

Budget Transparency in the Sunshine State

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The First Amendment Foundation believes that government openness and transparency is critical to citizen trust and involvement in our democratic society – without Government in the Sunshine, civic engagement cannot bloom. Through ongoing monitoring of the state’s public records and open meetings laws, and the education of government officials and the citizens they serve about those laws, the Foundation promotes the public’s constitutional right to oversee and to participate in the governance process.

www.floridafaf.org

i n t e g r i t y

F L O R I D A

Integrity Florida is a nonpartisan research institute and government watchdog whose mission is to promote integrity in government and expose public corruption.

www.integrityflorida.org

Executive Summary

According to a March 2012 report by the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG) titled “Following the Money 2012,” Florida received a D grade (59/100) on a report card of how the 50 states rate in providing online access to government spending data. In comparison, Texas received the top score with an A grade (98/100).

The First Amendment Foundation, an organization that has been protecting and advancing open government in Florida for over 25 years, and Integrity Florida, a nonpartisan research institute and government watchdog group, have assessed the Transparency 2.0 website developed by Spider Data Services and conclude that Florida would save millions of dollars and would receive an A grade for public access to government spending on future report cards if the site is allowed to publicly launch with a multi-year commitment from the State to invest in site maintenance and real-time data.

Recommendation

The First Amendment Foundation and Integrity Florida strongly recommend that the Transparency 2.0 website be allowed to launch publicly to provide a globally competitive level of budget transparency and public access to information.

Background

TransparencyFlorida.gov

The Florida Legislature created TransparencyFlorida.gov, and made it available to the public in January 2010. Its purpose is “to provide the public with unprecedented access to state government spending information by posting Florida’s operating budget and associated expenditure records online.”

TransparencyFlorida.gov is meant to provide a current, continually updated picture of the state’s operating budget as well as daily expenditures made by state agencies. The numbers are supposed to be updated as funds are released to agencies, transferred between budget categories, and payments are written for goods and services. It is not clear from the TransparencyFlorida.gov website which agency or department is responsible for maintaining the website or how frequently it is updated. A message on the website states that it is “a work in progress” and that in the coming months “it is our goal to add more information,” yet it is unclear who is responsible for managing and updating the website.

MyFloridaCFO.com/Transparency

Florida’s Chief Financial Officer (CFO) Jeff Atwater has made financial transparency a priority for his administration. The state budget tracking website was actually created under former CFO Alex Sink in 2009 as “Florida’s Checkbook.” Under CFO Atwater’s leadership, the Transparency Florida website has become even more comprehensive, offering “unprecedented

access to state government spending information by posting Florida’s operating budget and associated expenditure records online.”

On June 27, 2012, CFO Atwater launched the Florida Accountability Contract Tracking System (FACTS). The FACTS tool on the Transparency Florida website makes contracting processes more transparent through a centralized contract reporting system. The tool is not meant to be simply a repository for historical data, but includes contract information that is regularly updated and audited. Search results are in a downloadable format which also lists contract deliverables. Florida law now requires state agencies to input contracts to FACTS within 30 days of execution of a contract and the responsibility for uploading these records is with the 34 state agencies presently participating in the contract system.

Transparency 2.0

Transparency 2.0 is a privately developed software program that was licensed by the Florida Senate under former Senate President Mike Haridopolos at a cost of \$4.5 million. It was developed and patented by Spider Data Services and, according to its website, is meant to be “a single source of information that will not only serve as a portal to raise awareness of how government is organized, but it will reveal specific details on programs, functions and the positions that are critical to successful governance and operations.”

While Transparency 2.0 is fully developed and was ready for use in January 2012 when the legislative session began, it was not rolled out and made available to legislators or the public. According to a [report](#) published November 26th in the *Miami Herald*, the Florida Senate transferred management of the program to the Governor’s office over the summer and the Governor’s office is not ready or willing to take ownership. The *Herald* report was based in part on an August status [report](#) by Spider Data Services that details the history of the development of the software program. Unless the state contract with Spider Data Services is renewed, it will expire on December 31, 2012 without the program being launched.

