

# New Orleans, LA

Granicus provided streaming media technology to better inform residents and displaced citizens of the City's redevelopment efforts



## Problem

When Hurricane Katrina hit east of New Orleans in 2005, the City suffered a catastrophic failure of its levee system, flooding the city and forcing thousands of citizens to evacuate. Citizens were upset with the lack of communication and response from all levels of government. New Orleans struggled to keep all residents, specifically those displaced and living outside of the city and parish, informed on their revitalization efforts and rebuild trust.

## Solution

New Orleans deployed streaming media technology with automated minutes and votes recording, strengthening communication and broadening its reach through convenient, online access to public meetings and announcements.

## Benefits

With Granicus, New Orleans increased citizen awareness and access to information, helping to build public trust. The new technology allowed citizens to immediately access public hearings through the internet. New Orleans achieved some of the highest, live viewership of any Granicus client, exceeding 12,000 live hits to its city council meetings in a 30-day period.

### Fast Facts

**Agency Type:** City

**Population:** 240,000

**Solution:**

Granicus Platform

Government Transparency Suite

Meeting Efficiency Suite

Legislative Management Suite

**Active Since:** 2008

“This technology was one of the most important, proactive communications decisions made by the New Orleans City Council in the last ten years.”

- Cynthia Willard-Lewis,  
New Orleans Councilmember

## New Orleans fought to educate displaced citizens on the City's revitalization plans and progress

In August of 2005 New Orleans experienced the largest civil engineering disaster in American history, leaving 80% of the City under water and displacing thousands of residents. Not to mention, destroying the plans for a modern meeting process and forcing the City to layoff over 50% of its workforce. Hurricane Katrina forever changed the city's landscape, people and their government. It's estimated that some 90% of residents living in southeastern Louisiana during the hurricane, fled the region. Thousands of residents never returned to their homes.

Elected officials were concerned that the longer they waited to educate residents on improvement plans, the greater, long-term effect this would have on the City's population. They feared they would lose people permanently. "City council got pretty serious on how to get more information out to displaced citizens. New Orleans has a strong government access channel but it only reaches Orleans Parish; even if people were displaced into adjoining parishes, they couldn't see the actions the City was taking," recalls Valeri LeBlanc, Legislative Technical to the City of New Orleans.

Within days of the hurricane, New Orleans began city-wide planning and reorganization. "After Katrina the number of government and information meetings more than doubled. There was a lot of government action but not a lot of access to it," says LeBlanc. Additionally, New Orleans witnessed a rise in citizen concern; residents wanted to stay informed on decisions directly affecting them and their community. Not only did residents speak up, but the entire country tuned in to see how govern-

ment would respond to this national disaster. There was a public outcry from across the nation and people felt compelled to participate in the recovery efforts. "Following Katrina there was a rally of citizen activism. People got involved in levees, planning, and education issues that the city had never received community-wide participation on before and the Council wanted to support this increased involvement," continues LeBlanc. While it was easier for those who returned to New Orleans after the hurricane to participate in local government, it was those who had not come back who struggled to learn of the city's planning and reorganizing initiatives. New Orleans needed a communication medium that reached a broader audience and did not limit the sharing of public information to those living in Orleans Parish.

Councilmember James Carter was a key advocate for bringing streaming media to New Orleans. Through his leadership on the Cable and Telecommunications Committee, Carter wanted to ensure that those still living outside of the city could be included in the decisions affecting their community. A priority for his committee had always been to "increase citizen participation throughout the displaced community," recalls Carter.

Among other issues, New Orleans needed to restructure its IT infrastructure to get back to a place where it had been 18 months prior to Katrina. "We knew what we wanted to do and how we wanted to move government IT forward, but needless to say, things had fallen apart," recalls LeBlanc. To ensure that residents and displaced citizens received information on the revitalization of the city, she looked for vendors who provided streaming media technology over the internet.

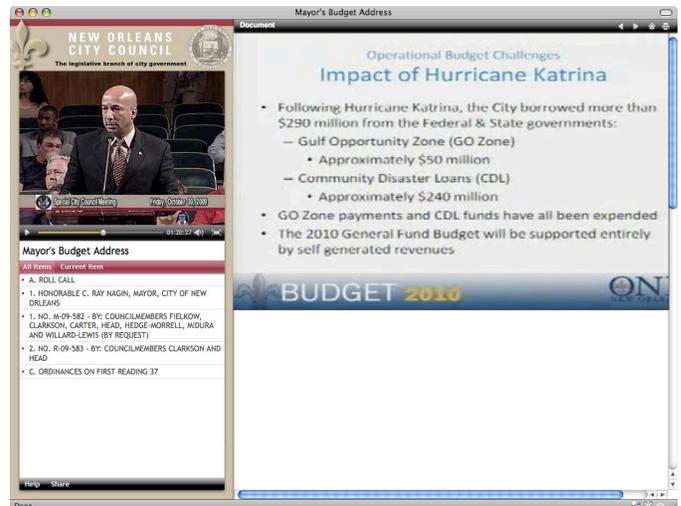
## Streaming video allowed New Orleans to share public information with all citizens

