

What are my options for making a website at MIT?

Q: What are my options for making a website at MIT?

Answer

There are number of options available for creating or hosting a website for your department, lab, center, course, student activity, or personal site. This page explains the various options and their pros and cons.

It is important to take some time to think carefully about your options before proceeding. The cheapest or easiest option now may end up costing you more time in the future. By the same token, the most flexible option may prove to be unmaintainable by your successors or colleagues. If you still have questions after reading this document, you'll find a link to IS&T's Web Hosting Consultation service in the last section.



Document Your Work

The most common problem associated with websites is when a student, faculty or staff member inherits a web site from their predecessor and has no idea how it was configured or what special restrictions or considerations are in place. Please, for the benefit of your colleagues and fellow students, document any unusual configurations, locker layouts, access controls, etc. The typical convention is a "README" file in the top level of your locker – even if that file then directs future maintainers to other documentation.

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Overview Comparison

The following table provides a side-by-side comparison of the various options for hosting at MIT and their support for various common features. For an in-depth discussion of each of the various options, please scroll down past the table.

Service	web.mit.edu	Campus Press	scripts.mit.edu	Drupal Cloud (drupalcloud.mit.edu)	MIT Wiki Service (wikis.mit.edu)	IS&T-managed server	Personal or DLC-hosted server	Out Host Pro
Minimum skills required	Athena command line	None	Athena command line and independent debugging	None ²	None	Technical project management; willingness to hire web design contractor ⁶	System administration Web server configuration	Com mar und willi mak req ven
Best suited for...	a basic website, including static frameworks	WordPress	Custom coding	a full-featured Drupal website without the overhead of system administration	DLC wikis; activity or personal wikis	DLC "front door" websites that are central to institute functioning	Prototypes, custom technical needs, research projects	DLC flexi take adv. com offe
Cost	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free	Free ⁷	(varies) ⁸	(var
Support provider	IS&T	IS&T, Campus Press helpdesk	SIPB Volunteers ⁹	IS&T ¹⁰	IS&T	(varies) ¹¹	None	(var

Supports hostnames				4		4	4	
Supports web forms					n/a			
Supports access control	MIT certificates only	Touchstone	MIT certificates and website-specific passwords	Touchstone	Touchstone	5	5	(var)
Supports personal wikis						5	5	
Supports blogs						5	5	
Supports arbitrary custom web scripts or frameworks						5	5	



MIT Sloan faculty are encouraged to contact the Office of Communications at mitmgmtwebhelp-sloan@mit.edu to set up a new personal website. Or, if you have a website in the "Scripts" template and would like to move out of it, you can find [more information here on your options](#).

¹ An MIT **hostname** is a name that ends in .mit.edu, such as myactivity.mit.edu or mylabgroup.mit.edu. This is distinct from a **subdomain**, which are generally reserved for an entire department. For example, csail.mit.edu is a subdomain, and hostnames within that subdomain might include tig.csail.mit.edu or www.csail.mit.edu.

² Drupal Cloud sites come with a basic template and configuration, so at a minimum, you need only provide your content. Additional Drupal configuration is possible for advanced users.

³ For authorized projects (with academic sponsorship from faculty) custom hostnames can be allocated (on web.mit.edu). Please ask the service desk.

⁴ Selecting a hostname is required to use this service.

⁵ Because this option gives you complete control over your server environment, you can integrate with Touchstone, but development/programming experience is required. Similarly, because you have full control over the environment, you may install any web script or framework, including a wiki or blog of your choice.

⁶ In the IS&T Managed Server program, IS&T provides an environment ready to run the required website technologies, but software maintenance of the content management system itself (eg. WordPress updates) should be done by the customer, or by a suitable web contractor hired by the customer.

⁷ IS&T allocates space with discretion towards institute need/official projects. Customers usually hire a suitable web development contractor to maintain the website software.

⁸ Consult with your DLC or contact IS&T for more information. Costs may include: installation of a new network drop, purchase of the physical server, purchase of a warranty or SLA for the server, man-hours or headcount cost associated with server maintenance overhead

⁹ Scripts.mit.edu uses AFS for its storage. IS&T can provide basic assistance with uploading files to your AFS locker. SIPB's student members provide best-effort volunteer support for Scripts.

¹⁰ IS&T provides the Drupal platform and basic site provisioning. The [Drupal Cloud Community](#) is available for best-effort peer support.

