Following the Money 2015

How the 50 States Rate in Providing Online Access to Government Spending Data

TexPIRG Education Fund

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Table of Contents

Executive Summary 1

Introduction 6

Transparency Websites Empower Citizens to Track Government Spending 7
- Transparency Websites Make Government More Effective and Accountable 7
- Transparency Websites Give Users Detailed Information on Government Expenditures 12

New Transparency Websites and Features Open the Books 18
- Colorado 18
- Kansas 18
- Montana 21
- Nevada 21
- North Dakota 23
- Ohio 23

Making the Grade: Scoring States' Online Spending Transparency 25
- Leading "A" States 26
- Advancing "B" States 28
- Middling "C" States 29
- Lagging "D" States 29
- Failing "F" States 30

States Innovate with Cutting-Edge Practices 32

Continuing the Momentum Toward Greater Transparency: How States Can Improve their Transparency Websites 34

Appendix A: Methodology 36

Appendix B: Transparency Scorecard 54

Appendix C: List of Questions Posed to Transparency Website Officials 56

Appendix D: Agencies or Departments Responsible for Administering Transparency Websites by State 57

Notes 59

Executive Summary

Every year, state governments spend hundreds of billions of dollars through contracts for goods and services, subsidies to encourage economic development, and other expenditures. Accountability and public scrutiny are necessary to ensure that the public can trust that state funds are spent as well as possible.

In recent years, state governments across the country have created transparency websites that provide checkbook-level information on government spending —meaning that users can view the payments made to individual companies as well as details about the goods or services purchased or other public benefits obtained. These websites allow residents and watchdog groups to ensure that taxpayers can see how public dollars are spent.

In 2015, all 50 states operated websites to make information on state expenditures accessible to the public and these web portals continue to improve. For instance, in 2015, all but two states allow users to search the online checkbook by agency, keyword and/or vendor, and 44 states provide checkbook-level data for one or more economic development subsidy programs. Many states are also disclosing new information and are making it easier for outside researchers to download and analyze large datasets about government spending.

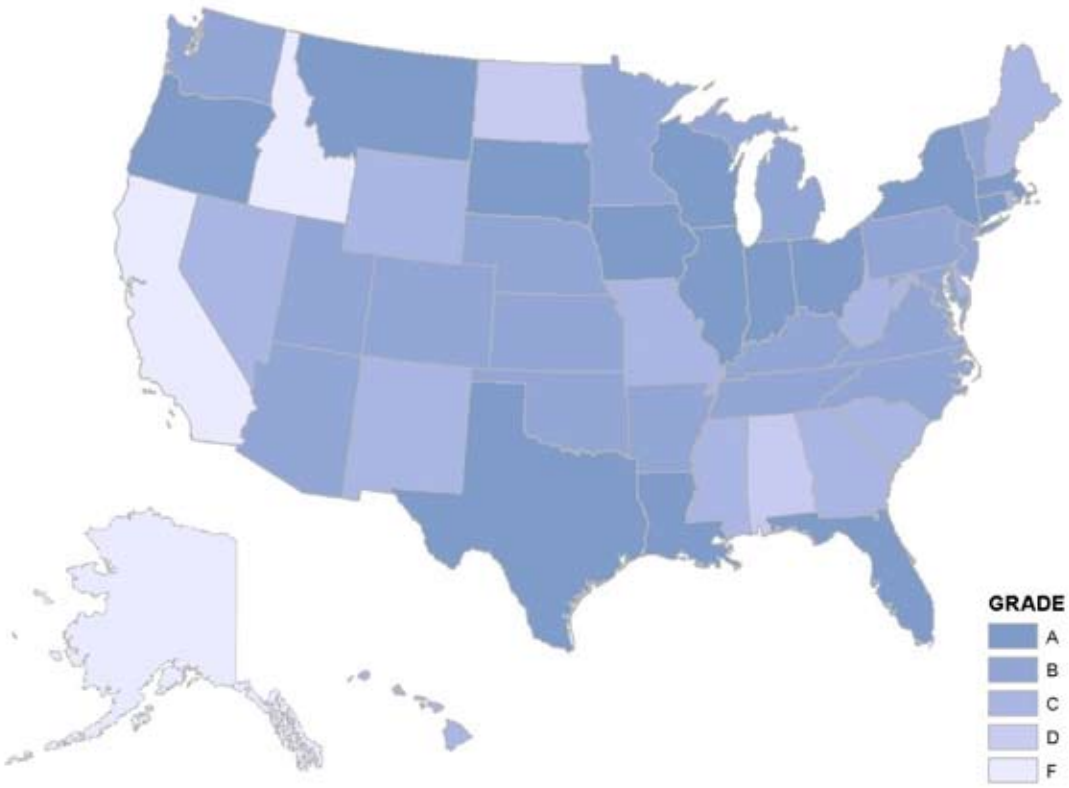
This report, our sixth annual evaluation of state transparency websites, finds that states continue to make progress toward comprehensive, one-stop, one-click transparency and accountability for state government spending. Over the past year, many states have launched new and improved websites to better open the books on public spending, or have adopted new practices to further expand citizens' access to critical spending information. Some states, however, still have a long way to go.

Over the past year, several states have launched new websites or made substantive upgrades to their existing websites.

- **Colorado** re-launched its transparency portal with a new, more user-friendly data viewer.

- **Kansas'** website overhaul included the addition of keyword search functions, downloadable data and a page

Figure ES-1: How the 50 States Rate in Providing Online Access to Government Spending Data



Transparency Websites Should Be Comprehensive, One-Stop and One-Click

Comprehensive: A user-friendly web portal provides residents the ability to search detailed information about government contracts, spending, subsidies and tax expenditures for all government entities.

One-Stop: Residents can search all government expenditures on a single website.

One-Click Searchable and Downloadable: Residents can search data with a single query or browse common-sense categories. Residents can sort data on government spending by recipient, amount, legislative district, granting agency, purpose or keyword. Residents can also download data to conduct detailed off-line analyses.

Confirmation of Findings with State Officials

To ensure that the information presented here is accurate and up to date, our researchers sent initial assessments and a list of questions to transparency website officials in all 50 states and received feedback from 47 states. State transparency officials were given the opportunity to verify information, clarify their online features, and discuss the benefits of transparency best practices in their states. For a list of the questions posed to state officials, please see Appendix C.

that details the information excluded from the website.

- **Massachusetts** significantly increased the number of quasi-public agencies accounted for via the state's transparency website.
- **Montana** continued to improve on its provision of information pertaining to economic development subsidies.
- **Nevada** made a tax expenditure report available for the first time, as well as data on three of the state's five most important subsidy programs.
- **North Dakota** improved its website with partially downloadable data.
- **Ohio** unveiled an entirely new transparency website incorporating all of the features typically found on leading sites, as well as cutting-edge functionality.

States have made varying levels of progress toward improved online spending transparency. (See Figure ES-1 and Table ES-1.)

- *Leading States ("A" range):* Fourteen states lead in online spending transparency, representing an all-time high in this category. They have created user-friendly websites that provide visitors with accessible information on an array of expenditures. Not only can ordinary citizens find information on specific vendor payments through easy-to-use search features, but experts and watchdog groups can also download and analyze the entire checkbook dataset.
- *Advancing States ("B" range):* Eighteen states are advancing in online spending transparency, with spending information that is easy to access but more limited than Leading States. Most Advancing States have checkbooks that are searchable by recipient, keyword and agency.
- *Middling States ("C" range):* Thirteen states are middling in online spending transparency, with comprehensive and easy-to-access checkbook-level spending information but limited information on subsidies or other "off-budget" expenditures.

- *Lagging States ("D" range):* The two Lagging States fail to provide tax expenditure reports and provide almost no checkbook-level detail on the recipients of economic development subsidies (North Dakota makes data available for a single program). There are significantly fewer Lagging States this year than last, evidence of states' ongoing progress in opening the books on spending.

- *Failing States ("F" range):* Three states fail to meet several of the standards of online spending transparency. For example, two of the three do not host an online database for searching or viewing expenditure details, and only one makes tax expenditure reports available via a central transparency portal. None of the Failing States provide any information on economic development subsidies.

Some states are innovating new features for online transparency. They have developed new protocols and datasets and introduced new website functionality, giving the public unprecedented ability to monitor and influence how their government allocates resources. For instance:

- *Ohio's* site populates instant search suggestions based on the letters typed into the search bar, creating a website that looks and behaves much like the top search engines Ohioans most commonly visit and interact with elsewhere on the internet. This feature aids transparency by helping users track down information without needing prior knowledge of exact search terms. In addition, every web page has the phone number and email address for a point of contact in state government, as well as social media "share" buttons.

- *Minnesota*, *Oklahoma and Texas* have added new detail, and made data easier to understand, with new visualization tools including maps, graphs and a taxpayer "receipt" that explains how a citizen's tax dollar is distributed to different state spending functions.

- *Florida* now posts the value of payments excluded from the checkbook for confidentiality reasons, enabling users to better grasp the missing state payments that policies prohibit from being listed in the checkbook database.

All states, including Leading States, have opportunities to improve their transparency.

- The checkbooks in five states have limited searchability.

- Only eight states provide checkbook-level information that includes the recipients of each of the state's most important subsidy programs. While many other states provide checkbook-level information for *some* of their major subsidy programs, disclosure for all programs would provide greater transparency and accountability.

- Six states do not provide tax expenditure reports that detail the impact on the state budget of targeted tax credits, exemptions or deductions.

- In addition to improving the comprehensiveness of their transparency portals, states should begin to enhance user-friendliness in design and functionality.

- No state provides a comprehensive list of government entities outside

the standard state budget. Ideally, all governmental and quasi-governmental entities—even those that are entirely financially self-supporting—would integrate their expenditures into the online checkbook, and a central registry of all such entities would be available for public reference.

- Even top-scoring states should continue to expand the universe of data accounted for by their transparency portals. Important advancements would include detailing all active public-private partnerships, and supporting municipal and county level transparency and making those data available centrally.

Table ES-1: How the 50 States Rate in Providing Online Access to Government Spending Data

State	Grade	2015 Score
Ohio	A+	100
Indiana	A	97
Wisconsin	A	96.5
Oregon	A	96.5
Louisiana	A	96
Connecticut	A	96
Massachusetts	A	95.5
Florida	A	95
Iowa	A-	94
Illinois	A-	93
Montana	A-	92
New York	A-	91
Texas	A-	91
South Dakota	A-	90
North Carolina	B+	89.5
Colorado	B+	89
Vermont	B+	89
Oklahoma	B+	88
Maryland	B+	87
Michigan	B+	87
Nebraska	B+	87
Washington	B	86
Utah	B	86
Kentucky	B	86
Minnesota	B	85

State	Grade	2015 Score
New Jersey	B	84
Arizona	B	84
Kansas	B	84
Pennsylvania	B	83
Arkansas	B-	82
Tennessee	B-	82
Virginia	B-	82
Mississippi	C+	79
South Carolina	C+	78
New Mexico	C+	77
Missouri	C+	77
Maine	C+	76
Rhode Island	C+	76
New Hampshire	C+	75
Georgia	C	74
Nevada	C	74
West Virginia	C	73
Hawaii	C	71
Delaware	C	71
Wyoming	C-	67
North Dakota	D+	64
Alabama	D	55
Idaho	F	45
Alaska	F	43
California	F	34

Introduction

Almost every facet of day-to-day life is moving online, from shopping to socializing to finding a ride home. More than half of the U.S. population shops online, more than one in 10 retail dollars are spent via the internet, and Americans now use the web more than they watch television.[1] These changes are even impacting social norms. Surveys find that 40 percent of respondents now feel more comfortable engaging online than in person.[2]

Americans regularly interact with sophisticated and user-friendly online platforms for almost everything they do, satisfying a growing public expectation for all kinds of information on demand. In recent years, even citizens' digital interactions with government have increasingly moved online. Today, every state offers at least a basic website for accessing information regarding state government expenditures, and hundreds of billions of dollars of state spending are now accessible in checkbook-level detail online. This number continues to grow as leading states disclose more expenditures that occur indirectly or through "off-budget" government entities that use public dollars.

This report, the sixth annual installment in the *Following the Money* series, assesses states' ongoing progress in opening the books on taxpayer-supported expenditures. It also underscores the need for continued improvement. The following pages identify the states that still lag behind, and look forward to the next wave of improvements states are making to help citizens "follow the money." By continuing to enhance the scope and accessibility of these web-based transparency portals, states can provide citizens with the ability to monitor how tax dollars and quasi-public entity funds are spent in a way that comports with contemporary expectations of information availability. To ensure an engaged and informed democracy in the so-called Information Age, it is vital that accessing public information be no harder than the other queries or transactions we now pursue effortlessly online.

Transparency Websites Empower Citizens to Track Government Spending

Practically speaking, public information is not truly accessible unless it is online. Government spending transparency websites give citizens and government officials the ability to monitor many aspects of state spending in order to save money, prevent corruption, reduce potential abuse of taxpayer dollars, and encourage the achievement of a wide variety of public policy goals.

Practically speaking, public information is not truly accessible unless it is online.

Transparency Websites Make Government More Effective and Accountable

States with good transparency web portals have experienced a wide variety of benefits. Transparency websites have helped governments find ways to save money and meet other public policy goals.

Transparency Websites Save Money

States with transparency websites often realize significant financial returns on the associated investment. Savings can be realized through more efficient government administration, less staff time spent on information requests, and the posting of contracts enabling potential new vendors to identify opportunities to win lower-cost bids or offer higher-quality goods and services. This can add up to millions of dollars in taxpayer savings. Harder to measure is the potential abuse or misspending that is avoided because government officials, contractors and subsidy recipients know that the public may be looking over their shoulders. Transparency websites also help citizen watchdogs ensure that government contractors and vendors deliver goods or services at a reasonable price, and allow for public scrutiny of economic development subsidies and the benefits they bring.

Transparency websites can save money in a variety of ways, including:

- **Negotiating contracts and increasing competition.**

- Better information and increased competition, partially resulting from the launch of Florida's contract database, has allowed the state to re-bid and renegotiate contracts at lower costs, saving $40 million since the 2013-2014 fiscal year.[3]

- In 2010, Texas was able to renegotiate its copier machine lease to save $33 million over three years. The state was also able to negotiate prison food contracts to save $15.2 million.[d]

- In 2011, Massachusetts reported that by posting information on state contracts and bidding opportunities through the state's checkbook-level procurement website, Comm-Pass, bids for transportation projects funded by Recovery Act funds came in 15 to 20 percent below the state's initial estimates.[5] Posting contracts enables potential new vendors to see opportunities to win lower-cost bids or provide higher-quality goods and services, and empowers losing contractors to raise the alarm if they perceive that the best bids are not selected.

