

## **Transparency Advisory Group Minutes October 6, 2020**

The Transparency Advisory Group held its fifth meeting on October 6, 2020 at 10 a.m. eastern via Zoom.

### Committee Members Present:

- **Tiffany Carpenter**, UT System, vice president for communications and marketing (chair)
- **Sally Badoud**, UT Health Science Center, assistant vice chancellor for communications and marketing
- **Harry Brooks**, former legislator
- **Terry Denniston**, UT Chattanooga, chief of staff
- **Taylor Flores**, UT Chattanooga, student
- **Annie Freeland**, UT System, director of policy and engagement – government relations
- **Edie Gibson**, UT Martin, executive assistant to the chancellor
- **Scott Gordy**, UT Institute for Public Service, information technology manager
- **John North**, WBIR, senior investigative journalist
- **Tyvi Small**, UT Knoxville, vice chancellor for diversity and engagement
- **John Zomchick**, UT Knoxville, provost

### Other Attendees:

- **Deborah Fisher**, Tennessee Coalition for Open Government, executive director
- **Frank Lancaster**, UT System, associate general counsel
- **Jorge Perez**, UT System, associate vice president for institutional effectiveness
- **Ryan Stinnett**, UT System, general counsel
- **Melissa Tindell**, UT System, director of communications

### COVID-19 Efforts:

Ms. Carpenter gave the group an overview of the UT System's response to COVID-19, including the creation of a website - [Tennessee.edu/coronavirus](https://tennessee.edu/coronavirus). The site compiles information and communications from each UT campus and institute in one location includes a list of media experts from across the system. She informed the group that the system has worked with the campuses to coordinate timing of announcements and has held regular calls with communicators and emergency managers to monitor the situation, coordinate efforts and discuss best practices and next steps.

Over the summer, communicators from across the campus came together for a planning session to discuss possible COVID-related scenarios and communications efforts needed around each.

As fall classes began, chancellors on each of the campuses have been hosting weekly virtual town halls to update students, faculty and staff on efforts and sending regular communication with updates. The Institutional Effectiveness team with the UT System has created a dashboard

that is updated every evening at 6 p.m. eastern with number of active cases for students and employees as well as number of individuals in quarantine/isolation.

Ms. Carpenter asked the group for other things the System or campuses could be doing to be more transparent with their efforts. While the group had no other suggestions, Mr. North commended Mr. Perez and his team for the dashboard and the Chancellor Plowman for her weekly updates. He said his station is constantly evaluating the needs of the public and trying to find a balance between COVID fatigue and staying informed.

#### Review of Site Analytics:

Ms. Carpenter provided the group with analytics for the Transparent UT website. In September, the site had 6,791 pageviews with 5,121 unique views. Ninety percent of the September views were to the salary database. The data dashboard landing page had 474 views, with enrollment numbers a distant third in viewers with on 72 views.

Ms. Carpenter reminded the group that individuals could submit request for additional information to include on site through a portal at Tennessee.edu/transparency. The portal has only received one request since the groups last meeting, which was for a link to University of Tennessee training sessions. Ms. Carpenter opted to make that more prominent on the HR website.

#### Updates to the Site:

Ms. Carpenter updated the group on items that have been added to the site since the April 4th meeting. Items included:

- Addition of the COVID-19 Situation Dashboard – Aug. 21, 2020
- Information regarding the UT System's nonbinding letter of intent with Martin Methodist College – Sept. 11, 2020
- Contract for UT Knoxville's head football coach, Jeremy Pruitt – Sept. 24, 2020

In addition to the items added, the System Office of Communications and Marketing has updated the executive contract portion of the site to remove contracts for former athletic department employees and added contracts for new hires.

The salary database will be updated in early November along with several annual reports that will be approved at the October Board of Trustees meeting.

#### FOI Portal Update:

Ms. Tindell updated the group on the new FOI Portal and gave a demonstration of the process. The new software will allow requestors to securely upload personal information and create a tracking process for requests. The UT System is currently utilizing the software, and UT Knoxville will begin using the software when things slow down around COVID.

Mr. North asked if an option could be added to the drop down menu for individuals who just want to come to the office to review documents. Mr. Small suggested making the portal

available on the Transparency site. Ms. Freeland asked if a definition could be added to the proof of residency. Ms. Tindell will be working to make the adjustments as well as ensuring the link to the portal easier to find on the UT System website as well as the Transparency page.

Rep. Brooks asked if the system would create additional public records. Ms. Fisher told the committee that all FOIA requests are public, and a statute was passed in the most recent session to require retention of all requests for 12 months. Rep. Brooks suggested we might want to consider having all requests received viewable by anyone.

Ms. Freeland asked if individuals without internet service could file a request. Ms. Tindell said she will still be taking requests via phone, email, mail or handwritten request.

#### Discussion with Deborah Fisher, Tennessee Coalition for Open Government

Ms. Fisher gave an overview of the history and role of the Tennessee Coalition for Open Government (TCOG). TCOG works to identify legislation that will make changes to open records or public meetings law that would impede the public's access to information. The coalition works to make sure public entities are following guidelines. While the group is interested in ensuring access to information, they are also interested in the cost of government to support that access. Last year TCOG worked with Sen. Hale on legislation that would limit harassing requests. The legislation did not pass, but may be re-addressed in the upcoming session. Anyone can sign up for their newsletter at [www.tcog.info](http://www.tcog.info).

Ms. Fisher commended UT for the work on the portal and was excited about the opportunities UT would have through the portal to analyze requests, time spent, processing time and payments going forward.

Ms. Fisher commended MTAS and CTAS for work in providing guidance and suggested that they could be a help to local government entities across the state.

Ms. Carpenter asked what legislation they were tracking for the upcoming session. Ms. Fisher stated they were particularly interested in legislation around electronic meetings for locally-governed bodies and access of the public to those meetings.

#### Other topics

Going forward, the group will meet every six months.