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State and Federal E-Government in the United States, 2006

by

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
A Note on Methodology	3
Online Information	4
Electronic Services	4
Novel Services	5
Privacy and Security	5
Readability	6
Disability Access	6
Foreign Language Access	7
Ads, User Fees, and Premium Fees	7
Public Outreach	9
State E-Government Ranking	10
Federal Agency E-Government Ranking	11
Conclusions	12
Appendix	14
Table A-1 Overall State E-Govt Ratings, 2005 and 2006	
Table A-2 Overall Federal Agency E-Govt Ratings, 2005 and 2006	
Table A-3 Individual State/Fed Profiles for Publications, Databases, Foreign Language, and Services, 2006	
Table A-4 Individual State/Fed Profiles for Disability Access, Privacy, and Security, 2006	
Table A-5 Best Practices of Top Federal and State Websites, 2006	

Executive Summary

This report presents the seventh annual update on the features that are available online through American state and federal government websites. Using a detailed analysis of 1,564 state and federal government sites, we measure what is online, what variations exist across the country, and what differences appear between state and national government. We compare the 2006 results to 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005.

Among the more important findings of the research are the following:

- 1) *Fifty-four percent of federal sites (up from 44 percent last year) and 43 percent of state sites (up from 40 percent last year) meet the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) disability guidelines.*
- 2) *Seventy-seven percent of state and federal sites have services that are fully executable online, compared to 73 percent last year.*
- 3) *One percent of government sites are accessible through personal digital assistants, pagers, or mobile phones, the same as last year.*
- 4) *Seventy-one percent have some form of privacy policy on their site, up from 69 percent in 2005. Sixty-three percent have a visible security policy, up from 54 percent last year.*
- 5) *Thirty percent of sites offered some type of foreign language translation, up from 18 percent last year.*
- 7) *Sixty-four percent of government websites are written at the 12th grade reading level, which is much higher than that of the average American.*
- 8) *Sites with user fees rose from 2 to 12 percent over the past year.*
- 9) *The highest ranking states include Texas, New Jersey, Oregon, Michigan, Utah, Montana, New York, Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania.*
- 10) *Top-rated federal websites include the federal portal Firstgov.gov, Department of Agriculture, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Commerce, Department of the Treasury, the Internal Revenue Service, the Postal Service, the Department of Education, the Social Security Administration, and the Department of State.*

A Note on Methodology

This project is based on a comprehensive analysis of 1,564 government websites (1,503 state government websites, 48 federal government legislative and executive sites, and 13 federal court sites). The list of web addresses for the 50 states can be found at www.OutsidePolitics.org/states.html, while the federal government sites are located through the national portal, FirstGov.gov.

Among the sites analyzed are portal or gateway sites as well as those developed by court offices, legislatures, elected officials, major departments, and state and federal agencies serving crucial functions of government, such as health, human services, taxation, education, corrections, economic development, administration, natural resources, transportation, elections, and agriculture. An average of 30 websites is studied for each individual state so we could get a full picture of what is available to the general public, plus all the major federal government sites. Tabulation for this project was completed at Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island by Eric Beck and Jason Lee during June and July, 2006.

Websites are evaluated for the presence of a number of different features, such as online publications, online databases, audio clips, video clips, foreign language or language translation, advertisements, premium fees, user payments or fees, disability access, several measures of privacy policy, multiple indicators of security policy, presence of online services, the number of online services, digital signatures, credit card payments, email addresses, comment forms, automatic email updates, website personalization, PDA accessibility, and readability level.

Online Information

In looking at the availability of basic information at American government websites, we find that access to publications and databases is excellent. Ninety-eight percent of sites provide access to publications (the same as last year), while 82 percent have databases, compared to 67 percent in 2005).

Similar to the patterns found in previous years, most websites do not incorporate audio clips or video clips into their sites. Ten percent provide audio clips, while 28 percent have video clips.

Percentage of Websites Offering Publications and Databases

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<i>Phone Contact Info.</i>	91%	94%	96%	--	--	--	--
<i>Address Info</i>	88	93	95	--	--	--	--
<i>Links to Other Sites</i>	80	69	71	--	--	--	--
<i>Publications</i>	74	93	93	98	98	98	98
<i>Databases</i>	42	54	57	80	87	67	82
<i>Audio Clips</i>	5	6	6	8	17	12	10
<i>Video Clips</i>	4	9	8	10	21	18	28

Electronic Services

Fully executable online service delivery benefits both government and its constituents. In the long run, such services offer the potential for lower cost of service delivery and make them more widely accessible to the general public, who no longer have to visit, write, or call an agency in order to execute a specific service.

Of the web sites examined this year, 77 percent offer services that are fully executable online, up from 73 percent last year. Of the sites this year, 23 percent have no services, 16 percent offer one service, 12 percent have two services, and 49 percent have three or more services. Clearly, both state and federal governments are making significant progress at placing fully executable services online. Of the government websites analyzed, 24 percent accept credit cards, and 3 percent allow for digital signatures.

Common services included the following: **Governor sites:** Request an appearance by the governor at an event; **Attorney General sites:** Sign up for “do not call” lists; **Secretary of State sites:** United Commercial Code filings, search databases of registered corporations, file annual reports, search for registered notaries; **Treasurer sites:** Search for unclaimed property; **Revenue sites:** File taxes, check refund status; **Education sites:** Search databases with school information and statistical information about test performance; **Correction/Public Safety sites:** Search incarcerated offender’s databases, search for registered sex offenders in your area; **Motor vehicle sites:** Renew drivers licenses and vehicle registration, order specialty plates, take sample drivers tests; **Fish/Wildlife/Natural Resources sites:** Order hunting and fishing licenses; **Vital records (often health sites):** Online ordering is usually outsourced to VitalChek, Inc.; **Transportation sites:** Check status of roads, through video camera feeds and interactive maps; **Elections sites:** Online finance filings for lobbyist and candidates; search for polling place; **Business regulation sites:** Search professional registries (e.g., confirm registration of doctor, nurse, electrician, etc.) or renew professional registration; **Legislative sites:** Search state laws and pending legislation; and **Judicial sites:** Search and track judicial decisions.