- **Identifying and eliminating inefficient expenditures.**

  - In Texas, the Comptroller's office uses its transparency website to evaluate state agency spending patterns. By monitoring contracts more closely and sourcing services from new vendors when the potential for cost-cutting was identified, the state claims to have realized more than $163 million in savings to date.[6]

  - State agencies in Arkansas routinely utilize the state's transparency portal to monitor travel spending and ensure that employees are making prudent decisions. For example, the Arkansas Teacher Retirement System has downloaded and analyzed travel spending data to ensure state employees are carpooling together when possible, reducing the agency's travel costs.[7]

  - After South Dakota's new transparency website was launched, an emboldened reporter requested additional information on subsidies that led legislators to save about $19 million per year by eliminating redundancies in their economic development program.[8]

  - Wisconsin's Department of Administration states that its OpenBook Wisconsin transparency portal has given state agencies previously unavailable insight into IT costs. With better information in hand, the state now believes it can cut its information technology bill by 15 percent.[9]

- **Reducing costly information requests.**

  - Mississippi has estimated that every information request fulfilled by its transparency website rather than by a state employee saves the state between $750 and $1,000 in staff time.[10]

  - Massachusetts' procurement website has saved the state $3 million by eliminating paper, postage and printing costs associated with information requests by state agencies and paperwork from vendors. Massachusetts has also saved money by reducing staff time for public records management, retention, provision, archiving and destruction.[11]

- Kansas reports that, while the impact is difficult to quantify, its transparency efforts have caused Kansas Open Records Act requests to decrease "significantly."[12]

- In 2010, South Carolina open records requests initially dropped by two-thirds after the creation of its transparency website, reducing staff time and saving tens of thousands of dollars.[13] In 2015, the state reports that its transparency website continues to reduce open records requests.[14]

- In 2012, Delaware's Department of Finance reported a "significant reduction" in Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, saving valuable staff time.[15]

- Similarly, New Mexico currently attributes the reduction in information requests to the information available on the transparency website.[16]

Online Transparency Provides Support for Achieving Policy Goals

Transparency websites provide states tools to assess their progress toward community investment, affirmative action, economic development and other public policy goals. Governments often stumble when trying to meet policy goals because managers struggle to benchmark agency activities, spread best practices, or identify contractors or subsidy recipients who best advance these agency goals. Online transparency portals allow states to better measure and manage the progress of programs.

Both Kentucky and North Carolina have improved their procurement processes and streamlined government as a result of their government transparency efforts. In Kentucky, not only can vendors make use of publicly available information to identify and inform their bids, but state procurement officers are also better able to search for existing contracts.[17] In North Carolina, it was the act of developing a state transparency portal that spurred wholesale reform of the state's procurement process. During data collection, the state realized that it was using several different systems and processes to source contracts and began a reform initiative to consolidate and standardize procurement activities. Expected benefits for the state include efficiency in operation, saving both time and money, and more effective leveraging of the state's buying power.[18] Consolidated procurement efforts can lead to lower costs for the state as vendors may be willing to offer lower per-unit prices in order to secure a single, larger contract.

Transparency in contracting can also aid governments in their efforts to contract with minority- and women-owned businesses. At the city level, New York City has done just that. The city's transparency portal links to a public report card tracking real-time transactions between city government and certified minority- and women-owned businesses.[19] With better information, it is easier for citizens and public officials to identify agencies that may be falling short of official goals or that otherwise have opportunities to enhance their contracting with such businesses. States can use their transparency portals for similar ends.

Online Transparency Costs Little

The benefits of transparency websites have come with a low price tag, both for initial creation of the websites and ongoing maintenance. Several states—including Delaware, Georgia, Montana and Oregon—created and update their websites with funds from their existing budgets. For websites that required a special appropriation or earmark, the cost

Table 1: Cost to Create and Maintain a Transparency Website[20]

State	Start-Up Costs	Annual Operating Costs
Alabama	$125,000	Less than $12,000
Alaska	$5,000	"Nominal"
Arizona	$72,000, plus existing staff time	Approximately $90,000, of which approximately $60,000 pertains to database and website costs
Arkansas	$558,000	$175,000
Colorado	$200,000 from existing budget, plus existing staff time	$169,400 from existing budget
California	-	-
Connecticut	Existing budget	Existing budget
Delaware	Existing budget	Existing budget
Florida	Existing budget	$489,563, including staff time and benefits, consulting and IT maintenance
Georgia	Existing budget	Existing budget
Hawaii	Existing budget	Existing budget
Idaho	Approximately $28,000 from existing budget	Existing budget
Illinois	Approximately $100,000	Approximately $10,000
Indiana	-	-
Iowa	Less than $330,000 over three years	$120,000
Kansas	$150,000 from existing budget	Existing budget, plus a significant upgrade in 2014 costing $25,000 for IT programming (the cost of state planning, oversight, decision-making and testing was not tracked)
Kentucky	$150,000	$10,000-$15,000
Louisiana	$325,000	"Minimal"
Maine	$30,000	$25,000
Maryland	$65,000	$5,000
Massachusetts	$540,000[21]	$431,000
Michigan	Existing budget	Existing budget
Minnesota	Existing budget	Existing budget
Mississippi	$2,200,000[22]	$300,000
Missouri	$293,140 from existing budget	Less than $5,000, plus a website upgrade of less than $25,000 in staff time
Montana	Existing budget	Existing budget
Nebraska	$30,000-$60,000	$10,000-$15,000

State	Start-Up Costs	Annual Operating Costs
Nevada	$78,000	$30,000
New Hampshire	Existing budget	Existing budget
New Jersey	$372,667 for initial purchase and switchover to Socrata software	$118,495 for employee costs. The state expects costs to decrease going forward now that the software switch has been implemented
New Mexico	$230,000	$125,000
New York	Existing budget	-
North Carolina	$624,000[23]	$80,600
North Dakota	$231,000	$30,000
Ohio	New website cost $814,000, funded entirely by existing budget	Existing budget
Oklahoma	$8,000, plus existing staff time	$5,000, comprised of two weeks of staff time to update datasets and 280 hours of development and testing
Oregon	Existing budget	Existing budget
Pennsylvania	$900,000	Existing budget
Rhode Island	Existing budget	-
South Carolina	$30,000 in existing staff time	Existing staff time
South Dakota	Not tracked (nominal)	Existing budget
Tennessee	Existing budget	$60,000 for a website upgrade that came from the existing budget
Texas	$310,000	Existing budget
Utah	$192,800, plus existing staff time ($100,000)	$63,400, plus one fulltime staff member ($96,000) and website modifications by vendor ($224,855, comprised of $192,800 for initial development and $32,855 for enhancements)
Vermont	Existing budget	Existing budget[24]
Virginia	Existing budget	Existing budget
Washington	$300,000	No more than $170,000
West Virginia	Existing budget	-
Wisconsin	$160,000	$115,000
Wyoming	$1,600	-

Note: Some costs are approximations. Blank cells indicate that state officials did not provide or did not track the information. Funds for many websites for which states provided specific costs (as opposed to "existing budget") came from the agency's existing budget allocation as opposed to a separate appropriation. To see a list of the agencies or departments responsible for administering the transparency websites in each state, see Appendix D.

has usually been less than $300,000 to create the website and even less to keep it updated. (See Table 1.) Jurisdictions that are concerned about the costs of contracting out for expensive proprietary software for data management and interface platforms can also consider adapting the top-notch code of New York City's transparency portal, which is available in an open source, nonproprietary format.[25]

Transparency Websites Are Important and Useful to Residents

Residents, watchdog groups and government officials use the tools and access the information available on transparency websites. Several websites have reported large numbers of visits:

- In 2014, Ohio's new online checkbook registered more than 100,000 searches in the first few months following its launch.[26]
- In 2014, Washington's transparency portal saw approximately 111,000 visits and users ran 665,775 reports.[27]
- In 2013, the Texas transparency website enjoyed more than 560,000 page views.[28]

Several years of survey data show that the public cares about access to specific information about government spending. In 2009, a survey by the Association of Government Accountants found that some 30 percent of Americans reported having tried to search online for information on how the government generates or spends tax dollars.[29] A full three-quarters of surveyed Americans in 2010 thought it was important for state level websites to track American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funds.[30]

These results are echoed in more recent survey evidence from George Washington University. In 2014, an overwhelming majority—93 percent—of Americans believed that state and local government officials should initiate standards for accountability and financial transparency in government spending. A full 86 percent of respondents endorsed this view "strongly." Support was similarly large across all major political and demographic groups.[31]

Transparency Websites Give Users Detailed Information on Government Expenditures

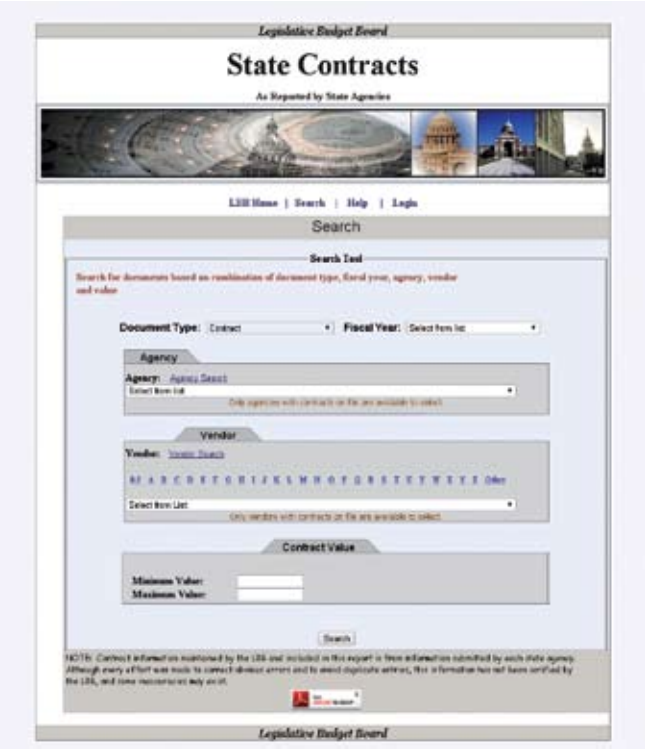
Transparency websites that meet current standards for best practices offer information on government expenditures that is comprehensive, one-stop and one-click.

Comprehensive

Transparency websites offer spending information that is broad and detailed, and that helps citizens answer three key questions: how much the government spends on particular goods and services, which companies receive public funds for these goods and services, and what results are achieved by specific expenditures. Topflight transparency websites empower citizens to answer those questions for every major category of state spending, including:

- **Payments to private vendors and nonprofits.** Many government agencies spend large portions of their budgets on outside vendors through contracts, grants and payments made outside the formal bidding process.[32] To give an example from a single state, in fiscal year 2014, Wisconsin's state agencies alone spent $451 million on outside services.[33] Compared to civil

Figure 1: Texas' Contract Database Allows Users to Search by Agency, Vendor or Contract Value for Details on State Procurement



servants, these vendors are generally subject to fewer public accountability rules, such as sunshine laws, civil service reporting requirements and freedom of information laws.

- **Subsidies such as tax credits for economic development.** State and local governments allocate more than $80 billion each year to private entities in the form of economic development subsidies.[34] These incentives—which can take the form of grants, loans, tax credits and tax exemptions—are awarded with the intent to create jobs and spur growth, yet many governments fail to disclose adequate company-specific information on these expenditures and their outcomes. When information is lacking on whether companies deliver on promised benefits, state officials cannot hold them accountable or make fully informed decisions to generate a larger "bang for the buck" with economic development policies in the future. States that follow transparency best practices allow citizens and public officials to hold subsidy recipients accountable by listing the public benefits specific companies were expected to provide and what they actually delivered, such as the specific number of new or retained jobs.[35] When governments recapture funds (through so-called "clawbacks") from companies that fail to deliver on the agreed-upon public benefits, the best websites provide information on the funds recouped.

Adhering to best practices in transparency for economic development subsidies is likely to become easier as new official standards point the way for

states to better appraise and compare these expenditures. In November 2014, the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB), a body that develops standards for state and local accounting and financial reporting, began a process to establish new standards for how states should account for the costs of economic development incentives.[36] According to GASB's initial guidelines, by calendar year 2016 state governments should add new content to their Comprehensive Annual Financial Reports (CAFRs) including program costs in terms of forgone tax revenue, commitments made by recipients such as job creation or capital investment, and rules that provide for "clawbacks" if promises go unfulfilled.[37] While the final GASB guidelines may only call for aggregate rather than company-specific reporting, and the presence of the new data in CAFRs will not necessarily make them easily accessible to the public, this step will nonetheless provide a standard format for agencies that use it as the basis for user-friendly, checkbook-level reporting. State officials will know with certainty that they can defend the way they account for these expenditures. These standards are particularly influential because governments must adhere to the principles set forth by GASB in order to receive ratings from major credit agencies and participate in the bond market.

- **Other tax expenditures.** "Tax expenditures" are subsidies bestowed through the tax code in the form of special tax exemptions, credits, deferments and preferences. Tax expenditures have the same bottom-line impact on state budgets as direct spending: every dollar must be balanced by increased taxes or program cuts elsewhere. But unlike direct budget appropriations, once created tax expenditures typically are not subject to the same oversight appropriations because they do not appear as state budget line items subject to legislative debate and they rarely require legislative approval to renew. For these reasons, spending through the tax code is in particular need of disclosure. States that follow transparency best practices provide transparency and accountability for tax expenditures, usually by linking their transparency portal to a tax expenditure report, which details a state's tax credits, deductions and exemptions with the resulting revenue loss from each program.

- **Quasi-public agencies.** Each state contains several independent government corporations that are created through enabling legislation to perform a particular service or a set of public functions, such as waste management, pension administration, or operation of toll roads, water treatment or community development programs. The defining feature of a quasi-public agency is that though they are typically governed by a board appointed substantially or entirely by the state, they are largely or wholly "off-budget." Quasi-public agencies typically collect fees or some other form of their own revenue, and therefore do not rely solely, or often even at all, on regular appropriations from the legislature. Quasi-publics have often been created in order to assure public bond investors that obligations for payment will not need to compete with general government functions, or to assure that managers of these entities will have greater insulation from politics. Over time, quasi-public agencies have delivered a growing share of public functions.[38] According to a study by MASSPIRG Education Fund

from 2010, revenues from quasi-public agencies in Massachusetts amounted to at least $8.76 billion—equal to one-third of the state's general budget.[39] Since their expenditures typically are not subject to the checks and balances of the regular budget process, and accounts fall outside of the "official" state budget, quasi-public agencies can suffer from an accountability deficit, and online transparency is particularly important.

State officials themselves are typically not even aware of how many quasi-public agencies exist in a particular state. The best practice would be to maintain a central, public registry of all quasi-public entities in a state to facilitate transparency for their budgets. Transparency websites should include expenditure data for all of these bodies.

- **Leases and concessions to private companies.** States sometimes sell or lease to private companies the right to construct or operate a public asset or service in return for the right to collect and retain user fees from the public or to receive contracted payments from the government. These arrangements are most common for toll roads, garages, parking meters and water systems. They have also become more common at state parks, public golf courses and in the operation of fee-collecting services such as motor vehicle licensing. Reporting on public outlays to these "public-private partnerships" and the user fees collected by them is typically lacking, which is a problem, especially because these arrangements ordinarily do not fall under laws meant to ensure public scrutiny through public access laws that pertain to the civil service, conflict of interest and Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) rules.[40] In Florida, for example, public universities have been accused of attempting to get around the state's transparency laws by establishing private corporations to oversee athletic programs, dorm construction and more.[41]

For each of these forms of government expenditure, taxpayers deserve to know exactly which businesses and organizations receive public expenditures and details on what is being paid for.

