



The Nelson A. Rockefeller Center at Dartmouth College

The Center for Public Policy and the Social Sciences

## Policy Research Shop

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# BOLSTERING GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

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*An Evaluation of Challenges and Best Practices in Online Fiscal  
Transparency Across the United States*

Presented to the NH Commission on State Government Innovation,  
Efficiency and Transparency

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A transparent system for accessing New Hampshire's government spending and revenue collection is an essential component of ensuring the state's accountability to its citizens. The public has the right to understand where its state receives revenue, how its tax contributions are spent, and who receives these allocations of money. One of the most effective means for dispensing government statistical information is through a user-friendly web portal. New Hampshire currently maintains *TransparentNH* for this purpose. However, the website has ranked at the bottom of state transparency reviews in the past. As such, the website has not developed to its full potential and could be improved by adopting innovative, effective strategies for content, presentation, and coordination. We aim to guide the Commission on Innovation, Efficiency and Transparency in progressing towards a wider availability of online data, better organization of that data, and the establishment of a performance-based reporting system. We explore other states' online transparency initiatives in order to offer a set of recommendations to New Hampshire as it reevaluates *TransparentNH*.

### 1. NEW HAMPSHIRE'S TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVE

#### *1.1 Progress of Transparency Efforts in New Hampshire*

Fiscal transparency is a vital component of good government. Public access to financial records strengthens the accountability of both executive agencies and legislative appropriations. Federal legislators brought attention to the issue of fiscal transparency with the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006.<sup>1</sup> Now, nearly every state in the US provides checkbook-level financial information online, with the exception of California, whose site is down, and Iowa, whose site only reports votes on bills.<sup>2</sup>

In 2010, the New Hampshire legislature mandated the creation of *TransparentNH*, an online portal for state revenue and spending data, with the goal of increasing fiscal transparency. The law specified which types of fiscal information the Department of Information Technology would need to provide on this site. In addition, the law established a legislative oversight committee to develop new criteria for the website's content and to monitor compliance with the basic standards set in place by the law.<sup>3</sup>

*TransparentNH* has successfully met the basic standards set in place by the 2010 legislation. In 2012, New Hampshire earned a D- ranking from the U.S. Public Interest Research Group Education Fund, a grade based on searchability and breadth of content within the state's transparency website.<sup>4</sup> Additional efforts raised that grade to a B- in 2013.<sup>5</sup> However, in their most recent study—published in April of this year—New Hampshire's grade fell to a C+.<sup>6</sup> This suggests that additional improvement is possible. New Hampshire has a centralized financial system, which makes it relatively easy to provide monthly updates to the website's records. Given this, our investigation aims to



identify ways in which the state can improve fiscal transparency, particularly the use of performance-based reporting and enhanced data presentation to viewers of the website.

### *1.2 The Challenges of Improving Transparency*

A conversation with the Assistant Commissioner and his team at New Hampshire's Department of Administrative Services revealed several systemic challenges to improving online fiscal transparency.<sup>7</sup> First, website development capacities are limited by staffing shortages. There is one full-time web developer for the entire state government website who can dedicate only a small percentage of time to *TransparentNH*. Furthermore, there are only three staff members on the team dedicated to the management of the site, and they receive no supplemental funding. Second, New Hampshire has strict confidentiality legislation in place, which limits the fiscal information that can be publicly released in the state. Title VI Chapter 91-A, updated in 2013, specifies that certain entities are exempt from access requirements. This includes juries, personal school records, records regarding internal personnel, any data that would constitute a violation of privacy, and records pertaining to emergency response functions.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, New Hampshire will need to decide whether or not to give increased priority to its transparency portal, likely in the form of financial appropriations and decisions balancing transparency against confidentiality.

## **2. METHODS**

In order to determine how New Hampshire can move forward in its web-based transparency initiative, we compared New Hampshire's website to those of other states, especially states that rank higher than New Hampshire in the most recent transparency reports.<sup>9</sup> We also engaged in an in-depth overview of *TransparentNH* to identify gaps in information and weaknesses in design. We present our findings accordingly, and examine both innovative transparency options and potential pitfalls. Our recommendations are tailored to the capabilities and needs of the New Hampshire transparency initiative.

We place special emphasis on the potential for setting up a performance-based transparency system and examine all ten of the states that have pursued outcomes-based reporting. All of these states were contacted for interviews, but only five responded. Conducting these interviews and evaluating the ten performance-based reporting sites (see Appendix A for a full list) allowed us to identify best practices and potential barriers that New Hampshire might keep in mind when developing its own performance-based reporting system.

