Center for Science, Technology and Environmental Policy Studies

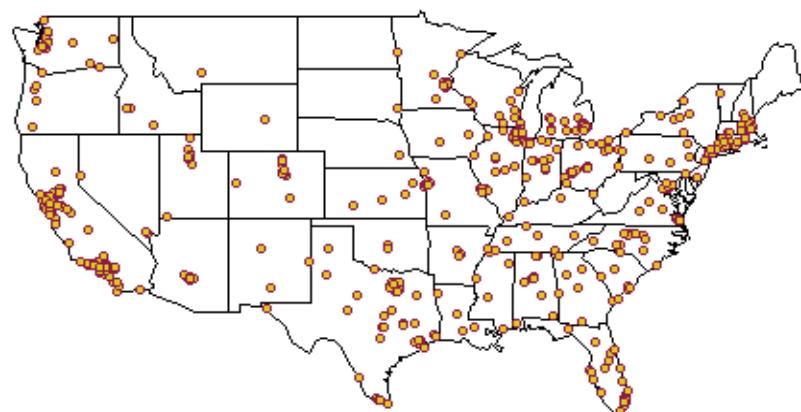**Arizona State University**

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Municipal websites provide access to government information, offering greater benefit to citizens by encouraging online civic engagement. More advanced websites include features that provide information, enable two-way communication, and offer access without physical limitations. A recent study by Dr. Mary K. Feeney and Dr. Adrian Brown draws on a content analysis of websites of 500 U.S. cities. The cities included in the study are illustrated in Figure 1. The research team evaluated the municipal websites ranking the availability of important features and the factors that explain improvement over time.

Figure 1: 500 Cities in Website Study

Key Findings

From 2010 to 2014, there was a noticeable improvement in the number of website features across all municipal websites. Over half of the cities in the study improved their websites by adding one or more features. Less than one in five cities lost one or more features. Even the lowest ranking websites in 2010 showed an increase in the number of website features available in 2014.

Website contractors play an important role in upgrading accessibility and information provision on city websites. For example, Fremont, California's jump to the top of the list in 2014 is in part due to CivicPlus, a private website firm that provides website services aimed at helping *"communities engage and interact"*. Fremont is not alone in using a private contractor to manage the city website. The majority of the cities that had the greatest improvements contracted out website design.

Study Design: These data come from a multi-year national study sponsored by the Center for Science, Technology, and Environmental Policy Studies at ASU.

Highest Ranking Cities

As noted in Table 1, in 2010 the city with the most website features was Augusta, GA with 22 of 27 possible features. The five missing features were: ability to file police reports online, a mayor's blog, mention of Freedom of Information Act, page date, and a statement noting who develops and maintains the site. Two cities moved to the top rankings in 2014: Fremont, CA and Chandler, AZ, both with 23 of the 27 features. Among the cities with the top ranking in 2014, three were in California and two in Colorado. There are three cities that rank in the top 10 in both 2010 and 2014: Alexandria, VA, Elmhurst, IL, and Reno, NV.

Table 1: Highest ranking city websites in 2010 and 2014

2010			2014		
Rank	City	# features	Rank	City	# features
1	Augusta-Richmond, GA	22	1	Chandler, AZ	**23**
2	Alexandria, VA	21	1	Freemont, CA	**23**
2	Newport News, VA	21	2	Alexandria, VA	**22**
2	Reno, NV	21	2	Elmhurst, IL	**22**
3	Arlington, VA	20	2	Fontana, CA	**22**
3	Cape Coral, FL	20	2	Loveland, CO	**22**
3	Charlottesville, VA	20	2	Norfolk, VA	**22**
3	Denton, TX	20	2	Orlando, FL	**22**
3	Elmhurst, IL	20	2	Palm Bay, FL	**22**
3	Fullerton, CA	20	2	Reno, NV	**22**

NOTE: Also tied for 2010 3rd place ranking with 20 website features: Longmont, CO; Rockville, MD; Salt Lake City, UT.
NOTE: Also tied for 2014 2nd place ranking with 22 website features: Richardson, TX; San Bernardino, CA

The top-ranking websites have many of the same features, thus indicating some continuity amongst the top ranked cities in regards to the features offered on their websites. In comparison, there is little consistency across the lower performing websites. For those websites with five or fewer features, some had district maps, others had employee directories. None offered features to accept payments for services or to pay fines. Among these lower performing websites, the most common feature was having an index of laws or city code and noting the mayor's contact information.

Most Improved City Websites

Table 2: Most Improved City Websites, 2010 to 2014

City	Website Ranking			# Features		
	2010	2014	Improvement	2010	2014	Improvement
Greenville, MO	492	280	212	4	15	11
Mount Pleasant, SC	447	76	371	8	19	11
Clarksville, TN	448	77	371	8	19	11
Escondido, CA	366	25	341	10	20	10
Norwich, CT	473	212	261	6	16	10

Table 2 notes the cities with the most improved municipal websites from 2010 to 2014. Among the five most improved cities, they reported 10 to 11 more features, which is impressive because there were well over a hundred cities that showed negative or no improvement.