

Gainesville, Fla., Publishes Mayor's, Commissioners' Emails in Searchable Database

Colin Wood | June 25, 2014

Bored in Gainesville, Fla.? Why not [read some of Mayor Ed Braddy's emails](#)? On May 29, the city launched an open database including more than 10,000 emails sent and received by the mayor and city commissioners. The emails, which date back to March, were posted online after 10 years of considering the idea.

Some emails containing confidential information are not publicly available, but otherwise the emails featured on the [website](#) have helped improve transparency and save the city the time and labor it once took to fulfill Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, according to the city. Anyone can browse the database by official and search for emails by subject and date. There is also a function to export data.

Alachua County, Fla., has been offering similar information on its [website](#) for 10 years, said county Communications Coordinator Mark Sexton. The county has always taken open approach to information and communication with the press, he said, so this website was a natural extension of that philosophy.

Sexton said he hears from a lot of journalists and citizens who use the database, usually to browse and get a pulse on what people are saying about hot issues. All emails sent to and from the county's five commissioners are automatically uploaded to the public database and can be browsed by date, with no human work needed. A disclaimer on the county's website warns that any information sent to the commissioners will be made public record.

Making the data available was never a matter of saving time on public records requests for the county and, in fact, the website hasn't really done that, Sexton said. Usually when someone makes a records request, they ask for information regarding a certain subject and falling within a certain date range, and the Alachua County's email database doesn't offer those sorting functions. For them, it was just an extra tool to provide data to the public.

"I don't want to spin stuff. I'm a citizen here, too," Sexton said. "I've lived here since 1977, and if I was dealing with the county, I wouldn't want it to be difficult to find information."

<http://www.govtech.com/local/Gainsville-Fla--Publishes-Mayors-Commissioners-Emails-in-Searchable-Database.html>