To evaluate the content of the New Hampshire transparency site compared to other sites, we took detailed notes on how each state within a representative set provides information on the following categories of interest: budgets, tax revenues, tax expenditures, employee compensation, pension disbursements, vendor payments, contracts, and grants. In each of these information areas, we note how easy it is to access information, which types of



metrics are presented, how the information is presented, what type of information is downloadable for analysis, when the relevant statistics were last updated, and how frequently the statistics are updated. Accessibility is benchmarked by how many clicks it takes to reach the relevant data from the portal homepage and whether the links are easy to find within the page. Metrics refers to how the data is presented, for example: as current spending, percent change from the previous year, or agency-specific spending. When we describe how the information is presented, we examined whether or not there are raw data, graphs, charts, or static reports summarizing findings. We also identified what information is downloadable, if any, when the information was last updated, and the frequency of updates.

We pulled best practices from each category independently in addition to looking at general website construction best practices. In order to determine the most effective way to present the data, we also examined general characteristics of *TransparentNH*, including its main page layout, navigation, search features, and support features. We did the same for other states but have chosen to focus on New Hampshire's capabilities.

At the end of this document, an appendix provides a list of all state transparency websites. A more detailed online appendix including all primary research is available at: [http://rockefeller.dartmouth.edu/shop/nh\\_web\\_transparency\\_data.xlsx](http://rockefeller.dartmouth.edu/shop/nh_web_transparency_data.xlsx)

### **3. EXPLORING PERFORMANCE-BASED TRANSPARENCY INITIATIVES**

#### *3.1 Defining Performance-Based Transparency*

The Obama Administration, in a White House memorandum, has stressed the importance of open government in promoting accountability and public engagement.<sup>10</sup> It treats information as a national asset, especially since the American public can provide feedback on problems and opportunities for progress. Fiscal transparency efforts seek to identify inequitable resource allocations, increase public participation in agency-level decisions, and improve the efficacy of policy implementation. This is separate from legislative transparency, which focuses on policymakers and bills rather than agency efforts and appropriations.

There is also an important distinction to be made between general fiscal transparency and performance-based transparency. General fiscal transparency encompasses the reporting of data as stand-alone figures or general time trends. For example, a transparency site might contain a database of agency expenditures, tax revenues, and government employee salaries by year. Performance-based transparency is achieved when governments report the progress made on agency-level and programmatic goals and targets. This is usually done through strategic planning and tracking of quantitative performance indicators over time compared to benchmarks. General fiscal transparency is an essential first step to getting information out to the public. However, this type of reporting is only useful for people with specific inquiries and pre-existing reference



points with which to evaluate the numbers shown. Performance-based reporting adds tremendous value to transparency initiatives because it sets up a framework that the public can use to pinpoint shortfalls and achievements across government sectors.

### *3.2 Performance-Based Transparency Reporting Across the States*

New Hampshire could benefit greatly from joining the rise of performance-based reporting across the country. States that have succeeded in implementing performance-based transparency serve as case studies for ways to overcome fiscal, technological, and political barriers. Only ten states currently have a fully functional performance-based reporting website, and only five of those states (Indiana, Maryland, Oregon, Rhode Island, and Virginia) responded to interview requests. The interviews ultimately enabled an in-depth analysis of challenges and opportunities faced by these states, but examining the websites of the remaining states still shed some light upon best practices and major inefficiencies. In the sections that follow, we summarize the key findings from each state's website.

#### *3.2.1 Georgia<sup>11</sup>*

Georgia's Transparency in Government Act of 2008 required that all state spending be publicized online. As a result, *Open Georgia* debuted in 2009. Furthermore, a series of policies called the Georgia Open Records Act or Sunshine Laws was enacted in 2009 to promote public access to public records of government bodies at all levels. SB 389 in 2010 added further reporting requirements for the *Open Georgia* site.

*Open Georgia* has a top-down performance-based reporting system that can be accessed through a link on the main portal called "Performance Reviews." This site provides searchable, downloadable performance audits of departmental programs for individual years. However, data are usually not available annually, and there is immense variation in the presentation of the data; some audit reports have quantitative data, but others are text-heavy and numberless.

