

Center Offers Website Development Assistance

For a small law enforcement agency, the prospect of building and launching a website can seem as daunting as assembling one of those 1,000-piece jigsaw puzzles that are just one solid color.

Now, thanks to a new initiative from the Small, Rural, Tribal and Border Regional Center (SRTB-RC), agencies with fewer than 50 sworn officers can get website help from a team of “puzzle experts” — the Web team from SRTB-RC and its sponsor, The Center for Rural Development.

SRTB-RC is part of the National Law Enforcement and Corrections Technology Center System, which is a program of the Office of Justice Programs’ National Institute of Justice.

SRTB-RC will supply agencies that need help in establishing a Web presence with a template. The template document lists all of the information an agency needs to supply in order to have SRTB-RC create a website. An agency just needs to check off some boxes and attach text files, photos and even video.

After about a year in project development, SRTB-RC was ready to name an initial test site and the Colorado River Indian Tribes (CRIT) Law Enforcement Services (LES) in Parker, Ariz., applied for and received that designation. Design work for the CRIT police department began in January 2012 and the site launched in March. A five-man department in Montgomery, La., also joined in the initial test phase, which will expand to 10 beta test sites before SRTB-RC opens the project to all comers later this year.

SRTB-RC staff will create sites in the order that they receive requests, and there’s no limit on the amount of participants the project can handle. SRTB-RC staff are creating a guide for agencies interested in participating so that they can collect the necessary information in the appropriate formats before signing up for a site.

The SRTB-RC design team uses a content management system that’s behind millions of websites, and they set the agencies up as a subdomain of SRTB-RC’s own website. SRTB-RC recommends that agencies go out and

register their own URL, which will be redirected to it from the STRB-RC site. That way the only cost to participating agencies would be that URL registration fee.

SRTB-RC will do the initial setup and make sure all the correct links are in place, and ensure that everything is just the way the participating agency wants it. All the agencies have to do is provide the information. After the site is up and running, they will be shown how to update the content so they have control over what content is available on their site.

CRIT LES did a terrific job with providing information, says Lonnie Lawson, who is the president and chief executive officer of The Center for Rural Development and the principal investigator for the center. The department became involved through the efforts of the Tribal prosecutor, and the collection of information was coordinated by Hannah Ward-Harper, administrative coordinator for the Motor Vehicle Injury Prevention program. Ward-Harper says her primary responsibility is coordinating a traffic safety grant focused on reducing injuries and fatalities by decreasing drinking and driving and promoting seat belt use. However, other projects also come her way, including this one, her first foray into the Internet world.

“I was actually very pleasantly surprised by how positive the experience was,” Ward-Harper says. “I’d never heard of SRTB-RC before, and I didn’t know there was a center that helped small departments like ours with technology. The whole process was really smooth and easy. I had a tight deadline to gather all the information I needed from our various divisions in a one-week timeframe, but after that I just gave SRTB-RC the information and let them create the site. The design they put together is really nice. It was a great opportunity for us to get a website without having to pay someone to develop it.”

Lawson had similar praise for CRIT LES, which got the nod to become the pilot site by promising a fast turnaround, and then coming through. Ward-Harper says she had great cooperation within the department.

“We sat down and talked about it with all of the different divisions and asked them to provide some information on their services, including photos,” she says.

“All of the information had to get the approval of the CRIT Attorney General’s Office, and the Tribe’s attorney reviewed it and got it right back to me. It was definitely a coordinated effort on everyone’s part,” she says, adding, “The feedback we’ve gotten internally has been positive, everyone likes it a lot. We’re just starting to promote it to the public, and we think it will be a real boost for the department because the public may not be fully aware of what services we offer to the community or the different types of programs we are currently working, such as our Motor Vehicle Injury Prevention, Highway Safety and Sex Offender Registration and Notification programs. It should also help with future grant applications to have information out there on the Internet as well as on local radio and in print.”

Lawson says he’s excited by the interest from the pilot sites, and he’s anxious to see how much interest the full project generates among SRTB-RC’s target community.

“We’re going to promote it through conferences, through training, through our e-mail list,” he says. “We’ll be waiting to see if we’re bombarded or if it comes in a slow and steady stream. We’re going to do our very best to take care of everybody who needs this service.”

For more information on the Small, Rural, Tribal and Border Regional Center’s website assistance project or to be a beta test site, contact SRTB-RC at info@srtbrc.org. For more information on the services of SRTB-RC, contact Executive Director Dave Mather at dmather@srtbrc.org, go to www.justnet.org/srtb, or contact the federal program manager, Michael O’Shea, at michael.oshea@usdoj.gov.



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