

The Helmsley Charitable Trust

Helping to Realize a Bold Philanthropic Vision

With $4 Billion in net assets, The Leona M. & Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust focuses on grants in health & medical research, human services, education, and conservation. Founded in 2008, The Trust set out to quickly ramp-up its grant making process. Within a few years, The Trust found that it was stuck with a brochure website that failed to support their content and operational needs, particularly failing to keep up with rapid growth in programs and grants. MSDS was asked to develop interactive strategy, then help architect and design a long-term online vision to raise awareness of Helmsley grantees, highlight outcomes and achievements, generate traction in critical program areas, and advance their mission and reach their organizational goals.

MSDS

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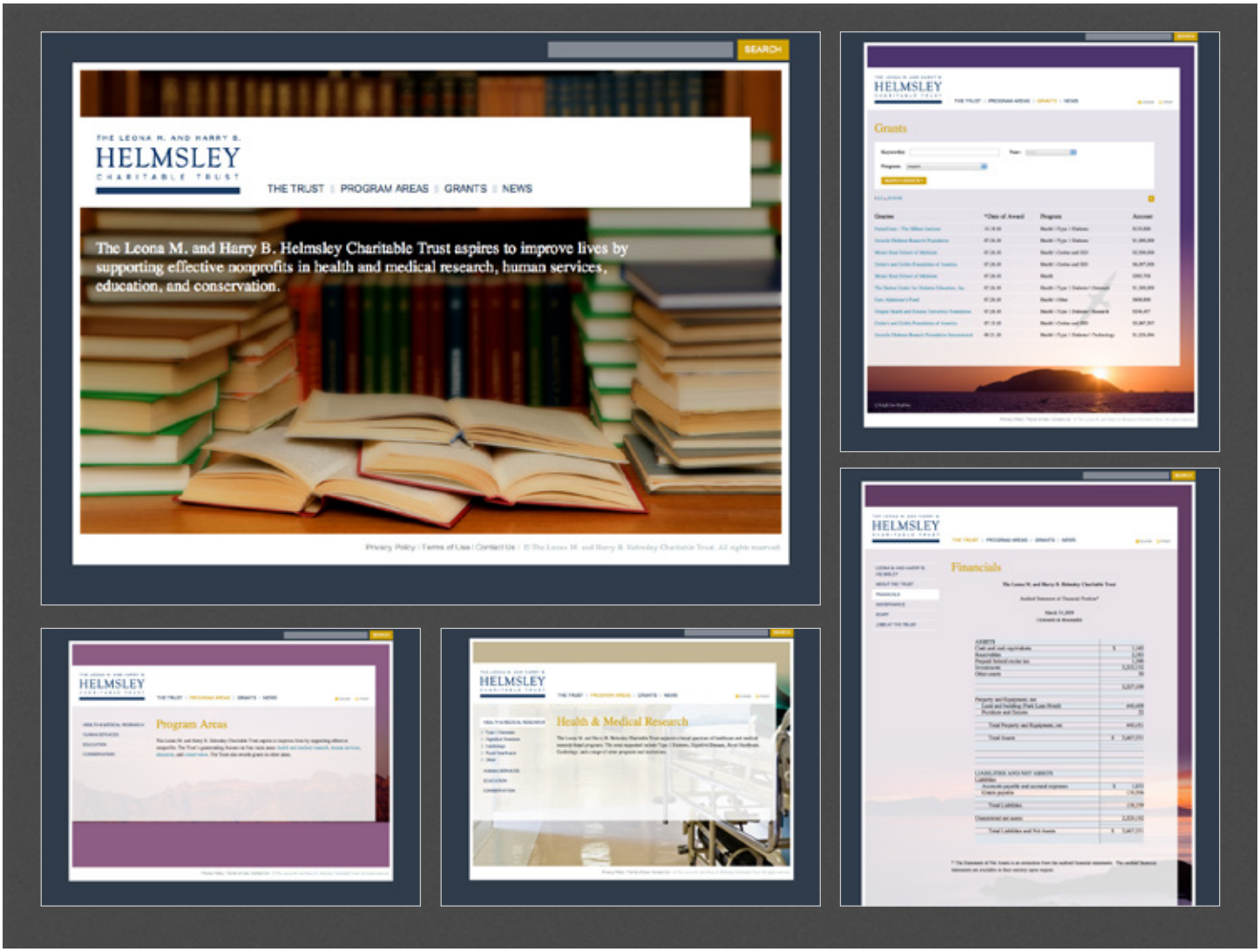