#### *3.2.2 Indiana<sup>12</sup>*

Indiana's transparency portal has a "Performance & Accountability" link on the left sidebar. The database allows browsing by agency, program within the agency, or agency fund, but there is no search feature. It is only possible to see text descriptions of the significance and method of computation of key performance indicators (KPIs) when browsing by agency. Programs and funds have separate outcome-based measures that are supplemental to agency goals, but only graphs are shown. There are no accompanying tables, but there are browser compatibility issues for displaying the graphs (i.e., on Chrome). Like Georgia, Indiana's transparency chronology is patchy, with data missing for quarters within a single year.





In an interview, Shannon Bibby, from the Indiana Office of Management and Budget (OMB), described the purpose of the performance-based reporting as driving “a business type culture of accountability.”<sup>13</sup> Agencies work in conjunction with the Government Efficiency and Financial Planning (GEFP) division of the OMB to develop measures and targets, but the GEFP has final say as per IC title 4-3-22. However, Indiana only has four staff members manually maintaining portfolios of agency measures, and like New Hampshire, the one Office of Technology staffer working on the transparency site has other duties. The GEFP also did not have a separate budgetary appropriation and had trouble convincing some agencies to prioritize outcomes-based reporting and contributing some funding to the initiative.

### 3.2.3 Louisiana<sup>14</sup>

Louisiana has pushed for performance-based reporting since 1997, when it passed Act 1465, the Louisiana Government Performance and Accountability Act. This piece of legislation required all agencies with appropriated budgets to produce progress reports. As a result, the Louisiana Office of Planning and Budget (OPB) created *LaTrac*, an online transparency database.

*LaTrac* has a link on its main page called “Performance.” This directs visitors to a database that can be browsed by individual performance indicators within objectives, programs, agencies, and fiscal years. Its issues include data gaps between quarters, a complete lack of graphs, no comparability across years and no search capabilities. Nevertheless *LaTrac*’s performance-based reporting is simple to navigate, clearly identifies the measures being tracked, and compares quarterly data to quarterly targets.

### 3.2.4 Maryland<sup>15</sup>

Maryland HB 1252 / SB 995 was passed in 2007 as the Maryland Accountability and Transparency Act, requiring online reporting of all state grants and contracts. In the following year, Maryland HB 358 was passed, expanding the requirement to all state expenditures.

*StateStat* was created as Maryland’s transparency portal, and on the top banner of the main page, there is a tab called “Goals.” Implemented by Governor Martin O’Malley in 2008, this portion of the *StateStat* site is known as the “Delivery Unit” and contains targets for 16 strategic areas. Each area includes a couple of specific measures, several time-trend graphs, and detailed commentary describing what the goals are and what actions have been taken to achieve them. Unfortunately, there is no search feature, the measures are not split up by agency and program, and the link to tabulated data and additional measures is not easy to locate.

In an interview, Matt Power, from Maryland’s Office of the Governor, highlighted the concision of the Delivery Unit as an effort to make the data more palatable for the



public.<sup>16</sup> The primary users of Maryland's transparency site are advocacy groups, who are looking to identify statewide progress on specific issues. Accessibility, less raw data, and greater integration with social media were priorities in the design of Maryland's transparency portal. Support for the initiative has grown with the success of *BayStat*, a regional environmental data reporting system that showed the advantages of setting cross-agency strategies and goals. The *StateStat* team is composed of six individuals and one Webmaster, and they use Excel and Socrata to manually organize and input agency data. The biggest driver of this initiative's success was the support of Governor O'Malley; the transparency portal is incorporated into the budget of the Governor's office.

### 3.2.5 Massachusetts<sup>17</sup>

The Massachusetts Office of Commonwealth Performance, Accountability and Transparency (CPAT) was created by the legislature in 2012, and Governor Deval Patrick launched *Informed Massachusetts* as the state's transparency site. As part of his FY14 Budget Recommendation, Massachusetts rolled out the *MassResults* performance-based reporting site.

*MassResults* can be accessed via a tab-at-the-top banner of the overarching transparency portal, but rather than having a database, the site contains downloadable reports for 2014 in the eight secretariat departments. These documents cover strategic planning, and progress made on measures, but there is not a standardized format for reports across departments.

### 3.2.6 Nevada<sup>18</sup>

Chapter 239 of Nevada's Revised Statutes addresses access to public records. In combination with other policies, this led to the *Open Nevada* transparency site. On the main page of the transparency portal is a link called "Priorities and Performance Based Budget". It is possible to browse by core function (departmental area), objective (measure), activity (specific program), or do a search for keywords. But the main data shown is the allocation of spending rather than performance. There is a small tab called "Benchmarks" at the activity level that does show some benchmark targets and graphs of progress over time. However, a lot of data has not been collected yearly.

