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FOG Conducts Review of City and County Websites

ALBUQUERQUE - The New Mexico Foundation for Open Government, FOG, today released an audit of city and county websites, which evaluates whether the public can easily find important government information online.

Using objective criteria, the FOG audit examined the websites of 31 New Mexico cities and 27 of the 33 New Mexico counties and assigned scores in seven categories - financial data, accountability data, public meetings information, contact information, public records information, website functionality and other frequently sought information.

The remaining county websites were omitted from the study because those sites were either under construction or several years out of date.

"Government websites should be resources for the public to easily access key information," said Gregory Williams, president of the FOG board and an Albuquerque attorney. "This audit is intended to assist government bodies to better manage websites and present useful public data in accessible formats."

Williams added that nationwide the gold standard is for online government information to be downloadable, searchable and sortable, not in PDF form.

In order to assist public bodies, FOG identified common best website practices, such as the use of search bars, site indexes and detailed contact information for public employees.

According to FOG law intern Frank Cardoza, who conducted the majority of the assessment, city and county financial data should go beyond the publication of budgets. "When websites make check registers available, citizens can readily determine how much is spent on specific projects and see how much vendors are being paid," Cardoza explained.

As a result of the audit, FOG recommends that public meetings be included on interactive calendars, and public records request pages offer a tracking feature to check the status of pending requests.

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"We want to ease the burden on public records custodians and other government staff by encouraging public bodies to include as much information as possible on their websites," Williams said.

The audit was conducted in February and March 2015 and updated in July 2015. During that 4-5 month period, a number of cities and counties improved their scores by posting additional information.

Rio Rancho topped the list of cities in the state receiving a cumulative score of 84 out of a possible 95. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the top five was comprised of other large New Mexico cities - Albuquerque (83), Los Alamos (70), Santa Fe (70) and Las Cruces (67).

Among websites for cities and towns with populations less than 15,000, Silver City and Ruidoso tied for the best municipal site with scores of 56. Truth or Consequences received a score of 51. Artesia and Las Vegas Artesia rounded out the top five, receiving scores of 50 and 49, respectively. Cities with the lowest scores included Anthony (8), Grants (20), Espanola (30) and Raton (31).

Among the findings for county websites, Santa Fe and Bernalillo Counties received considerably higher marks, earning an 84 and 83 out of a possible 100, respectively. The least effective county websites were Harding (14), Cibola (18) and Quay (19).

"While we certainly understand that budgets and staffing are limited, particularly in the smaller counties and municipalities, this study provides benchmarks and offers recommendations for making websites more effective," Williams said.

"FOG is available to government bodies needing guidance to implement website improvements," Williams added. "Our organization's primary mission is to educate citizens, professionals and public officials about their rights and responsibilities under New Mexico's open government laws."

The website audit was made possible by grants from the LANL Foundation and Santa Fe philanthropist Dee Ann McIntyre.

[Read the full website audit report and access the raw data and scores here](#)

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and www.nmfog.org.

About FOG

The New Mexico Foundation for Open Government is celebrating 25 years of educating, advocating and litigating for transparency. FOG is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, statewide, member-supported organization dedicated to protecting the public's right to know. FOG is committed to enhancing our democracy by informing citizens and officials about their rights and responsibilities under New Mexico's Sunshine Laws. To learn more, visit www.nmfog.org.