Analysis

The chart below compares the features and data sources of transparency 1.0 sites TransparencyFlorida.Gov, MyFloridaCFO.com to the Spider Data Transparency 2.0 site:

Transparency 1.0 Site TransparencyFlorida.Gov	Transparency 1.0 Site MyFloridaCFO.com/Transp arency/	Transparency 2.0 Site by Spider Data
Limited information about public expenditures	Limited information about public expenditures	Comprehensive information about public expenditures
Numerous websites, public records requests necessary for information about government expenditures	Numerous websites, public records requests necessary for information about government expenditures	One-stop source of all government expenditures on a single website
Complex tool for informed insiders	Complex tool for informed insiders	Plain language resource with common-sense categories

Transparency 1.0 Site TransparencyFlorida.Gov	Transparency 1.0 Site MyFloridaCFO.com/Transp arency/	Transparency 2.0 Site by Spider Data
Multiple searches/clicks to answer research questions	Multiple searches/clicks to answer research questions	One-click research answers
Must know exact vendor name	Must know exact vendor name	Full-text search of any part of vendor name, program purpose or related keywords
Data results are not easy to sort	Data results are not easy to sort	Flexible and sortable data
Easy report printing	No printing buttons	Easy report printing
Multiple data conversion steps to export/download data	No data export/download buttons	Easy data export/download
Complex site navigation	Complex site navigation	User-friendly
No vendor contracts	Vendor contracts	Vendor contracts
Payments to vendors	Payments to vendors	Payments to vendors
No tracking features or email alerts	No tracking features or email alerts	Tracking feature with email alerts
No social media sharing	Social media sharing	No social media sharing*
No state agency planning documents	No state agency planning documents	State agency planning documents
No governor planning Documents	No governor planning Documents	Governor planning documents
No legislature planning documents	No legislature planning documents	Legislature planning documents
No state agency budget documents	No state agency budget documents	Agency budget documents
No governor budget documents	No governor budget documents	Governor budget documents
No legislature budget documents	No legislature budget documents	Legislature budget documents
Financial services accounting system data	Financial services accounting system data	Financial services accounting system data
No management services personnel system data	No management services personnel system data	Management services personnel system data

*Spider Data Services indicates that social media sharing would be available on a public version of the site, which was initially designed for internal use by government staff and officials.

Transparency 2.0

The Transparency 2.0 website is likely to provide significant cost savings to Florida taxpayers. According to the U.S. PIRG report, transparency websites often help states realize significant benefits by identifying and eliminating inefficient spending. The PIRG report provides the following examples:

- In Texas, the Comptroller was able to utilize the transparency website in its first two years to save \$4.8 million from more efficient administration.

- Once 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.
- 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. The state has saved money by reducing staff time for public record management, retention, provision, archiving and document destruction.
- South Carolina has seen a considerable reduction in its open records requests after the creation of its transparency website, with records requests dropping by one third after the website was launched. This has resulted in significant reduction in staff time and tens of thousands of dollars in cost savings.
- Every information request resolved by Mississippi’s transparency website rather than by a state employee saves the state approximately \$750 in staff time.

The Transparency 2.0 website, if made public, would put state government contracts, spending, government employee salaries and agency budgets online for all Floridians to read in plain language and in one place. Budget transparency reform through the launch of Transparency 2.0 would place a significant spotlight on how Florida government awards state contracts to outside businesses, making the contracting process more transparent – and accessible – for Florida citizens.

Corruption does not like sunlight and disclosure is the key to accountability. Shedding more light on the budget and allowing Floridians the opportunity to follow their money through Transparency 2.0 would complement the outstanding progress being made by state leaders on ethics reform, and can only enhance Florida’s reputation as the Sunshine State.

A public launch of Transparency 2.0 would allow Florida Governor Rick Scott to achieve his goal of Accountability Budgeting. By making each state agency set annual goals for every dollar they spend, those goals could be captured in the Planning module of the Transparency 2.0 site. Performance of state agencies would be easily measured against those goals and the public and policymakers could hold agencies accountable for their outcomes. Transparency 2.0 would allow all state officials and employees to justify the expenditure of Floridians’ tax dollars.

With full transparency of state government programs, plans, vendor contracts, and personnel salary and benefit packages, the Transparency 2.0 site gives policy makers, government employees and the public the tools necessary to help eliminate waste, increase efficiencies and eliminate ineffective programs. Transparency 2.0 has the ability to help all Floridians and policy makers oversee their government – and hold it accountable – with a businesslike, searchable and measurable website dashboard view of state government as an enterprise. Transparency 2.0 will allow our government to live within its means and balance the State budget with a clear view of the source of every dollar in the budget and where and why it is spent. The only way for Floridians to get the most for their money is to give them the ability to see and track where their money goes, both in and out of State government, through Transparency 2.0.

