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Blueprint *for* Transparency

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# A REVIEW OF OKLAHOMA MUNICIPAL WEBSITES

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**OKLAHOMANS**  
*for Responsible Government*

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# BLUEPRINT *for* TRANSPARENCY: MUNICIPALITIES

# SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Taxpayers have a right to see how the dollars they provide to government are being spent. It's as true today as it was back in the early years of our nation when President John Adams said, "Liberty cannot be preserved without a general knowledge among the people, who have a right and a desire to know." While transparency in the federal and state governments has received a lot of attention, cities must also be held to a certain standard of openness when it comes to spending.

It's impractical for every citizen to be able to attend every city council meeting, but the internet gives cities the ability to connect with taxpayers. That only works, however, if a city's website provides the proper information. Oklahomans for Responsible Government has looked at the websites for the 75 cities in the state with a population of 5,000 or more to see if the information provided meets a certain level of transparency. The cities were selected based on 2008 U.S. Census Bureau estimates prepared by the Oklahoma Census Data Center at the Oklahoma Department of Commerce and the transparency criteria are those developed by SunshineReview.org, an online leader in open government. Websites were analyzed during the first two weeks of March, 2010.

As with our previous Blueprint for Transparency which looked at school district websites, this report is intended to be a guideline for cities on how to improve their connection with taxpayers. We hope that city officials will read through it and come up with a plan to meet all the criteria by next year when the Blueprint will be updated. Cities rely on taxpayer dollars to operate and they should be willing to open themselves up to the scrutiny of the people providing the money.

This survey of cities with populations of 5,000 or more represents over 2.3-million people or more than 60% of Oklahoma's citizens. It shows that with the exception of those living in Owasso – the only city to receive a perfect score – those citizens could be better served by their municipal website. Two Oklahoma cities, Cushing and Vinita, use the websites of their Chambers of Commerce to disseminate information while two others, Idabel and Lone Grove, have no web presence at all. Idabel officials tell us that they are working on a website while Lone Grove has no plans for one. In this age of technology, we feel that it is imperative for cities to have a website and to provide information important to taxpayers on it.

Of the ten criteria, cities did the best in the areas of contacting elected and administrative officials. The vast majority of municipal websites included the names and some sort of contact information for council members and key department heads. But it's important to note that with e-mail being nearly universal in this day and age, it is crucial for e-mail addresses to be made available to the public so they can contact city officials and keep a record of those contacts. Cities were also good overall at posting city council meeting agendas, but need to do a better job with posting the minutes of previous meetings.

The criteria that the fewest cities met were lobbying, open records and taxes. Only one city, Owasso, disclosed that it belonged to taxpayer-funded lobbying groups. Only a few more cities had both taxes AND fees charged by the city disclosed on the website. This is a fundamental piece of information that cities should be disclosing to taxpayers on the web.

There are 15 cities that completely met six or more of the criteria (see page below). It's important to point out that the size of a city is not necessarily an indicator of the transparency of its website. Owasso, which met all of the criteria, has five-percent of the total population of Oklahoma City. Blackwell and Sallisaw – each with less than 9,000 people - fully met seven of the ten criteria.

## BEST MUNICIPAL WEBSITES

Bartlesville	Guthrie	Norman	Stillwater
Blackwell	Lawton	Oklahoma City	Tulsa
Broken Arrow	Moore	Owasso	The Village
Edmond	Muskogee	Sallisaw	

## THE CRITERIA

Each website was assessed on whether it had information in ten categories.

### Budget

**Required:** The current budget needs to be posted.

**Suggested:** Providing budgets from previous years plus graphs showing changes in spending over time. Posting monthly check registers and credit card receipts.

### Meetings

**Required:** Agendas for the upcoming or most recent meeting plus minutes of previous meetings need to be posted along with dates, times and places for upcoming meetings.

### Elected Officials

**Required:** The mayor and city council members should have contact information, including e-mail addresses, listed.

**Suggested:** If council members represent wards, a boundary map should be provided. Also, the dates the member was elected and when the member's term expires should be posted.

### Administrative Officials

**Required:** The heads of all municipal departments and other key administrators should be posted online along with contact information, including e-mail addresses.

