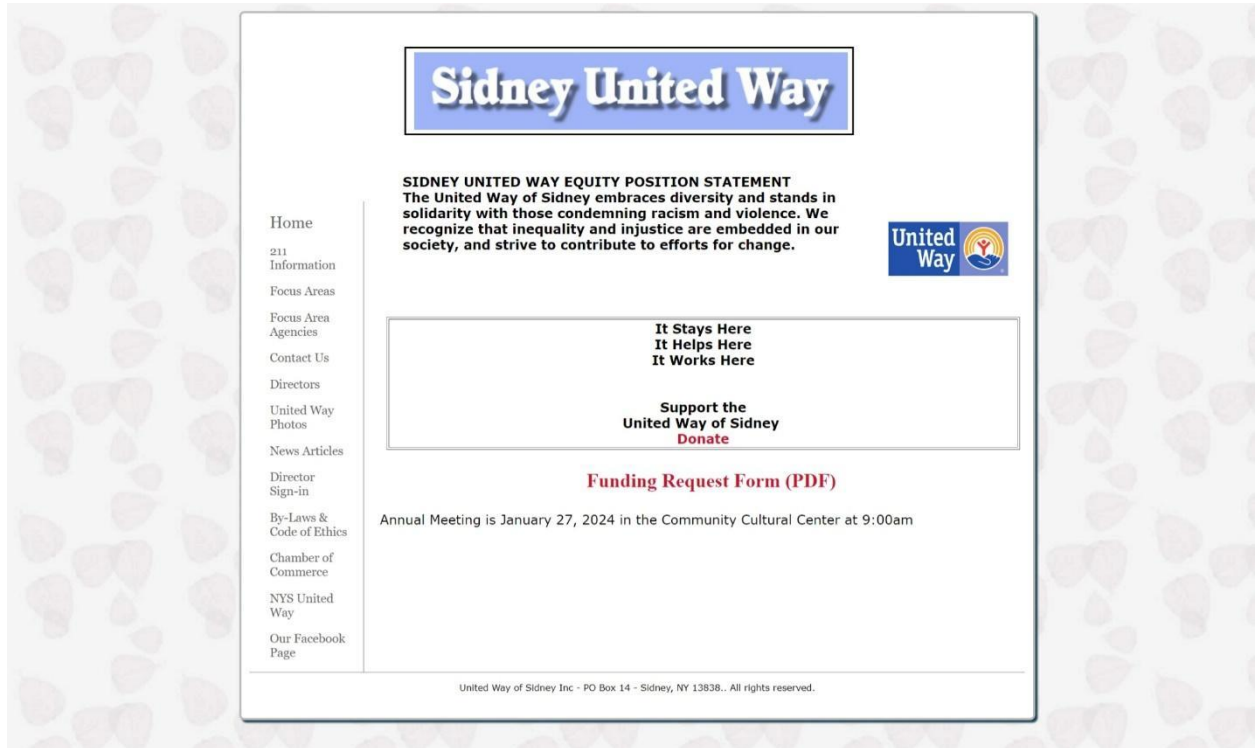


Appendix I - United Way of Greater Oswego County home page web capture.  
Website available at <https://oswegounitedway.org/>



**Appendix J - Sidney United Way home page web capture.**

Website available at <https://www.sidneyunitedway.org/>



## Appendix K - Tioga United Way home page web capture.

Website available at <https://tiogaunitedway.com/>

The screenshot shows the homepage of Tioga United Way. At the top left is the logo with the text "United Way Tioga United Way, Inc.". To the right are three buttons: "GIVE" (blue), "ADVOCATE" (red), and "VOLUNTEER" (orange). Below these is a navigation menu with links: HOME, NEED HELP, COMMUNITY IMPACT, CAMPAIGN, AGENCIES, GET INVOLVED, and CONTACT US.

The main content area features a large image of two young girls in white t-shirts that say "LIVE UNITE". To the right of the image is the "COMMUNITY IMPACT" section, which includes a paragraph about community problems and a list of three items: "FAMILYWIZE", "COMMUNITY NEEDS SURVEY", and "FLOOD THEM WITH LOVE".