### 3.2.7 New Jersey<sup>19</sup>

Governor Chris Christie recently initiated a performance-based reporting system called the "Governor's Performance Center," which is a link on the left sidebar of New Jersey's main transparency portal. Here, like for Massachusetts, it is possible to download static reports by department that contain tables of measures and a comparison of actual values to target values. There is data yearly from 2010 to 2013, and most of the time, each year





has multiple reports by quarter. Unlike Massachusetts, there is no text to describe the design of the measures and the agency-level strategic planning.

### *3.2.8 Oregon<sup>20</sup>*

In 2009, HB 2500 (Open Books Oregon Project) mandated that the Department of Administrative Services create an online transparency website. Six new bills in 2011 added additional reporting requirements for the website.

On the left sidebar of Oregon's main transparency portal, there is a link to "Agency Key Performance Measures," which involves more static, downloadable reports by agency containing targets, strategies, and graphs of progress made. Only one year of reports is available, and tabulated quantitative data has to be accessed separately.

In an interview, Gene Newton from Oregon's Chief Information Office described the involvement of the legislature in the process, as measures need to be approved by the Legislative Fiscal Office.<sup>21</sup> It is the responsibility of the agencies to propose measures and collect accurate data. Data are usually in Excel or .csv form, and are uploaded into a Socrata platform database in [data.oregon.gov](http://data.oregon.gov). Currently, the transparency website must be run "at no additional cost using existing data and existing state agency resources and without reallocation of resources. This is becoming increasingly difficult, as Oregon seeks to expand the number of years of reports that are available. The next legislative session will likely address this restrictive policy.

### *3.2.9 Rhode Island<sup>22</sup>*

Governor Lincoln Chafee implemented a performance-based reporting system as part of his Performance Management Initiative. There is a link in the left sidebar of the main transparency portal called "Performance Measures". Initially, when clicking this link, there are "dashboards" available for two departments showing graphs of recent progress in several specific measures, although goal levels are not marked. Clicking instead on the "Search Performance Measures" link allows browsing by specific measures within agencies and programs, but it lacks a keyword search. You must specify the exact agency, program, and measure you are interested in to display results, so it is hard to compare programs or agencies. The data shown does include a comparison of actual performance with respect to target levels, but there are no source data or graphs.

In an interview, Thom Guertin and Brian Daniels from the Rhode Island Office of Digital Excellence and Department of Administration, respectively, emphasized the importance of consistent communication between agencies and transparency oversight bodies.<sup>23</sup> The Rhode Island OMB assists agencies in establishing "ambitious but attainable" targets and meets with departments several times each year to evaluate progress and identify what barriers exist. What the public sees is only a small portion of all the measures that agencies track, and these are meant to serve as a "snapshot" of areas with high priority.



The actual quantitative data are stored in an internal SQL database, and it is possible to access static performance reports by department similar to those in previous states from within the state's OMB site.<sup>24</sup> The transparency team, including three IT staffers who allocate only a small share of their time to the site, has limited resource time but seeks to convert the static department reports into dashboard graphs and integrate legislative salaries into the payroll section of the transparency website.

### 3.2.10 Virginia<sup>25</sup>

Finally, the leading example of performance-based reporting in the states is *Virginia Performs*, a site established by the Council on Virginia's Future. This agency was formed in 2004 through HB 2097 as a way to roadmap the state's long-term visions and missions. *Virginia Performs* exists completely separately from the general fiscal transparency site for simple revenue and spending data.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the general transparency site does contain a link to the homepage of *Virginia Performs*.

*Virginia Performs* presents a wide variety of information catering to all audiences. Although not searchable, there is a database with quantitative data and graphs for several measures within each agency of each secretarial area. Baseline values, targets, progress over time, calculation explanations, and budget allocations can all be easily accessed. In addition, strategic plans detailing values, objectives, and programs for each agency can be selectively downloaded by section of the document. Progress on the tabulated measures is further explained within static, downloadable agency reports similar to those of previous states. One such report exists for the progress of the entire state. For members of the public who are not interested in numbers, *Virginia Performs* has designed scorecards for each of its regions and seven major performance areas (i.e., education, public safety, and natural resources). These indicate progress in specific topics through directional arrows, and each topic links a blog-style description with graphs. To further monitor nonspecific areas of performance, *Virginia Performs* is experimenting with report cards for topics like entrepreneurship and general government operations. This site is an excellent model of an endpoint for any fiscal transparency effort.

