

---

For immediate release:  
**Tuesday, May 10, 2011**

Contact:  
**KATHRYN KLOBY**  
732-263-5892 (office)  
[kkloby@monmouth.edu](mailto:kkloby@monmouth.edu)  
**THOMAS LAMATSCH**  
732-263-5672 (office)  
[thomas.lamatsch@monmouth.edu](mailto:thomas.lamatsch@monmouth.edu)

## **NEW JERSEY E-GOVERNMENT: BEST PRACTICES IN MOMOUTH COUNTY**

### **A Project of the Monmouth University Polling Institute and the Public Policy Graduate Program**

The use of websites by the public sector is gaining significant attention in recent years among practitioners and academics in the fields of public policy, public affairs, and communication. Websites have become one of the most important tools for citizens to get information about municipalities. A recent Monmouth University/NJ Press Media Poll shows that New Jerseyans go online as often as they stop by town halls to get information about their hometowns and they are far more likely to visit a municipal website than call or write a town official.

There is growing recognition that websites can prove to be a useful tool to inform the public, create efficiencies in the provision of public services, and engage the public. This trend is also recognized by the state of New Jersey which now requires, by statute, that certain information, such as the town budgets, be available online. Websites are a vehicle to increase public sector transparency, facilitate open government, and increase public trust in government. Efforts to incorporate technology into public sector service delivery and interact with the public are referred to as E-Government.

The Monmouth University Polling Institute and the Public Policy Graduate Program are conducting a project to examine municipal websites in New Jersey. The aim of this project is building long-term cooperation between New Jersey's municipalities and Monmouth University researchers to find the best ways to inform citizens through municipal websites, provide services with online transactions, and encourage public engagement using municipal websites. The

project will involve professional development seminars and workshops as well as the identification of best practices on what should be available to citizens in various electronic formats. The project will also aim to advance E-Government efforts by regularly evaluating the state of municipal websites. Researchers will examine existing content and check available information and services against a range of accepted standards. As a pilot program in this effort, the project team analyzed Monmouth County municipal websites to establish benchmarks and test the evaluation methodology.

### **2011 New Jersey E-Government Awards (Monmouth County)**

This document describes the methodology used to determine how municipal websites are performing and the criteria used to evaluate municipal websites. A comprehensive list of the items used to determine website performance, the list of scores for all municipalities in Monmouth County, and scores for each award category are available in Appendices A and B. The municipal websites in Monmouth County who were recognized for exemplary performance in E-Government are:

*Best Website in Monmouth County:* Colts Neck Township  
*Best Informative Website:* Colts Neck Township  
*Best Citizen-Centered Website:* Howell Township  
*Best Interactive Website:* Howell Township, Red Bank Borough  
*Best Social Networking Website:* Asbury Park City, Belmar Borough

### **Items for Examining Municipal Websites**

The team started by defining what constitutes a good website. More than 100 discrete pieces of information and online activities were identified as important for government website design. Importance was determined by applying best practices of E-Government research, integrating examples from award winning websites from communities in and outside of the state of New Jersey<sup>1</sup>, as well as using items identified as important by New Jerseyans in a recent Monmouth

---

<sup>1</sup> Such as the Coralville, Iowa municipal website which was honored in 2010 by the Center for Digital Government as one of the nation's top five municipal sites

University/NJ Press Media Poll<sup>2</sup>. The discrete pieces of information, or items, were then grouped into four categories, generally accepted by practitioners and in scholarly publications: informative items, citizen-centered items, interactive options, and social networking integration. Future studies will use individual items in these four areas to evaluate municipal websites across the state. The criteria were applied in the Monmouth County pilot to find websites that best exemplified integrating these criteria into their website. Appendix A lists all 53 Monmouth County municipalities and how their websites performed in each of the four categories and overall in the four categories combined. Appendix B lists all evaluation items, as well as the weighted scores awarded if the information was available on the website.<sup>3</sup>

### *Information for Citizens*

The purpose of this category is to determine how much information is readily available to citizens. Information ranges from the names and contact information of elected officials and key personnel to schedules for meetings and garbage pickup.

High scoring websites in this category provide information about the following:

- City hall location and hours of operation.
- The name and phone numbers of the mayor and council members
- The name and phone numbers of business administrators or city managers
- Meeting schedules, agendas, minutes, and transcripts for city council, zoning board, planning board, and citizen committees
- Municipal department contact information such as phone numbers
- Permit information, zoning laws, or ordinances
- Garbage and recycling schedules and instructions
- Police, Fire, and EMS contact information as well as crime statistics.

