

Preliminary Report on Salt Lake City's Greater Transparency for Collaborative Government Initiative

A Web Site Review: Ratings on Transparency Best Practices

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"Democracies die behind closed doors. A government operating in the shadow of secrecy stands in complete opposition to the society envisioned by the framers of our Constitution." – Judge Damon Keith, 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati, September 2002.

At the request of Salt Lake City officials, a review was made of the Greater Transparency for Collaborative Government Initiative relation to the Salt Lake City Web site. The stated goals and policies of the initiative are solid and consistent with good transparency policy and need no real critique. Therefore, this analysis is directed at **specific ways** the Web site and city officials can institute their stated goals of the Greater Transparency for Collaborative Government Initiative. This document is best read in electronic form where the embedded links can be clicked to view Internet examples.

Evaluation of the Salt Lake City Web site. Several surveys have been conducted which rank government Web sites in terms of government services and accessibility. For example, in the 2008 Digital Cities Survey Salt Lake City ranked second among cities of similar population. This study integrated survey material and criteria from the Center for Digital Government, the Knight Citizen News Network, and Information Technology and Innovation Foundation. The scale using the following scale:

- A – Excellent
- B – Good
- C – Average
- D – Needs improvement
- Incomplete – The standard appears to be in progress
- Future – Possible future addition

This analysis has divided the Web site into three distinct categories:

TRANSPARENCY. This is the availability in a proactive fashion of making government information available for citizens to view without them having to make a request for records.

ACCESSIBILITY AND E- GOVERNMENT . This is the ease of access for Web users and availability of government services.

CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT, E-DEMOCRACY . This moves beyond government services such as paying bills and uses technology to involve citizens in new ways in the input and governing process.

Note: The study is ongoing and a final report will be issued as Salt Lake City government meets its objectives including more detailed analysis of the General Work Plan submitted to the City Council in May 2009.

Criteria	Current Rating	Recommendation
TRANSPARENCY		
1. Government staff directory and organizational chart with ease of access to find information	A	City directory and city organizational chart is very good http://www.slcgov.com/departments/org.htm
2. Visibility of online resources for access to open meetings and records, i.e. home page links.	B-	I took six clicks into the site to finally find a PDF GRAMA request form. City would benefit from posting links to laws and instructions how to use through its front page. An online interface such as used by the federal government would be beneficial.
3. Provide comprehensive information on open meetings and records	C	Limited information is only available through City Council site. May be hard to locate for some residents. Online information on Open Meetings Act was a training handout for city council. Here is how the U.S. Department of Justice posts the law and resources: http://www.usdoj.gov/oip/04_1.html
4. Electronic “reading rooms” or areas for frequently requested records	D	Identify and post documents and articles of interest in online reading room. Examples: http://www.sanjoseca.gov/openGovernment/records.asp#RecordsOnline http://www.epa.gov/foia/ http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/leg/foia/foiatoc.html
5. Availability of online data about government	A	Collections of data scattered throughout Web site. It would be nice to have master index of all online data in a central reading room. The Salt Lake City Info Center http://www.slcgov.com/info/default.htm is very good although I am not sure everything is listed there. Here is an example of an electronic reading room: http://www.usdoj.gov/crs/crs-electronic-rr.htm
6. Ways to file records requests online	F	Here is an example of an online FOIA request form: http://www.faa.gov/foia/email_foia/index.cfm?region=western See also San Jose, Calif., Open Government page http://www.sanjoseca.gov/openGovernment/index.asp
7. Access to budget and financial data. Data available in spreadsheets	B+	Currently only available in PDF Format. Government transparency trend is to provide spreadsheets and searchable databases. Utah cities are mandated to put such information online within two years. Example: transparent.utah.gov. The Salt Lake City Budget workshop is a good start. http://www.slcgov.com/budgetworkshop/default.htm