Moreover, it is best practice for states to explain what kinds of expenditure information are *not* provided on a transparency portal. There may be specific types of information that should not be listed for public safety reasons. For instance, it's hard to make the case that the identities of confidential police informants or landlords housing protected witnesses should be released. There may be some departments or agencies that are not yet integrated into the state's general accounting system. Whatever the reason, it is helpful for the public to know what specific kinds of information cannot be found on the state transparency portal. People may have legitimate differences of opinion about whether certain exemptions from transparency are justified. Knowledge of what is and is not omitted is a precondition for productive debate over whether omitted types of information should be included.

One-Stop

Transparency websites in leading states offer a single portal from which citizens can search all government expenditures, just as they would use a single search engine to access anything on the web. With one-stop transparency, residents and public officials can access comprehensive information on direct spending, contracts, tax expenditures and other subsidies from a single starting point. Expert users may already know what they are looking for and

may already be familiar with what kinds of expenditures would fall under specific bureaucratic silos that are subprograms for other agencies that may have data split up among other separate websites. But ordinary citizens are more likely to be impeded by the need to navigate a variety of obscure, bureaucratic sources in order to find important information on government spending.

One-stop transparency is particularly important for public oversight of subsidies. Subsidies come in a dizzying variety of forms—including direct cash transfers, loans, equity investments, contributions of property or infrastructure, reductions or deferrals of taxes or fees, guarantees of loans or leases, and preferential use of government facilities—and are administered by a variety of government agencies. Few people already know the range of these programs, their official names, or which agency's website they should search to find information about them.

Making all data about government subsidies reachable from a single website empowers citizens to engage in closer scrutiny of spending supported by their tax dollars. For example, when Minnesota began to require agencies to submit reports on the performance of subsidized projects, the reports revealed that numerous projects were receiving assistance from two or more funding sources—that is, Minnesota taxpayers were sometimes double- and triple-paying for the creation of the same jobs. After the centralized publication of those reports, the double-dipping stopped.[42]

One-Click Searchable and Downloadable

Transparent information is only as useful as it is accessible. Transparency websites in leading states offer a range of search and sort functions that allow residents to navigate complex expenditure data with a single click of the mouse. States that follow the best transparency standards allow residents to browse information by recipient, agency or category, and to make directed keyword and field searches.

Citizens who want to dig deeper into government spending patterns typically need to download and analyze the data in a spreadsheet or database program. Downloading whole datasets enables citizens to perform a variety of advanced functions—such as aggregating expenditures for a particular company, agency or date—to see trends or understand total spending amounts that might otherwise be lost in a sea of unrelated data. Leading states enable citizens to download the entire checkbook dataset in one file.

Transparency Websites Should Be Comprehensive, One-Stop and One-Click

Comprehensive: A user-friendly web portal provides residents the ability to search detailed information about government contracts, spending, subsidies and tax expenditures for all government entities.

One-Stop: Residents can search all government expenditures on a single website.

One-Click Searchable and Downloadable: Residents can search data with a single query or browse common-sense categories. Residents can sort data on government spending by recipient, amount, legislative district, granting agency, purpose or keyword. Residents can also download data to conduct detailed off-line analyses.

Figure 2: South Dakota's Transparency Website Allows Visitors to Search for Specific Vendor Payments

New Transparency Websites and Features Open the Books

Over the past year, many states created new transparency websites and features or greatly improved their existing portals. These websites post new data online, consolidate important spending information, or make existing transparency tools more user-friendly. Below are highlights from the many new and improved web portals around the country.

Colorado

In January 2015, Colorado re-launched its transparency portal with a new, more user-friendly inteface. The website features advanced search and browse-by-category functionality, and the new data viewer also incorporates a one-click drill-down feature and "back" arrow allowing for simple navigation between varying levels of detail.

Kansas

In last year's *Following the Money* report, Kansas was one of just a handful of states that did not follow the transparency best practices of enabling data downloads, and it did not explain what data were excluded from its transparency portal.

In the fall of 2014, Kansas made strides toward addressing these shortcomings with an overhaul of its KanView transparency portal. The improved site incorporates a keyword search function, bulk downloadable expenditure data, and an "Excluded Information" page detailing the types of payments that are not disclosed on the website. These features help Kansas provide its citizens with better information and more accessible spending data.

Kansas made additional important progress with top-level disclosure of information regarding economic development subsidies. The KanView site now includes dedicated pages for seven of Kansas' incentive programs.[48] In some instances, these pages link to annual program reports and spreadsheets documenting, in checkbook-level detail, the value of individual benefits for companies and the job creation or retention impacts. Providing such clear, program-specific webpages and data just a mouse click away from the homepage makes critical information regarding millions in taxpayer-supported spending easily accessible to the public.

Figure 3: Colorado Re-Launched Its Online Checkbook in 2015

Figure 4: Kansas' Overhauled Transparency Portal Includes New Features Making Information More Accessible To the Public

State Employee Compensation and Government Transparency

Many states post the salaries of state workers online on their transparency websites or elsewhere. There is much debate about whether the benefits of this practice outweigh the costs.

On one hand, opening the books on public-sector compensation helps protect against salaries that the public might find unacceptable. Additionally, hard data allow for informed public debate about public sector compensation practices. Public workers tend to be better compensated, on average, than those in the private sector, but public employees with an advanced degree typically receive lower salaries than comparably educated non-government employees.[43]Regardless, there can be considerable public interest in salary information. In Illinois, for example, the Comptroller's office reports that its government salary database—including details on paid appointments to state boards and commissions—is the most popular one on its website.[44]

On the other hand, there can be good reasons to limit the scope of personal information in the public domain. People may use the information inappropriately, or it could be abused by marketers or criminals. Moreover, research evidence suggests that posting compensation details can undermine employee morale.[45]

Delaware offers an example of one approach to navigating between these competing perspectives. The state publishes salary ranges by job title, thereby preserving some measure of anonymity while preserving the ability to identify compensation that might be dramatically out of line with experience, qualifications or public norms.[46] Another way states might navigate the issue would be to post only the highest compensated employees—such as those making more than three times the average, the highest paid 10 employees and contractors in each department, or the 50 highest paid employees in the state.

Ultimately, there is a need for more information about the relative merits of different approaches to transparency in public sector employee compensation. One study examined the effects of a 2010 California mandate requiring cities to publicly post municipal salaries and found that, compared with cities that already posted such information, newly transparent municipalities cut salaries for their highest paid employees and experienced a 75 percent increase in quit rates among those workers.[47] Further study is necessary to know if these kinds of findings are generalizable.

Montana

For the second year in a row, Montana has improved its provision of centrally accessible information on economic development subsidies. Every year, Montana spends millions of dollars on tax credits, exemptions, grants and loans intended to bolster the state's economy by incentivizing job creation, training or capital investment. In 2013, Montana made information on this spending available from the transparency website by providing a link to the Department of Commerce's portal for economic development subsidies, empowering Montanans to more easily monitor awards given to companies intended to grow the economy. The portal contains award information for 19 programs dating back to 1989.

Montana has built on its gains. This year, the portal's data are downloadable for the first time as CSV or XML files. The benefit of downloadable subsidy data, as with traditional state expenditures, is the ability for citizens, journalists or watchdog groups to conduct more sophisticated analyses. The ability to dig into the data is perhaps even more important when the spending comes in the form of economic development incentive programs that are not subject to scrutiny and legislative debate in the regular budgetary process.

Nevada

The Silver State made important advances in transparency this year, opening the books on spending conducted through the tax code and economic development subsidies. For the first time, Nevada now

Figure 5: Nevada Links Economic Development Subsidies Information to its Transparency Portal

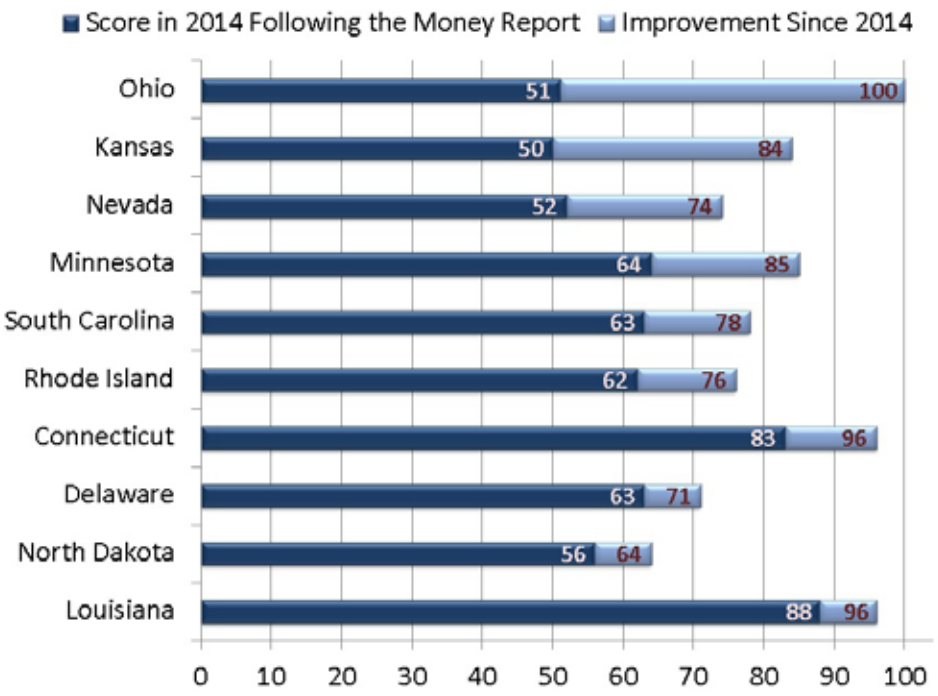
Top 10 Most Improved Transparency Websites from 2014 to 2015

The new transparency portals and major improvements in the past year increased the scores for many states. (Some leading states—such as Colorado, Florida, Massachusetts and Oregon—continued to make improvements on their already strong scores from 2014 but do not appear in our top ten most-improved list. Their already high scores in 2014 limited the opportunities for improvement.)

Ohio saw the largest improvement with an increase of 49 points. This is the first year of our study in which the state with the highest score was also the most improved.

In order, the states with the largest increase in score from last year are as follows:

Figure 6: Top 10 Most Improved Transparency Websites from 2014 to 2015



links to the state tax expenditure report, giving citizens an easy look at the forgone revenue incurred by Nevada's slate of tax credits, exemptions and deductions.

Nevada now also links to reports on three of the state's five most important subsidy programs. The reports document the projected economic benefits for each recipient's subsidy, and catalog the actual economic benefits realized on a per-recipient basis for two of the programs.

North Dakota

North Dakota improved its transparency website this year by allowing for downloads of data, though not in a single, bulk file for the whole year. Users can now download data from the data viewer in PDF, CSV or Excel file formats for further analysis offline.

North Dakota can continue to improve by allowing for *bulk* downloads of datasets covering all expenditures for an entire fiscal year. Providing bulk downloadable data is a best practice because it allows website users to store, aggregate or manipulate data, helping them identify big-picture trends that might otherwise be lost when drilling down in an online checkbook. The state can also boost transparency by completing its economic development incentives "Data Center," which is currently under construction.

Ohio

In the fall of 2014, the Office of the Ohio Treasurer unveiled a new transparency website and online checkbook to shine a light on state spending.[49]

After receiving a score that was among

Figure 7: The Launch of Ohio's New Transparency Portal Marks the Beginning of a New Era in Open Government for the State

the lowest in the nation in last year's *Following the Money* report, Ohio has made enormous strides with its new site, which incorporates user-friendly features that are commonplace on the internet's cutting-edge sites but typically lacking in government's web presence. Searching the checkbook tool is easier and akin to searching with a high-performance web tool thanks to Google-style contextual search functionality, which populates suggested search terms in response to typing in the search bar. Citizens can also avail themselves of social media "Share" buttons of the type commonly found on digital media platforms to easily share their findings with their networks, and "Help" buttons that aid site navigation. With these features, Ohio's transparency website pursues topflight standards for user-friendliness, creating a portal that feels like many search websites citizens use every day.

Other features have improved public access to information and made that information more comprehensible to non-experts. The $408 billion in state spending that is now searchable through the website is analyzable through interactive charts and graphs, and can be compared with one click on every screen against historical trends in spending or against spending by other agencies. This contextualizes the data for everyday Ohioans. The front page shows, for instance, the companies that receive the largest share of state expenditures. For the first time, Ohioans are now also able to download all kinds of spending data for further analysis and examination offline.

Making the Grade: Scoring States' Online Spending Transparency

All 50 states operate websites to make information on state spending accessible to the public and these web portals continue to improve. For instance, in 2015, every state but two allows users to search the online checkbook by recipient, and 44 states' transparency websites provide information on one or more economic development subsidies. Many states are also disclosing information that is "off-budget" and are making it easy for outside researchers to download and analyze large datasets about government spending.

Each state's transparency website was evaluated and assigned a grade based on its searchability and the breadth of information provided, using the same criteria as in 2014. (See Appendix B for the complete scorecard, and Appendix A for a full explanation of the methodology and how the scoring system was applied to each state's specific website.) An initial inventory of each state's website and a set of questions were first sent to the administrative offices believed to be responsible for operating each state's transparency website. (For a list of questions sent to state officials, see Appendix C.) Follow up e-mail and—if necessary—phone calls were used to maximize the number of responses we received. Officials from 47 states responded with insights, anecdotes and/or clarifying or confirming information about their websites. In some cases, our research team adjusted scores based on this clarifying feedback. Alabama and Rhode Island did not substantively respond to our inquiries. Idaho responded to our outreach but declined to participate by reviewing our inventory of their website and did not respond to our survey questions.

A state's grade reflects the entire state government's provision of tools and information to access spending data through the online transparency portal. The grades do not necessarily measure the effort of the office that manages the transparency website. Improving transparency may require other offices or quasi-public agencies to provide information in a usable format, additional funding from the state legislature, or changes to laws and regulations outside the control of the managing office. Best practices in spending transparency typically require collaboration from several parts of state government. The

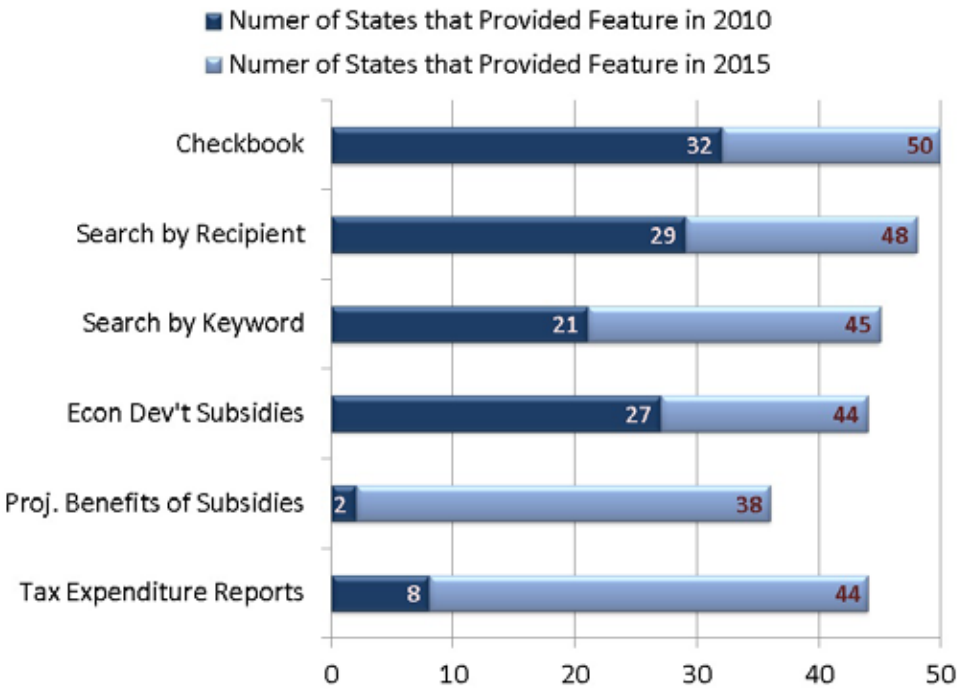
grades in this report score the success of that collaboration.

