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Report: Transparent and Accountable Budgets.

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.

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