### Permits and Zoning

**Required:** Ordinances need to be posted and applications for permits should be available online for download.

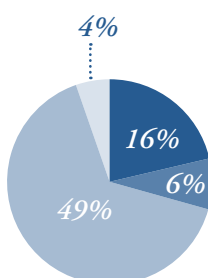
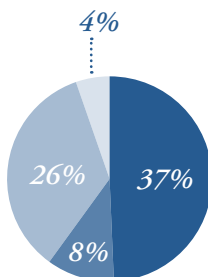
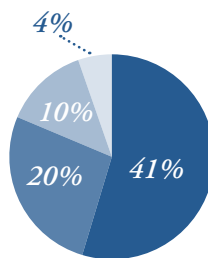
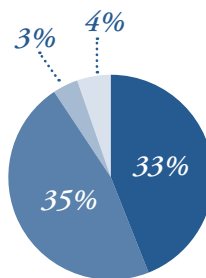
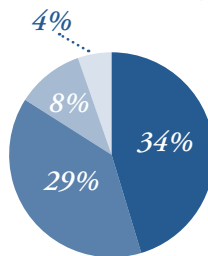
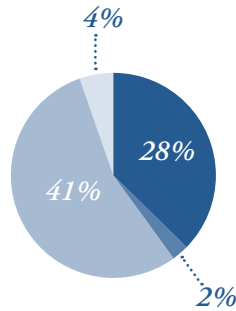
**Suggested:** Constituents should be able to submit applications and track the process online.

### Audits

**Required:** Municipal websites should include audit report results.

**Suggested:** Performance audits for government programs should be posted.

■ Present ■ Incomplete ■ Missing ■ No Website



### Contracts

**Required:** Rules governing contracts should be posted online including bids and contracts for purchases over \$10,000.

**Suggested:** Campaign contributions made by the vendor should be posted along with the contract.

### Lobbying

**Required:** If the municipality participates in any lobbying whether through direct payment of a lobbyist or participation in an organization that funds its lobbyist through dues paid with tax dollars, it should be disclosed on the website.

### Public Records

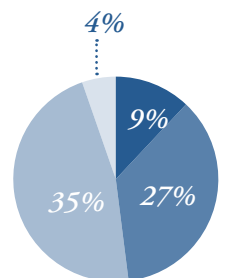
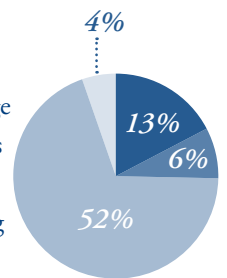
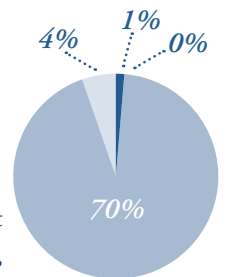
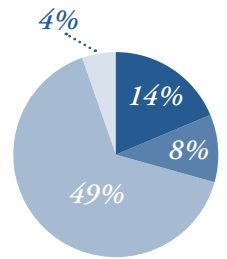
**Required:** The name and contact information of the person in charge of fulfilling Open Records requests needs to be made available online as well as any charges for obtaining records.

**Suggested:** Allowing for requests to be filed online instead of by mail or in-person.

### Taxes

**Required:** All taxes and fees imposed by the city should be available online.

**Suggested:** Taxes, fees and budget information should be located in the same section of the website. Posting the source of revenue for each agency would also be helpful.



# MUNICIPAL WEBSITES TRANSPARENCY



City	Pop.	Budget	Meetings	Elected Officials	Admin. Officials	Permits & Zoning	Audits	Contracts	Lobbying	Public Records	Taxes
Ada	16,729	✗	▸	▸	✗	✓	✗	▸	✗	✗	▸
Altus	18,912	✓	✓	▸	✓	▸	✓	▸	✗	✗	▸
Anadarko	6,323	✗	✗	▸	▸	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Ardmore	24,810	✓	✗	✓	▸	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	▸
Bartlesville	35,914	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	▸	✗	✓	▸
Bethany	19,729	✓	▸	✓	✓	✓	▸	✗	✗	✗	▸
Bixby	20,678	✗	▸	▸	▸	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Blackwell	7,144	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	▸	✗	✓	▸
Blanchard	6,599	✗	▸	✓	✓	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Broken Arrow	92,931	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
Catoosa	6,607	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Chickasha	17,062	✓	✓	▸	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	▸	✗
Choctaw	11,354	✗	▸	▸	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Claremore	17,458	▸	✓	▸	▸	▸	▸	✗	✗	✗	✓
Clinton	8,768	✗	▸	▸	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	▸
Collinsville	5,039	✗	▸	▸	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	▸
Coweta	9,096	✗	▸	▸	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	▸
Cushing	8,767	No Website									
Del City	22,067	✗	▸	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Duncan	22,617	✗	✗	▸	✗	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Durant	16,450	✗	✓	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Edmond	79,559	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
El Reno	16,545	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✓	▸
Elk City	11,311	✗	▸	▸	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	▸
Enid	47,396	✓	▸	✓	✓	✓	▸	✓	✗	✗	▸
Glenpool	9,914	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
Grove	6,338	✗	▸	▸	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Guthrie	11,043	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	▸	✗	✗	✗	✓
Guymon	10,702	✗	▸	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗
Harrah	5,208	✗	✓	✓	✓	▸	▸	✗	✗	✗	▸
Henryetta	6,031	✗	✗	▸	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Holdenville	5,417	✗	✗	✗	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Hugo	5,390	✗	▸	▸	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Idabel	6,851	No Website									
Jenks	15,590	✗	▸	✓	▸	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Lawton	90,091	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	▸	▸
Lone Grove	5,276	No Website									
McAlester	18,388	✓	✓	✓	▸	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	▸