Based on the grades assigned to each website, states can be divided into five categories: Leading States, Advancing States, Middling States, Lagging States and Failing States. The following sections summarize common traits shared by the states in each of these categories to highlight their strengths and weaknesses.

Leading "A" States

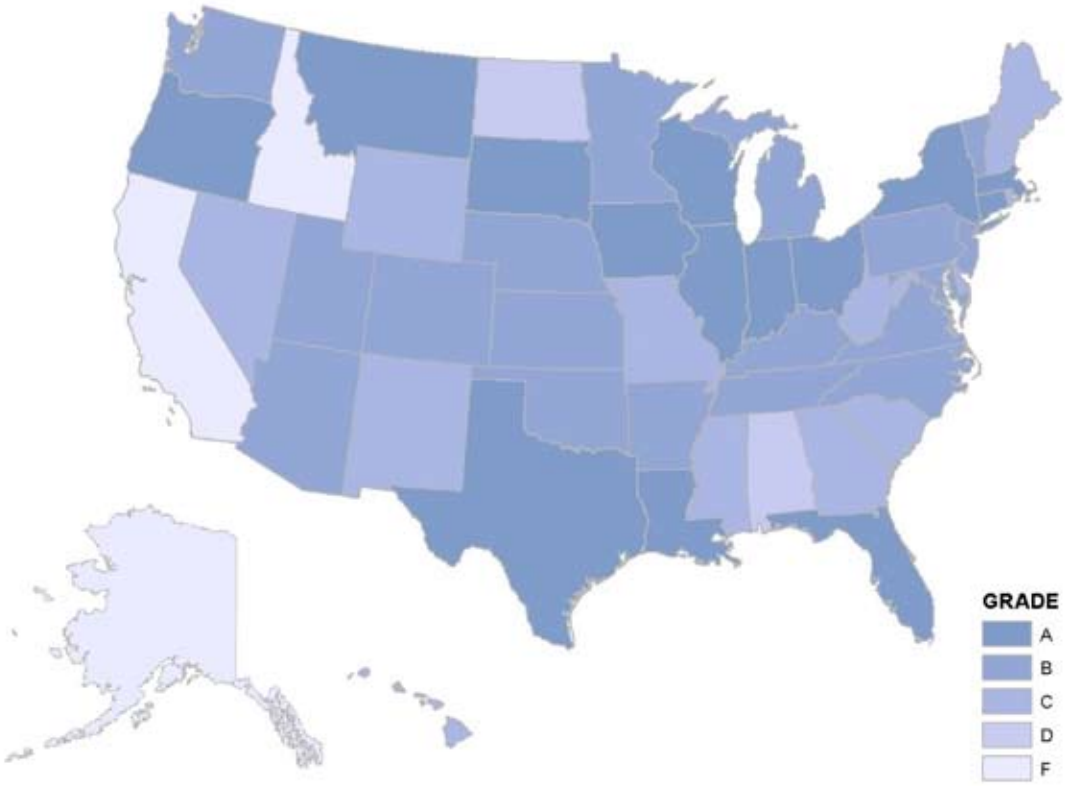
The number of Leading States has almost doubled from eight to 14 since last year, a testament to ongoing progress in state spending transparency. These states have created user-friendly websites that provide visitors with accessible information on an array of expenditures. Not only can ordinary citizens find information on specific

Figure 8: States Have Rapidly Made Spending Information Available Online



Note: Data on the number of states that offered each feature in 2010 came from U.S. PIRG Education Fund's 2010 *Following the Money* report. For the methodology used to compare criteria between the 2010 report and this year's, see "Comparing Features in 2015 to Features in 2010" in Appendix A. States are considered to have each feature based on whether it is accessible from the central transparency website.

Figure 9: How the 50 States Rate in Providing Online Access to Government Spending Data



State	Grade	2015 Score
Ohio	A+	100
Indiana	A	97
Wisconsin	A	96.5
Oregon	A	96.5
Louisiana	A	96
Connecticut	A	96
Massachusetts	A	95.5
Florida	A	95
Iowa	A-	94
Illinois	A-	93
Montana	A-	92
New York	A-	91
Texas	A-	91
South Dakota	A-	90

vendor payments through easy-to-use search features, but experts and watchdog groups can also download the entire checkbook dataset to conduct offline analyses. Every Leading State's checkbook contains the payments from at least several quasi-public agencies, which usually fall outside legislatures' general appropriations. Some even highlight a selection of their most prominent quasi-public entities on a dedicated page of their transparency portals.

While the online checkbooks in these states do not include all types of state spending—either because of limitations in the states' accounting systems or privacy rules—all 14 of these states provide at least some information on the nature of data exclusions, allowing users to understand why they might not be able to find particular information.

Leading States also provide visitors with recipient-specific information on subsidy awards. All leading states provide information on the value of the subsidies received by companies through most (three or more) of the state's most important subsidy programs. Connecticut, Ohio, South Dakota and Wisconsin provide such information for all five programs. Ohio and Wisconsin also provide information on projected *and* actual economic benefits for every program considered.

Leading States still have opportunities to improve transparency. For example, only Connecticut and Ohio make recipient-specific information for all subsidy programs available to be downloaded for analysis. Many Leading States provide only incomplete information on the public benefits delivered by recipients of economic development subsidies—either providing projected benefits for some programs but not others, or providing projected benefits without a corresponding accounting of whether those benefits ever materialized. And, while not a feature scored in this year's report, all states can improve quasi-public agency transparency by providing a central registry of all quasi-public entities and major public-private partnerships in the state—both those that are self-supporting and those that receive some state money—so that citizens and watchdog groups can more easily identify the entities for which transparency data are unavailable.

Advancing "B" States

This year, 18 states are Advancing in online spending transparency, with spending information that is easy to access but more limited than Leading States.

Advancing States, with the exception of Maryland, have checkbooks that are searchable by recipient, keyword *and* agency. (Maryland allows for searches using two of the three.) With the exception of Pennsylvania, Advancing States also allow users to download all or part of the checkbook data for offline analysis. In addition, all Advancing States follow the best practice of posting tax expenditure reports online, providing summaries of the tax revenue forgone from tax exemptions, credits and other breaks (though Colorado and Virginia could improve by posting reports covering a greater number of years).

All Advancing States provide information on the value of subsidies received by companies for at least two of the state's important subsidy programs. Colorado, Michigan, North Carolina and Vermont even match the performance of Leading States and provide information for each of the subsidy programs considered. Ten of the Advancing States provide at least some of this information in a form that

State	Grade	Score
North Carolina	B+	89.5
Colorado	B+	89
Vermont	B+	89
Oklahoma	B+	88
Maryland	B+	87
Michigan	B+	87
Nebraska	B+	87
Washington	B	86
Utah	B	86
Kentucky	B	86
Minnesota	B	85
New Jersey	B	84
Arizona	B	84
Kansas	B	84
Pennsylvania	B	83
Arkansas	B-	82
Tennessee	B-	82
Virginia	B-	82

can be downloaded for offline analysis.

All but two of the Advancing States also provide some information on the public benefits—either anticipated or actual—of the subsidies.

Middling "C" States

State	Grade	Score
Mississippi	C+	79
South Carolina	C+	78
New Mexico	C+	77
Missouri	C+	77
Maine	C+	76
Rhode Island	C+	76
New Hampshire	C+	75
Georgia	C	74
Nevada	C	74
West Virginia	C	73
Hawaii	C	71
Delaware	C	71
Wyoming	C-	67

Thirteen states are Middling in online spending transparency, with generally comprehensive and easy-to-access checkbook-level spending information but more limited information on subsidies or other off-budget expenditures.

The online checkbooks in Middling States cover a wide range of spending. Their basic checkbooks have the same search functionality as those in Leading and Advancing States. Twelve of the states allow users to download all or part of the checkbook data. Eleven of the states provide checkbook-level information on the payments made by some quasi-public agencies.

The information provided on subsidies in Middling States tends to be more limited than the subsidy information provided by Leading and Advancing States. About half of Middling States provide recipient-specific information on only one key subsidy program and two fail to provide any information at all. Only five states—Mississippi, Missouri, Nevada, West Virginia and Wyoming—provide recipient-specific information on the projected *and* actual economic benefits created by some of the subsidy funds under consideration.

Lagging "D" States

State	Grade	Score
North Dakota	D+	64
Alabama	D	55

Checkbook-level spending in the two Lagging States is less accessible or complete than checkbook-level spending in other states. For example, neither Lagging State provides a link to tax expenditure reports from its transparency portal. This hinders the ability of citizens or watchdog groups to understand the scope of tax revenue forgone because of the credits, deductions and exemptions in the state tax code. Further, only North Dakota provides any information on economic development subsidies from its transparency website, and it does so for only one of the incentive programs examined here. (Though North Dakota is a Lagging State, it is also one of the country's most improved states in this year's report and with a few simple changes could improve its score substantially.)

As evidence of the continuing improvement we are seeing in state spending transparency, 2015 is the first year in which every Lagging State allows for searches by recipient, keyword and agency.

Failing "F" States

State	Grade	Score
Idaho	F	45
Alaska	F	43
California	F	34

This year, only three states score a failing grade reflecting their failure to follow many of the best practices of online spending transparency. Both Alaska's and Idaho's transparency websites fail in part because they do not provide any information on the recipients of economic development subsidies. Additionally, Idaho does not link to tax expenditure reports from its portal.[50]

California receives the lowest score (unchanged from 2014) and is weighed down primarily by bureaucratic fragmentation of its information.[51] While the state has made some interesting and useful datasets available to the public—including, for example, one documenting spending at the county level—California does not succeed in creating a "one-stop" transparency portal. For example, the state produces tax expenditure reports and publishes data on the Film and Television Production Incentive, but these are not available via a central transparency website, making this valuable information difficult to find for citizens and others who may not already know where to look. It would be relatively easy for California to substantially improve its score by providing clear links to sources of data from a central website.

Members of Both Parties Support Government Transparency

The political leaning of a state provides little indication of its level of transparency. Neither Republican-leaning states nor Democratic-leaning states tend to be more transparent than the other.

There was no difference in the average transparency score of states with single-party, Democratic legislatures (80.0) and those with single-party, Republican legislatures (80.0).[52] States with a Republican governor averaged a transparency score of 83.1 in our study—near the average score of states with Democratic governors (80.2).[53]

State Revenue Size Does Not Determine the Level of Transparency[54]

The size of state revenue does not determine a state's level of transparency. While states with smaller budgets may have more difficulty investing in topflight information technology systems, they may have an easier time gathering data because they spend less money on contracts and have fewer staff across fewer agencies. Some states with small revenue streams earned high transparency scores, while some states with large revenue streams earned low scores. California has the largest revenue and expenditure of any state, yet received 34 points, the lowest score. In contrast, South Dakota and Vermont have the lowest annual revenues in the country, yet they earned some of the highest scores at 90 and 89, respectively.

Overall, states with larger revenue streams tend to score higher, but with clear exceptions. The average score of the 10 smallest-revenue states was 74.5, while the average score of the ten largest-revenue states was 85.1. Among the fourteen Leading States, six had total revenues below the national median.

The data show that small states with small budgets can create and maintain comprehensive and user-friendly transparency websites. Likewise, states with large budgets do not automatically become leaders in state spending transparency.

States Innovate with Cutting-Edge Practices

Some innovative states have introduced new transparency practices or features to their websites. They have developed new tools, protocols and datasets, giving residents new or enhanced ability to view, analyze, monitor and influence how their government allocates resources. Some examples are described here.

Connecticut, Florida, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon and West Virginia Aim to Bring Quasi-Public Agencies Out of the Shadows: In recent years, several states have begun to address the fact that quasi-public entities have traditionally inhabited a murky corner of the public square. With pages solely dedicated to these agencies, boards, authorities and commissions prominently featured on their transparency sites, the states of Connecticut, Florida, Louisiana, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Oregon and West Virginia are making financial information for at least some of their quasi-public agencies more accessible. In the process, they are shining a valuable light on the existence of these entities and the roles they play in state and local governance.

Ohio Sets a New Standard for User-friendliness and Accountability with Its Online Checkbook: Many transparency websites offer search functions and contact information, but Ohio's new online checkbook raises the bar. With the ability to conduct Google-style contextual searches, which populate instant search suggestions based on the letters typed into the search bar, Ohioans will find that their state's transparency website looks and behaves much like the webpages they most commonly visit and interact with elsewhere on the internet. This feature makes the website easier to use, but also aids transparency by helping users track down information without needing specific search terms, or even find relevant data they were not actively looking for. Additionally, Ohio takes accountability to the next level by establishing a new best practice of providing a phone number and email address for the most appropriate human point of contact alongside every line of data. Citizens should be able to question and discuss the data they find with their government, and Ohio makes this easier by eliminating barriers to access. Similarly, Ohio provides a

"share" button at every data point to make it easy for visitors who find interesting or puzzling information to "share" it via email or a social media platform. Ohio also provides strong context for its data, including data visualizations for each query that help show information in context and historical data going back several years.

Florida Posts the Share of Expenditures Excluded from the Checkbook: Due to data limitations or protocols to protect private information, states' checkbook websites exclude payments for some types of expenditures. While some transparency officials address this by detailing the types of payments excluded from the checkbook, most states do not go so far as to specify the share of total spending accounted for by the excluded payment types. Florida's checkbook posts the percentage of all payments that are confidential under state law and thus excluded from the checkbook. This level of disclosure enables users to understand the checkbook's comprehensiveness and would provide a well-informed starting point for discussions about whether the state should disclose more or less information.

Minnesota, Oklahoma and Texas Add Detail, and Make Data Easier to Understand, with New Visualization Tools: Minnesotans interested in the state's economic development spending can now get more than just financial data for two of the state's subsidy programs. With a new mapping feature, grants made through the Minnesota Investment Fund and Job Creation Fund can be plotted on a state map, enabling citizens to assess the geographic spread of these grants alongside their financial value and economic benefits. Texas has joined other leading states such as Ohio in recognizing that graphs can help users better analyze and interpret budget data. The state's new "Data Visualization" page offers several charts and figures representing key financial information in more compelling and intelligible formats than a simple data table. Oklahoma is helping citizens better understand how their tax dollars are spent with its "Tax Payer Receipt Function." After entering the dollar value of a tax payment—for example, $100 in state personal income tax—the tool reports how those dollars are spent, specifying the share and related dollar value directed to the state's general revenue fund, transportation fund, economic development programs such as the Quality Jobs program, and so on. Together, Minnesota, Oklahoma and Texas are joining other states at the forefront of using their transparency portals not just to make data available, but to help make them useful and engaging for the public.