Percentage of Government Sites Offering Online Services

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<i>No Services</i>	78%	75%	77%	56%	44%	27%	23%
<i>One Service</i>	16	15	12	15	18	11	16
<i>Two Services</i>	3	4	4	8	11	8	12
<i>Three or More Services</i>	2	6	7	21	27	54	49

Novel Services

Numerous state tourism sites feature online planner options that allow users to map out a trip complete with accommodations, attractions, and dining. When using this option, businesses throughout the state are suggested to the user while a trip is mapped out within the state. This helps travelers know what food, lodging, and service options are available in different areas.

Among the innovative features that we found this year included the following: **Iowa and Massachusetts**: pay traffic tickets online; **Indiana, Montana, Utah**: live chat for help; **Alaska**: Webcam of DMV office waiting rooms so citizens can see whether the offices are busy; **Connecticut and Pennsylvania** portal sites have a “daily flag status alert” to indicate whether the U.S. and state flags are at “full staff”; **Minnesota, Idaho**: Pay child support online; **Michigan, Kentucky**: report a pothole; **Minnesota**: file for workman’s compensation; **West Virginia** order NASCAR Driver license plates for \$25; **Pennsylvania**: Video guide on using different voting machines; **Oregon**: search baby names database; information and calculate mileage between cities; **Oklahoma**: interactive/searchable map of areas in state which are sensitive to pesticides; and **Ohio**: online shopping for correctional industries.

Privacy and Security

A growing number of sites offer privacy and security statements. In 2006, 71 percent have some form of privacy policy on their site, up from 69 percent in 2005. Sixty-three percent now have a visible security policy, up from 54 percent last year.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Privacy Policies	7%	28%	43%	54%	63%	69%	71%
Security Policies	5	18	34	37	46	54	63

In order to assess particular aspects of privacy and security, we evaluate the content of these publicly posted statements. For privacy policies, we look at several features: whether the privacy statement prohibits commercial marketing of visitor information; use of cookies or individual profiles of visitors; disclosure of personal information without the prior consent of the visitor, or disclosure of visitor information with law enforcement agents.

In this analysis, we found that 58 percent of government websites prohibited the commercial marketing of visitor information. Sixteen percent prohibited the use of cookies or individual profiles. Fifty-four percent say they do not share personal information, and 49 percent indicate they can disclose visitor information to law enforcement agents. Sixty percent indicate they use computer software to monitor website traffic.

Assessment of E-government Privacy and Security Statements

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Prohibit Commercial Marketing	12%	39%	32%	40%	64%	58%
Prohibit Cookies	10	6	10	16	21	16
Prohibit Sharing Personal Information	13	36	31	36	65	54
Share Information with Law Enforcement	--	35	35	39	62	49
Use Computer Software to Monitor Traffic	8	37	24	28	46	60

Readability

Literacy is the ability to read and understand written information. According to national statistics, about half of the American population reads at the eighth grade level or lower. A number of writers have evaluated text from health warning labels to government documents to see if they are written at a level that can be understood by citizens. The fear, of course, is that too many government documents and information sources are written at too high of a level for citizens to comprehend.

To see how government websites fare, we use a test of the grade-level readability of the front page of each state and federal government website that we studied. Our procedure is to employ the Flesch-Kincaid standard to judge each site's readability level. The Flesch-Kincaid test is a standard reading tool evaluator and is the one used by the United States Department of Defense. It is computed by dividing the average sentence length (number of words divided by number of sentences) by the average number of syllables per word (number of syllables divided by the number of words).

As shown below, the average grade readability level of American state and federal websites is at the 10.8th grade, similar to the 11th grade last year. Both numbers are well above the comprehension of the typical American. Sixty-four percent of sites read at the 12th grade level, down from 67 percent last year. Only 14 percent fell at the eighth grade level or below, which is the reading level of half the American public, compared to 10 percent last year.

	Percentage Falling within Each Grade Level
Fourth Grade or Less	3
Fifth Grade	1
Sixth Grade	2
Seventh Grade	3
Eighth Grade	5
Ninth Grade	6
Tenth Grade	7
Eleventh Grade	9
Twelve Grade	64
Mean Grade Level	10.8

Disability Access

There has been some progress in disability access on government websites. We tested accessibility using automated software provided by Watchfire, Inc. Its accessibility module scans online properties for over 170 comprehensive checks such as appropriate text and background color contrast and the presence of text equivalent "alt" tags on images. The scan results

automatically formulate user-friendly dashboards and reports, affording visibility into the issues that may be affecting the accessibility of the site and driving potential users away

In our analysis, we used this software to judge whether sites are in compliance with the Priority Level One standards recommended by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C). Sites are judged to be either in compliance or not in compliance based on the results of this test. In this year's study, 43 percent of state sites (up from 40 percent) satisfy the W3C standard of accessibility. Fifty-four percent of federal sites meet the W3C standard, up from 44 percent last year.

Percentage of State and Federal Sites Meeting W3C Disability Accessibility				
	2003	2004	2005	2006
Federal	47%	42%	44%	54%
State	33	37	40	43

Foreign Language Access

This year, 30 percent of government sites provided foreign language accessibility. This is up from 18 percent last year. By foreign language feature, we mean any accommodation to the non-English speaker, from a text translation into a different language to translating software available for free on the site to translate pages into a language other than English.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Foreign Language Access	4%	6%	7%	13%	21%	18%	30%

Ads, User Fees, and Premium Fees

One percent of sites have commercial advertisements on their sites, meaning non-governmental corporate and group sponsorships, compared to one percent last year. When defining an advertisement, we eliminate computer software available for free download (such as Adobe Acrobat Reader, Netscape Navigator, and Microsoft Internet Explorer) since they are necessary for viewing or accessing particular products or publications. Links to commercial products or services available for a fee are included as advertisements as are banner, pop-up, and fly-by advertisements.