---

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.monmouth.edu/polling/admin/polls/MUP38\\_4.pdf](http://www.monmouth.edu/polling/admin/polls/MUP38_4.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Please contact [thomas.lamatsch@monmouth.edu](mailto:thomas.lamatsch@monmouth.edu) to receive a full spreadsheet

### *Citizen Opportunities for Engagement*

Citizen-centered websites go beyond the provision of information and provide opportunities for citizens to engage government through emails, convey their satisfaction with services, or sign up for alerts or other messages. Websites that are more citizen-centered are more likely to offer opportunities for participation by posting information about citizen advisory committees or professional positions.

High scoring websites in this category include the following:

- The availability of a search box and a suggestion box
- Ability to send emails to the mayor, clerk, business administrator or city manager, and departments
- Email addresses for zoning and planning boards, and citizen advisory committees
- Availability of information on job or board openings and online applications
- Links to participate or receive results of citizen surveys
- Sign-up opportunities for emergency alerts
- Publication of bidding opportunities for municipal contracts

### *Provision of Interactive Government Services*

Websites that are interactive take advantage of web-based technology to conduct online transactions for the convenience of citizens and more efficient public services. Interactive features include the availability of online forms, payment opportunities, and applications.

High scoring websites in this category include the following transactions:

- The availability of downloadable forms or PDFs
- Online payment opportunities for parking tickets, taxes, or dog licenses
- Online applications (e.g., dog licensing)
- Online public records requests (OPRA)

### *Integration of Social Networking Tools*

An increasing number of practitioners and academics are exploring the use of social networking applications by the public sector. In many cases government agencies are in the experimental stages of using Facebook and Twitter. There are many questions about how government should harness this web-based tool for engaging the public, leading elected officials and public administrators to seek best practices. Determining what municipalities are linking to social media and how they are using these tools is critical for assessing the level of advancement in this new frontier and identifying best practices to share among state and local officials and administrators. High scoring websites in this category provide links to the following:

- Twitter and/or Facebook
- Videos from online providers like YouTube
- Photo albums or sharing via Flickr or other providers
- City supported mapping capabilities or links
- Listservs and blogs

### **Data Collection Methodology**

Data collection started with the research team developing and testing code sheets which were then used by student researchers who evaluated 49 municipal websites in Monmouth County. Four towns currently do not have an official web presence. All items across the four categories previously identified were listed on coding check lists where student researchers marked each item as available or not available on a town website. The full-time researchers leading the project pretested the code sheets to determine the reliability and ensure comprehensiveness. This included the examination of three towns by each researcher and a comparison of their individual answers to identify redundant or missing items, as well as potential inconsistencies. Once the reliability of the code sheet was established, a written training guide was produced and four student researchers received one-on-one training on how to interpret the code sheet and search for each of the items. Websites were scored in March and April of 2011. The student researchers were instructed to look for the items on the code sheet across the entire website using direct links, scroll-down menus, and search boxes. Students exclusively used the town website to look

for the information, i.e. students did not employ Google or other search engines other than to initially find the actual town website. The consistency of data collection was tested by having approximately 25% of code sheets double-checked by more than one student researcher. The data recorded on the paper code sheet was entered into a statistical database (SPSS) by a single full time researcher.

### **Criteria for Selecting Sites for Awards**

Sites were evaluated in each of the four categories separately, as well as combined. “Weighted scores” were used to reflect the relative importance of the individual items. Weighting means items were not simply counted, but different scores were attached to each item. A full breakdown of these scores can be found in Appendix B. Weighted scores were added up for each category and each town. Scores were converted into percentages by dividing the raw score by the maximum number of points available in each category. These percentages reflect how much of the pre-determined information was found on each website. For example, a town getting a score of 60% means that 60% of the information for that particular category was found on the town’s website. The town with the highest percentage in the category received the award in this particular category. Scores in other categories were not considered for individual awards, i.e. a town could theoretically win one category while scoring 0 in all others. Weighted scores across all categories were added to determine the "Best Website in Monmouth County".