Below this is the "Our Services" section, which contains three columns. The first column is titled "Agencies" and describes support for domestic abuse. The second column is titled "FamilyWize" and includes an image of a "Prescription Savings Card" with details like "Save up to 75%", "Show this card to your pharmacist", and "This is not insurance - Discounts only". The third column is titled "2-1-1" and also describes support for domestic abuse.

The next section is a dark banner with a red heart icon and the text "JOIN THE ANNUAL GIVING CAMPAIGN BECAUSE WHEN YOU GIVE TO ONE YOU GIVE TO MANY". Below the text is a "CAMPAIGN" button.

Below the banner is the "Our Mission" and "Our Vision" section. "Our Mission" is "PROVIDING HOPE AND OPPORTUNITY FOR OUR COMMUNITY". "Our Vision" states: "Tioga United Way, Inc.'s vision is to be a leader in developing the capacity of our community to care for people. We will provide for our community's changing needs through the donors, volunteers, staff and service providers working together as the heart of a compassionate system." Below this text is a "READ MORE" button.

To the right of the mission and vision text is an image of four young girls in white t-shirts that say "LIVE UNITE".

The footer contains four columns: "Quick Links" (ABOUT US, PARTNER AGENCIES, FAMILYWIZE, CONTACT), "Contact Us" (607-587-4028, 9 Sheldon Guile Blvd, Owego, New York, 13827), "Follow Us" (Facebook), and "NEWSLETTER SIGN UP" (Enter your e-mail and subscribe to our newsletter, with an email input field and a "Subscribe" button).

At the bottom left is the copyright notice: "Copyright © 2024 Tioga United Way, Inc. All Rights Reserved." At the bottom right is the text "Powered by Face Websites".



**Appendix L - United Way of Schuyler County home page web capture.**  
 Website available at <https://www.unitedwayschuyler.org/>

**United Way of Schuyler County** ABOUT OUR MISSION 2023 CAMPAIGN CONTACT

Make Schuyler County a better place.

**DONATE**

**21** local agencies supported

**100%** volunteer run

**70+** years serving the community

**WHO WE ARE**

The United Way of Schuyler County is a passionate group of Schuyler County residents devoted to making sure that the organizations that make our community great already have the resources they need to do their jobs. We're here to help you, because together we can make a difference.

**2023 CAMPAIGN**

**LIVE UNITED**

**Schuyler County United Way: The Beginning**

"Give. The more you give, the more you get." This motto has guided the lives of our donors for over 100 years. It's the motto that has made Schuyler County what it is today.

The Schuyler County Community Chest, one of the first programs of its kind, was founded by President Henry Truman as a social consciousness of the day. It was the first of its kind in the county. It was the first of its kind in the county. It was the first of its kind in the county.

When the people of a country are united, they will achieve great things. It is the motto that has guided the lives of our donors for over 100 years. It's the motto that has made Schuyler County what it is today.

In Schuyler County, the first of its kind was the Schuyler County Community Chest. It was founded in 1914. It was the first of its kind in the county. It was the first of its kind in the county. It was the first of its kind in the county.

What you need will benefit you, as it does your neighbors and friends, as it does your community. It's the motto that has guided the lives of our donors for over 100 years. It's the motto that has made Schuyler County what it is today.

The donor campaign, and the giving of over 100 years ago, was the beginning of the United Way of Schuyler County. It was the first of its kind in the county. It was the first of its kind in the county. It was the first of its kind in the county.

In 2023, the United Way of Schuyler County will support 21 agencies serving Schuyler County residents. This includes Schuyler Hospital, founded in 1954, and the Boy and Girl Scouts, which benefit from the donations.

It's your chance to give. It's your chance to make a difference.

**LEARN MORE**

**EVENTS**

**RAVENS AND WALKERS**  
September 10, 2023 - 10:00 am  
Over 100 people walked over 500 miles for a great cause.

**LEARN MORE**

**KICK-OFF SPAGHETTI DINNER**  
October 15, 2023 - 4:00 pm  
Thank you to those who supported this event. Your support makes a difference.

