

Using the power of the Web to spur reform

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Two Tulane University professors are launching a website ? New Orleans Satellite Government ? that contains information on the makeup, mission and money spent by more than 200 commissions, boards, security and improvement districts, public benefit corporations and other public bodies operating in New Orleans.



Professors Aaron Schneider, left, and David Marcello hope their new website advances best practices and general awareness, fostering transparency and accountability of city government satellites. (Photo by Sabree Hill)

These entities can be considered “satellites” of New Orleans city government because they spend city tax dollars, generate revenue and set policies.

“These satellite government entities perform important public functions in New Orleans, and there is a need for transparency and information about who they are, what they do, how they do it, and with what mechanisms of oversight,” say the site's founders, David Marcello, executive director of the Public Law Center at Tulane Law School, and Aaron Schneider, the Jill H. and Avram A. Glazer Professor of Political Science at Tulane.

The [site](#) contains the names and contact information of satellite government board members, the satellites' legal origins, their funding, expenditures, operational requirements, reporting policies and more.

Potential users of the site include the media, good government organizations, watchdog groups, community activists, students, concerned citizens and the public entities themselves. Marcello and Schneider hope the site advances best practices and general awareness, fostering transparency and accountability in an area of government that can be difficult to understand.

“Some entities may be operating and reporting really well and other groups can learn from them,” Schneider says. “Others may display practices that are outdated or not designed appropriately for the goals of the entities.” Both professors hope the website will spur reform efforts, where needed.

“My enthusiasm is governmental reform,” Marcello says. “This database supports reforms that we've achieved in New Orleans over several decades, such as the Inspector General and Ethics Review Board. By making information available about satellite government, this database stands in that line of progress.”