Examples of advertisements include the following: **Indiana tourism:** "Visit Indiana" site includes small box ads for travel industry companies. Examples include Best Western hotel chain, Indianapolis Motor Speedway, and Indiana Beach Amusement Resort; **Tennessee economic development:** Main page has a small ad for Nissan; **Tennessee tourism:** On main tourism page, there is a small box with the word "Advertisement" under it that toggles between Rock City, Tennessee Aquarium and Country Music Hall of Fame; and **Nebraska tourism:** Main page has a small box with the words "View more tourism partners" that toggles between various stores and hotels.

Percentage of Sites with Ads, User Fees, and Premium Fees

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Ads	2%	2%	1%	9%	3%	1
User Fees	2	2	3	19	2	12
Premium Fees	--	1	0.4	4	0	4

Twelve percent of state and federal sites require user fees to access information and services, up from 2 percent last year. Sites that have user fees are: **Michigan state police**, order traffic crash reports: \$10.00/each; **Minnesota criminal history record**: \$5.00/each; **Minnesota hunting and fishing license**: \$3.50/each; **Idaho drivers license record**: \$5.50/each; **Hawaii filing taxes online**: credit card fee is passed onto user; **Florida fishing licenses**: \$2.25 plus 2.5% of total sale; **New Mexico motor vehicles**: Renewing vehicle registration online requires a \$1.29 transaction fee; **Wisconsin DOT**: vehicle registration renewal for \$1.50; **Nebraska portal**: Shows a list of transaction fees throughout the entire site; **Nebraska Court cases**: \$0.50 fee to search court records; **Nebraska DMV**: \$3.00 fee to search drivers license records; **Nebraska Revenue**: \$5.00 fee for sales tax permit; **Nebraska Secretary of State**: \$8.00 fee for UCC filings; **Pennsylvania health**: \$7.00 fee for requesting vital records online (Birth and Death Certificates); **Montana revenue**: Montana Department of Revenue allows businesses and individuals to pay taxes online. **Virginia game and inland fisheries**: Hunting and fishing licenses online – \$2.00. Also offers boat and watercraft registration renewals online – \$1.50; and **New Mexico game and fish**: Offers hunting/fishing licenses online for processing fee of \$4.95.

Only a handful (4 percent) of government websites require premium fees to access portions of the e-government site. By a premium fee, we mean financial charges that are required to access particular areas on the website, such as business services, access to databases, or viewing up-to-the-minute legislation. A charge is classified as a premium fee if a payment is required in order to enter a general area of the website or access a set of premium services.

Examples of premium fees include: **Alabama judiciary**: Appellate opinions are available through Alalinc, the Alabama State Law Library's Legal Information Network. Subscription cost is \$200/yr.; **Arkansas**: Subscription to Information Network of Arkansas costs \$75/yr for access for up to ten users. Additional 10 users can be added for \$75/yr. Some subscription services are also available to non-subscribers who pay a user fee. Most services, even if available to subscribers only, have a user fee in addition to subscription fee. Services include state police accident records, commercial background checks, vehicle/title/registration/lien search, commercial driver watch (companies can receive notification if a driver has a change in status), secretary of state filings, UCC filings, workman's comp claim searches; **Hawaii**: Subscription fee is \$75/yr for up to ten users. Members can file annual reports (also possible for non-subscribers who pay a user fee), search professional and vocational licenses at a discount (lower user fee than non-subscribers), generate a list of business entities in a particular zip code (additional user fee applies, but available to subscribers only); **Iowa judiciary**: Basic case information is free, but advance search capabilities for the electronic docket system require a \$25/mo fee. Additional information includes case schedules, judgment index, lien index, exhibit lists, bonds, and service returns; **Idaho**: Subscription fee of \$75/yr to access UCC searches, driver's license record searches, or motor vehicle record searches. Up to 100 users can be linked to a single account. Additional user fees for each service apply. (\$3/search for UCC, \$5.50/search for DLR and MVR). Portal site also has special "subscribers VIP lounge" with newsletter, quick links, etc.; **Indiana**: No subscription; only user fees (but \$15 minimum if you get mailed invoice; no minimum if you pay online). Some services require a subscription, others entail user fee discounts. Services include BidWatch (\$35/mo, e-mail notification of RFP's), business entity database bulk downloads (\$3,000+), custom business entity searches (\$25/ea), business entity registration searches (\$1/ea), certificates of existence (\$20/ea), nurse's aide and home healthcare aide registry search (\$1/ea), driver's license search (\$6/ea), health professional license search (\$1/ea), criminal history search (\$15/ea), only lobbyist filing (\$1/record, \$5 to register), title and lien search (\$5/ea), etc. Subscription can be paired with CivicNet, which is subscription service for Indianapolis and Marion County; **Kansas**: Initial subscription is \$75/yr, with \$60/yr renewal. Additional user fees apply. Services include business entity name reservations (\$27/ea), UCC searches (\$10/ea), UCC filings (\$8/ea), criminal history searches (\$17.50/ea), legislative bill searches (\$1/ea), drivers license records (\$6.50/ea), and