¹¹ For managed servers, IS&T provides basic configuration and operating system installation. For co-location servers, IS&T provides co-location service only.

Wikis and Course Websites

In many cases, you may not need to create a standalone website. MIT has platforms that can host content for you without any of the hassle of maintaining your own website or software. The primary advantage of these platforms is that you need only create the content you want to display and set up any group membership using standard [Moira lists](#); you don't need to worry about software configuration or maintaining another set of usernames and passwords.

- **Wikis:** The [MIT Wiki](#) service provides a hosted environment suitable for setting up a wiki for your group, lab, department, course, UROP, activity, or even for your own personal use. A wiki is a great way to make knowledge or content available in a dynamic form, and wiki pages can also contain attachments or links to any type of content (PDF, zip files, etc). Wikis support basic hierarchies and tables of contents, as well as access control.

An AFS locker and web.mit.edu

All courses, ASA activities, living groups, departments, labs and centers at MIT are eligible for an AFS locker. (Your group may even have a locker already – contact IS&T User Accounts if you need assistance identifying your locker.) You can host static content (i.e. .html files, images, PDF files, zip files, etc) on web.mit.edu, but cannot host dynamic content (e.g. wikis, blogs, PHP scripts, CGI scripts). You can restrict access to specific directories using MIT Certificates, but cannot restrict access with a username and password.

The URL for this space will be web.mit.edu/yourlockernamespace.

How can I get started with a web.mit.edu website?

Campus Press

Campus Press

In order to provide quick start WordPress to the MIT community, IS&T has contracted with Campus Press, for them to operate and provide a WordPress network. The front door is at <https://sites.mit.edu> and a new site can be requested from there. Normally until the site is fully developed URLs will be at <https://sites.mit.edu/something> - custom hostnames can be added/transferred there for eligible departments, labs, centers and recognized student groups.

As of fall 2023, this is being rolled out as the successor service to Drupal Cloud, and existing Drupal Cloud sites will be offered migration.

drupalcloud.mit.edu



With the launch of the MIT Sites service, Drupal Cloud is being phased out. Effective January 2, 2024, no new Drupal Cloud sites will be created. Students, faculty, and staff are invited to visit sites.mit.edu to create a new MIT website on CampusPress.

The IS&T-run <http://drupalcloud.mit.edu> service allows a starting point of a Drupal 7 template. This service integrates with the MIT Touchstone service for authentication or access control, allows the creation of different user accounts for updating portions of the site, has interoperation with the MIT Events Calendar, and offers a variety of other modules. Because Drupal is a popular content management platform, you can also take advantage of the wide range of Drupal knowledge outside the MIT Community.

scripts.mit.edu

Scripts, run by SIPB, allows you to host dynamic content in your AFS locker, but you must access it through a scripts.mit.edu URL, or a hostname (e.g. something.mit.edu) registered through the Scripts infrastructure. Scripts provides automatic installers for popular software packages, including WordPress and MediaWiki. You can also run virtually any web script or hosting framework on Scripts, but you must have the technical knowledge to do so. The [Scripts FAQ](#) has more information about what is and is not possible on scripts.mit.edu.

The Scripts team also provides sql.mit.edu, which allows members of the MIT community to host MySQL databases. This integrates with many of the scripts.mit.edu auto-installers.

stuff.mit.edu

The stuff.mit.edu server, run by SIPB (a student computing group), supplements sites hosted in AFS with a few additional features, including the ability to password-protect certain sections of your site.

Your own web server

Finally, you can choose to maintain your own web server, either hosted somewhere in your office or DLC, as a hosted or managed server in the IS&T datacenter, or in a virtual environment such as [SIPB's XVM service](#). This is often the most costly option in terms of money, time, or both. Running your own server requires that you stay up to date on security patches, and maintain the operating system in a secure manner. It also requires someone with considerable expertise to keep everything up to date, and recover from any issues that may arise. However, it does provide the most flexibility. If you do choose this option, particularly if you are a student, visiting scientist, or other member of the community whose time at the Institute is limited, you are strongly encouraged to consult with your colleagues and ensure that there is someone else in your group who has the necessary knowledge and skills to take over maintenance of the site.

Overwhelmed by all these options?

We realize all these choices may be overwhelming, but we want to ensure you find the best option that meets your needs. If you need further assistance selecting an option, please fill out our [Hosting Consultation Form](#), and an IS&T staff member can help you find the option that meets your needs.

Have Questions or Still Need Help?

- Contact the IS&T Service Desk