Gerard Ward, the Deputy Director of the Council on Virginia's Future, pointed out several challenges and opportunities that the state has encountered in the construction of *Virginia Performs*.<sup>27</sup> First, Virginia had a unique political environment supportive of long-term initiatives because the Governor can only serve one consecutive term. This solidified the idea that "agencies are eternal but politicians are temporary" and pushed Virginia towards aligning day-to-day operations with a direction for the state government as a whole.<sup>28</sup> Rather than micromanaging agencies from afar, the Council on Virginia's Future asked the question "How do we know where we are?" and trained agencies on the strategic importance of transparency and internal evaluation through analyzing performance data. Agencies are given the freedom to design their own plans and targets, and the site can also serve as a vehicle for agencies and the administration in power to



share needs and priorities. With regards to site management, the Council delegated the database component to the Department of Planning and Budget.

Some of the challenges to the site included funding cuts across the board and the limited personnel (six) assigned to the initiative. Also, in order to make the user-friendly scorecards and report cards, subjective calls needed to be made. Many times, quantitative changes are hard to understand, especially since they are relative to or influenced by other measures and areas. For the cases where some years of data are missing, the biggest barrier is simply the need to manually add historical data into the system, which is tedious at best. Finally, Virginia experienced some degree of resistance to centralization of information, not only in terms of funding but also in terms of support from localities. Communities have partnered with organizations like the Community Indicators Consortium to implement local transparency programs, which are more relevant to municipality functions.

### *3.3 Lessons Learned*

The states that have already implemented performance-based reporting present several key lessons on the process of developing a sustainable system and on optimal design elements. The best performance-based reporting systems focus on presenting information in a format that is digestible for the general public while also ensuring access to the source data. Graphs and progress arrows serve this purpose well, as long as there is also a description of how measures are tracked and calculated. While downloadable reports are thorough, they are not viable as the only source of information on benchmarks and progress because they are inconvenient for identifying specific issues of interest across years. Apart from being a channel to inform the public of governmental goals and achievements, performance-based reporting is also a powerful tool for internal performance management and cross-agency communication.

For all cases, staffing on the transparency site has been inadequate, and the states that have succeeded have maximized partnerships between the transparency oversight body and the agencies themselves. They have also used simple databases like Excel for data aggregation and organization as well as standardized platforms like Socrata. To gather political support and financial resources, states have integrated performance-based transparency with the Governor's office, aligning goals across state agencies and setting priorities.

## **4. IMPROVING KEY CONTENT CATEGORIES**

We examine best practices in the following categories that have been identified as key areas for transparency in the state of New Hampshire.



#### 4.1 Budget

*TransparentNH* provides the current fiscal year's budget broken down into six main categories of government in the form of a table and pie chart easily accessible from the homepage.<sup>29</sup> For each category, it displays the monetary amount and overall percent of the whole. It also provides a link at the bottom of the page to access detailed operating budgets from a number of years.<sup>30</sup> Opportunities for improvement on this section of the website include providing a direct link to the current year's budget and more clearly showing trends from the prior budgets. Minnesota's transparency website provides a good example of what type of content New Hampshire may consider including.<sup>31</sup> Minnesota's site has line graphs showing changes in the budgets for major categories. Dynamic pie charts with links to the line graphs could be a useful way to integrate such information into New Hampshire's current site. The Minnesota site also includes direct links to detailed and summarized budgets. This is more user friendly and it allows for more complex information dissemination, and is therefore a practice that New Hampshire may consider. New Hampshire currently provides figures and critical information on the webpage itself, keeps as much information accessible from the *TransparentNH* domain, and generally avoids creating extra links that provide little additional information which are all good practices to try to maintain while implementing changes.

#### 4.2 Tax Revenue

New Hampshire's website contains information about the current fiscal year's restricted and unrestricted funds presented in separate pie charts and tables.<sup>32</sup> For each category, it displays the monetary amount and overall percent of the whole. It also includes two small links at the bottom of the page that links to detailed reports for earlier years. A few opportunities exist to improve the transparency of New Hampshire's tax revenue reporting. In Maine, for example, the website displays revenue reports for each year and quarter along with percent changes from the previous time period.<sup>33</sup> New Jersey's site provides data downloadable by agency, revenue type, revenue fund, and revenue source.<sup>34</sup> Kentucky has a citizen tax calculator which shows roughly how much each citizen's tax money is spent in a particular category to provide more intuitive understanding to citizens.<sup>35</sup> New Hampshire can consider these ideas when determining how to make its revenue streams more transparent.