motor vehicle records (\$5/ea). Some subscription services are also available to non-subscribers at higher user fee; **Kentucky:** Subscription is \$75/yr; some services have additional user fees. Services include online vehicle information system to retrieve vehicle, title, lien information, board of nursing bulk data searches, board of medicine bulk data searches, board of pharmacy bulk data searches; **Maine:** InforME subscription costs \$75/yr plus user fees, and features include driver's license records search (\$7/ea), title records search (\$5/ea), registration records search (\$5/ea), corporation filing services, UCC searches, annual report filings, criminal record requests; **Minnesota Secretary of State:** Subscription of \$75/yr allows search of corporation details and UCC or tax lien debtor name; **Montana portal:** Access to all Montana online services 24/7, individual passwords, monthly billing. Annual fee is \$50; **Montana Secretary of State:** Search for business associations of individuals; search UCC (Uniform Commercial Code) filings online. Requires registration with MT.gov; **Nebraska portal:** Subscribers have access to the following services: Drivers Records Searches, Title and Lien Searches, Court Records, Corporate Entity Searches, Sales Tax Permits, EFS Searches, UCC Filing and Searches. Some of these services require additional transaction fees in addition to subscription fee. Subscribers also require username/passwords, billing and account management, online technical support, and multiple billing options. Annual fee is \$50; **Nebraska DMV:** Drivers License Record Monitoring Service allows users to monitor and receives updates on drivers license records. Requires Nebraska.gov subscription and login. Also requires an additional service fee per record; **Nebraska Secretary of State:** Businesses can order Letters and Certificates of Good Standing from the Dept. of State. Requires Nebraska.gov subscription and login. Also requires an additional transaction fee per letter/certificate; **Oregon judiciary:** OJIN (Oregon Judicial Information Network) allows users to search court records and documents. Free access from terminals inside the Oregon circuit courts in each county, but online access elsewhere requires a subscription. \$295 setup fee. An additional \$10 monthly fee for each User ID.; and **Utah portal:** Offers subscription services to Utah.gov for an annual fee of \$60. Allows user to conduct all online services with one account and pay all fees in a single bill; access to "premium services" that are only available with subscription.

Public Outreach

One of the most promising aspects of e-government is its ability to bring citizens closer to their governments. In our examination of state and federal government websites, we determine whether a visitor to the website can email a person in the particular department other than the webmaster. In 2006, we found that 92 percent have email addresses, the same as last year. Other methods that government websites employ to facilitate democratic conversation include areas to post comments (other than through email), the use of message boards, surveys, and chat rooms. This year, we found that 46 percent of websites offer this feature, up from 28 percent last year.

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
<i>Email</i>	68%	84%	81%	91%	93%	92%	92%
<i>Search</i>	48	52	43	--	--	--	--
<i>Comments</i>	15	5	10	24	29	28	46
<i>Email Updates</i>	5	9	5	12	24	21	31
<i>Broadcast</i>	2	7	4	--	--	--	--
<i>Personalization</i>	0	1	2	2	3	3	6
<i>PDA Access</i>	--	--	--	1	1	1	1

Thirty-one percent of government websites allow citizens to register to receive updates regarding specific issues. With this feature, web visitors can input their email address, street address, or telephone number to receive information about a particular subject as new information becomes available. The information can be in the form of a monthly e-newsletter highlighting an attorney general's recent opinions to alerts notifying citizens whenever a particular portion of the website is updated. Six percent of sites allow for personalization of the site in order to tailor the website information directly to the individual viewer.

State E-Government Ranking

In order to see how the 50 states rank overall, we created a 0 to 100 point e-government index for each website within that state. Four points are awarded each website for the following features: publications, databases, audio clips, video clips, foreign language access, not having ads, not having user fees, not having premium fees, W3C disability access, having privacy policies, security policies, allowing digital signatures on transactions, an option to pay via credit cards, email contact information, areas to post comments, option for email updates, allowing for personalization of the website, and PDA or handheld device accessibility. These features provide a maximum of 72 points for particular websites.

Each site then qualifies for up to 28 additional points based on the number of online services executable on that site (zero for no services, one point for one service, two points for two services, three points for three services, four points for four services, and so on up to a maximum of 28 points for 28 services or more). The e-government index therefore runs along a scale from zero (having none of these features and no online services) to 100 (having all 18 features plus at least 28 online services). This total for each website is averaged across all of the state's web sites to produce a zero to 100 overall rating for that state. On average, we assess around 30 government websites in each state across the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government.

The top state in our ranking is Texas with a 51.7 percent ranking. It is followed by New Jersey, Oregon, Michigan, Utah, Montana, New York, Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania.

Overall State E-Government Performance, 2006

<i>TX</i>	51.7	<i>NJ</i>	51.5
<i>OR</i>	49.1	<i>MI</i>	48.5
<i>UT</i>	48.1	<i>MT</i>	47.8
<i>NY</i>	47.3	<i>IL</i>	46.9
<i>IN</i>	46.6	<i>PA</i>	46.4
<i>TN</i>	45.7	<i>WA</i>	45.4
<i>ND</i>	44.9	<i>MN</i>	44.9
<i>DE</i>	44.8	<i>OH</i>	44.1
<i>SC</i>	44.0	<i>ME</i>	43.8
<i>NE</i>	43.6	<i>MO</i>	43.0
<i>KY</i>	42.9	<i>MA</i>	42.5
<i>KS</i>	42.0	<i>IA</i>	42.0
<i>NC</i>	41.9	<i>FL</i>	41.6
<i>CT</i>	41.5	<i>SD</i>	41.1
<i>VA</i>	40.8	<i>ID</i>	40.8
<i>CA</i>	40.8	<i>RI</i>	40.6
<i>LA</i>	40.6	<i>NH</i>	40.1
<i>MD</i>	39.5	<i>AZ</i>	39.5
<i>VT</i>	38.6	<i>GA</i>	38.0

<i>NV</i>	37.3	<i>OK</i>	37.3
<i>CO</i>	36.8	<i>WI</i>	36.5
<i>HI</i>	35.3	<i>NM</i>	34.3
<i>AR</i>	33.8	<i>WV</i>	33.6
<i>MS</i>	33.4	<i>WY</i>	29.0
<i>AL</i>	28.4	<i>AK</i>	28.3

Federal Agency E-Government Ranking

Federal sites are rated by the same criteria as the 50 states. An identical e-government index is devised that rated federal websites on contact information, publications, databases, portals, and number of online services (see previous section). The unit of analysis is the individual federal agency.

The top e-government performers are the national portal, FirstGov.gov, Department of Agriculture, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Commerce, and Department of the Treasury, Internal Revenue Service, Postal Service, Department of Education, Social Security Administration, and Department of State.

