An information-packed website to help residents navigate the complex network of about 150 boards, commissions and other public entities in New Orleans was launched Wednesday by two Tulane University professors.

The site, called New Orleans Satellite Government, contains information about agencies such as Traffic Court, the Audubon Nature Institute, the French Market Corp. and the Orleans Parish coroner's office, including their origins, boards and finances. It can be found at http://nolasatellitegovernment.tulane.edu.

"This is another effort to bring sunshine, transparency and accountability to government," said David Marcello, one of the founders, at a midday news conference.

It is the brainchild of Marcello, executive director of the Public Law Center at Tulane Law School, and Aaron Schneider, who holds an endowed political science professorship.

The site took a year and a half to build and cost about $12,000, they said. Money came from the office of Tulane Provost Michael Bernstein and Tulane's Murphy Institute, which studies economic, moral and political issues.

When people use the site, they can explore by clicking on one of 25 categories, such as public institutions.
and neighborhood groups; organizations' names; or board members.

To be included on the site, Marcello and Schneider said an organization had to meet at least one of four criteria: it was created by local or state law, it spends a significant amount of public money, it depends on government appropriations or it is regulated by public rules.

"Entities we contacted (for information) were thrilled that people were interested in what they do," Schneider said.

Because the organizations on the site perform a broad variety of public functions, from operating Louis Armstrong International Airport to running the New Orleans Museum of Art, there is a need for transparency and information about what they do and where they get their money, Schneider and Marcello said in a prepared statement.

It is, Marcello said, a work in progress that will be updated continually as new information becomes available.

Both men said they welcome suggestions for putting even more information online, including, perhaps, contracts that the organizations award and the people who nominate their members.

Schneider said his interest in the website grew out of his academic interest in political economics. Marcello said the concept appeals to his abiding interest in political reform.

John Pope can be reached at j pope@timespicayune.com or 504.826.3317.

© 2011 NOLA.com. All rights reserved.