8. Searchable contract database	Future	This would be a great addition. Example: www.fedspending.org
9. Easy accessibility to council, commission, committee agendas	A-	Access may be impeded by defining by department rather than topic. Many top-rated government Web sites have changed their menus to topical lists. See for example see the City of Denver: http://www.denvergov.org/
10. Background info on agenda items	A	This seemed very easy to find within two clicks from the home page.
11. Archives of minutes, video and/or audio records	A	This seemed very easy to find within two clicks from the home page.
12. Ways to participate in decision-make processes	A	This seemed very easy to find within two clicks from the home page.
13. Clear links to public notices	D+	The public notice Web functionality is clumsy and awkward. Does not have a search function. This will be mitigated as Utah newspapers and state partnership launch utahlegals.com by Jan. 1, 2010
14. Searchable public notice database, possibly with RSS feeds	F	See above.
15. Searchable/downloadable Campaign finance reports	C	The reports are available, but there is no search capability. Good example: http://cal-access.sos.ca.gov/campaign/
ACCESSIBILITY AND E-GOVERNMENT		
16. Policies and policies translated into "Plain English"	Incomplete	The prospects of the City Hall 101 look promising.
17. Disabled accessibility	B	Many Web sites are now installing easy ways to increase size of text on the top of the Web site.
18. Available in multiple languages	Future	At the very least, the city could recommend Google translator for those whose native language is other than English. You can direct Translate.google.com to translate the Web site from English into several languages.
19. Development of RSS feeds or e-mail alerts about items of interest	B	E-mail alerts currently available. RSS feeds could be developed. Example: http://www.roanokeva.gov/WebMgmt/ywbase61b.nsf/DocName/\$news

20. Web site is not agency-centric, put presents online services according to citizen needs	A	Noticeable positive changes made in this area since January 2009.
21. Easy access to e-government applications	A	Resident Center is a great gateway by topic
22. Online payment functionality	A	These are highly visible on the front page
23. Explains how contractors can do business with government agencies and departments.	A	
24. Access to customer service reps, 24-hour service	Future	
25. "Wizards" that walk citizens through complicated processes	Future	Guide to Doing Business, for example, might have interactive video and training features
26. Public procurements (bids or RFPs)	A	Guide to Doing Business is Good
CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT, E-DEMOCRACY		
27. Easy ways to find representative and/or community council contacts	A-	A bit difficult to find, but the map page is wonderful
28. Remote access to participate in meetings or other means to submit public comment	A-	There is now capability to submit comments through the City Council site. The ability to submit online comments during the meeting is a positive step and waiting at least a week to receive comments from those not at the meeting is also a positive step.
29. Messages and information about and from elected representatives, i.e. weekly radio	A	There are messages from the mayor and chief of police

addresses, speeches		
30. News service available via RSS or push e-mail	C-	Link to news service page http://www.slcgov.com/news/ is dead. News needs dates.
31. Web 2.0 applications Use of Social media such as Facebook or Twitter	B	Beginning use of blogs
32. Use of podcasts and video	B	SLCTV should be promoted more. The "YouTube" generation will connect through video and podcasts.
33. Mashups of government information	Incomplete	Great promise here from crime information. Possibly connect to crimereports.com where Utah is listing crime reports.
34. Access to voter registration form (online)	B	A bit hard to find
35. Evidence of way to publicize and connect to general public, i.e. partnerships with local media	C	Look outside the box to see if you can create private-public partnerships to increase visibility and engagement in the site.
36. Index and search of "hidden" information	B	Search capability good. Would recommend a site map.
37. Archives of ordinances and votes. Ordinance tracking service.	C	Utah's Legislature Web site is a great example of this at http://le.state.ut.us .

Some ideas from the Nation's best government Web sites:

Gaming the system – Budget calculator. This allows residents to play with the numbers to see how they would use the system. See an example at Mukilteo, Wash., Web site <http://www.ci.mukilteo.wa.us/News.asp?NewsID=22>

Training for employees and citizens. Online training allows citizens to learn about city processes at their leisure.

Handbooks. These give varied audiences “inside” information about how to engage and use government processes and systems.

Public Access counselor. An official is designated to help citizens to request and obtain information. See the Indiana Public Access Counselor page <http://www.in.gov/pac/>

Openness statement posted at offices. These statements declare that records in the office are public and outlines “rules of engagement” to request records. See versions of the Texas poster at <http://www.oag.state.tx.us/open/pia/pia.shtml>.

Text of Open Meetings and Open Records Law. Many entities post the text and plain English explanation of laws to citizens at the local level.

Annual reports about GRAMA response. The reports require accountability of government transparency initiatives. See annual FOIA reports at the U.S. Department of Justice http://www.usdoj.gov/oip/04_6.html

Wireless applications. Many entities now have text feeds for meetings and other important issues and emergencies. See Emergency notification page at Aurora, Colo. <http://www.auroragov.org/AuroraGov/Departments/Fire/OfficeofEmergencyManagement/049741>

News releases from police and city combined. Some cities now issue press releases from a central source with RSS feeds.

Online accident and police reports. Sex offender information. These allow easy access to records or at least summaries. <http://crimereports.com/>

Recycling hotline. These hotline help citizens find information about recycling.

Interactive maps. These maps help identify resources, contacts and information that is “hyperlocal” to their area.

A variation of the map above is a “Find your Rep” service. You put in your address to find community council, city council member and related city services. See the service in Texas. <http://www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/>