Overall Federal Agency E-Government Performance, 2006

FirstGov Portal	84.0	Dept. of Agriculture	80.0
Housing/Urban Development	80.0	Department of Commerce	73.0
Department of Treasury	72.0	IRS	71.0
Postal Service	64.0	Department of Education	63.0
Social Security Administration	63.0	Department of State	62.0
FCC	61.0	SEC	60.0
Department of Interior	58.0	Department of Transportation	58.0
Library of Congress	58.0	Small Business Administration	58.0
NASA	57.0	White House	57.0
Consumer Products Safety Commission	54.0	General Services Administration	54.0
Congressional Budget Office	53.0	Department of Defense	53.0
House of Representatives	53.0	National Transportation Safety Board	53.0
US Trade Rep	50.0	Department of Labor	49.0
FDIC	48.0	Senate	48.0
Federal Election Commission	47.0	National Parks	47.0
Department of Energy	46.0	EPA	46.0
Federal Reserve	46.0	Government Printing Office	46.0

National Science Foundation	46.0	Veterans Affairs	46.0
Central Intelligence Agency	45.0	Health and Human Services	44.0
Equal Employment Opportunity	43.0	FDA	42.0
Federal Trade Commission	42.0	Department of Justice	41.0
Homeland Security	41.0	National Endowment for the Arts	41.0
Supreme Court	41.0	GAO	38.0
Federal Court of Appeals	37.0	4 th Circuit Court of Appeals	33.0
National Labor Relations	32.0	National Endowment Human	31.0
1 st Circuit Court of Appeals	29.0	9 th Circuit Court of Appeals	29.0
8 th Circuit Court of Appeals	28.0	Office of Management and Budget	28.0
11 th Circuit Court of Appeals	26.0	6 th Circuit Court of Appeals	25.0
2 nd Circuit Court of Appeals	24.0	5 th Circuit Court of Appeals	24.0
10 th Circuit Court of Appeals	22.0	3 rd Circuit Court of Appeals	21.0
7 th Circuit Court of Appeals	20.0		

Conclusions

To summarize, considerable progress has been made in placing services and information online but many state websites still have inconsistent layouts and color schemes and pages that look very different as users browse from agency site to agency site or even within an agency site. This can be intimidating and overwhelming as users sometimes are not sure if they still are on an official state website when they all look different, and the user has to orient himself for every new website.

Some states have remedied this problem by using a consistent template across all state agencies. These states include Alaska, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, and Oregon. Consistent templates make navigation much easier and more comfortable. A lesser—but still beneficial—improvement is found in states such as Maine and Utah, which don't use a set template (perhaps recognizing each agency's web design autonomy) but instead place a consistent navigation bar at the top of every webpage. This navigation bar assures users that they are still on a government website and allows them easy navigation.

Some sites try to put too much information and too many links on the portal or agency homepage. This creates a cluttered look that is overwhelming to the visitor. Simplified, streamlined homepage designs are best. Sites that lead users to services by clicking on simple, intuitive menus are better than sites that list every link on the homepage.

Some sites—both portals and agency homepages—are filled with many small boxes for specific programs, initiatives and other websites. These might be useful links, but they lack

intuitive organization and create a frustratingly cluttered appearance. Illinois' portal page, for example, features ten such boxes on both the left and right sides, taking users to links as disparate as the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the Department of Transportation's road information page. These boxes clutter the page and make it difficult to navigate.

States should have consistent URL's for agencies. These would make it easy for visitors to navigate between state agencies, since they always know they're visiting an official state website. Florida, for example, has inconsistent URL's. Some have the state.fl.us ending (<http://www.dc.state.fl.us/> for the Department of Corrections), while others have a .gov ending (<http://www.flgov.com/> for the governor's office), and still others have a .org ending (<http://www.floridavets.org/> for the Department of Veterans Affairs). Oregon is another example of a state which uses both the .gov and .us ending. Michigan, meanwhile, has consistent URL's, with all sites starting with www.michigan.gov followed by the agency (<http://www.michigan.gov/mdch/> for the Department of Community Health, <http://www.michigan.gov/corrections/> for the Department of Corrections, and <http://www.michigan.gov/deq/> for the Department of Environmental Quality). Rhode Island and Pennsylvania consistently use the .us ending.

Websites can be useful to transmit important information during special circumstances, but they must be kept updated. Louisiana websites contained information about Hurricane Katrina, but it was generally outdated. Many state agency sites provided information about temporary policies in place to respond to Katrina, but often these policies were outdated (e.g., the special procedures were in place through October 2005, but the information was still posted as of July 2006).

In general, most sites prominently display key features and services on the main page, or provide a link to online services. This is true for the majority of state portal sites. Texas, for example, has a comprehensive listing of over 500 online services contained within state websites. Some departmental sites such as the Utah Health Department website also provide easy navigation to a listing of online services. But others do a poor job presenting their services, often burying the most useful functions of the site. The Wyoming portal page for instance has virtually no mention of the e-services offered by the state's website, making navigation a hassle. States could make their sites more user friendly by providing quick access to e-services and useful features from the main departmental/portal pages.

Some websites will offer features without explaining their purpose. For instance, the Pennsylvania budget website has a login button on the main navigation, but makes absolutely no mention of what logging in will do. The main Pennsylvania portal page does explain subscriptions, but this will be lost upon users who go directly to the budget website. Other sites do explain the purpose of certain features but do not provide specific instructions until after the user logs in. This can create confusion as the user may not want to register without knowing exactly how to use the feature.

Finally, a few websites claim to meet disability access guidelines, but do not pass the accessibility test run through Bobby software. The New Jersey legislature page is one example of this problem.