HelmsleyTrust.org: Before Redesign

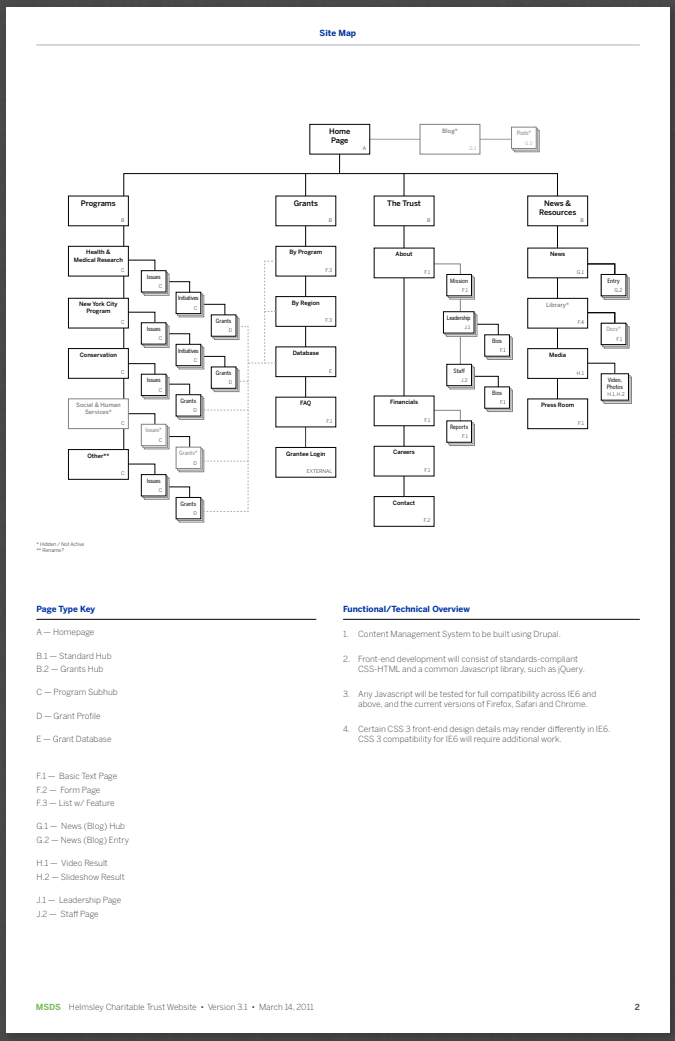
To develop a quick online presence while they focused on scaling operations, The Helmsley Trust created a basic marketing website to provide top-level insight into the organization, its program areas, grantees, and financials. While the site presented their brand elegantly, evolution of their program areas and rapid growth of grant-making activities meant it was quickly failing to tell The Trust's story or properly support their grantees. They needed a strategy that encouraged deeper exploration of their programs and issues and a scalable site structure that would grow elegantly alongside them. In short, The Helmsley Trust needed a website that fit the size and scope of the impact they were having, and planned to have, on the world.



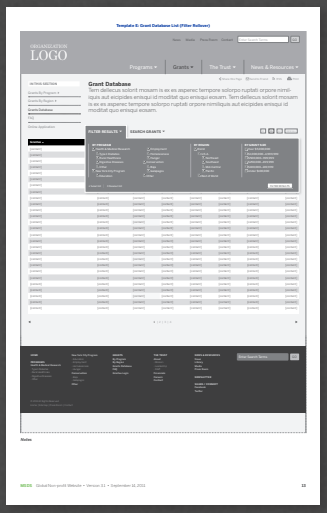
Discovery & Strategy

Given that many of Helmsley's key stakeholders were new to The Trust, and their program areas were rapidly evolving, getting everyone on the same page was even more important than usual. We kicked off the engagement with stakeholder surveys and interviews to solicit individual perspectives from Helmsley's executive leadership and program directors on the state of the organization, their goals moving forward, and how the re-imagined website could help reach them.

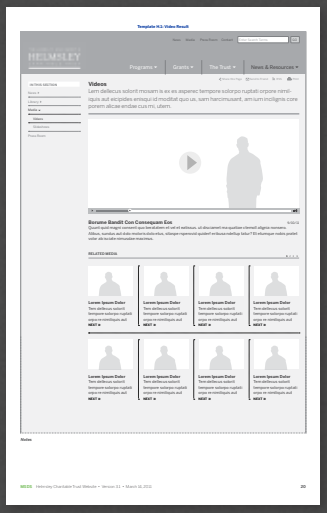
After creating a strategic brief and multi-dimensional audience profiles to build a shared understanding of who Helmsley were trying to reach and why, we performed competitive set analysis of other foundations and organizations in their space to help give the foundation insight into best practices and potential points of differentiation.