**LEARN MORE**

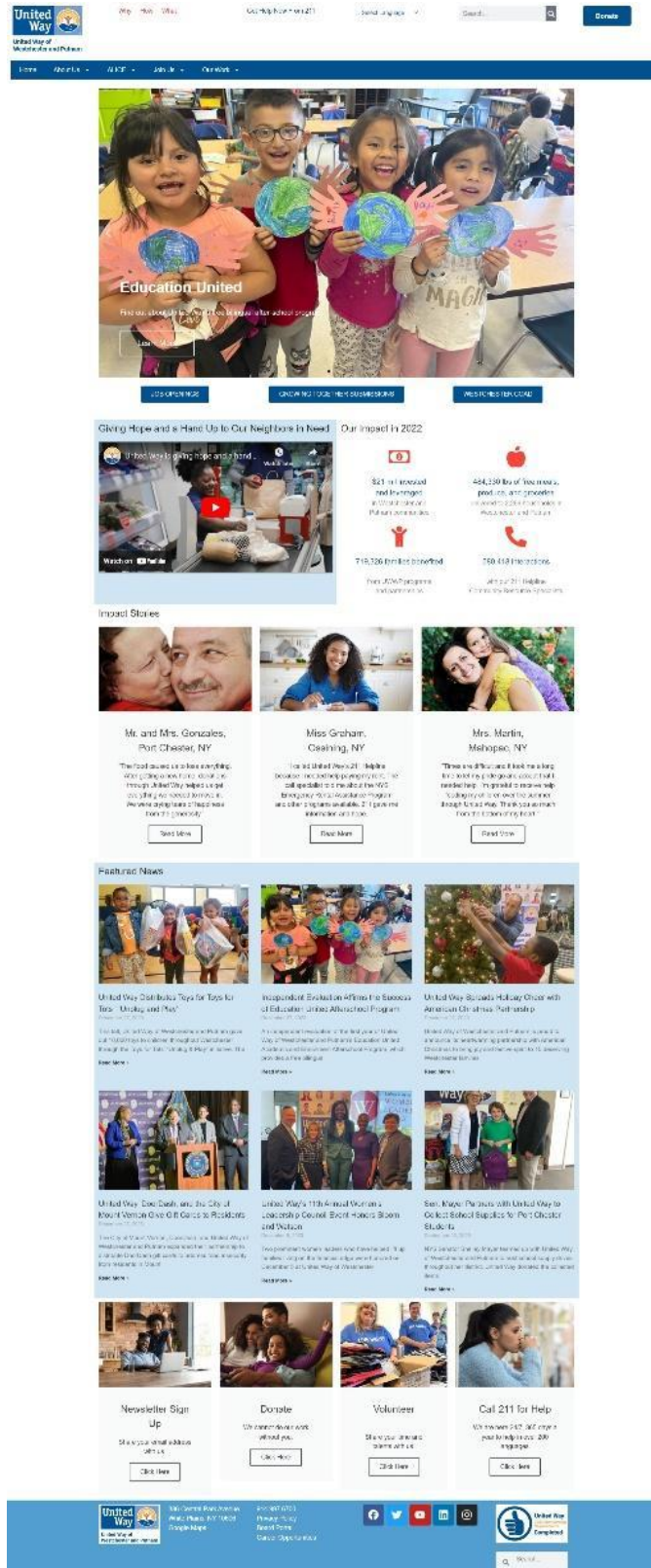
**UNITED WAY OF SCHUYLER COUNTY**  
PO Box 710  
Watkins Glen, NY 14891

**DONATE**

www.unitedwayschuyler.org  
United Way of Schuyler County

# Appendix M - United Way of Westchester and Putnam home page web capture.

Website available at <https://www.uwwp.org/>



**Appendix N - United Way of Long Island home page web capture.**  
*Website available at <https://www.unitedwayli.org/>*