Appendix

Table A-1 Overall State E-Govt Ratings, 2005 and 2006 (2005 ranking in parentheses)

Rank	State	Rating Out of 100 Pts	Rank	State	Rating Out of 100 Pts
1. (18)	Texas	51.7 (45.8)	2. (3)	New Jersey	51.5 (59.5)
3. (12)	Oregon	49.1 (49.2)	4. (5)	Michigan	48.5 (53.0)
5. (1)	Utah	48.1 (62.1)	6. (26)	Montana	47.8 (41.5)
7. (14)	New York	47.3 (49.0)	8. (38)	Illinois	46.9 (36.9)
9. (20)	Indiana	46.6 (44.0)	10. (22)	Pennsylvania	46.4 (43.3)
11. (6)	Tennessee	45.7 (52.2)	12. (25)	Washington	45.4 (41.9)
13. (16)	North Dakota	44.9 (47.7)	14. (34)	Minnesota	44.9 (35.5)
15. (7)	Delaware	44.8 (51.9)	16. (21)	Ohio	44.1 (43.6)
17. (43)	South Carolina	44.0 (34.90)	18. (2)	Maine	43.8 (61.3)
19. (23)	Nebraska	43.6 (43.2)	20. (40)	Missouri	43.0 (36.5)
21. (34)	Kentucky	42.9 (39.0)	22. (8)	Massachusetts	42.5 (51.4)
23. (27)	Kansas	42.0 (41.1)	24. (32)	Iowa	42.0 (39.5)
25. (4)	North Carolina	41.9 (59.0)	26. (31)	Florida	41.6 (39.7)
27. (19)	Connecticut	41.5 (44.1)	28. (24)	South Dakota	41.1 (43.0)
29. (35)	Virginia	40.8 (37.6)	30. (15)	Idaho	40.8 (47.8)
31. (47)	California	40.8 (33.8)	32. (39)	Rhode Island	40.6 (36.5)
33. (46)	Louisiana	40.6 (33.8)	34. (17)	New Hampshire	40.1 (46.8)
35. (30)	Maryland	39.5 (39.9)	36. (28)	Arizona	39.5 (38.8)
37. (41)	Vermont	38.6 (36.0)	38. (33)	Georgia	38.0 (38.2)
39. (10)	Nevada	37.3 (50.5)	40. (44)	Oklahoma	37.3 (34.8)
41. (13)	Colorado	36.8 (49.1)	42. (29)	Wisconsin	36.5 (40.1)
43. (37)	Hawaii	35.3 (37.2)	44. (45)	New Mexico	34.3 (34.4)
45. (11)	Arkansas	33.8 (50.4)	46. (36)	West Virginia	33.6 (37.4)
47. (9)	Mississippi	33.4 (50.7)	48. (50)	Wyoming	29.0 (38.4)
49. (48)	Alabama	28.4 (31.9)	50. (49)	Alaska	28.3 (29.2)

Table A-2 Overall Federal Agency E-Govt Ratings, 2005 and 2006 (2005 ranking in parentheses)

Rank	Site	Rating Out of 100 Pts.	Rank	Site	Rating Out of 100 Pts.
1. (9)	FirstGov Portal	84.0 (72.0)	2. (4)	Dept. of Agriculture	80.0 (81.0)
3. (7)	Housing/Urban Development	80.0 (73.0)	4. (14)	Department of Commerce	73.0 (68.0)
5. (3)	Department of Treasury	72.0 (84.0)	6. (25)	IRS	71.0 (60.0)
7. (30)	Postal Service	64.0 (52.0)	8. (26)	Department of Education	63.0 (58.0)
9. (6)	Social Security Administration	63.0 (80.0)	10. (2)	Department of State	62.0 (84.0)
11. (8)	FCC	61.0 (72.0)	12. (31)	SEC	60.0 (52.0)
13. (22)	Department of Interior	58.0 (61.0)	14. (19)	Department of Transportation	58.0 (64.0)
15. (28)	Library of Congress	58.0 (53.0)	16. (13)	Small Business Administration	58.0 (69.0)
17. (27)	NASA	57.0 (58.0)	18. (1)	White House	57.0 (88.0)
19. (11)	Consumer Products Safety Commission	54.0 (69.0)	20. (24)	General Services Administration	54.0 (60.0)
21. (46)	Congressional Budget Office	53.0 (36.0)	22. (34)	Department of Defense	53.0 (45.0)
23. (35)	House of Representatives	53.0 (45.0)	24. (40)	National Transportation Safety Board	53.0 (40.0)
25. (41)	US Trade Rep	50.0 (40.0)	26. (12)	Department of Labor	49.0 (69.0)
27. (32)	FDIC	48.0 (49.0)	28. (53)	Senate	48.0 (28.0)
29. (33)	Federal Election Commission	47.0 (48.0)	30. (43)	National Parks	47.0 (38.0)
31. (21)	Department of Energy	46.0 (61.0)	32. (5)	EPA	46.0 (80.0)
33. (16)	Federal Reserve	46.0 (65.0)	34. (36)	Government Printing Office	46.0 (44.0)
35. (29)	National Science Foundation	46.0 (53.0)	36. (50)	Veterans Affairs	46.0 (29.0)
37. (38)	Central Intelligence Agency	45.0 (41.0)	38. (10)	Health and Human Services	44.0 (72.0)
39. (23)	Equal	43.0 (61.0)	40. (17)	FDA	42.0 (65.0)

	Employment Opportunity				
41. (37)	Federal Trade Commission	42.0 (42.0)	42. (15)	Department of Justice	41.0 (65.0)
43. (18)	Homeland Security	41.0 (65.0)	44. (39)	National Endowment for the Arts	41.0 (40.0)
45. (45)	Supreme Court	41.0 (37.0)	46. (44)	GAO	38.0 (37.0)
47. (58)	Federal Court of Appeals	37.0 (24.0)	48. (47)	4 th Circuit Court of Appeals	33.0 (32.0)
49. (42)	National Labor Relations	32.0 (38.0)	50. (49)	National Endowment Human	31.0 (29.0)
51. (55)	1 st Circuit Court of Appeals	29.0 (24.0)	52. (52)	9 th Circuit Court of Appeals	29.0 (28.0)
53. (57)	8 th Circuit Court of Appeals	28.0 (24.0)	54. (20)	Office of Management and Budget	28.0 (64.0)
55. (59)	11 th Circuit Court of Appeals	26.0 (21)	56. (51)	6 th Circuit Court of Appeals	25.0 (28.0)
57. (56)	2 nd Circuit Court of Appeals	24.0 (24.0)	58. (48)	5 th Circuit Court of Appeals	24.0 (29.0)
59. (54)	10 th Circuit Court of Appeals	22.0 (24.0)	60. (60)	3 rd Circuit Court of Appeals	21.0 (20.0)
61. (61)	7 th Circuit Court of Appeals	20.0 (20.0)			