Massachusetts, Ohio and Texas Encourage Local Spending Transparency: In Massachusetts, where the state transparency portal includes a link to revenue and expenditure data for cities and towns, the state in 2014 awarded grants to six cities to help them post their spending information online.[55] The state of Texas annually grades its counties on public spending transparency, rewarding leading localities and identifying best practices for others to follow.[56] Following the 2014 re-launch of Ohio's transparency website, the state is now approaching Ohio's 3,800 local governments to encourage them to include their data in the new online checkbook, which was built to accommodate it all.[57] Cities and counties are the layers of government with which everyday Americans most commonly interact and these states are leaders in encouraging transparency among them, ensuring that the project of opening the books on public spending does not stop at the state level.

Continuing the Momentum Toward Greater Transparency: How States Can Improve their Transparency Websites

Despite the continued improvements of state transparency websites, every state has the potential to do better still. In the next year, state officials should continue to update their websites to expand the scope and user-friendliness of their online checkbooks and subsidy information.

Every state's transparency website still has room for improvement.

Core Checkbook

- Seven states do not provide any details on the specific types of payments excluded from the checkbook. If visitors do not find information about a certain type of transaction, they should know that it may exist but just might be missing from the transparency website.

- The checkbooks in five states have limited searchability.

- Most websites fail to match the user-friendliness and intuitiveness common to Americans' everyday experience of the internet, including, for example, the ability to post content to social media websites.

- No state provides a comprehensive list of government entities outside the standard state budget. Ideally, all governmental and quasi-governmental entities—even those that are entirely financially self-supporting—would integrate their expenditures into the online checkbook, and a central registry of all such entities would be available for public reference. Even Leading States merely integrate or simply name an incomplete list of quasi-public agencies, or focus only on those that receive direct allocations from the general state budget.

- Even top-scoring states like Indiana, Ohio and Wisconsin should continue to expand the universe of data accounted for by their transparency portals. One important next step would be supporting transparency efforts at the municipal and county level and making those data available via the state's transparency website. Another would

be detailing all active public-private partnerships in a state and the related public and private expenses, goals and deliverables. In Ohio, for example, the Department of Transportation has broad authority to enter into public-private partnerships to develop, maintain or operate transportation facilities.[58] The public should have easy access to information on the private entities that have been entrusted with the construction or operation of public goods such as transportation infrastructure, and the details of the financial and other agreements that underpin such partnerships.

Economic Development Subsidies

- Only eight states provide checkbook-level information on the recipients of each of the state's most important subsidy programs. While many other states provide checkbook-level information for *some* of these programs, disclosure for all programs would provide greater transparency and accountability.
- Twelve states do not provide any recipient-specific details on the benefits—either projected or actual—of economic development subsidies. Without this information, watchdog groups and concerned citizens cannot ensure that taxpayers are getting their money's worth from the subsidy programs.

Tax Expenditure Reports

- Six states do not provide tax expenditure reports that detail the impact on the state budget of tax credits, exemptions or deductions.
- Six states provide tax expenditure reports that cover three years or fewer, limiting the scope of historical data available to the public.

With continued progress toward online transparency, citizens will have greater opportunity to monitor government spending, even of "off-budget" entities, and ensure that contracts to private companies are smart choices for the state.

Appendix A: Methodology

Grades for the scorecard were determined by assigning points for information included on (or in some cases, linked to) a state's transparency website or another government website that provides information on government spending. (See the "Criteria Descriptions and Point Allocation for the Scorecard" table on page 38 for a detailed description of the grading system.)

What We Graded

We graded one website for each state. If states had a designated transparency website, that site was graded. If a state had more than one transparency website, we graded the transparency website that earned the highest score. If states lacked a designated transparency website, we graded the state website that earned the highest score.[59]

The grades in this report reflect the status of state transparency websites as of December 2014 and early January 2015, with the exception of cases in which state officials alerted us to oversights in our evaluation or informed us of changes that had been made to the websites prior to early February 2015. In these cases, we confirmed the presence of the information pointed out by the state officials and gave appropriate credit for that information on our scorecard.

How We Inventoried and Assessed the Websites

The researchers reviewed websites and corresponded with state officials as follows:

- During December 2014 and early January 2015, our researchers evaluated every accessible state transparency website based on the criteria laid forth in the "Criteria Descriptions and Point Allocation for the Scorecard" table of the methodology.

- In mid-January, state agencies administering transparency websites received our evaluation via e-mail and were asked to review it for accuracy by January 28, 2015. That deadline was extended for a few states that requested additional time.

- In January and February 2015, our researchers reviewed the state officials'

comments, followed up on potential discrepancies, and made adjustments to the scorecard as warranted. As necessary, our researchers continued to correspond with state officials clarifying the criteria and discussing websites' features.

Calculating the Grades

States could receive a total of 100 points based on our core scoring rubric. States could receive an additional four points in extra credit for data on recouped funds in economic development subsidy programs up to *a maximum total score of 100 points*. Based on the points each state received, grades were assigned as listed in Table A-1.

States were given full credit for making particular categories of information available on their websites, regardless of whether we could ascertain if the data evaluated were complete. For example, if a state's contract checkbook contains only a portion of the payments the state made to vendors through contracts, full credit was awarded.

To determine which subsidy programs to assess, our researchers relied on the programs assessed in last year's report, *Following the Money 2014*.[60] That report derived its selection of subsidy programs largely by consulting *Show Us the Subsidized Jobs*, published in January 2014 by Good Jobs First, a non-partisan research group that promotes corporate and government accountability in economic development programs. Good Jobs First maintains a database of hundreds of thousands of economic development subsidies and tax incentives and has determined the five—or in some cases four—most important incentives in each state based on cost and other factors.[61] We are aware of no more comprehensive or accurate list of the most important economic development subsidy programs and tax incentives for each state.

Table A-1: Grading Scale

Score	Grade
99 to 100 points	A+
95 to 98 points	A
90 to 94 points	A-
87 to 89 points	B+
83 to 86 points	B
80 to 82 points	B-
75 to 79 points	C+
70 to 74 points	C
65 to 69 points	C-
60 to 64 points	D+
55 to 59 points	D
50 to 54 points	D-
1 to 49 points	F

Comparing Features in 2015 to Features in 2010

To examine nationwide changes in state spending transparency from 2010, we compared states' performance on this year's scorecard to states' performance on the scorecard in our 2010 *Following the Money* report according to the criteria listed in Table A-2.[62] Because some of the terminology or measures have been adjusted over time, this table explains those differences.

Criteria Descriptions and Point Allocation for the Scorecard

Checkbook-Level Spending			
Criteria	**Description**	**Partial Credit**	**Points**
Checkbook	A list or database of individual expenditures made to individual recipients.	No partial credit.	24
Searchable by Recipient	Ability to search checkbook-level expenditures by recipient (e.g. contractor or vendor) name. Search feature must be part of the checkbook tool.	No partial credit.	8
Searchable by Keyword or Fund	Ability to search checkbook-level expenditures by type of service, item purchased, or the paying government fund. Search feature must be part of the checkbook tool.	No partial credit.	8
Searchable by Agency	Ability to search checkbook-level expenditures by the purchasing entity of the government. Search feature must be part of the checkbook tool.	No partial credit.	8
Excluded Information	Statement about the *specific* types of transactions and/or government entities excluded from the checkbook. (Since disclosing all financial transactions is often not appropriate or lawful, users should be able to know which expenditures or entities are missing from the data.)	2 points are awarded for a statement about more *general* types of transactions and/or government entities excluded from the checkbook (e.g. "confidential data" or "salaries"). General statements that the checkbook excludes payments outside the state accounting system will not receive credit.	4
Bulk Downloadable	The complete dataset—by year, quarter, or month—can be downloaded for data analysis (via xlsx, csv, xml, etc.).	3 points are awarded if a portion of the dataset is downloadable.	6
Quasi-Public Agencies	Expenditures from all quasi-public agencies are included in the checkbook, which enables search by purchasing agency or downloads that indicate purchasing agency.	If the checkbook includes some quasis but excludes others, 4 points are awarded.	6

Economic Development Subsidies			
Criteria	**Description**	**Partial Credit**	**Points**
Checkbook-Level*	A list or database of individual payments made through the state's five most important economic development subsidy programs. These programs have been previously listed by Good Jobs First.[63] Recipients must be named in order to receive credit (i.e. referring to a company with a numerical code, project number or some other identifier that is not the company name is insufficient).	5 points if the payments made by one of the state's subsidy programs are available. 9 points if the payments made by two subsidy programs are available. 12 points if the payments made by three subsidy programs are available. 14 points if the payments made by four subsidy programs are available.** 15 points if the payments made by the five subsidy programs are available.	15
Downloadable*	Checkbook-level subsidy information can be downloaded for data analysis (via xlsx, csv, xml, etc.).	1 point if subsidy information is downloadable for one of the five most important programs. 2 points if subsidy information is downloadable for two programs. 3 points if subsidy information is downloadable for three programs. 3.5 points if subsidy information is downloadable for four programs.** 4 points if subsidy information is downloadable for five programs.	4

Economic Development Subsidies (cont'd)			
Criteria	**Description**	**Partial Credit**	**Points**
Projected Public Benefits*	The public benefits, such as the number of jobs, intended to be produced by specific private recipients of economic development subsidies (in the form of tax credits, grants, or other types of programs) are included. Recipients must be named in order to receive credit (i.e. referring to a company with a numerical code, project number or some other identifier that is not the company name is insufficient).	1 point if projected public benefits information is available for one of the five most important programs. 2 points if projected public benefits information is available for two programs. 3 points if projected public benefits information is available for three programs. 3.5 points if projected public benefits information is available for four programs.** 4 points if projected public benefits information is available for five programs.	4
Actual Public Benefits*	The public benefits, such as the number of jobs, actually produced by the specific private recipients of economic development subsidies (in the form of tax credits, grants, or other types of programs) are included. Recipients must be named in order to receive credit (i.e. referring to a company with a numerical code, project number or some other identifier that is not the company name is insufficient).	1 point if actual public benefits information is available for one of the five most important programs. 2 points if actual public benefits information is available for two programs. 3 points if actual public benefits information is available for three programs. 3.5 points if actual public benefits information is available for four programs.** 4 points if actual public benefits information is available for five programs.	4

Economic Development Subsidies (cont'd)			
Criteria	**Description**	**Partial Credit**	**Points**
Extra Credit: Recouped Funds*	Subsidies recouped are reported for programs with clawback provisions.[64] Recipients must be named in order to receive credit (i.e. referring to a company with a numerical code, project number or some other identifier that is not the company name is insufficient).	1 point if the funds recouped are available for one of the five most important programs. 2 points if the funds recouped are available for two programs. 3 points if the funds recouped are available for three programs. 3.5 points if the funds recouped are available for four programs. 4 points if the funds recouped are available for five programs. These points are added to a state's total score up to the maximum of 100 points.	4

Tax Expenditure Reports			
Criteria	**Description**	**Partial Credit**	**Points**
Tax Expenditures from Multiple Years	The state's tax expenditure report is available from the transparency website.	6 points plus one additional point for every year detailed in the tax expenditure reports, excluding the most recent, for a maximum of 9 points. One point docked if the most recent report available is from 2011 or earlier.	9

*(1) With two exceptions, we assessed the same subsidy programs as in last year's report, *Following the Money 2014*.[65] That report derived its selection of subsidy programs largely by consulting *Show Us the Subsidized Jobs*, published in January 2014 by Good Jobs First, a non-partisan research group that promotes corporate and government accountability in economic development programs. Good Jobs First maintains a database of hundreds of thousands of economic development subsidies and tax incentives and has determined the five—or in some cases four—most important incentives in each state based on cost and other factors.[66] We are aware of no more comprehensive or accurate list of the most important economic development subsidy programs and tax incentives for each state.

(2) If the best information available was last updated or produced in, or relied on data pertaining to 2011 or earlier, no credit was awarded.

**In instances in which only four subsidy programs are designated (as opposed to five), full credit was then awarded for providing the appropriate information on the four programs.

Table A-2: Criteria for Evaluating Progress from 2010 to 2015

Feature	Criteria in this year's (2015) *Following the Money* Report	Criteria in the 2010 *Following the Money* Report
Checkbook	"Checkbook-Level"	"Checkbook-Level Web Site"
Search by Recipient	"Searchable by Recipient" subcriterion	"Search by Contractor"
Search by Keyword	"Searchable by Keyword or Fund" subcriterion	"Search by Activity"
Economic Development Subsidies	Received at least five points for "Checkbook-Level" subcriterion for Economic Development Subsidies	Received at least five points for "Economic Development Incentives Information" (five points were awarded if vendor-specific grants and subsidies were included)
Projected Benefits of Subsidies	Received at least one point for "Projected Public Benefits" subcriterion for Economic Development Subsidies	Received 10 points for "Economic Development Incentives Information" (10 points were awarded if a detailed description of the incentive was provided, including estimates for the number of jobs created)
Tax Expenditure Report	"Tax Expenditure Reports"	"Tax Subsidy Information Provided in the Database or Linked"

State-by-State Scoring Explanations

Below is a state-by-state list of explanations for point allocations beyond the information provided in the expanded scorecard in Appendix B.

- **California:** The Enterprise Zone Hiring Tax Credit expired in 2014. We included it in this year's report because, while new vouchers for the credit are no longer issued, companies may carry over unused credits to claim against future tax liability for up to 10 years.[67] With the state still conceivably forgoing tax revenue because of this credit, citizens deserve to know who may be enjoying the benefit and what the state's economy has gotten in return.

- **Colorado:** Eight points were awarded for Tax Expenditure Reports because the two reports available present data for three calendar years (2009, 2011 and 2013).

- **Connecticut:** (1) The three discrete tax expenditure reports available report estimated revenue impacts for five fiscal years, thus making the state eligible for the full nine points for this criterion. (2) Connecticut receives full credit for actual economic benefits for the Film and Digital Media Tax Credit program. Though the state fails to document job creation related to film production activity, its accounting of total spending by the credit's beneficiaries is deemed eligible for credit on grounds that in incentivizing film production projects, which are necessarily fixed-term endeavors, boosting spending in the state is a legitimate programmatic goal. (In contrast, tax credits or grants that seek to incentivize a long-term business presence in the state are motivated rather more by supporting long-term job creation or retention.)

- **Maryland:** Only three of the state's five most important subsidy programs receive credit for making checkbook-level details available on the financial benefit a specific company enjoys. Two programs do not report the financial details of subsidy awards because of confidentiality laws. However, all five programs appear in the state's incentive database and receive credit for having downloadable information on the names of companies receiving the incentives and/or the projected and actual economic benefits.

- **Minnesota:** Though there is only one discrete tax expenditure report available via Minnesota's transparency portal, the report documents the state's tax expenditure budget for fiscal years 2012-2015, thus making it eligible for full credit.

- **Nevada:** Seven points were awarded for Tax Expenditure Reports because the single report available presents data for two fiscal years (2013 and 2014).

- **New Mexico:** The available Job Training Incentive Program annual report, which documents projected public benefits of the program on a company-specific basis, includes data no more recent than 2011 and is thus ineligible for projected public benefits credit. Checkbook-level details on award amounts are up to date and included in the state's data portal.