#### 4.3 Tax Expenditures

As noted in the budget section, New Hampshire's website displays the projected expenditures in the current year's fiscal budget by main government category.<sup>36</sup> The website also provides a link at the bottom of the page to access downloadable .csv files of every transaction completed by the government, including information on department, amount spent, who received the payment, and general purpose of the expenditure. On a separate tab, users can find a searchable database.<sup>37</sup>



The bulleted “more information” section on the bottom of the page provides useful information, but it is easy to overlook. Changing the links into buttons or creating a drop down menu on the main sidebar could make this information more accessible. Making the pie chart dynamic to access more detailed information could make the data more accessible and informative in this section as well as the revenue section. Additionally, linking the searchable database directly from the expenditures page might prove to be more useful than from a separate searchable database tab. *TransparentNH* might also consider providing updates on how actual expenditures are matching up to the budget, as Minnesota does on a biannual basis.<sup>38</sup>

#### *4.4 Employee Compensation*

After a few clicks, *TransparentNH* links a user to employee compensation information via a searchable database with information on agency, employee name, job title, pay type, salary range, year and provides info on total annual pay.<sup>39</sup> This information might be better accessible if it was a main tab on the main page, as many other states have. Additionally, the website only has information until 2012, whereas many websites are up to date, with some updating each pay period, showing year to date payments.

Minnesota’s website provides some direction for where *TransparentNH* might consider moving towards in terms of content. Minnesota’s website has a downloadable report on salary spending by agency and fund.<sup>40</sup> It gives the employee name, title, the full time equivalent, whether the position is hourly or weekly, salary, insurance, FICA, retirement, deferred compensation, and health care savings plan. The website also has yearly workforce report that describes the workforce with graphs, tables and text and has a quarterly report showing comparison between current levels of staffing compared with the previous year.

#### *4.5 Pension Disbursements*

Like many other states, New Hampshire does not display pension disbursement information on its website. Massachusetts, New Jersey, and Connecticut provide examples as to how New Hampshire might approach providing this information.<sup>41</sup> The best practices suggest having a direct link from home page and a searchable database with such information as name, employer, year of retirement, type of fund, last job title if available, last department worked, retirement date, and monthly and annual dollar amounts received in pension.

#### *4.6 Vendor Payments*

*TransparentNH* does not have a specific section devoted to vendor payments, though it does have a link to a comprehensive contracts database noted in the section below. New Hampshire could follow Vermont’s lead by providing vendor payment information by providing a searchable and filterable list that gives quarter, department, vendor name,



vendor state, purpose, and amount.<sup>42</sup> Vermont's website also provides downloadable data for Microsoft Access, another feature New Hampshire might consider implementing. In the effort to increase transparency, New Hampshire might try to avoid requiring individuals to sign in or know the vendor number to access information as is required in some other states.

#### *4.7 Contracts*

After multiple clicks, users are redirected to New Hampshire's Administrative Services website where they can search for contracts and download them.<sup>43</sup> Such information as contract description, NIGP code, agency, expiration date, contact, vendor name, vendor code, vendor phone, vendor fax, and status are available. Generally, New Hampshire is a leader in contracts related transparency. It could, however, make the information more easily accessible via a more direct link on the main sidebar or by using a more visible button rather than bulleted text at the bottom of the expenditure page.

#### *4.8 Grants*

*TransparentNH* does not provide specific information on grant payments. The general norm for states that do provide this information is to include the dollar amount of the grant, a brief description, the recipient name, and the agency providing the grant, as available on Connecticut's website.<sup>44</sup> In order to be more transparent on the specific nature of grants, New Hampshire could try to veer away from grouping grants with general expenditures if possible.

#### *4.9 Other Opportunities for Transparency*

Many states provide transparency information on areas not covered thus far in the report. New Hampshire may consider reporting on similar measures if they align with New Hampshire's transparency goals. For example, Rhode Island provides information on lobbying spending. New York includes information on pork barrel spending. Massachusetts displays information on campaign finance.<sup>45</sup> Missouri, interestingly, reports on which businesses are not paying taxes.<sup>46</sup> A number of states include additional local transparency data as well, like municipal data in New York and school district data in Vermont.

