

Seventh Annual State and Federal E-Government Study

Texas and New Jersey are Best States for American E-Government

A study of digital government in the 50 states and major federal agencies also finds that the national portal FirstGov.gov is the top-rated federal site.

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – Texas and New Jersey are the best states for e-government in the United States, according to the seventh annual e-government analysis conducted by researchers at Brown University. The federal portal FirstGov.gov and the Department of Agriculture are the most highly rated federal sites.

Darrell M. West, director of the Taubman Center for Public Policy at Brown University, and a team of researchers examined 1,564 state and federal sites. The researchers analyzed 1,503 state sites (or an average of 30 sites per state), plus 48 federal government legislative and executive sites and 13 federal court sites. Research was completed during June and July, 2006. Previous e-government studies were released in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005.

Websites are evaluated for the presence of various electronic features, such as online publications, databases, audio clips, video clips, foreign language content or language translation services, 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.

The results show that progress has been made on several fronts. In terms of online services, 77 percent of state and federal sites have services that are fully executable online, up from 73 percent last year. In addition, a growing number of sites offer privacy and security policy statements. This year, 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. Thirty percent of sites offer some type of foreign language translation, compared to 18 percent last year.

Citizens are being asked to shoulder more of the cost of providing online services, the survey found. Twelve percent of sites charge visitors a fee to utilize online services, compared to only 2 percent last year.

In terms of disability access for the visually impaired, automated Bobby software available from Watchfire, Inc. found that 54 percent of federal sites and 43 percent of state sites meet the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) disability guidelines. The federal numbers are up from 44 percent in 2005, while the state numbers are up from 40 percent last year.

The study also ranks the 50 states and various federal agencies on overall e-government performance. Using measures such as online services, attention to privacy and security, disability access, and foreign language translation, researchers rated the various state sites and compared their performance to last year.

The top ranking states include Texas, New Jersey, Oregon, Michigan, Utah, Montana, New York, Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania. The most poorly performing e-government states are Alaska, Alabama, Wyoming, and Mississippi. The following table shows where each state ranked in 2006, with the previous year's ranking and score 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)

Top-rated federal websites include the FirstGov.gov portal, Department of Agriculture, Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Commerce, Department of Treasury, Internal Revenue Service, Postal Service, Department of Education, Social Security Administration, and Department of State. At the low end of the ratings are the various circuit courts of appeals. The following table lists the ranking of federal agencies in 2006, with last year's rank and score 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 Employment Opportunity	43.0 (61.0)	40. (17)	FDA	42.0 (65.0)
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)			

In the conclusion of their report, West and his research team suggest several means to improve e-government web sites. One area where improvement is needed is consistency in design, navigation and appearance among the various websites. Many state websites have inconsistent layouts and color schemes, with pages that look very different as users browse from agency site to agency site or even within a single agency site itself. This can be intimidating and overwhelming as users sometimes are not sure if they still are on an official website when and users have to orient themselves for every new website.

Some states, such as Alaska, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, and Oregon, have remedied this problem by using a consistent template across all state agencies. Other states, such as Maine and Utah, place a consistent navigation bar on the top of every webpage, assuring visitors that they are on an official state website and providing easy access to other state pages.

The survey also found that many government websites try to place too many links on the portal or agency homepage, creating a cluttered look this 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.

Many states have inconsistent URL's, or web addresses, for agencies. Consistent web addresses would make it easy for visitors to navigate between state agencies, since they always know they are visiting an official state website. Florida, for example, has some sites that end with

“state.fl.us,” while others use a “.gov” ending and some end with “.org.” Michigan, meanwhile, has a consistent web address naming scheme, with all sites starting with “www.michigan.gov” followed by the agency, such as <http://www.michigan.gov/mdch/> for the Department of Community Health. Rhode Island and Pennsylvania consistently use “.us” to end their web addresses.

Most sites prominently display key features and services on the main page or provide links to online services. Texas, the top-rated site, has a comprehensive listing of over 500 online services contained within state websites. Other states, however, 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 difficult. States could make their sites more user friendly by providing quick access to e-services and useful features from the main departmental/portal pages.

For more information about the results of this study, please contact **Darrell West at (401) 863-1163** or see the full report at www.INSIDEPOLITICS.org. The appendix of that report provides e-government profiles for each of the 50 states and the federal agencies.