



Women's Council
· Wisconsin ·

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Sunshine Week 2016 and ConnectWI
Shining a Spotlight on Transparency in Local Government

March 14, 2016 (Madison) Sunshine Week 2016 is a time to highlight the important of easy access to online information on local public officials and open meetings. The Wisconsin Women's Council, in partnership with the Wisconsin Newspaper Association and the Wisconsin Broadcaster's Association, launched ConnectWI to recognize units of Wisconsin local government that provide easy access to information on public officials and public meetings through their official websites.

"The Women's Council works to empower women as their own agents of change – at home, at work, in the community. When that change involves interacting with government, or seeking government office, access to practical, timely information on elected officials and their activities is vital – and a simple thing for local governments to do," said Christine Lidbury, executive director of the Women's Council.

ConnectWI recognition is open to county, city, village, town and school district websites that meet criteria aimed at promoting transparency, including that there be a link devoted to the governing body on the website's homepage; the name, title and contact information of governing body members; meeting calendars that include board and committee meeting dates; access to board and committee agendas and minutes; and list of committees, with contact information for (at minimum) the committee chair.

Websites that excel beyond the basic criteria—meeting additional conditions—are awarded a gold designation.

To-date, ConnectWI has recognized 9 Wisconsin municipalities, most with Gold designations, including the Cities of Appleton, Eau Claire, Lodi, Reedsburg, River Falls and Waupaca and the villages of Deforest, Kronenwetter and Weston.

"The public often struggles to find the most basic information about who represents them and how to participate," said Beth Bennett, executive director of the Wisconsin Newspaper Association. *"Hopefully, this program will encourage all levels of government to be more transparent."*

Wisconsin is home to 2,350 local elected bodies, with a combined total of more than 13,000 elected officials. ConnectWI accepts applications from interested entities and announces periodically through the year.

"It is well worth the time and effort to simplify the digital connection between people and their local governments," said Michelle Vetterkind, President and CEO of the Wisconsin Broadcasters Association.

"Expanding knowledge and information is always a good thing and ConnectWI is a great program to help build this civic bridge."

ConnectWI is a platform for recognizing excellence in transparency and creating a source for best practices. Done well, web site transparency is a tremendous resource for the media, the public and opens doors for constituents to better know and engage with their public officials. Is your local government Connected? Look for the ConnectWI icon on their website.

Interested units of governments can apply for the designation online at womenscouncil.wi.gov/ConnectWI.