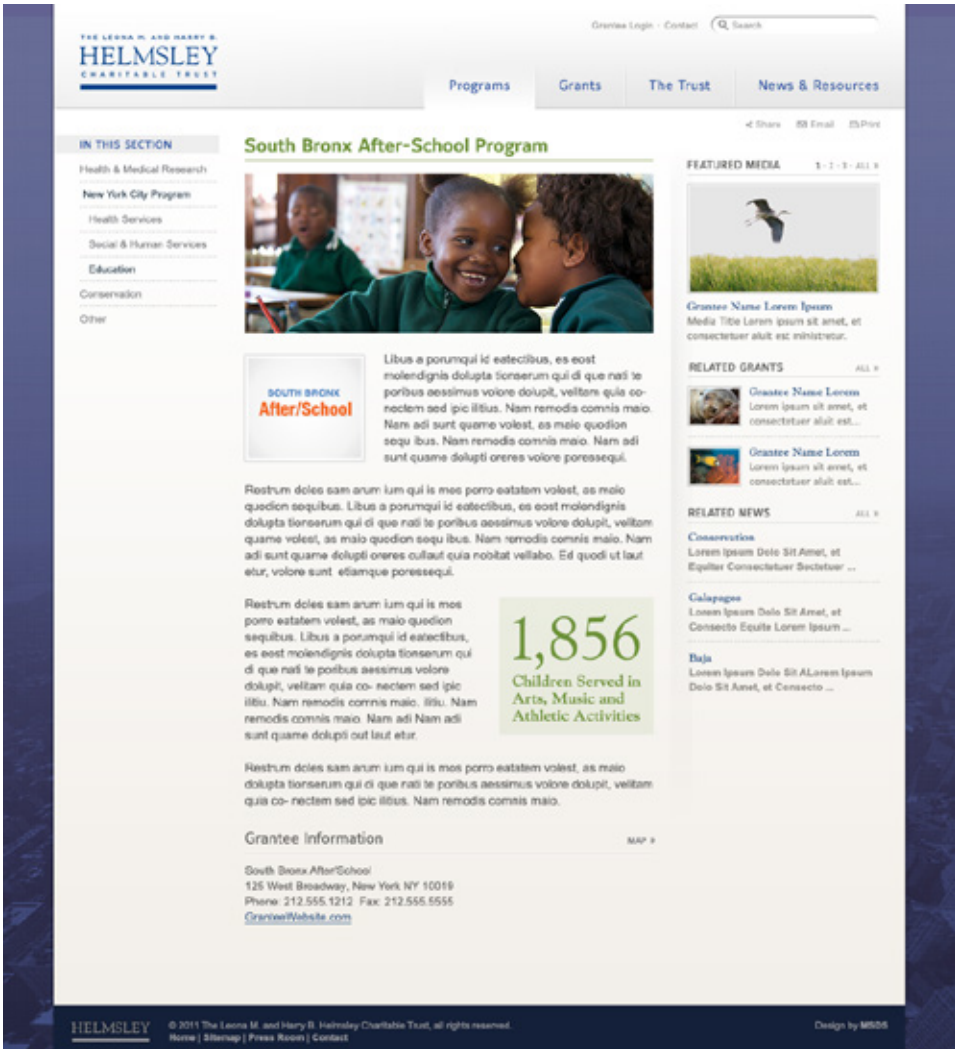
Content Strategy & Information Architecture

Helmsley's primary goal was to clarify their history and mission, while giving users the ability to explore program areas and the work of their grantees. Critical to realizing this vision was developing a content plan for development of organizational- and grantee-focused content, with taxonomies that aligned core issue areas with grantee focus. We first prioritized business goals and audience needs, then developed a scalable, user-centric experience to support Helmsley's rapidly growing operations. Program area hubs organize and feature grantees, while editorially-rich grantee profile pages shine a spotlight on their efforts and outcomes. A grants database, searchable by facets, puts essential information at users' fingertips, while a multimedia library tells a rich story that helps to connect audiences directly with grantees and the people they help.



HelmsleyTrust.org Website Design

Our design strategy focused on creating an experience that immediately conveys The Trust's mission and vision, while clearly communicating program areas and featuring grantees and related content throughout the site experience. With little in the way of brand guidelines other than The Trust's logo and existing website to work from, we took a cue from their established design to maintain continuity, then visually extended it to develop a more vibrant look and feel reflective of The Trust's work across multiple issue areas around the world. The redesigned site delivers a strongly-branded experience that emphasizes clarity and legibility to support Helmsley's content-heavy environment, and shares insights into Helmsley grantees, their work, and the positive impact they're having.







"We engaged MSDS to help us think through our interactive strategy and develop a website foundation to serve us through years of growth, both operationally and in grantmaking. They took the time to really understand us as an organization and did a great job engaging everyone from Leadership to our Program Directors and support staff to discuss our immediate needs and long-term goals.

Their research was insightful and the site strategy they developed did exactly what we needed most: communicate a clearer sense of our mission and goals, while providing a structured way to highlight our rapidly growing list of grantees and program areas."

Chris Percepo,
Manager, Grants Management Department