



Portal Naming and Implementation Standard

Council on Information Technology (COIT)

The City and County of San Francisco (City) seeks to serve the public with trustworthy, consistent, reliable and safe websites, regardless of department or service. To accomplish this goal, this policy standardizes and unifies portal naming and implementation standards.

PURPOSE AND SCOPE

This policy establishes the guidelines and procedures for the creation, management, and governance of portals providing services to the public for the City and County of San Francisco. It supports compliance with California Assembly Bill 1637 (2023-2024), the Charter of the City and County of San Francisco, and the City's Domain registration and management policy and Subdomain Standard while ensuring a consistent, secure, and user-friendly digital presence.

The requirements in this policy apply to all portals operated by or for the City and County of San Francisco, its departments, and commissions. Elected officials, employees, consultants, and vendors working on behalf of the City are required to comply with this policy.

PORTAL DEFINITIONS

A portal is a standalone web application or website whose primary purpose is transactions: submitting payments, registrations, requests, or applications; checking the status of a case or request; or performing complex searches.

There are two types of portals: custom portals and SaaS (software as a service) portals.

Custom Portals

A custom portal is developed exclusively for the City and County of San Francisco by internal staff or a design-build vendor. It may be hosted on-premise, in the Department of Technology's cloud environment, or by a vendor. Custom portals have historically used either a unique URL or an xyz.sfgov.org URL.

Examples of custom portals:

- housing.sfgov.org (built by City staff)
- careers.sf.gov (built by City staff)
- pay.sfgov.org (built by vendor)
- sfcitypartner.sfgov.org (built by vendor)

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SaaS Portal

A SaaS portal uses standard commercial functionality hosted and maintained by a software product company, and available to other jurisdictions or private-sector users. SaaS portals have historically used the software product's URL, with an indicator that the instance belongs to San Francisco (e.g., sf.company.com or company.com/sanfrancisco).

Examples of SaaS portals:

- data.sfgov.org
- sanfrancisco.nextrequest.com
- Sfpl.bibliocommons.com
- apm.activecommunities.com/sfrecpark

NAMING AND LABELING STANDARDS

Custom Portals

Custom portals must have a clear, short, plain-English third-level name that describes their purpose. This name must be appended to the appropriate official .gov domain as a third-level subdomain (e.g., purpose.sf.gov, purpose.sfpuc.gov, purpose.sfmta.gov).

The following requirements apply to all custom portal names:

- Names must be clear, concise, and descriptive of the content or service
- Names should avoid acronyms or initialisms unless widely recognized by the public
- Names should not include "SF" or "San Francisco" (e.g., use permits.sf.gov, not sfpermits.sf.gov)
- Names must use American English spelling conventions
- Names must be lowercase and contain only alphanumeric characters
- Hyphens may be used when necessary for clarity, but should be minimized

As required in the Subdomain Standard, owners of portals connected to SF.gov must consult Digital Services and the Department of Technology about portal naming to ensure clarity and to avoid duplicates. A similar standard is recommended to the owners of sfpuc.gov, sfmta.gov, and sfo.gov.

All custom portals must be clearly marked as official websites of the City and County of San Francisco on the portal itself.

SaaS Portals

SaaS portals should use "sanfrancisco" or "sf" in the second- or third-level subdomain, following the naming convention of the SaaS provider. For example: sanfrancisco.nextrequest.com or mychart.sfdph.org.

Departments must avoid using "sf" where it could be ambiguous, for example, where other organizations use the same abbreviation on the same platform.

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When multiple City departments use the same SaaS product, each department should include both "sanfrancisco" (or "sf") and a department identifier in their instance URL, following the provider's naming convention (e.g., sfhsa.box.com or sfdph.box.com). Departments must coordinate with COIT and Digital Services when onboarding a SaaS product already in use by another City department, to ensure naming consistency across instances.

SaaS portals must offer clear indicators of their official status wherever possible. Acceptable indicators include:

- A cross-link within the portal to an official .gov City webpage
- Consistent use of official City seals and department logos

APPLICATION AND APPROVAL PROCESS

Departments launching new custom portals must follow the subdomain application process established in the Subdomain Standard. This includes submitting a formal request to Digital Services and the Department of Technology covering:

- Proposed portal name
- Business justification addressing eligibility criteria
- Content and technical strategy, where applicable
- DAIS compliance plan
- Designated technical and content owners
- Timeline for development and launch

Departments onboarding new SaaS portals must notify Digital Services and COIT to ensure the portal is added to the public portal list and to coordinate naming if another department uses the same platform.

Review timelines and appeals procedures follow those established in the Subdomain Standard. Departments whose requests are denied may appeal to the Director of COIT within 30 days of notification by emailing coit.staff@sfgov.org.

GOVERNANCE AND COMPLIANCE

Each portal must have designated technical and content owners in the respective department. Owners are responsible for maintaining compliance with this standard and all related City policies, and must self-certify on an ongoing basis.

Portals that are found to be non-compliant with this standard, including portals that are not listed, improperly named, or lack appropriate official labeling, may be required to remediate. Portals with no active use or maintenance may be recommended for decommissioning in accordance with the Domain Standard.

COIT and Digital Services will review this standard periodically to ensure it remains aligned with evolving state law, City policy, and best practices in digital government.

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ACCESSIBILITY STANDARDS AND MAINTENANCE

As with all City web properties, portals must meet the Digital Accessibility and Inclusion Standard (DAIS) for all pages outside of any login wall. This requirement applies not only at initial launch but for any subsequent updates or upgrades over time.

For custom portals, the department takes responsibility for DAIS compliance in conjunction with any contracted vendors.

For SaaS portals, this responsibility primarily falls to the SaaS provider and must be addressed in the terms of the contract.

SF.GOV PORTAL LISTING

Departments must provide Digital Services with a list of their existing portals within 90 days of this policy being passed at COIT. Departments must provide this information:

- Portal URL
- Portal type (SaaS or custom)
- A 1–2 sentence description, suitable for translation into threshold languages, of who the portal is for and what it does
- Responsible department owner

Digital Services will create and maintain a public list of City portals on SF.gov. As new SaaS or custom portals are created, owners must notify Digital Services so that the public list can be kept current.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

See the [Domain Registration and Management Policy](#) for Roles and Responsibilities

DEFINITIONS

Portal

- A standalone web application or website where the primary purpose is transactions — submitting payments, registrations, requests, or applications; checking status; or performing complex searches.

Custom Portal

- A portal developed exclusively for the City and County of San Francisco by internal staff or a design-build vendor, hosted on-premise, in DT's cloud, or by a vendor.

SaaS Portal

- A portal using standard commercial software functionality hosted and maintained by a software product company, available to other jurisdictions or private-sector users.

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Threshold Languages

- Languages other than English that are spoken by a significant portion of the San Francisco population, as defined by the City's Language Access Ordinance.

SF.gov

- The official root domain for the City and County of San Francisco, managed by the Department of Technology's Network team. www.SF.gov is the City's central website, built and maintained by Digital Services.

RELATED POLICIES

- California Assembly Bill 1637 (2023–2024)
- Charter of the City and County of San Francisco
- Domain Registration and Management Policy (passed by PRB 2024; COIT 2025)
- Subdomain Standard (passed by PRB 2025; COIT 2026)
- Digital Accessibility and Inclusion Standard (DAIS)

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