Table A-3 Individual State/Fed Profiles for Publications, Databases, Foreign Language, and Services, 2006

	<i>Pubs</i>	<i>Data</i>	<i>Audio</i>	<i>Video</i>	<i>For Lang</i>	<i>PDA</i>	<i>Has Services</i>	<i>User Fees</i>
AK	94	42	6	12	6	0	42	3
AL	87	45	6	10	6	0	42	3
AR	97	60	7	7	10	0	50	20
AZ	100	71	6	19	26	0	61	10
CA	100	86	11	14	43	0	71	0
CO	100	84	6	6	32	0	68	6
CT	95	85	12	31	31	0	62	0
DE	93	79	17	21	86	0	79	17

FL	94	90	16	42	23	0	68	3
GA	100	79	4	29	14	0	79	0
HI	100	81	10	39	0	0	71	19
IA	100	96	11	26	37	0	93	7
ID	93	93	24	34	28	3	76	34
IL	100	97	34	44	53	9	72	16
IN	100	87	41	52	55	0	84	13
KS	97	87	40	27	37	0	83	20
KY	100	90	31	34	41	0	90	21
LA	100	93	37	57	10	0	83	17
MA	100	88	21	18	18	0	88	18
MD	94	81	19	26	32	0	71	23
ME	100	91	25	34	16	3	88	25
MI	100	97	38	41	41	7	83	24
MN	100	90	37	50	37	0	83	27
MO	100	83	38	38	38	0	76	24
MS	90	77	13	23	13	0	70	23
MT	97	87	10	13	7	0	87	20
NC	97	97	27	27	60	0	73	13
ND	100	79	24	52	7	7	79	0
NE	100	89	14	29	21	0	86	14
NH	100	77	17	20	7	0	83	0
NJ	100	96	11	43	43	4	93	11
NM	97	70	10	17	37	3	70	17
NV	100	80	17	13	43	3	73	7
NY	100	83	14	21	38	3	86	10
OH	100	94	10	26	16	0	94	16
OK	97	80	20	23	20	3	90	7
OR	100	80	13	20	43	0	87	17
PA	100	84	9	34	28	3	91	13
RI	100	83	3	17	48	3	76	14
SC	97	83	3	27	23	7	83	7
SD	93	86	21	21	7	0	89	4
TN	96	93	14	32	43	0	93	11
TX	100	91	50	53	84	0	91	16
US	98	77	43	33	59	0	89	0
UT	100	94	26	41	26	3	94	9
VA	100	81	15	23	38	4	85	12
VT	100	80	23	10	13	3	77	3
WA	100	100	28	38	59	0	75	0
WI	100	69	17	19	17	0	47	6
WV	96	56	7	33	0	0	63	7
WY	88	64	6	3	0	0	39	3

Table A-4 Individual State/Fed Profiles for Disability Access, Privacy, and Security, 2006

	<i>Email</i>	<i>Comme nt</i>	<i>Update</i>	<i>Persona lization</i>	<i>Disabil</i>	<i>Privacy</i>	<i>Security</i>		
AK	82	12	9	6	21	30	27		
AL	77	26	0	3	35	32	26		
AR	80	27	0	3	43	77	77		
AZ	97	48	19	0	35	97	87		
CA	93	64	18	4	36	93	50		
CO	90	42	3	3	32	77	71		
CT	100	27	35	0	73	88	85		
DE	90	41	24	14	76	93	93		
FL	90	35	29	13	55	74	65		
GA	93	46	14	7	36	68	68		
HI	74	23	13	0	55	48	58		
IA	96	52	48	7	22	67	67		
ID	97	55	21	7	28	52	48		
IL	81	41	78	9	34	94	94		
IN	94	68	26	6	42	87	87		
KS	100	53	33	17	60	47	37		
KY	100	45	21	10	38	69	69		
LA	97	50	33	7	17	50	40		
MA	91	42	36	9	42	79	79		
MD	94	35	26	0	26	84	65		
ME	100	31	34	13	75	78	78		
MI	97	83	52	10	48	83	83		
MN	93	40	53	13	50	60	60		
MO	97	28	48	3	72	69	69		
MS	93	23	37	0	30	37	17		
MT	100	73	40	3	77	90	97		
NC	93	60	43	3	43	53	53		
ND	100	24	45	14	97	79	55		
NE	100	46	36	14	21	96	96		
NH	83	20	17	3	53	90	87		
NJ	96	93	36	7	11	93	93		
NM	97	30	17	0	40	17	13		
NV	97	43	27	7	20	53	7		
NY	100	69	38	3	48	90	83		
OH	97	61	45	6	23	61	52		
OK	90	43	17	3	33	33	27		
OR	97	90	47	7	77	83	83		
PA	91	50	66	9	38	69	63		
RI	83	24	24	0	52	66	59		
SC	97	57	23	3	57	50	47		
SD	89	39	46	7	46	79	79		
TN	86	86	11	4	14	96	93		
TX	84	50	50	0	72	84	63		
US	97	59	43	20	54	82	75		
UT	97	50	44	0	47	91	88		
VA	96	50	31	4	27	85	42		

VT	90	37	17	3	30	70	57		
WA	91	47	47	0	38	88	81		
WI	92	50	19	0	53	56	58		
WV	93	37	15	0	30	59	15		
WY	73	18	6	0	39	55	55		

Table A-5 Best Practices of Top Federal and State Websites, 2006

I. Top Five Federal Agencies

1) FirstGov portal

Clear, organized, and user-friendly: these are several reasons why the FirstGov website ranks first among federal websites. The FirstGov website displays a stunning 254 online services for citizens, businesses, federal employees, and governments. All of the services are listed in alphabetical order by topic, which does not stress out the users while they search for the service they need. There are several newsletters and updates a user can sign up for: e-mail updates, RSS feeds, Podcasts, and government e-newsletters. One unique feature for this site regards finding government auctions around the country and buying new, seized, and surplus merchandise from the government; some of the products can be bought online. The website can be translated into twenty-eight other languages. Help is readily available and easily accessible for users: there is a whole category dedicated to contacting the government through different means, such as e-mail, phone, and in person. Lists of contact information by topic or agency are also available. We can tell that the government is willing to speak to and help its citizens, which is one telling reason why the FirstGov portal is ranked as the number one site for this year.

