



# Capitol Idea

*Technology Grants Access to Oregon's State Capitol*

The Oregon State Capitol is a major portal to democracy in Oregon. It is open to explore during work hours, Monday through Friday, and on select Saturdays during public event programming. Many Oregonians and others visit the Capitol throughout the year. There are potentially many more people who are interested in visiting the building, but never have had the opportunity.



**STACY NALLEY**

## **Embracing Technology**

In 2018 a virtual tour of the Capitol and the surrounding state park was launched aimed at the visitor experience ([www.oregoncapitol.com](http://www.oregoncapitol.com)). To supplement the virtual experience, the tour features an audio tour component, video gallery, picture gallery, and downloadable PDFs. There is even a resource page to guide visitors to other cultural and heritage organizations throughout the state.

“The Oregon State Capitol project was a great opportunity to provide an immersive educational experience for those unable to come tour the Capitol in person,” said Ben Powers, who worked on the project. “Being native Oregonians, this project was near and dear to our hearts. We’re proud of our home state, and are excited to

share it with the world, so anyone with an internet connection can visit this historic location right from the palm of their hand. The Capitol is groundbreaking in their use of this technology; it truly shows their commitment to inclusion, and we’re thrilled to help overcome some of their visitors’ accessibility challenges and work together to bring this vision to life.”

Powers continued to explain a little more about the technology used in the project: “The application allows for adding interactive elements such as audio hotspots, text-and-email share features, partner website integrations, and calls-to-action, giving the viewer an experience as close as possible to being there in person.”

The app loads onto any phone, tablet, or computer, and houses both traditional (photos, videos, PDFs, and websites) and immersive (360-degree, three-dimensional, virtual reality, augmented reality) content.

“We’ve made it easier than ever before to go on a self-guided tour of the Capitol without missing the crucial learning opportunities provided by the staff,” Powers said.

There are two ways to access the tour. The Capitol’s website, [www.oregoncapitol.com](http://www.oregoncapitol.com), houses an easy-to-use desktop version with additional galleries to explore in a left-side menu. Mobile visitors can access the tour at [www.orcapitoltour.com](http://www.orcapitoltour.com) through free public wifi, or a link will be texted directly to them if they text “Oregon” to 24587. The mobile version has a drop-down menu in the upper right that takes the visitor to each place within the building. The two versions were deemed necessary as the left- and right-side menus took too much space on a mobile device.

Adult visitors were not the only demographic in mind when Capitol staff were looking at the concept of a virtual tour. Visitor Services Manager Juliene Poppinga, who led the project, knew that it could also be a major supplement to a fourth-grade curriculum. Oregon history is taught in the state’s public schools during the fourth-grade year, and the Capitol is a destination for field trips.

“More than 20,000 school children visit the building during school tour season,” Poppinga said. “Teachers and students who are not able to visit the Capitol in person now have an opportunity to explore the Capitol through the online virtual tour and access the lesson plans.”

Visitor Services staff and the project funder, the Oregon State Capitol Foundation, worked with the Oregon Department of Education to identify and create fourth-grade lesson plans that met state standards. A “tool kit” was then placed online for teachers to download and use in their classroom to supplement either visiting the Capitol in person, or a virtual visit.

By using the tool kit, children are more prepared to explore the Capitol. They have learned essential vocabulary, and the basics regarding the legislative process.

Another role the virtual tour can address is foreign languages. Spanish and Chinese are the second and



A rack card with step-by-step instructions guides visitors to the virtual tour experience.

third top languages of the state and the next stage of the virtual tour’s adaption will address them. The audio and written components of the tour are slated to be offered in these languages as early as 2020.

For those visitors who are not able to climb the 121 steps to the observation deck on top of the building, the virtual tour allows those guests the ability to see the 360-degree view and a close-up of the Oregon Pioneer, a 23-foot, 17,000-pound statue covered in gold leaf.

## Training the Messaging

The use of this technology is new for the Capitol and as such, it has taken some time to train kiosk volunteers to guide visitors to the virtual tour outside of guided tour times. Messaging is looked at routinely and addressed through the volunteer newsletter, in-person training, and employee modeling. A rack card was printed with instructions to guide the visitor to use the virtual tour during their visit and is offered at an information kiosk. Inexpensive earphones are offered in the Capitol Store for \$1 in case the visitor doesn’t have any with them, for a more private tour experience.

When visitors arrive at the Capitol they enter the front doors and are in awe of the magnitude of the rotunda. They then make their way to the information kiosk located within the Visitor Services department. The Visitor Services area is composed of a permanent and rotating exhibit space, store, offices, and Galleria floor space available for daily rentals.

A lot of visitors comment on the openness of the building. The People’s Building, as it is sometimes referred to, is open for the public to wander and explore. Not only is it a terrific example of a WPA project, it is the embodiment of art deco architecture of the 1930s situated amongst the lovely landscaping of a state park. If you are ever in Oregon’s capital city, swing on in, and if you aren’t, you are welcome to explore the building online.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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*The Capitol contracted with Visiting Media, based in Portland, Oregon, on the virtual tour project, using TrueTour™ technology.*