### **Acknowledgements**

This pilot project was completed with close cooperation of the four main researchers, Dr. Joseph Patten, Chairman of the Department of Political Science and Sociology, Patrick Murray, Director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute, Dr. Kathryn Kloby, Director of the Public Policy Graduate Program, and Dr. Thomas Lamatsch, Assistant Director of the Monmouth University Polling Institute. All website evaluations were done by student researchers, Fred Strahl, Bryce Jacobs, Alison Ditommaso, and Adam Neary.

Appendix A– Full Scores:

<b>Overall Website Content</b>	
Colts Neck Township	77%
Red Bank Borough	75%
Belmar Borough	73%
Ocean Township	71%
Keyport Borough	71%
Aberdeen Township	70%
Fair Haven Borough	69%
Wall Township	68%
Tinton Falls Borough	67%
Eatontown Borough	66%
Howell Township	66%
Freehold Township	66%
Manasquan Borough	64%
Oceanport Borough	62%
Millstone Township	62%
Neptune Township	62%
Middletown Township	61%
Shrewsbury Borough	60%
Marlboro Township	60%
Spring Lake Heights Borough	59%
Hazlet Township	57%
Asbury Park City	56%
Matawan Borough	55%
West Long Branch Borough	54%
Holmdel Township	54%
Rumson Borough	54%
Manalapan Township	53%
Sea Girt Borough	53%
Monmouth Beach Borough	52%
Bradley Beach Borough	52%
Highlands Borough	52%
Little Silver Borough	52%
Long Branch City	51%
Sea Bright Borough	49%
Neptune City Borough	48%
Spring Lake Borough	48%
Lake Como Borough	48%
Atlantic Highlands Borough	47%
Union Beach Borough	42%
Keansburg Borough	42%
Interlaken Borough	40%
Upper Freehold Township	40%
Englishtown Borough	39%
Brielle Borough	39%
Loch Arbour Village	33%
Allenhurst Borough	28%
Avon-by-the-Sea Borough	22%
Deal Borough	19%
Freehold Borough	8%
Allentown Borough	*
Farmingdale Borough	*
Roosevelt Borough	*
Shrewsbury Township	*

\* These towns do not have official municipal websites

<b>Informative Website</b>	
Colts Neck Township	92%
Eatontown Borough	87%
Red Bank Borough	86%
Ocean Township	86%
Oceanport Borough	85%
Wall Township	84%
Tinton Falls Borough	83%
Belmar Borough	82%
Aberdeen Township	80%
Fair Haven Borough	80%
Manasquan Borough	79%
Freehold Township	79%
Keyport Borough	79%
Neptune Township	78%
Millstone Township	78%
Middletown Township	77%
Shrewsbury Borough	72%
Holmdel Township	71%
Neptune City	70%
Spring Lake Heights Borough	70%
Sea Bright Borough	70%
Marlboro Township	70%
Monmouth Beach Borough	68%
Rumson Borough	67%
Hazlet Township	66%
Matawan Borough	66%
Bradley Beach Borough	65%
Highlands Borough	64%
Little Silver Borough	64%
Howell Township	64%
West Long Branch Borough	63%
Manalapan Township	61%
Asbury Park City	61%
Lake Como Borough	61%
Keansburg Borough	61%
Interlaken Borough	61%
Englishtown Borough	59%
Sea Girt Borough	59%
Spring Lake Borough	58%
Long Branch City	57%
Brielle Borough	57%
Atlantic Highlands Borough	56%
Union Beach Borough	53%
Upper Freehold Township	51%
Loch Arbour Village	44%
Avon-by-the-Sea Borough	35%
Allenhurst Borough	33%
Deal Borough	30%
Freehold Borough	9%
Allentown Borough	*
Farmingdale Borough	*
Roosevelt Borough	*
Shrewsbury Township	*