- **Ohio:** (1) One of Ohio's five most important subsidy programs is the Job Retention Tax Credit. Though no clawback data were reported for the program last year, this was a function of all program participants complying with requirements. As such, the program still received credit for making clawback details available. (2) Ohio receives full credit for projected and actual economic benefits for the Motion Picture Tax Credit program. Though the state fails to document job creation related to film production activity, its accounting

of total spending by the credit's beneficiaries is deemed eligible for credit on grounds that in incentivizing film production projects, which are necessarily fixed-term endeavors, boosting spending in the state is a legitimate programmatic goal. (3) Ohio receives full credit for quasi-public agency inclusion. While it is possible that there are self-supporting quasi-public entities in Ohio that are not included in the state's online checkbook, we were unable to identify any.

- **Oklahoma:** We award full credit for quasi-public agency inclusion. While it is possible that there are quasi-public entities in Oklahoma that are not included in the state's online checkbook, we were unable to identify any.

- **Oregon:** Oregon receives partial credit for recouped funds for the Renewable Resource Equipment Manufacturing Facilities program because the state discloses whether a claw-back occurred, but not how much money was paid back.

- **South Dakota:** While there was not a link to a separate tax expenditure report, full credit was awarded because, unlike most states, which aggregate tax expenditure information into a single state report (PDF), South Dakota aggregates tax expenditure information into a tool (called "Tax Expenditures") on the transparency website.

- **Tennessee:** Tennessee loses one point relative to *Following the Money 2014* because the actual public benefits data available for the FastTrack programs date from 2011 and are thus too old to receive credit this year.

- **Utah:** The state's Life Science and Technology Tax Credit program, which was assessed in last year's report, is no longer accepting applications. Because the tax credit cannot be carried forward, we have dropped the program from consideration.[68]

- **Vermont:** The state loses one point this year versus last year's scorecard because there are no projected public benefits available for the Vermont Economic Development Authority loan program, unlike in 2014.

- **Virginia:** Though the state's economic development incentive report includes information on the Governor's Opportunity Fund and the Major Business Facility Job Tax Credit, the data are anonymized and aggregated, respectively, and are thus ineligible for credit. The decision to dock points for anonymized data is new in this year's report, resulting in a five-point decrease for the state relative to the 2014 score. Note that while some checkbook-level details are available in the incentives report we identified, the details pertain to fiscal year 2009 projects and are thus too old to receive credit.

- **Washington:** One of Washington's five most important subsidy programs, the Aerospace Non-Manufacturing Tax Incentive, was not awarded credit for Checkbook-Level Economic Development Subsidies. Although Washington's "Tax Incentive Public Disclosure Reports" have a column for the Aerospace Non-Manufacturing Tax Incentive that would have the value of the subsidy award, the column is blank.

- **Wyoming:** While Wyoming improved transparency for its Business Ready Communities Managed Data Center Cost Reduction Grants program, these gains were offset by the fact that we could not find a link from the transparency portal to recipient-specific subsidy data on the Film Industry Financial Incentive, unlike last year. Consequently, the state sees a net score change of -1.

Below is a list of the subsidy programs assessed in each state and the criteria that were fulfilled. For descriptions of the criteria see the previous section titled "Criteria Descriptions and Point Allocation for the Scorecard."

Alabama
- Alabama Industrial Development Training: no credit.
- Enterprise Zone Credit: no credit.
- Film Production Rebates: no credit.
- Income Tax Capital Credit: no credit.
- Industrial Development Grant: no credit.

Alaska
- Commercial Fishing Revolving Loan Program: no credit.
- Development Finance Program: no credit.
- Film Industry Tax Credit: no credit.
- Oil and Gas Production Tax Credits: no credit.

Arizona
- Arizona Competes Fund: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Arizona Jobs Training Program: checkbook-level and downloadable.
- Military Reuse Zone: no credit.
- Quality Jobs Tax Credit Program: no credit.
- Research and Development Tax Credit: no credit.

Arkansas
- Advantage Arkansas Income Tax Credits: no credit.
- ArkPlus Income Tax Credit: no credit.
- Business and Industry Training Program: checkbook-level and downloadable.
- Create Rebate Program: checkbook-level and downloadable.
- InvestArk Sales and Use Tax Credits: no credit.

California
- California Research Credit: no credit.
- Employment Training Panel: no credit.
- Enterprise Zone Hiring Tax Credit: no credit.
- Film and Television Production Tax Credit: no credit.

Colorado
- Colorado First Training Program: checkbook-level and downloadable.
- Enterprise Zone Program: checkbook-level and downloadable.
- Job Growth Incentive Tax Credit: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits, and actual public benefits.
- Strategic Fund: checkbook-level, downloadable and projected public benefits.

Connecticut
- Enterprise Zone and Urban Jobs Tax Credits: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.

- Film and Digital Media Tax Credit: checkbook-level, downloadable and actual public benefits.
- Job Creation Tax Credit: checkbook-level, downloadable and actual public benefits.
- Manufacturing Assistance Act: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Small Business Express: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.

Delaware
- Bank Franchise Tax Credits: no credit.
- Blue Collar Training Grant: no credit.
- Delaware Strategic Fund: no credit.
- New Jobs Creation: no credit.
- New Jobs Infrastructure Fund: no credit.

Florida
- Economic Development Transportation Fund: checkbook-level and downloadable.
- Enterprise Zone Program: no credit.
- Film & Entertainment Incentive: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Qualified Target Industry Tax Refund: checkbook-level, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- Quick Action Closing Fund: checkbook-level, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.

Georgia
- Economic Development, Growth and Expansion (EDGE) Fund: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Film, Television and Digital Entertainment Tax Credit: no credit.
- Job Tax Credit: no credit.
- Quality Jobs Tax Credit: no credit.
- Regional Economic Business Assistance (REBA): no credit.

Hawaii
- Capital Goods Excise Tax Credit: no credit.
- Employment and Training Fund Statewide Training Grants: no credit.
- Enterprise Zones: no credit.
- Film & Digital Media Income Tax Credit (Act 88): no credit.

Idaho
- 3% Investment Tax Credit: no credit.
- Business Advantage Program: no credit.
- Hire One Tax Credit: no credit.
- New Jobs Tax Credit: no credit.
- Research and Development Activity Income Tax Credit: no credit.

Illinois
- EDGE Tax Credit: checkbook-level, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- Enterprise Zone Expanded M&E Sales Tax Exemption: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Film Production Services Tax Credit: no credit.
- IDOT Economic Development Program: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Large Business Development Assistance Program: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.

Indiana
- Economic Development for a Growing Economy: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- Enterprise Zone Program: no credit.
- Hoosier Business Investment Tax Credit: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- Skills Enhancement Fund: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- Twenty-First Century Research and Technology Fund: checkbook-level.

Iowa
- Enterprise Zones: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- High Quality Jobs Program: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- Industrial New Jobs Training (260E): no credit.
- Iowa Industrial New Jobs Tax Credit (a.k.a. New Jobs Tax Credit): checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- Research Activities Credit: no credit.

Kansas
- High Performance Incentive Program: no credit.
- Investments in Major Projects and Comprehensive Training Program (IMPACT): checkbook-level, downloadable and actual public benefits.
- Promoting Employment Across Kansas (PEAK): checkbook-level, downloadable and projected public benefits.
- Research Credit: no credit.
- Star Bonds: no credit.

Kentucky
- Bluegrass State Skills Corporation Grant-in-Aid Program: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and recouped funds.
- Coal Used in the Manufacture of Electricity: no credit.
- Kentucky Business Investment Program: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Kentucky Enterprise Initiative Act: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Machinery for New and Expanded Industry and Certain Industry Machinery: no credit.

Louisiana
- Enterprise Zones: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Industrial Tax Exemption: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Motion Picture Investor Tax Credit: checkbook-level, downloadable and projected public benefits.
- Purchases of Manufacturing Machinery and Equipment Exemption: no credit.
- Quality Jobs Program: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.

Maine
- Business Equipment Tax Reimbursement Program (BETR): checkbook-level.
- Employment Tax Increment Financing: no credit.
- Pine Tree Development Zones: no credit.
- Research Expense Tax Credits and Super R&D Tax Credit: no credit.
- Business Equipment Tax Exemption: no credit.

Maryland
- Film Tax Credits: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Job Creation Tax Credit: downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- MEDAAF: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- One Maryland Tax Credit: downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- R&D Tax Credit: checkbook-level and downloadable.

Massachusetts
- Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP): checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Film Tax Credit: checkbook-level and downloadable.
- Investment Tax Credit: no credit.
- Life Sciences Investment Tax Credit: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Research Tax Credit: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.

Michigan
- Brownfield Redevelopment TIF & MBT: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Film and Digital Media Tax Credit: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Michigan Economic Growth Authority (MEGA) Tax Credits: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Michigan Business Tax Battery Credit: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.

- Renaissance Zone Program: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.

Minnesota
- Business Development Public Infrastructure Grant Program: no credit.
- Job Opportunity Building Zones (JOBZ): checkbook-level, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- Job Skills Partnership Program: checkbook-level.
- Minnesota Investment Fund: checkbook-level, downloadable and projected public benefits.
- Research and Development Tax Credits: no credit.

Mississippi
- Jobs Tax Credit: no credit.
- Major Economic Impact Act: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit: no credit.
- Rural Economic Development (RED) Credits: no credit.
- Advantage Jobs Rebate Program: projected public benefits.

Missouri
- Business Use Incentives for Large Scale Development (BUILD): checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- New Jobs Training (a.k.a. Community College New Jobs Training Program): checkbook-level and downloadable.
- Quality Jobs Program: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- State Supplemental Tax Increment Financing: no credit.

Montana[69]
- Big Sky Economic Development Trust Fund: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Primary Sector Workforce Training Grant: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Qualified Research Credit: no credit.
- Wood Products Revolving Loan Fund (State): checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.

Nebraska
- LB 775/Employment and Investment Growth Act: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Nebraska Advantage Act: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Nebraska Advantage Job Training Program: checkbook-level and downloadable.
- Nebraska Research and Development Act: no credit.
- Quality Jobs Program: projected public benefits.

Nevada
- Catalyst Fund: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Personal Property Tax Abatement: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Sales and Use Tax Abatement: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Silver State Works Employee Hiring Incentive: no credit.
- Train Employees Now: no credit.

New Hampshire
- Community Development Investment Program: no credit.
- Economic Revitalization Zone Tax Credits: no credit.
- Job Training Fund: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Research and Development Credit: no credit.

New Jersey
- Business Employment Incentive Program: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Economic Redevelopment and Growth (ERG) Program: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Film Production Tax Credit: no credit.
- Grow New Jersey Assistance Program: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Urban Enterprise Zone Program: no credit.

New Mexico
- Film Tax Credit: no credit.
- High Wage Jobs Tax Credit: no credit.
- Job Training Incentive Program: checkbook-level and downloadable.
- Manufacturer's Investment Tax Credit: no credit.
- Technology Jobs Tax Credit: no credit.

New York
- Empire State Film Tax Credit: no credit.
- Excelsior Jobs Program: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Industrial Development Agencies: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Brownfield Tax Credit Program: checkbook-level and downloadable.

North Carolina
- Article 3J Tax Credits for Growing Businesses: checkbook-level.
- Film Production Tax Credit: checkbook-level, actual public benefits.
- Job Development Investment Grant: checkbook-level, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- One North Carolina Fund: checkbook-level, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- William S. Lee (Article 3A) Tax Credits: checkbook-level and actual public benefits.

North Dakota
- Income Tax Exemption for New or Expanding Businesses: no credit.
- New Jobs Training: no credit.
- North Dakota Development Fund: checkbook-level.
- Renaissance Zones: no credit.
- Wage and Salary Credit: no credit.

Ohio
- Facilities Establishment Fund: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.[70]
- Job Retention Tax Credit: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- Job Creation Tax Credit: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- Motion Picture Tax Credit: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.

Oklahoma
- Investment/New Jobs Tax Credit: checkbook-level and downloadable.
- Quality Jobs/21st Century Quality Jobs: checkbook-level and downloadable.
- Training for Industry: checkbook-level and downloadable.

Oregon
- Enterprise Zone Program: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Oregon Investment Advantage: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Qualified Research Activities Tax Credit: no credit.
- Renewable Resource Equipment Manufacturing Facilities: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and partial credit for recouped funds.
- Strategic Investment Program: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.

Pennsylvania
- Film Tax Credit: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Job Creation Tax Credit: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Keystone Innovation Zone Tax Credits: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Keystone Opportunity Zone Program: no credit.
- Pennsylvania First Grant: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.

Rhode Island
- Corporate Income Tax Rate Reduction (a.k.a. Jobs Development Act/Corporate Income Tax Reductions): checkbook-level.
- Enterprise Zone Tax Credits (a.k.a. Distressed Areas Economic Revitalization Act—Enterprise Zones): checkbook-level.
- Job Training Tax Credits: checkbook-level.
- Manufacturing and High Performance Manufacturing Investment Tax Credits: no credit.
- Motion Picture Tax Credits: checkbook-level.

South Carolina
- Economic Impact Zone Investment Credit: no credit.
- Governor's Closing Fund: checkbook-level, downloadable and projected public benefits.
- Job Development Credits: no credit.
- Job Tax Credit: no credit.
- readySC Training: no credit.

South Dakota
- Agricultural Processing and Export Loan Program (APEX): checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Jobs Grant Program: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Revolving Economic Development and Initiative (REDI) Fund: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- SD Works: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Workforce Development Program: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.

Tennessee
- FastTrack programs: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Headquarters Tax Credit: no credit.
- Jobs Tax Credit: no credit.
- Tennessee Job Skills: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.

Texas
- Film Tax Credits: no credit.
- Skills Development Fund: no credit.
- Texas Economic Development Act (Ch. 313): checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- Texas Emerging Technology Fund: checkbook-level, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- Texas Enterprise Fund: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and recouped funds.

Utah
- Economic Development Tax Increment Financing: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Economic Opportunity Incentive: checkbook-level and projected public benefits.
- Enterprise Zone Program: no credit.
- Motion Picture Incentive Fund: checkbook-level and actual public benefits.

Vermont
- Economic Development Authority Loans: checkbook-level.
- Vermont Employment Growth Incentive (VEGI): checkbook-level and downloadable.
- Vermont Training Program: checkbook-level and actual public benefits.
- Workforce Education & Training Fund: checkbook-level and downloadable.

Virginia
- Enterprise Zone Real Property Investment Grant: projected public benefits.
- Governor's Opportunity Fund: no credit.
- Major Business Facility Job Tax Credit: no credit.
- Special Performance: checkbook-level.
- Virginia Investment Partnership and Major Eligible Employer: checkbook-level, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.

Washington
- Aerospace Manufacturer Preferential Tax Rate: actual public benefits.
- Aerospace Non-Manufacturing Tax Incentive: actual public benefits.
- High Technology Research and Development B&O Tax Credit: checkbook-level, downloadable and actual public benefits.
- High Technology Sales and Use Tax Deferral: checkbook-level, downloadable and actual public benefits.
- Data Center Sales and Use Tax Exemption: actual public benefits.

West Virginia
- Economic Opportunity Tax Credit: no credit.
- Film Industry Investment Act: no credit.
- Governor's Guaranteed Work Force Program: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Manufacturing Investment Tax Credit: no credit.
- Strategic Research and Development Tax Credit: no credit.

