



- PRESIDENT, Craig T. Fifer, Deputy Communications Director, City of Alexandria*
- VICE PRESIDENT, Dick Hammerstrom, Local News Editor, Free Lance-Star, Fredericksburg*
- SECRETARY, Olga Hernandez, Past President, League of Women Voters, Centreville*
- TREASURER: Paul Casalaspí, IT Director, Library of Virginia, Richmond*
- PAST PRESIDENT, Dorothy Abernathy, Bureau Chief, The Associated Press, Richmond*
- Mark Caramanica, FOI Director, Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, Arlington*
- Bob Gibson, The Sorensen Institute, Charlottesville*
- Mark Grunewald, Professor of Law, Washington & Lee, Lexington*
- Olga Hernandez, Past President, League of Women Voters, Centreville*
- Wat Hopkins, Professor of Communications Studies, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg*
- Forrest M. "Frosty" Landon, Roanoke*
- Del. Jim LeMunyon, Sterling*
- Jeff Lester, News Editor, The Coalfield Progress, Norton*
- Pam Luecke, Department Head, Washington & Lee School of Journalism and Mass Communications, Lexington*
- Lawrence McConnell, Publisher, The Daily Progress, Charlottesville*
- Thomas Moncure, Vice President & Counsel, George Mason University, Fairfax*
- Patricia O'Bannon, Henrico Board of Supervisors*
- Melody Scalley, 1330 AM, 103.3 WESR FM, RFCradio.com, Eastville*
- Nancy Kent Smith, Vice President for News, WWBT-12, Richmond*
- Jeff South, Associate Professor, VCU School of Mass Communications, Richmond*
- Michael Stowe, Managing Editor, The Roanoke Times*
- Doug Easter, ex officio, Executive Director, Virginia Association of Broadcasters, Charlottesville*
- Ginger Stanley, ex officio, Executive Director, Virginia Press Association, Glen Allen*
- Joe Smith, of counsel, Vienna*

Megan Rhyne
Executive Director, Williamsburg

P.O. Box 2576
Williamsburg VA 23187
540.353.8264
vcog@opengovva.org
Twitter: @opengovva

If you were watching television in the 1970s, then you'd undoubtedly remember the classic cartoon commercial of the little boy asking the forest animals, "How many licks does it take to get to the tootsie roll center of a tootsie pop?" The animals pass on answering, each one admitting to the boy that they don't know because they "always bite" before they get to the end.

Then the wise old owl says he has the answer: "One. Two. Three. [Caaaa-ruunch]. Three."

The voiceover proclaims that the world may never know how many licks it does take to get to the center of a Tootsie Roll Pop.

And until now, the state of Virginia has never known just how many CLICKS it takes to get to a city or county budget, the heart and center of any local government, on that locality's website.

After a comprehensive survey of the websites for all 134 counties and independent cities in the state, the Virginia Coalition for Open Government can tell you that in King George County it takes six clicks of a mouse to get to this fiscal year's current operating budget. It takes five in Norfolk, four in Tazewell County, three in Harrisonburg, two in Amelia County, and just one in Manassas. Unfortunately, in 26 localities, no amount of clicks would reach a current budget, because none was posted.

VCOG didn't just count clicks, however. We also surveyed the localities for how easy it was to find and follow each click to the budget. We examined whether the budget was available in one comparative document, in sections or both. We looked at formats and whether it was searchable by keyword. We looked at whether the budget could be found on a home-page search box or a site map. We wondered if past budgets were available and how many. We searched for context, explanations and summaries. And we took note of helpful information along the way: explanations of the budget process, a budget calendar, citizen input, offers of free budget CDs.

We gathered all this data and then asked 10 basic questions of each site. Based on the answers to each of these questions we then came up with a grade for each county.

The results have been compiled into the accompanying new VCOG report: "How Many Clicks Does it Take to Get to Your Budget?"

It is our hope that localities and citizens will use this report as a platform from which to launch a discussion about how best to present the budget and other important public records.

The more sunlight in the Commonwealth, the better.

Megan Rhyne
Executive Director
Virginia Coalition for Open Government

www.opengovva.org