Policy Options

1. **Governor's Office launches Transparency 2.0 publicly and makes a multi-year commitment to investing in site maintenance and real-time data.** The Executive Office of the Governor and the Florida Senate could execute the draft Memorandum of Understanding to complete the transfer of the Spider Data Services contract from the Florida Senate to the Governor's Office and utilize the funds already allocated to invest in the final phase of making the Transparency 2.0 website public. Additional legislation may not be necessary.
2. **Chief Financial Officer launches Transparency 2.0 publicly and makes a multi-year commitment to investing in site maintenance and real-time data.** With existing transparency 1.0 websites currently maintained by the Chief Financial Officer, the Florida Legislature and Governor could decide it would make more sense to roll out the next generation budget transparency website through myfloridacfo.com/transparency since Floridians are already utilizing that site for budget and vendor information. Legislation may be needed.
3. **Florida Legislature launches Transparency 2.0 publicly and makes a multi-year commitment to investing in site maintenance and real-time data.** The Florida Legislature could easily switch over its existing transparency 1.0 website to point to the transparency 2.0 platform. Legislation may be needed.
4. **The Governor's Office, Florida Legislature or Chief Financial Officer launches Transparency 2.0 for policy makers and staff only and makes a multi-year commitment to investing in site maintenance and real-time data.** Not a preferred option for a transparency website but this could be considered as a phase one step with a long-term goal of public access to assist in the 2013-2014 appropriations process and to allow for additional site enhancements before a public launch.
5. **Do nothing, which would shut down the site.** Florida taxpayers would be out the \$4.5 million invested in the Transparency 2.0 site.

Transparency 2.0 Screen Shots


The following screen shots provide a quick overview of the primary views of the Spider Data Transparency 2.0 site. The first is a screenshot of the Planning section of the site. In the current budget year (FY 2012-13 which runs July 1, 2012 through June 30, 2013), state agencies made the following budget requests, including use of more than \$1.3 billion in federal stimulus dollars and more than \$21.3 billion in federal government funds:

Planning Tab Screen Shot







State of Florida

Do you want more information about how Florida's state government operates? Gain insightful information about each state agency's planning process along with interesting details about their programs. Use the search tool and locate information on planning for the next budget year. View the agency's program descriptions and find out more about the inner workings of state government.

[ALL AGENCY PLANNING DOCUMENTS](#)



BUDGETED:
Agencies: 34
Programs: 353

	AGENCY REQUEST	
 Education	General Revenue: \$13,500,873,741 Trust Funds: \$7,569,949,093 Federal Funds: \$2,777,404,513 Federal Stimulus: \$472,887	PLANNING DOCUMENTS
 Human Services	General Revenue: \$7,194,043,832 Trust Funds: \$22,633,986,405 Federal Funds: \$14,723,528,301 Federal Stimulus: \$1,140,203,461	PLANNING DOCUMENTS
 Criminal Justice and Corrections	General Revenue: \$3,375,551,543 Trust Funds: \$1,117,490,076 Federal Funds: \$186,529,117 Federal Stimulus: \$54,188,163	PLANNING DOCUMENTS
 Natural Resources and Transportation	General Revenue: \$174,311,734 Trust Funds: \$8,537,801,721 Federal Funds: \$2,614,161,912 Federal Stimulus: \$67,070,110	PLANNING DOCUMENTS
 General Government	General Revenue: \$703,519,285 Trust Funds: \$3,146,965,368 Federal Funds: \$1,044,342,858 Federal Stimulus: \$59,064,569	PLANNING DOCUMENTS
 Judicial Branch	General Revenue: \$309,969,587 Trust Funds: \$182,691,308 Federal Funds: \$2,036,373 Federal Stimulus: \$19,818,195	PLANNING DOCUMENTS

Budget Tab Screen Shot


According to the Transparency 2.0 site, the State of Florida has a budget of \$70,772,250,922 and 118,426 state government jobs were funded across 34 agencies and 353 programs for the current budget year. Here are Transparency 2.0 snapshots of how the public's money was budgeted:

State of Florida

Follow the money. Where are Florida's tax dollars being budgeted?

Each year the Legislature appropriates money to each state agency. Follow the budget process beginning with each agency's budget request. Review, research, and report on the final state budget to actually see where the money goes. Use the search tool to locate specific details.

FUNDING COMPARISON
ALL BUDGET BILLS
ALL BUDGET DETAILS



BUDGET
\$70,772,250,922

POSITIONS
118,426

	BUDGET	POSITIONS	
 Education	\$20,149,754,664	2,408	BUDGET BILLS BUDGET DETAILS
 Human Services	\$30,487,836,245	34,976	BUDGET BILLS BUDGET DETAILS
 Criminal Justice and Corrections	\$4,203,895,785	42,279	BUDGET BILLS BUDGET DETAILS
 Natural Resources and Transportation	\$11,749,351,953	15,700	BUDGET BILLS BUDGET DETAILS
 General Government	\$3,743,587,252	18,739	BUDGET BILLS BUDGET DETAILS
 Judicial Branch	\$437,825,023	4,322	BUDGET BILLS BUDGET DETAILS

Visualize On


Personnel Tab Screen Shot

The following screenshot is of the Personnel section. This is a breakdown of the salaries and benefits of all budgeted positions in state government:

State of Florida







Where do state employees work? Follow the hiring of state employees in this module to see how many people work for state government, where they work, which county they work in, and how much money they make. In this module you can see the details for each position in a state agency and their job titles. You may want to search specific titles to see where the agency is spending its salary allocation.