\* These towns do not have official municipal websites



**Citizen-Centered Website**

Howell Township	87%
West Long Branch Borough	79%
Keyport Borough	77%
Aberdeen Township	77%
Colts Neck Township	72%
Ocean Township	69%
Freehold Township	69%
Belmar Borough	67%
Tinton Falls Borough	67%
Shrewsbury Borough	64%
Wall Township	62%
Eatontown Borough	62%
Neptune Township	59%
Spring Lake Heights Borough	59%
Millstone Township	54%
Matawan Borough	54%
Bradley Beach Borough	54%
Spring Lake Borough	51%
Fair Haven Borough	49%
Manasquan Borough	49%
Oceanport Borough	49%
Atlantic Highlands Borough	49%
Asbury Park City	46%
Manalapan Township	46%
Middletown Township	44%
Highlands Borough	41%
Hazlet Township	38%
Rumson Borough	38%
Monmouth Beach Borough	38%
Sea Girt Borough	36%
Long Branch City	36%
Union Beach Borough	33%
Upper Freehold Township	33%
Marlboro Township	31%
Allenhurst Borough	31%
Little Silver Borough	28%
Red Bank Borough	26%
Holmdel Township	23%
Sea Bright Borough	23%
Englishtown Borough	21%
Loch Arbour Village	21%
Lake Como Borough	18%
Brielle Borough	15%
Neptune City Borough	13%
Interlaken Borough	13%
Freehold Borough	10%
Avon-by-the-Sea Borough	5%
Deal Borough	3%
Keansburg Borough	0%
Allentown Borough	*
Farmingdale Borough	*
Roosevelt Borough	*
Shrewsbury Township	*

\* These towns do not have official municipal websites

<b>Interactive Website</b>	
Red Bank Borough	86%
Howell Township	86%
Keyport Borough	71%
Sea Girt Borough	57%
Manasquan Borough	57%
Fair Haven Borough	54%
Marlboro Township	54%
Colts Neck Township	54%
Little Silver Borough	54%
Aberdeen Township	54%
Manalapan Township	54%
Middletown Township	54%
Wall Township	54%
Rumson Borough	54%
Long Branch City	43%
Freehold Township	43%
Shrewsbury Borough	43%
Keansburg Borough	43%
Hazlet Township	39%
Ocean Township	39%
Highlands Borough	39%
Millstone Township	39%
Spring Lake Heights Borough	39%
Matawan Borough	39%
Tinton Falls Borough	39%
Monmouth Beach Borough	39%
Belmar Borough	29%
Holmdel Township	29%
Atlantic Highlands Borough	29%
Asbury Park City	25%
Lake Como Borough	25%
Union Beach Borough	25%
Neptune Township	25%
Neptune City Borough	25%
Spring Lake Borough	25%
Bradley Beach Borough	25%
Eatontown Borough	25%
Sea Bright Borough	25%
Upper Freehold Township	25%
Loch Arbour Village	14%
Allenhurst Borough	14%
Brielle Borough	14%
Oceanport Borough	11%
Interlaken Borough	11%
West Long Branch Borough	0%
Avon-by-the-Sea Borough	0%
Deal Borough	0%
Freehold Borough	0%
Englishtown Borough	0%
Allentown Borough	*
Farmingdale Borough	*
Roosevelt Borough	*
Shrewsbury Township	*

\* These towns do not have official municipal websites

<b>Social Networking Website</b>	
Belmar Borough	95%
Asbury Park City	95%
Red Bank Borough	89%
Fair Haven Borough	68%
Marlboro Township	63%
Hazlet Township	58%
Lake Como Borough	58%
Long Branch City	58%
Holmdel Township	42%
Sea Girt Borough	42%
Ocean Township	26%
West Long Branch Borough	26%
Colts Neck Township	16%
Oceanport Borough	16%
Highlands Borough	16%
Little Silver Borough	16%
Atlantic Highlands Borough	16%
Union Beach Borough	16%
Aberdeen Township	11%
Manasquan Borough	11%
Neptune Township	11%
Millstone Township	11%
Neptune City Borough	11%
Spring Lake Heights Borough	11%
Matawan Borough	11%
Manalapan Township	11%
Spring Lake Borough	11%
Loch Arbour Village	11%
Allenhurst Borough	11%
Tinton Falls Borough	5%
Freehold Township	5%
Keyport Borough	5%
Middletown Township	5%
Bradley Beach Borough	5%
Howell Township	5%
Brielle Borough	5%
Avon-by-the-Sea Borough	5%
Deal Borough	5%
Freehold Borough	5%
Eatontown Borough	0%
Wall Township	0%
Shrewsbury Borough	0%
Sea Bright Borough	0%
Monmouth Beach	0%
Rumson Borough	0%
Keansburg Borough	0%
Interlaken Borough	0%
Englishtown Borough	0%
Upper Freehold Township	0%
Allentown Borough	*
Farmingdale Borough	*
Roosevelt Borough	*
Shrewsbury Township	*

\* These towns do not have official municipal websites

Attachment B:

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Weighted Score</b>
Search box	Citizen Interaction	1.00
Voter registration	Citizen Interaction	1.00
City hall email	Citizen Interaction	0.50
Mayor's email	Citizen Interaction	0.50
Bus. administrator/city manager email	Citizen Interaction	0.50
Individual city council emails	Citizen Interaction	0.50
Clerk email	Citizen Interaction	0.50
Zoning board email	Citizen Interaction	0.25
Planning board email	Citizen Interaction	0.25
Citizen advisory committees emails	Citizen Interaction	0.50
Citizen advisory committees openings/terms	Citizen Interaction	0.50
Citizen advisory committees application process	Citizen Interaction	0.50
Citizen advisory committees online application	Citizen Interaction	0.50
Department emails	Citizen Interaction	0.25
City hall employment	Citizen Interaction	0.50
Suggestion box	Citizen Interaction	1.00
Citizen surveys	Citizen Interaction	0.25
Sign up for emergency alert (red alert)	Citizen Interaction	0.25
Bidding opportunities	Citizen Interaction	0.50
City council meetings audio	Information	0.50
City council meetings video	Information	0.50
Citizen committees members	Information	1.00
Interactive calendar	Information	2.00
Population reported	Information	1.00
Town history	Information	1.00
City hall address	Information	0.50
City hall phone	Information	0.50
City hall hours	Information	0.50
Name of the mayor	Information	0.25
Mayor's phone	Information	0.25
Mayor's bio/message	Information	1.00
Date of next mayoral election/term info	Information	0.50
Bus. administrator/city manager name	Information	0.50
Bus. administrator /city manager phone	Information	0.50
Bus. administrator /city manager bio/message	Information	1.00
City council members	Information	0.50
City council phone	Information	0.50
Clerk name	Information	0.50
Clerk phone	Information	0.50
City council schedule	Information	0.50
City council agenda	Information	0.50
City council minutes	Information	0.25
City council transcripts	Information	0.25
Date of next city council election/term information	Information	0.50
Zoning board members	Information	0.50
Zoning board phone	Information	0.10
Zoning board schedule	Information	0.10
Zoning board agenda	Information	0.10
Zoning board minutes	Information	0.10
Zoning board transcripts	Information	0.10

Zoning board meeting audio	Information	0.10
Zoning board meeting video	Information	0.10
Planning board members	Information	0.50
Planning board phone	Information	0.10
Planning board schedule	Information	0.10
Planning board agenda	Information	0.10
Planning board minutes	Information	0.10
Planning board transcripts	Information	0.10
Planning board meeting audio	Information	0.10
Planning board meeting video	Information	0.10
Citizen committees phone	Information	0.25
Citizen committees schedule	Information	0.25
Citizen committees agenda	Information	0.25
Citizen committees minutes	Information	0.25
Departments	Information	0.75
Departments phone	Information	0.25
Zoning laws	Information	0.25
Contact information for zoning law questions	Information	0.25
Ordinances/codes	Information	0.25
Contact information for ordinance/code questions	Information	0.25
Building permit information	Information	0.25
Trash pick-up schedule	Information	0.75
Recycling pick-up schedule	Information	0.75
Recycling/trash regulations	Information	0.50
Public utilities (water/sewer)	Information	0.75
Private utilities (power/gas)	Information	0.25
Library information	Information	0.25
Local hospital information	Information	0.25
Local school information	Information	0.25
Tax rates	Information	1.00
Tax assessor	Information	0.50
Tax collector	Information	0.50
City budget	Information	1.00
Leisure activity schedules	Information	0.50
Dog licensing information	Information	0.50
Crime stats	Information	0.50
Police department information	Information	0.25
Fire department information	Information	0.25
EMS information	Information	0.25
OPRA request form	Information	1.00
Facebook	Social Media	2.00
Twitter	Social Media	1.00
Blogs	Social Media	0.25
Photos (Flickr...)	Social Media	0.50
Listservs	Social Media	0.25
Videos (YouTube etc.)	Social Media	0.50
GIS maps	Social Media	0.25
Download permit form (pdf, word)	Transaction	1.00
Apply for permit online	Transaction	1.00
Pay parking tickets	Transaction	1.00
Pay taxes	Transaction	1.00
Download dog license form (pdf, word)	Transaction	0.75
Apply for dog license online	Transaction	1.25
OPRA online requests	Transaction	1.00