✓ Present ▸ Incomplete ✗ Missing

# MUNICIPAL WEBSITES TRANSPARENCY



City	Pop.	Budget	Meetings	Elected Officials	Admin. Officials	Permits & Zoning	Audits	Contracts	Lobbying	Public Records	Taxes
Miami	13,027	✓	▸	▸	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✗	✓
Midwest City	56,394	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	✗
Moore	52,615	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓
Muskogee	40,099	✓	✓	▸	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	▸
Mustang	17,727	✗	✓	▸	▸	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	▸
Newcastle	7,250	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Noble	5,812	✓	▸	▸	▸	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	▸
Norman	106,957	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	▸
Oklahoma City	551,789	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	▸
Okmulgee	12,634	✗	▸	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Owasso	27,467	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pauls Valley	6,121	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Perry	5,060	✗	✗	▸	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Piedmont	5,504	▸	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓
Ponca City	24,507	✗	✓	▸	▸	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	▸
Poteau	8,258	✗	▸	▸	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	▸	✗
Pryor Creek	9,293	✗	▸	▸	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Purcell	6,129	✗	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Sallisaw	8,742	✓	✓	▸	✓	✗	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Sand Springs	18,489	✗	✓	✓	✓	▸	▸	✗	✗	✗	▸
Sapulpa	21,173	✗	▸	▸	✓	✓	✗	▸	✗	▸	✗
Seminole	6,804	✗	▸	▸	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Shawnee	30,562	✓	✓	✓	▸	✓	✓	✗	✗	▸	▸
Skiatook	6,820	✗	▸	▸	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Stillwater	47,653	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	▸	✗	▸	✓
Tahlequah	16,623	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	▸
Tecumseh	6,667	✗	▸	▸	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
The Village	9,769	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✓	▸
Tulsa	385,635	✓	✓	▸	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	▸
Tuttle	6,036	✗	▸	▸	✗	✗	✗	▸	✗	✗	✗
Vinita	6,059	No Website									
Wagoner	8,081	✗	▸	✓	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Warr Acres	9,427	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Watonga	5,657	✗	✗	▸	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Weatherford	10,185	✓	▸	▸	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	▸
Woodward	12,299	✓	▸	▸	✓	▸	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗
Yukon	22,849	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗

✓ Present   ▸ Incomplete   ✗ Missing

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## CONCLUSIONS

Every city can improve their websites to include more information that taxpayers find helpful. The criteria section (see page 2) not only lists what is required to get a check mark but also gives some suggestions on how to go above and beyond the minimum requirements set by Sunshine Review. For the majority of cities, it's simply a question of uploading information to a website that already exists or adding text to a page to give more details on subjects like taxes or fees. In most cases, any documents to be uploaded are already in electronic form.

This report is intended to be the baseline for comparisons of future reports. It is our hope that the cities will use this report as a guide to put more information onto their websites so that taxpayers will have a clearer picture of how their municipal government works. It's also important for taxpayers to hold their elected officials accountable and demand more openness in government. OFRG will update the Blueprint annually so taxpayers can easily see if their city is becoming more transparent.

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## ABOUT US

The information in this report was researched by OFRG Executive Director Brian Downs, Communications Director and Projects Manager Peter J. Rudy and Melissa Chasteen, a senior at the University of Oklahoma who is our intern for the spring semester. The report was written by Peter J. Rudy and designed by Grant Hill and the staff at Hilco Creative in Norman.

Founded in 2008, Oklahomans for Responsible Government is a non-profit taxpayer advocacy organization dedicated to limit the growth of government and make it more accountable and transparent to taxpayers. We do this by educating voters on policy issues, advocating solutions to lawmakers and getting grass roots support for the principles of individual liberty and free markets.

OFRG works to identify issues in all forms of government – from the school board and city council to county government and the state legislature. We rely solely on the generous support of our donors to continue promoting transparency, accountability and fiscal responsibility across Oklahoma.

If you would like more information about our organization or would like to contribute to our mission, please visit us online at [www.ofrg.org](http://www.ofrg.org). You can also find us on Facebook ([www.facebook.com/OFRGnews](http://www.facebook.com/OFRGnews)) and Twitter ([www.twitter.com/OFRGnews](http://www.twitter.com/OFRGnews)).



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