[ALL AGENCY PERSONNEL DOCUMENTS](#)



SALARIES & BENEFITS
\$6,637,273,190

POSITIONS
Regular: 117,506
OPS: 9,284
Vacant: 10,803

	SALARIES & BENEFITS	POSITIONS	Visualize On
 Education	\$168,472,707	Regular: 3043 OPS: 457 Vacant: 236	PERSONNEL DOCUMENTS
 Human Services	\$1,768,349,898	Regular: 33486 OPS: 3926 Vacant: 3171	PERSONNEL DOCUMENTS
 Criminal Justice and Corrections	\$2,331,748,375	Regular: 42217 OPS: 1389 Vacant: 4268	PERSONNEL DOCUMENTS
 Natural Resources and Transportation	\$950,281,832	Regular: 15804 OPS: 2035 Vacant: 1464	PERSONNEL DOCUMENTS
 General Government	\$1,055,065,027	Regular: 18790 OPS: 1361 Vacant: 1558	PERSONNEL DOCUMENTS
 Judicial Branch	\$363,355,351	Regular: 4167 OPS: 117 Vacant: 107	PERSONNEL DOCUMENTS


Accounting Tab Screen Shot

This screenshot is of the Accounting section. According to the Spider Data Transparency 2.0 site, as of November 12, 2012, nearly \$18 billion has already been spent in FY 2012-13:

State of Florida

Follow the money. How are Florida's tax dollars being spent? We all have budgets, but do we spend it according to our plans and budget? This module will answer the question: Where does the money go? Follow the money after it is appropriated to see how the state agencies are actually spending it. Use the search tool to isolate and report expenditure details.

[ALL AGENCY ACCOUNTING DOCUMENTS](#)



TOTAL EXPENDITURES
\$17,749,787,000

Here is a snapshot of where the public's money has been spent in FY 2012-13:

	EXPENDITURES	Visualize On
 Education	\$5,762,364,882	ACCOUNTING DOCUMENTS
 Human Services	\$8,160,070,147	ACCOUNTING DOCUMENTS
 Criminal Justice and Corrections	\$1,364,286,581	ACCOUNTING DOCUMENTS
 Natural Resources and Transportation	\$1,326,412,813	ACCOUNTING DOCUMENTS
 General Government	\$998,690,781	ACCOUNTING DOCUMENTS
 Judicial Branch	\$137,961,792	ACCOUNTING DOCUMENTS


Contract Tab Screen Shot

This screenshot is of the Contract section of the site. According to the Spider Data Transparency 2.0 site, state agencies have signed 20,199 vendor contracts with a commitment to spend \$18.5 billion:

State of Florida




Are you interested in knowing more about state contracts? In this module you will find the contracts for each state agency, the names of the vendors, and the value of each state contract. Search the details to locate this and other information.

ALL AGENCY CONTRACT DOCUMENTS



CONTRACTS
20,199

ANNUAL AMOUNT
\$18,512,469,538

	CONTRACTS	ANNUAL AMOUNT	
 Education	508	\$394,776,929	CONTRACT DOCUMENTS
 Human Services	3645	\$6,275,811,012	CONTRACT DOCUMENTS
 Criminal Justice and Corrections	1504	\$663,634,893	CONTRACT DOCUMENTS
 Natural Resources and Transportation	12731	\$9,839,310,312	CONTRACT DOCUMENTS
 General Government	1811	\$1,338,936,388	CONTRACT DOCUMENTS
 Judicial Branch	0	\$	CONTRACT DOCUMENTS

Visualize On

Conclusion

Policy makers and Floridians who want simple answers to questions like “where did the stimulus dollars go in Florida?” or “how much is invested in programs for veterans?” are able to find answers easily and quickly in the Spider Data Transparency 2.0 website. While the cost of site maintenance has been raised as an issue, many other states have demonstrated significant cost savings in the use of such sites that are greater than the estimated annual maintenance costs of Transparency 2.0. Questions have also been raised about the original procurement process for Spider Data Services, which is ironic since the Transparency 2.0 website developed by the vendor would provide complete sunlight on any such contracts, payments and related budget items if launched and the site offers the most detailed and comprehensive history of every state vendor contract available compared to limited contract history offered by the transparency 1.0 sites.

Recommendation

The First Amendment Foundation and Integrity Florida strongly recommend that the Transparency 2.0 website be allowed to launch publicly in January 2013 with a multi-year commitment from the State to invest in site maintenance and real-time data to provide a globally competitive level of budget transparency and public access to information. With Transparency 2.0, Floridians – our leaders and our citizens – will have access to vitally important information at their fingertips, information that will allow government to be more efficient and our citizens more informed.

Acknowledgements

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