Wisconsin
- Business Retention and Expansion Investment: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Economic Development Tax Credit Program: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Enterprise Zone Jobs Tax Credit: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Jobs Tax Credit: checkbook-level, downloadable, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.
- Transportation Economic Assistance (a.k.a. Transportation Facilities Economic Assistance and Development Program/TEA): checkbook-level, projected public benefits and actual public benefits.

Wyoming
- Business Ready Communities Grants: checkbook-level, projected public benefits, actual public benefits and recouped funds.
- Business Ready Communities Managed Data Center Cost Reduction Grants: checkbook-level, actual public benefits, projected public benefits and recouped funds.
- Data Center Sales Tax Exemption: no credit.
- Film Industry Financial Incentive: no credit.
- Pre-hire Workforce Training Grant: no credit.

Appendix B: Transparency Scorecard

State	Grade	Point Total	Contracts and Expenditures					
			Checkbook-Level	Search by Recipient	Search by Keyword	Search by Agency	Bulk Down-loadable	Quasi-Public Agencies
Total Possible		**100**	**24**	**8**	**8**	**8**	**6**	**6**
Alabama	D	55	24	8	8	8	3	4
Alaska	F	43	24	0	0	0	6	0
Arizona	B	84	24	8	8	8	6	4
Arkansas	B-	82	24	8	8	8	6	4
California	F	34	24	0	0	0	6	4
Colorado	B+	89	24	8	8	8	3	4
Connecticut	A	96	24	8	8	8	6	5
Delaware	C	71	24	8	8	8	6	4
Florida	A	95	24	8	8	8	6	5
Georgia	C	74	24	8	8	8	3	4
Hawaii	C	71	24	8	8	8	6	4
Idaho	F	45	24	8	0	8	3	0
Illinois	A-	93	24	8	8	8	6	4
Indiana	A	97	24	8	8	8	6	4
Iowa	A-	94	24	8	8	8	6	4
Kansas	B	84	24	8	8	8	6	4
Kentucky	B	86	24	8	8	8	6	4
Louisiana	A	96	24	8	8	8	6	5
Maine	C+	76	24	8	8	8	6	4
Maryland	B+	87	24	8	0	8	6	4
Massachusetts	A	95.5	24	8	8	8	6	5
Michigan	B+	87	24	8	8	8	3	4
Minnesota	B	85	24	8	8	8	3	4
Mississippi	C+	79	24	8	8	8	6	4
Missouri	C+	77	24	8	8	8	6	0
Montana	A-	92	24	8	8	8	6	4
Nebraska	B+	87	24	8	8	8	6	4
Nevada	C	74	24	8	0	8	6	4
New Hampshire	C+	75	24	8	8	8	6	4
New Jersey	B	84	24	8	8	8	6	5
New Mexico	C+	77	24	8	8	8	6	4
New York	A-	91	24	8	8	8	6	5
North Carolina	B+	89.5	24	8	8	8	3	4
North Dakota	D+	64	24	8	8	8	3	4
Ohio	A+	100	24	8	8	8	6	6
Oklahoma	B+	88	24	8	8	8	6	6
Oregon	A	96.5	24	8	8	8	6	5
Pennsylvania	B	83	24	8	8	8	0	4
Rhode Island	C+	76	24	8	8	8	3	0
South Carolina	C+	78	24	8	8	8	6	4
South Dakota	A-	90	24	8	8	8	6	4
Tennessee	B-	82	24	8	8	8	6	4
Texas	A-	91	24	8	8	8	6	4
Utah	B	86	24	8	8	8	6	4
Vermont	B+	89	24	8	8	8	6	4
Virginia	B-	82	24	8	8	8	6	4
Washington	B	86	24	8	8	8	6	4
West Virginia	C	73	24	8	8	8	3	5
Wisconsin	A	96.5	24	8	8	8	6	4
Wyoming	C-	67	24	8	8	8	0	4

	Economic Development Subsidies						
Excluded Information	Checkbook-Level	Down-loadable	Projected Public Benefits	Actual Public Benefits	Tax Expenditure Reports	Extra Credit: Recouped Funds	Website URL
4	**15**	**4**	**4**	**4**	**9**	**4**	
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	www.open.alabama.gov
4	0	0	0	0	9	0	www.doa.alaska.gov/dof/reports/transparency.html
4	9	2	1	1	9	0	www.openbooks.az.gov
4	9	2	0	0	9	0	www.transparency.arkansas.gov
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	www.dgs.ca.gov
4	15	4	2	1	8	0	www.colorado.gov/apps/oit/transparency/index.html
2	15	4	3	4	9	0	www.osc.ct.gov/openCT/
4	0	0	0	0	9	0	www.delaware.gov/topics/transparency
4	14	1	3	3	9	2	www.myfloridacfo.com/Transparency
4	5	0	1	0	9	0	www.open.georgia.gov
4	0	0	0	0	9	0	www.transparency.hawaii.gov/
2	0	0	0	0	0	0	www.transparent.idaho.gov
4	14	0	3.5	3.5	9	1	www.accountability.illinois.gov
4	14	3	3	3	9	3	www.in.gov/itp
4	12	3	3	3	8	3	www.data.iowa.gov
4	9	2	1	1	9	0	www.kanview.ks.gov
2	12	0	3	1	9	1	www.opendoor.ky.gov
4	14	3.5	3.5	3	9	0	wwwprd.doa.louisiana.gov/latrac/portal.cfm
4	5	0	0	0	9	0	www.opencheckbook.maine.gov
4	12	4	3.5	3.5	9	1	www.spending.dbm.maryland.gov
4	14	3.5	3	3	9	0	www.mass.gov/informedma
0	15	0	4	4	9	0	www.michigan.gov/openmichigan
4	12	1	2	1	9	1	www.mn.gov/mmb/transparency-mn/
4	5	0	2	1	9	0	www.transparency.mississippi.gov
4	12	3	2	2	0	0	www.mapyourtaxes.mo.gov/map
4	12	3	3	3	9	0	www.transparency.mt.gov
4	12	1	3	0	9	0	www.nebraskaspending.gov
0	12	0	3	2	7	0	www.open.nv.gov
2	5	0	1	0	9	0	www.nh.gov/transparentnh
0	12	0	3	1	9	0	www.yourmoney.nj.gov
4	5	1	0	0	9	0	www.sunshineportalnm.com
4	12	3	2	2	9	0	www.openbooknewyork.com
4	15	0	1	3.5	9	2	www.ncopenbook.gov
4	5	0	0	0	0	0	www.data.share.nd.gov/pr
4	15	4	4	4	9	3	www.ohiotreasurer.gov/transparency/home
4	12	3	0	0	9	0	www.data.ok.gov
4	14	3.5	3.5	3	9	0.5	www.oregon.gov/transparency
4	14	0	4	0	9	0	www.pennwatch.pa.gov
2	14	0	0	0	9	0	www.transparency.ri.gov
4	5	1	1	0	9	0	www.cg.sc.gov/fiscaltransparency
4	15	0	4	0	9	0	www.open.sd.gov
4	9	0	2	0	9	0	www.tn.gov/opengov
4	12	1	3	2	8	3	www.texastransparency.org
4	12	0	2	1	9	0	www.utah.gov/transparency
4	15	2	0	1	9	0	www.spotlight.vermont.gov
4	9	0	2	1	8	0	www.datapoint.apa.virginia.gov
4	9	2	0	4	9	0	www.fiscal.wa.gov
0	5	1	1	1	9	0	www.transparencywv.org
4	15	3.5	4	4	8	0	www.openbook.wi.gov
0	9	0	2	2	0	2	www.wyo.gov/transparency

Appendix C: List of Questions Posed to Transparency Website Officials

Our researchers sent a list of questions and an initial assessment of each state's transparency website to the officials responsible for their state's site, and received responses from such officials in 47 states (Alabama and Rhode Island did not respond; Idaho responded to decline to participate in reviewing our inventory and survey).[71] Our researchers used the response to ensure that the information gathered from the websites was up-to-date and to supplement the content of the report. Below is a list of questions posed to state officials:

1. The attached spreadsheet lists each item for which your transparency website could have received credit, followed by a **Y** (yes), **N** (no), or **P** (partially) indicating whether we found that feature on the site. If you believe that our scoring gives less credit than appropriate, **please explain to us exactly how to find the feature so we can confirm it is on the website**. If you believe that our scoring gives more credit than appropriate, please also let us know. If you are able to update the website by January 28th to include a transparency feature that is currently missing or incomplete, please notify us and we will do our best to incorporate the update into this year's report.

2. Please identify specific efficiency gains or cost savings resulting from the transparency website. For instance, some states have identified savings from reduced information requests, consolidated procurement, enlarged contracting pools, or recognition of redundancies. If possible, please include an estimate of the dollar value of these savings. Other anecdotes will also help us describe the gains from your transparency efforts.

3. Our prior research shows the start-up cost of the website to be [dollar amount] and the annual operating cost to be [dollar amount]. Please let us know if there is more up-to-date information. Have upgrades to the website over the past year changed the cost?

4. Has [STATE] created innovative features that track government finances or interface spending data with other information, but are not part of our inventory? We would like the text in our report to bring attention to innovative features, even when they do not affect the summary score.

5. Please tell us about any special challenges with implementing best practices in your state, such as jurisdictional, technological or legal issues.[72]

Appendix D: Agencies or Departments Responsible for Administering Transparency Websites by State

In some cases more than one government transparency website exists for a state, in which case the highest scoring single web portal was selected.

State	Who Is Responsible for the Transparency Website?	Transparency Website Address
Alabama	State Comptroller's Office, Department of Finance	www.open.alabama.gov
Alaska	Division of Finance, Department of Administration	www.doa.alaska.gov/dof/reports/transparency.html
Arizona	General Accounting Office, Department of Administration	www.openbooks.az.gov
Arkansas	Department of Finance and Administration	www.transparency.arkansas.gov
California	Department of General Services	www.dgs.ca.gov
Colorado	Office of the State Controller, Department of Personnel and Administration	www.colorado.gov/apps/oit/transparency/index.html
Connecticut	Office of the State Comptroller	www.osc.ct.gov/openCT/
Delaware	Cooperation between Office of Management and Budget, Government Information Center, and Department of Finance	www.delaware.gov/topics/transparency
Florida	Department of Financial Services	www.myfloridacfo.com/Transparency
Georgia	Department of Audits and Accounts	www.open.georgia.gov
Hawaii	State Procurement Office, Department of Accounting and General Services	www.transparency.hawaii.gov/
Idaho	Office of the State Controller	www.transparent.idaho.gov
Illinois	Department of Central Management Services	www.accountability.illinois.gov
Indiana	State Auditor's Office	www.in.gov/itp
Iowa	Department of Management	www.data.iowa.gov
Kansas	Department of Administration	www.kanview.ks.gov
Kentucky	Governor's Office: E-Transparency Task Force, a multi-agency effort led by officials of the Finance and Administration Cabinet	www.opendoor.ky.gov
Louisiana	Division of Administration	wwwprd.doa.louisiana.gov/latrac/portal.cfm
Maine	Office of the State Controller	www.opencheckbook.maine.gov
Maryland	Department of Budget and Management	www.spending.dbm.maryland.gov

State	Who Is Responsible for the Transparency Website?	Transparency Website Address
Massachusetts	Executive Office for Administration and Finance	www.mass.gov/informedma
Michigan	Office of Financial Management, State Budget Office, Department of Technology, Management and Budget	www.michigan.gov/openmichigan
Minnesota	Minnesota Management and Budget	www.mn.gov/mmb/transparency-mn/
Mississippi	Department of Finance and Administration	www.transparency.mississippi.gov
Missouri	Office of Administration	www.mapyourtaxes.mo.gov/map
Montana	Department of Administration	www.transparency.mt.gov
Nebraska	State Treasurer's Office	www.nebraskaspending.gov
Nevada	Budget and Planning Division, Department of Administration	www.open.nv.gov
New Hampshire	Department of Administrative Services and the Department of Information Technology	ww.nh.gov/transparentnh
New Jersey	Office of the Treasurer	www.yourmoney.nj.gov
New Mexico	Department of Information Technology	www.sunshineportalnm.com
New York	Office of the State Comptroller	www.openbooknewyork.com
North Carolina	Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM) with substantial help from the Department of Administration (DOA), the Office of the State Controller (OSC), and the Office of Information Technology Services (ITS)	www.ncopenbook.gov
North Dakota	Office of Budget and Management	www.data.share.nd.gov/pr
Ohio	Office of the Ohio Treasurer	www.ohiotreasurer.gov/transparency/home
Oklahoma	Office of State Finance	www.data.ok.gov
Oregon	Enterprise Information Strategy and Policy Division, Department of Administrative Services	www.oregon.gov/transparency
Pennsylvania	Office of Administration	www.pennwatch.pa.gov
Rhode Island	Office of Digital Excellence	www.transparency.ri.gov
South Carolina	Comptroller General's Office	www.cg.sc.gov/fiscaltransparency
South Dakota	Bureau of Finance and Management	www.open.sd.gov
Tennessee	Department of Finance and Administration	www.tn.gov/opengov
Texas	Comptroller of Public Accounts' Office	www.texastransparency.org
Utah	Division of Finance, Department of Administrative Services	www.utah.gov/transparency
Vermont	Department of Finance and Management	www.spotlight.vermont.gov
Virginia	Auditor of Public Accounts	www.datapoint.apa.virginia.gov
Washington	Legislative Evaluation and Accountability Program and the Office of Financial Management	www.fiscal.wa.gov
West Virginia	State Auditor's Office	www.transparencywv.org
Wisconsin	Department of Administration	www.openbook.wi.gov
Wyoming	Department of Administration and Information	www.wyo.gov/transparency

Notes

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3 Christina Smith, Florida Department of Financial Services, personal communication, 28 January 2015.

4 Beth Hallmark, Office of the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, personal communication, 11 February 2011.

5 Ramesh Advani, Massachusetts Executive Office for Administration and Finance, personal communication, 11 February 2011.

6 Beth Hallmark, Office of the Texas State Comptroller, personal communication, 27 January 2015.

7 Paul Louthian, Department of Finance and Administration, personal communications, 10 February 2014, 28 February 2014 and 29 January 2015.

8 Rep. Bernie Hunhoff, "Pierre Report: Open Government Saves $10M," *Yankton Press and Dakotan* (South Dakota), 17 March 2010.

9 Cullen Werwi, Wisconsin Department of Administration, personal communication, 28 January 2015.

10 Jenny Bearss, Mississippi Department of Finance and Administration, personal communication, 14 February 2014.

11 See note 5.

12 Martin Eckhardt, Kansas Office of Management Analysis and Standards, personal communication, 28 January 2015.

13 R.J. Shealy, South Carolina Comptroller General's Office, personal communication, 2 March 2010.

14 Eric Ward, South Carolina Comptroller General's Office, personal communication, 27 January 2015.

15 Mike Mahaffie, Delaware Government Information Center, personal communication, 27 January 2012.

16 Estevan Lujan, New Mexico Department of Information Technology, personal communication, 29 January 2015.

17 Donna Duncan, Kentucky Office of Policy and Audit, personal communication, 28 January 2015.

18 Anita Ward, Office of State Budget and Management, personal communication, 28 January 2015.

19 Benjamin Davis, Frontier Group, and Phineas Baxandall and Ryan Pierannunzi, U.S. PIRG Education Fund, *Transparency in City Spending: Rating the Availability of Online Government Data in America's Largest Cities*, January 2013.

