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Transparency: A Means to Improving Citizen Trust in Government

Author: Shayne Kavanagh Vincent Reitano

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Citizens' trust in government is vital to the functioning of a democratic system. Transparency is one way in which governments can build trust. However, "transparency" does not mean just making financial data available to those who have an interest in it. In fact, psychological research suggests that people do not rely solely or even primarily on logic and reason to form judgements, such as trust. Hence, governments must go beyond open and accessible data strategies in order to build trust. There are costs associated with transparency. These range from time and money spent on transparency initiatives to less obvious concerns about unintended consequences, like misunderstandings about what data means and giving too much access to special interest groups. Thus, the future of government may not necessarily lie in more transparency, but rather in smarter transparency that:

- Shows that the values government operates by are the same core values held by its citizens;
- Demonstrates that government officials care about citizens' well-being and acting fairly; and
- Provides information on government performance with enough context for citizens to evaluate the quality of government's work.

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