

Public Information Dissemination

Developing Shared Civic Infrastructure *BUILDING BLOCK 6 OF 12 - BUILDING SKILLS AND CAPACITY*

The screenshot shows the City of Phoenix website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Phone Directory, Mayor / City Council, Departments, and E-Services. A search bar and weather information (62F Mostly Cloudy | 9:38 PM | Nov. 06, 2011) are also present. Below the navigation bar, there are several menu categories: Residents, Businesses, Visitors & Newcomers, Public Safety, Transportation, Culture & Recreation, City Government, Employment, and Environment & Sustainability. The main content area is divided into several sections: eServices (listing various online services like paying bills and registering for library cards), News & Events (with recent news items like 'Last Day to Vote' and 'Phoenix 10K Race'), Features (highlighting the City Water Department's AAA credit rating), and a Featured Video section (showing a video about a public library NOOK e-reader). On the right side, there are several promotional banners for the 2011 Runoff Election, Phoenix Shines photo gallery, Sunshine Review (Top Transparency Website in 2011), and Innovation & Efficiency.

Transparency and Responsiveness Online

Arvada, Colorado (pop. 106,000)
Contact: Chris Longshore, Information Systems Manager,
(720) 898-7870, clongshore@arvada.org,
www.arvada.org

Arvada's e-government services provide 24/7 access to City Hall. Citizens are able to communicate with local government through their choice of medium: phone, website, social media or mobile applications. An array of Web 2.0 tools are in use, and the city has its own YouTube channel. To ensure transparent and user-friendly systems, the city convened citizens, employees, elected officials and others to help design the website and services. The most widely used feature on the site is ASK Arvada, a tool that allows citizens to either search for answers in a large FAQ database or to request services through the web that are routed automatically to the proper department for resolution. Many public meetings can be accessed through podcasts or streaming video. There is a community partner directory that lists service companies, businesses, faith institutions and other organizations; a unique feature of the directory is that residents are able to post comments about services they received from the businesses and organizations. Juggle.com, an online encyclopaedia and reference resource, recently gave Arvada.org its Top Local Government Website Award for its outstanding online advocacy of local businesses and community.

Citizens are bombarded with information daily, making it difficult to keep them updated on key issues. Making government more transparent by allowing greater access to public data is an important step, but it is likely to be inadequate by itself. Using social media tools, communities can give citizens the chance to identify their interests and customize the announcements and information they receive. Using more interactive tools — like “serious games,” budget simulators and online land use visualization tools — cities can make the raw information more compelling and help people to absorb and assess it.

PRIORITIES TO ADDRESS:

- Inform and educate citizens.
- Support other components.

POTENTIAL ACTIONS:

- Create customizable online public information systems that allow citizens to sign up for updates on issues and services that interest them.
- Make more government records available online.
- Create “serious games” that educate citizens on public issues and services.
- Create online budget simulators that allow citizens to see the implications of different spending and revenue options.
- Use barcode technology to provide information on public buildings, parks and other facilities.
- Ensure that key information — especially about how people can get involved — is available in the different languages spoken in the community.

WORK BEST WHEN:

- They build on, and connect to, neighborhood associations and other groups that are intended to be more permanent hubs for public life.
- They serve as an “early warning system” that will help bring citizens to the table at a point in the policymaking process when their participation will be more strategic and influential.
- They alert people to face-to-face and online opportunities to submit questions, comments and ideas on public issues.