

New \$65K website flush with Fresno County data

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Details

Published on 05/12/2014 - 11:45 am

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Did you know for every 100,000 residents, there are 39.1 art-related businesses in California, but only 7.6 in Fresno County?

Or that biomass makes up about 4 percent of Fresno County's renewable energy production?

How about the fact that per 100,000 residents, Fresno County has six patents awarded, compared to 34.9 in the US and 75.2 in California?

That information and more lives in a digital format with hundreds of different sources, where it is updated on a regular basis. But it was never easily accessible until now with the launch of fresnoscorecard.org.

The website, which went live at the end of February, is the fruit of a partnership between the Fresno Business Council and ValleyPBS, though a group of more than 100 community stakeholders helped determine the various data indicators.

There are a total of 11 indicators on the website, each including their own subsets for a total of around 150 data points:

• People • Agriculture • Culture & Quality of Life • Economic Vitality • Education • Equity • Health • Housing • Safe Community • Strong Families • Sustainable Infrastructure

The Institute for Public Policy and Economic Analysis at Eastern Washington University in Spokane built the website as part of a contract with the Fresno Business Council. The site cost \$65,000, plus about \$20,000 in annual maintenance costs, which includes updating the information as updates are released, said Deb Nankivell, CEO of the Fresno Business Council.

She said the website is an effort to hold a mirror to the community, to see what areas need work.

“Just like in business — you know that what you measure, you focus on,” Nankivell said. ValleyPBS is heading up the marketing campaign for the website, which will include videos and other forms of outreach. Paula Castadio, president and CEO of Valley PBS, expects the website to increase its data offerings as the public adopts it.

“We want to grow our list of resources,” Castadio said.

The original idea for the project came from local retired orthopedic surgeon Dr. Alan Pierrot, who is also a member of the Fresno Business Council executive committee. A bit of a numbers guy, Pierrot felt it was a time-honored concept to gauge the health of a community using real statistics. He's the one who first contacted Eastern Washington University in Spokane, which has built seven similar sites for communities in Washington state.

Pierrot said the new website should be considered a starting point for many conversations in the community.

“We look forward to people reviewing the information and figuring out how we can move those indicators in a favorable direction, which is the ultimate goal,” Pierrot said.

Patrick Jones, executive director of the Institute for Public Policy & Economic Analysis in Spokane that built the site, said there are examples of similar sites in Washington being a springboard for positive change. In Spokane, the site led to the creation of a community foundation that chose to tackle the high-school dropout rate, which has steadily plummeted since 2008.

Jones actually has a connection to Fresno. He lived here for two to three years as a small boy, while his father operated the Kress building on Fulton Street. Jones joked that his mother, a Norwegian American, was quite popular when they moved to Washington on account of all the good Armenian recipes she brought with her.

Jones said these websites are built for the average person to comprehend, and it is full of interactive graphs where users can turn “on and off” various data points from the federal level all the way down to Fresno County.

“It’s not necessarily there for a data guru, but more for the lay person who wants to find some answers in some good-looking graphs,” Jones said.