20 There is no standard methodology for estimating these initial investment and operational costs and researchers could not ascertain the costs for some states. The sources of state cost estimates are as follows: Alabama: Mike Hudson, Office of the Alabama State Comptroller, personal communication, 27 January 2012; Alaska: Scot Arehart, Alaska Division of Finance, personal communication, 26 January 2012 and 29 January 2015; Arizona: Jennifer Verhelst, Arizona Department of Administration, personal communication, 14 February 2014, and Christopher Lesure, Arizona Department of Administration, personal communication, 18 February 2015; Arkansas: Paul Louthian, Arkansas Department of Finance and Administration, personal communication, 1 February 2013 and 29 January 2015; Colorado: David McDermott, Colorado State Controller, personal communication, 31 January 2012, and Brent Voge, Office of the State Controller, personal communication, 28 January 2015; Connecticut: Jacqueline Kozin, Connecticut Office of the State Comptroller, personal communication, 7 February 2013 and 11 February 2015; Delaware: Mike Mahaffie, Delaware Government Information Center, personal communication, 27 January 2012; Florida: Christina Smith, Florida Department of Financial Services, personal communication, 26 January 2012, 14 February 2014 and 28 January 2015; Georgia: Lynn Bolton, Georgia Department of Audits, personal communication, 31 January 2012 and 19 January 2015; Hawaii: Luis Salaveria, Hawaii Department of Budget and Finance, personal communication, 10 February 2014; Idaho: Scott Phillips, Office of the Idaho State Controller, personal communication, 8 February 2013; Illinois: Karl Thorpe, Illinois Department of Central Management Services, personal communication 22 February 2013; Iowa: Scott Vander Hart, Iowa Department of Management, personal communication, 19 February 2014 and 28 January 2015; Kansas: Martin Eckhardt, Kansas Office of Management Analysis and Standards, personal communication, 25 January 2012 and 29 January 2015; Kentucky: Greg Haskamp, Office of Policy and Audit, personal communication, 24 January 2012 and 8 February 2013, and Donna Duncan, Office of Policy and Audit, personal communication, 28 January 2015; Louisiana: Steven Procopio, Louisiana Division of Administration, personal communication, 3 February 2012; Maine: Douglas Cotnoir, Deputy State Controller, Office of the State Controller, personal communication, 4 February 2013 and 28 January 2015; Maryland: Robin Sabatini, Maryland Department of Budget and Management, personal communication, 31 January 2012; Massachusetts: Ramesh H. Advani, Massachusetts Executive Office for Administration and Finance, personal communication, 26 January 2012, 23 February 2012, and 8 February 2013, and Corey Jenks, Massachusetts Executive Office for Administration and Finance, personal communication, 28 January 2015; Michigan: Paul McDonald, Michigan Office of Financial Management, personal communication, 24 January 2012 and 13 February 2013, and Daniel Jaroche, Michigan Office of Financial Management,

personal communication, 28 January 2015; Minnesota: Joel Ludwigson, Minnesota Management and Budget, personal communication, 30 January 2012, and Ryan Baumtrog, Minnesota Management and Budget, personal communication, 27 January 2015; Mississippi: Cille Litchfield, Mississippi Department of Finance and Administration, personal communications, 26 January and 21 February 2012, and Jenny Bearss, Department of Finance and Administration, personal communication, 14 February 2014 and 28 January 2015; Missouri: Tim Robyn, Missouri Office of Administration, personal communication, 26 January 2012, 7 February 2013, and 17 February 2014, and Jessica Opie, Missouri Office of Administration, personal communication, 30 January 2015; Montana: Sheryl Olson, Montana Department of Administration, personal communication, 7 February 2013, and Audrey Hinman, Montana Department of Administration, personal communication, 26 January 2015; Nebraska: Jason Walters, Nebraska State Treasurer's Office, personal communications, 27 January 2012, 8 February 2013, 14 February 2014 and 27 January 2015; Nevada: Lesley Henrie, Nevada Department of Administration, personal communication, 6 February 2012; New Hampshire: Robert Beaulac, New Hampshire Department of Administrative Services, personal communication, 8 February 2013, and Stephen McLocklin, New Hampshire Department of Administrative Services, personal communication, 28 January 2015; New Jersey: Jennifer D'Autrechy, New Jersey Office of the Treasurer, personal communication, 20 February 2013 and 18 February 2014, Christine Brilla, New Jersey Office of the Treasurer, personal communication, 30 January 2015; New Mexico: Estevan Lujan, New Mexico Department of Information Technology, personal communication, 30 January 2012 and 29 January 2015; New York: Nick Ladopoulos, New York Office of the State Comptroller, personal communication, 27 January 2012 and 27 January 2015; North Carolina: Jonathan Womer, North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management, personal communication, 27 January 2012, and Anita Ward, Office of State Budget and Management, personal communication, 28 January 2015; North Dakota: Toby Mertz, North Dakota Office of Management and Budget, personal communication, 19 January 2012 and 15 January 2015; Ohio: Chris Wilkin, Ohio Department of Administrative Services, personal communication, 27 January 2012, and Seth Unger, Office of the Treasurer of Ohio, personal communication, 28 January 2015; Oklahoma: Center for Fiscal Accountability, *Transparency in Government Spending: Cost vs. Savings*, downloaded from www.fiscalaccountability.org/userfiles/cost&savings.pdf, 16 February 2012, Dan Ross, Office of Management & Enterprise Services, personal communication, 14 February 2014, and Lisa McKeithan, office of Management & Enterprise Services, personal communication, 28 January 2015; Oregon: Sean L. McSpaden, Oregon Enterprise Information Strategy and Policy Division, personal communication, 25 January 2012; Pennsylvania: Dan Egan, Pennsylvania Office of Administration, personal communication, 14 February 2014 and 28 January 2015; Rhode Island: Treasury Online Checkbook, State of Rhode Island, *Frequently Asked Questions*, downloaded from www.treasury.ri.gov/opengov/faq.php, 14 September 2009; South Carolina: James Holly, South Carolina Comptroller General's Office, personal communication, 3 February 2012, and Eric Ward, South Carolina Comptroller General's Office, personal communication, 27 January 2015; South Dakota: Colin Keeler, South Dakota Bureau of Finance and Management, personal communication, 24 January 2012; Tennessee: Lola Potter, Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration, personal communication, 3 February 2012 and 28 January 2015, and Jan Sylvis, Tennessee Department of Finance, personal communication, 14 February 2014; Texas: Beth Hallmark, Office of the Texas State Comptroller, personal communication, 27 January 2012 and 27 January 2015; Utah:

John C. Reidhead, Utah State Department of Administrative Services, *Letter to Derek Monson*, *Sutherland Institute*, 29 January 2009, and Brenda Lee, Utah Department of Finance, personal communication, 27 January 2012, 8 February 2013, 14 February 2014, 29 January 2015; Vermont: Susan Zeller, Vermont Department of Finance and Management, personal communication, 5 February 2013; Virginia: April Gunn, Office of the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts, personal communication, 7 February 2013, and April Cassada, Office of the Virginia Auditor of Public Accounts, personal communication, 26 January 2015; Washington: Jerry Brito and Gabriel Okolski, Mercatus Center, George Mason University, *The Cost of State Online Spending-Transparency Initiatives*, April 2009, and Michael Mann, Washington State Legislative Evaluation and Accountability Program Committee, personal communication, 8 February 2013 and 28 January 2015; Wisconsin: Stephanie Marquis, Wisconsin Department of Administration, personal communication, 12 February 2014, and Cullen Werwie, Wisconsin Department of Administration, personal communication, 28 January 2015; Wyoming: Joyce Hefenieder, Wyoming Department of Administration and Information, personal communication, 27 January 2012.

21 The cost listed is part of a larger information technology upgrade.

22 The cost listed includes the cost to expand and update the state's previous information technology system (MERLIN, established in 1995), the product of which was the current transparency website, www.transparency.mississippi.gov.

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33 Wisconsin Department of Administration, *Contractual Services Purchasing Report: July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014*, 22 December 2014.

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36 Governmental Accounting Standards Board, *Proposed Statement of the Governmental Accounting Standards Board: Tax Abatement Disclosures*, 20 October 2014. These standards are significant because governments must adhere to the accounting principles set forth by GASB—known as Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP)—in order to receive ratings from major credit agencies and participate in the bond market.

37 Good Jobs First, *Good Jobs First Analysis: GASB's Exposure Draft on Government Cost Reporting of Tax Abatements for Economic Development*, 31 October 2014.

38 For a history of this expansion, see Alberta M. Sbragia, *Debt Wish: Entrepreneurial Cities, U.S. Federalism, and Economic Development* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 1996).

39 Deirdre Cummings, MASSPIRG Education Fund, Phineas Baxandall, U.S. PIRG Education Fund, and Kari Wohlschlegel, Frontier Group, *Out of the Shadows: Massachusetts Quasi-Public Agencies and the Need for Budget Transparency*, Spring 2010.

40 See Rani Gupta, The Reporters Committee for Freedom of the Press, *Privatization v. the Public Right to Know*, Summer 2007, available at www.rcfp.org/privatization-v-publics-right-know; and Christine Beckett, "Government Privatization and Government Transparency," *News Media & The Law*, Winter 2011.

41 NBC 6 South Florida, *Colleges Duck Public Records Law Via Corporations*, 12 October 2014, accessed at www.nbcmiami.com/news/local/Colleges-Duck-Public-Records-Law-Via-Corporations-278940381.html on 12 October 2014.

42 Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, *1999 Business Assistance Report*.

43 Olivera Perkins, "Public Sector Workers Make More in Salary and Benefits Than Those in Private Sector, Labor Department Says," *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, 12 September 2013; Congressional Budget Office, *Comparing the Compensation of Federal and Private-Sector Employees*, January 2012.

44 Barton Lorimor, Policy Analyst, Office of the Illinois Comptroller, personal communication, 6 November 2014.

45 David Card, Alexandre Mas, Enrico Moretti, Emannuel Saez, National Bureau of Economic Research, NBER Working Paper No. 16396, *Inequality at Work: The Effect of Peer Salaries on Job Satisfaction*, September 2010.

46 State of Delaware, *Classification and Compensation*, downloaded from www.jobaps.com/de/auditor/ClassReports.asp, 8 January 2015.

47 Alexandre Mas, National Bureau of

Economic Research, NBER Working Paper No. 20558, *Does Transparency Lead to Pay Compression?*, October 2014.

48 Not all of these incentives are included in the list considered for purposes of this report.

49 In previous years, we graded transparency websites that were operated by other offices in the Ohio state government.

50 Idaho's site does present a link to tax expenditure reports, but the link is broken.

51 The website evaluated for California in this report focuses on providing information pertaining only to state contracts and procurement and is not really a "transparency portal." The state does maintain a central data hub at www.data.ca.gov that can be more readily considered a "transparency portal," but it was not evaluated for purposes of this report because it fails to score better than the website we evaluated (which was the same site as the one assessed in previous years).

52 National Conference of State Legislatures, *2015 State and Legislative Partisan Composition*, 4 February 2015. Note: the eight states with mixed party legislatures were not included in either average. In addition, Nebraska, which has a unicameral, nonpartisan legislature, was not included in the average calculations.

53 National Conference of State Legislatures, *2015 State and Legislative Partisan Composition*, 4 February 2015.

54 Revenue data: U.S. Census Bureau, *2013 Annual Survey of State Finances*, released February 2015, accessed at www.census.gov/govs/state on 3 February 2015.

55 Mark Fine, Massachusetts Executive Office of Administration and Finance, personal communication, 14 February 2014.

56 Hugh Taylor, "Harrison County Earns Top Transparency Title," *Marshall News Messenger*, 11 December 2014.

57 Josh Mandel and Seth Unger, Office of the Treasurer of Ohio, personal communication, 23 December 2014.

58 D. Bruce Gabriel, Jeffrey A. Bomberger and Greg R. Daniels, Squire Sanders LLP, with Practical Law Finance, "Public Private Partnership Legislation: Ohio," *Practical Law Finance*, February 2014.

59 Note that West Virginia is in the process of launching a new transparency portal, which promises improvements over the state's existing site. Though we hoped to evaluate it for this report, it was not launched in time to be included. We graded the state's previous transparency website, which remains online for archival purposes. Note also that while California maintains a central data hub that best represents a state transparency portal, it does not score as well as the state contract and procurement website we have graded in previous years. We graded that site again this year. For more, see note 51.

60 In two states, Colorado and Ohio, we omit one of the five economic development subsidy programs assessed in last year's report, leaving four programs for assessment in each state. The programs omitted are, respectively, the Existing Industry Training Program and the Ohio Incumbent Workforce Training Voucher program. Both subsidy programs incentivize training of existing employees with the goal of supporting greater economic competitiveness on the part of the workforce and businesses. The precise economic benefits of such training initiatives are difficult to define and measure. For this reason we elected not to assess the programs in this year's report. This had no impact on the number of points each state could potentially receive. We applaud the fact that both programs feature strong disclosure of incentive recipients and amounts.

61 Philip Mattera, Thomas Cafcas, Leigh

McIlvaine, Kasia Tarczynska, Elizabeth Bird and Greg LeRoy, Good Jobs First, *Show Us the Subsidized Jobs: An Evaluation of State Government Online Disclosure of Economic Development Subsidy Awards and Outcomes*, January 2014.

62 Kari Wohlschlegel, Frontier Group, and Phineas Baxandall, U.S. PIRG Education Fund, *Following the Money: How the 50 States Rate in Providing Online Access to Government Spending Data*, April 2010.

63 See note 61.

64 Some economic development subsidies are administered in a manner that makes clawbacks impossible. For example, a grant or tax credit may only be awarded *after* a company has met pre-established standards. Nonetheless, clawback provisions are a widely regarded best practice in economic development subsidy spending, ensuring that the government retains control of the public purse at all times. To avoid unfairly penalizing states for failing to provide information they do not have, while also rewarding those that follow this best practice, we regarded information on recouped funds as an extra credit feature. It is possible to achieve a full score of 100 points without information pertaining to clawbacks. Extra credit points are awarded up to a maximum total score of 100 points.

65 See note 60.

66 See note 61.

67 Larisa Trikhacheva, BKD CPAs & Advisors, *Big Changes in California: Enterprise Zone Credits Expiring Soon*, September 2013, accessed at www.bkd.com/articles/2013/big-changes-in-california-enterprise-zone-credits-expiring-soon.htm on 12 October 2014.

68 Utah Governor's Office of Economic Development, *Life Science and Technology Tax Credits*, accessed at www.business.utah.gov/programs/incentives/tax-credits/ on 2 January 2015.

69 In *Following the Money 2014*, we included an "Oil and Natural Gas Production Exemption" in our assessment of economic development subsidy programs in Montana. In producing this report, state officials informed us that this exemption does not exist and it was removed from consideration. We did not replace it and evaluated the remaining four programs and incentives.

70 Ohio's Facilities Establishment Fund is also referred to as "166 Direct" and "Regional 166 Direct" in state reports.

71 The Illinois state official we corresponded with works in the Office of the Illinois Comptroller, which maintains a different transparency website than the one we ultimately assessed for the state (www.accountability.illinois.gov).

72 In certain instances we added questions or comments specific to individual states in our website assessment.