2) Department of Agriculture

The Department of Agriculture website is easy to navigate due to features such as the “I Want To...” section on the front page that lists the most popular information and services available on the site. It also has a page that clearly lists all the online services offered, which makes them easy for citizens to access. The site also has a personalization feature called MyUSDA, which enables users to tailor the agency’s online resources to their own needs. Also, the site has clear privacy and security statements, which demonstrate concern for the protection of site users. Furthermore, efforts to make the site accessible have been made in a number of respects. The site offers a Spanish version, it passes the software test for accessibility to disabled individuals, and the text on the site is written at a seventh grade reading level, which is much lower than most other federal sites. Lastly, there is an online survey which provides a medium for citizens and other users to share their comments and opinions about the site.

3) Housing and Urban Development

The Department of Housing and Urban Development website is clearly organized and easily navigable for users. It has a link on the front page that sorts information by state, which enables citizens to quickly access online resources relevant to them. The site can be more specifically personalized by using the links that have information sorted by different types of users, such as citizens and those in the housing industry. The site features an “At Your Service” section, which lists all of the online services offered and makes it easy for users to find and execute these services. Also, a webcast archive is offered, which allows site users to view agency broadcasts on topics such as buying a home and community development. The site has clear and visible privacy and security statements as well as an extensive site index, and the site is also offered in Spanish. The text on the site is written at an eighth grade reading level, which is

significantly below the level of other federal sites and makes the site more accessible to users with low education levels or foreign native languages.

4) Department of Commerce

The Department of Commerce is a simple site with clear headers so that users may navigate the website with ease. A link to the site map is easily found, showing that the website has been designed with the user in mind. The website is updated often and news on the main page is supplemented with photos; a news archive is available with news from 2001 to present. If a citizen needs to contact a local commerce office, the website offers a comprehensive list of offices nearby. The website even has weather conditions on its main page. The Department of Commerce website also offers a link to census information, budget information, and hurricane information for its citizens. This inter-department information is a very useful way to integrate e-government so each department is not just a single, separate entity on the World Wide Web.

5) Department of the Treasury

The Department of the Treasury is a well-designed site that utilizes the layout to maximize the amount of information available on the page and supplements with colors that are easy on the eyes. Webcasts of media briefings and reports are available for citizens to view. There is also an extensive archive of webcasts leading back to 2002. The site is updated frequently with at least one news story each day. A user can also simply enter an e-mail address (without worrying about privacy issues) and sign up for newsletters. The site clears the web accessibility test for disabled people. The website offers services from filing your taxes online to buying coins and paper money to applying for a career at the department. There is also a link to MyMoney.gov, which is a website dedicated to teaching Americans about finance (i.e. credit, home ownership, retirement planning). By catering to the needs of the citizen, the Department of Treasury website is a prime example of a good government website.

II. Top Five States

1. Texas

Texas was the highest-rated state in our 2006 study. The TexasOnline portal site has a simple, effective navigation system and an exhaustive list of over 500 online services contained within the state's websites — the most of all sites assessed in this study. The e-services are divided into 15 categories and organized alphabetically, allowing for quick access to desired services, including online sales tax payment, vehicle registration renewals, and searchable license records databases. In addition, Texas features audio and video clips on the majority of its websites, as well as a Spanish version of nearly every page. Overall, Texas has made a strong effort to deliver convenient access to a vast number of online services, thus topping our rankings.

2. New Jersey

New Jersey's website, the second ranked site in our study, offers a unique experience to users by allowing them to personalize the portal page. Registered users of MyNewJersey can customize the site by selecting both the layout of the homepage as well as the news content displayed. New Jersey also provides easy access to online services via drop-down boxes, which direct the user to common e-services such as paying traffic violations or searching unclaimed property. Furthermore, the site contains direct links to live online support as well as a form to e-mail the governor.

3. Oregon

Ranked number three, Oregon's site prominently features "5 top links" as well as a listing of common questions and answers. But perhaps the most convenient aspect of the site is the

consistent design scheme of nearly all of its pages. The uniform layout allows for comfortable, straightforward navigation of each department's site and provides links to all state agencies. The consistency of the pages also allows users to easily refer to privacy and security policies and submit a form for comments on nearly all of the site's pages. Oregon also features a great number of e-services: the Licenses, Permits and Registrations page, for example, offers nearly 200 services such as business license renewals and searchable databases.

4. Michigan

Michigan, the number-four ranked site, is designed to provide visitors with easy access to commonly requested services and information. Four drop-down boxes prominently located on the portal homepage lead visitors to popular online services, answers to commonly asked "how do I...?" queries, frequently used forms, and telephone and e-mail directories. In addition to directing visitors to services and information, the Michigan portal keeps citizens up-to-date on late-breaking state news. The governor's weekly podcast, RSS feeds of news releases for many government agencies, a state blog, a special site for wireless devices and cell phones, and an "alerts" page with Amber Alerts, cyber warnings and weather alerts help keep Michigan citizens informed. Michigan is also one of the few states with a consistent layout and appearance for state agency websites, helping the user to easily navigate across all of the state's web pages.

5. Utah

Utah's website received the fifth-highest marks in our study. The main portal site contains a variety of resources, including a page for subscribers, live chat support, RSS feeds, and a listing of over 100 online services. The homepage also contains links to news releases, audio and video clips, weather and traffic updates, and an alerts page, which provides updates through e-mail or mobile device. In addition, each departmental site features a toolbar on the top of the screen which provides links to e-services, state agencies, and Utah's business portal. Overall, Utah's site succeeds by offering an impressive array of features and services to its visitors, many of them available on the state's main homepage.