LeBlanc found resounding support for implementing Granicus from various departments within the City, including the City Council. Council members and city staff appreciated the technology's simplicity in the public meeting process, specifically around the casting and recording of votes, but respected what it brought to the community. "This technology was one of the most important, proactive communications decisions made by the New Orleans City Council in the last ten years," says Councilmember Cynthia Willard-Lewis.

In selecting Granicus as their streaming media provider, New Orleans opened its government and gave citizens live and on-demand access to public meetings. Residents heard first-hand the decisions impacting their reviving community and gained a new level of access to and appreciation for government. Additional communication mediums, like online streaming, fulfilled the City's intention to "communicate where we are, and what we still need to do" recalls LeBlanc. Citizens could now review the progress of legislation and track changes made by the Council whether living in the city limits or an adjoining state. This enhanced transparency, brought government online and provided a new level of openness for the City of New Orleans.

The public could search agenda items while watching the corresponding video testimonials for enhanced legislative knowledge and a deeper understanding of their government processes. "This new streaming video technology is yet another significant improvement in citizens' access to the official proceedings of the New Orleans City Council," says City Council President Arnie

Fielkow. "Links within meeting agendas direct viewers to the Council's discussions on those items, greatly expanding access to our proceedings including votes, documents and videos related to agenda items," he continues.



*New Orleans Mayor found a way to reach displaced citizens scattered throughout the United States in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.*

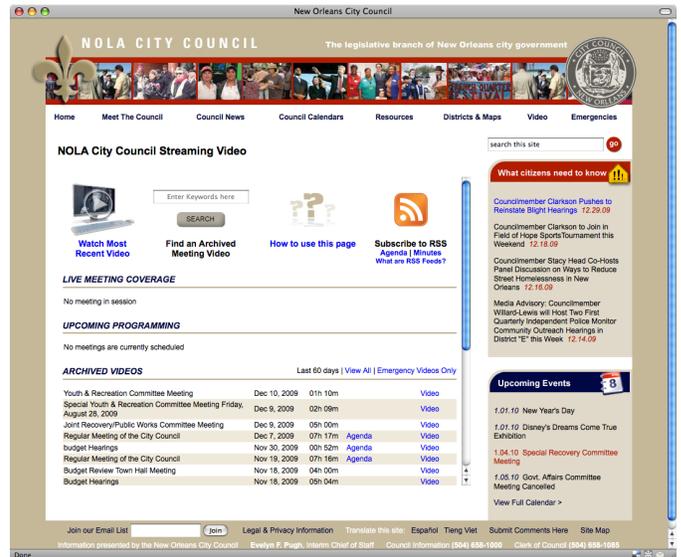
## City ranks as a Granicus top performer for receiving thousands of online viewers, live during Council meetings

New Orleans has ranked as one of the highest performing Granicus clients since going live with its solution in mid-2009. Within a 30-day period, New Orleans grossed over 12,000 live views to its City Council meetings. Further, its on-demand viewership during this same period climbed to nearly 1,000 hits. Live and on-demand viewer ratings indicate the City's success with streaming media technology and accomplishing its goals for broader, public access.

By combining efforts for a new, easy-to-navigate website with streaming media technology, New Orleans “brought people to a user-friendly website and allowed residents to watch public hearings on their own time. Everyone gained access to the same information,” says Denise Estopinal, CEO of The Estopinal Group, a company contracted by the City Council to enhance its communication efforts. The redesigned website also contains a streaming media page dedicated solely to emergency coverage. In the event that there is an emergency, there would be regular, on-going, live coverage of the situation, allowing for a more comprehensive approach to emergency responses.

Since implementing Granicus, New Orleans has strengthened government transparency, enhanced legislative management, and increased citizen awareness. “Granicus combined our goals for electronic government and making information available to displaced citizens,” says LeBlanc. “With Granicus, citizens can now be informed of what’s going on in the City from a more lucid perspective. The more information citizens have, the better our democracy works,” continues Councilmember James Carter.

The support Council has seen for this technology has driven more governing bodies at the City to follow suit. More than 10 boards and commissions are following the Council’s lead and plan to bring streaming media to their departments.



*City Council’s redesigned, user-friendly website provides an easily accessible library of archived public videos and meeting agendas.*

“The more information our citizens have, the better our democracy works.”

- James Carter, New Orleans Councilmember