Another opportunity for upgrading the site's content is supplying checkbook-level data for economic development in New Hampshire. Most states currently provide data tracking stimulus funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009. In its recent evaluations of transparency, USPIRG has recently given economic development a significantly greater weight, and New Hampshire may consider expanding its content to include such information.<sup>47</sup>





Increased funding also opens many doors for transparency, as demonstrated in the state of Florida.<sup>48</sup> Florida's website is rated as one of the best in the country, receiving an A- in national rankings.<sup>49</sup> One reason it has received such a high ranking is the vast array of information it posts to its website. Florida initially allocated 600,000 dollars for transparency efforts, which it used to contract IBM to set up the website and create an automatic updating feature that receives daily data updates from a variety of information sources. As a result, Florida is able to provide a large amount of information to its citizens. New Hampshire's transparency might also benefit from increased funding which has been shown to be highly effective in Florida.

## **5. A CRITICAL EVALUATION OF *TRANSPARENTNH'S* DESIGN**

In order to determine the most effective way to present the data, we also examine general characteristics of the websites such as their main page layout, navigation, what types of search functions are available and effective, how they describe their purpose and provide commentary, how they approach a FAQ section, how they present a glossary, and what types of links are available from the sites.

### *5.1 Main Page Layout*

On the home page of New Hampshire's transparency portal, the rotating banner has prevents the mouse cursor from changing into the "link-clicking hand" when hovering over the text contained within the moving black area. Fixing this issue will help ensure that people know to click for more information. To better delineate specific content, the left sidebar could use links titled as "State Expenditures," "State Revenues", "Grants", "Contracts", "Employee Pensions", etc. in the place of "Where The Money Comes From" and "Where The Money Goes". Currently, these link to text-heavy pages with non-interactive graphs. In the future, New Hampshire could consider following other sites in making the graphs clickable to pop-out insets with more specific spending information. The link called "Search Applications" is ambiguous and could be split into two links named "State Expenditure Registry" and "State Employee Payrolls". Other states use "State Checkbook", so once the database in New Hampshire expands beyond just expenditures and payrolls, this name would be more appropriate and could link to a page containing further links to each individual database.

### *5.2 Navigation and Search Tools*

Within the "Where The Money..." sections, a downloadable report may be more useful than linking visitors outside of the transparency site. If an ideal transparency portal is self-contained, then external links would only serve as supplementary material. Within the "State Expenditure Register", the java applet loads slowly compared to the platforms used by other states. While having the dual browsing boxes is very handy for navigation, the tabs for "Departments", "Agencies", "Accounting Units", "Classes", "Accounts", "Vendors", and "Transactions" cause more problems than benefits. If the tabs in the two



browsing boxes are clicked out of order, then visitors are sent to a page that says, “An error has occurred. It is recommended that you start from the beginning.” Also, the two browsing boxes can unlink with each other. This means that clicking something on the left box does not bring up the appropriate subsequent options in the right box. Overall, these tabs do not increase navigation speed by much and can be eliminated so that the right box stays linked to what is happening in the left box. For cases where the number of options is more than 20, the current browsing box has a “next page” option. In place of separate pages, a scrolling bar would be more convenient for users. Finally, while the export data feature is useful in concept, the files that are downloaded are text-heavy and of very little use for the public. Numerical data and graphs are likely to be far more useful for the public rather than the codes and classes that are for internal use only.

With regards to the “State Employee Pay Search”, if a user attempts to search with partial completion of fields and dropdown selections, the page enters a loading phase that lasts up to five minutes. Debugging and optimizing this feature will allow interested individuals to browse through payrolls more conveniently.

A site-wide search feature would be an ideal long-term goal, but given the current advanced search system, one next step would be to allow the keyword and vendor search to be not limited by fiscal year. USPIRG focuses more on browsability than direct search features, so the top priority is optimizing the search interface and speed with a simpler system like HTML or Socrata.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

New Hampshire’s limited human and financial resources along with strict confidentiality requirements may restrict the potential of New Hampshire’s transparency website. Despite these barriers, the following are possible actionable recommendations that New Hampshire may consider implementing:

For performance-based reporting:

1. In order to receive funding for performance-based initiatives, other states have linked their transparency websites with the state Governor’s websites, aligning departmental strategic plans with the overall vision of the Governor’s office. New Hampshire might pursue a unified set of goals for where the state wants to go in the coming years. These goals can serve as the first steps towards identifying key indicators for performance tracking and reviews.
2. Excel can be standardized as a form of data reporting from agencies. This makes it low-cost to analyze and user-friendly for those without a background in computer science or statistical software.
3. Local pilot programs are a strong motivator for statewide performance-based reporting programs, especially since more-focused areas like schools and municipalities have targeted needs and capabilities. The public is more likely to



- access and support these simpler initiatives, and later on, it will be more likely to utilize a more complex performance-based reporting system.
4. Sharing knowledge about goal-setting and progress-tracking between agencies requires better communication and standardized training programs. New Hampshire's Department of Administrative Services could take on the role of providing guidance for state agencies unfamiliar with strategic planning.
  5. Advocacy groups and internal agencies are the primary users of performance-based information, so the site could be specifically targeted to these audiences by including data organized by issue (i.e. education, health, environment).
  6. Collaborate with the agencies to develop goals and stress the importance of using performance-based reporting as a strategic planning tool for shaping the future of the state rather than just as a way to make information public.
  7. The first priority for additional funds is acquiring additional website developers and webmasters, who have the technical expertise to put in place new transparency ideas.
  8. Establish regular reporting periods for progress towards achievements and provide support for monitoring, evaluating, and revising agency targets.

For key content categories:

1. Ensure that information on pensions, vendor payments, and grants are available independently from other areas of interest.
2. Provide side tabs to access data for identified areas of interest so that they are accessible from all pages on the website.
3. Make links to important data sources more accessible via direct buttons rather than bulleted lists.
4. Create dynamic pie charts to allow citizens to easily access detailed information
5. Explore which content related best practices displayed by other states can be most easily replicated in New Hampshire.
6. At minimum, maintain information for the current fiscal year, but strive to update biannually, monthly, or otherwise as noted in other states' best practices.
7. Provide information for previous years to benchmark current practices, particularly on the main pages for revenues and expenditures.
8. With the public as the primary audience, prioritize easy to read graphs and reports over extensive data sets when applicable.

For site design:

1. Use platforms like Socrata, which other states have used effectively, rather than complicated java applets.
2. Be clear about the titles of links and pages in order to provide a user-friendly, guided navigation system.



3. Increase the scale and scope of downloadable data so that members of the public interested in conducting fiscal research can efficiently compare quantitative data across years.
4. Avoid linking site viewers to other government sites for more information, especially if reports could be directly integrated into the transparency portal.

By increasing its web transparency efforts, New Hampshire can better deliver on its commitment to building a healthier democracy via fiscal transparency. The key recommendations outlined above are first steps that New Hampshire may consider in its pursuit to increase web transparency in the state. Adopting these best practices in performance-based reporting, content additions, and design changes can help New Hampshire enhance its transparency efforts; this could be a major joint achievement between legislators, the transparency team, the executive agencies, and New Hampshire's civically-engaged public.



## APPENDICES

### Appendix A. Table of States and Their Transparency Websites

Selected States and Websites Examined	
State	Website
Colorado	<a href="http://tops.state.co.us/">http://tops.state.co.us/</a>
Connecticut	<a href="http://www.transparency.ct.gov">www.transparency.ct.gov</a>
Florida	<a href="http://www.transparencyflorida.gov">www.transparencyflorida.gov</a>
Georgia	<a href="http://www.open.georgia.gov/rsa/performance/viewMain.aud">http://www.open.georgia.gov/rsa/performance/viewMain.aud</a>
Illinois	<a href="http://www.accountability.illinois.gov">www.accountability.illinois.gov</a>
Indiana	<a href="http://www.in.gov/itp/2334.htm">http://www.in.gov/itp/2334.htm</a>
Kentucky	<a href="http://www.opendoor.ky.gov">www.opendoor.ky.gov</a>
Louisiana	<a href="http://wwwprd.doa.louisiana.gov/Lapas/public/">http://wwwprd.doa.louisiana.gov/Lapas/public/</a>
Maine	<a href="http://opencheckbook.maine.gov/transparency/about.html">http://opencheckbook.maine.gov/transparency/about.html</a>
Maryland	<a href="http://www.statestat.maryland.gov">www.statestat.maryland.gov</a>
Massachusetts	<a href="http://www.mass.gov/informedma/">www.mass.gov/informedma/</a>
Minnesota	<a href="http://www.mmb.state.mn.us/tap">http://www.mmb.state.mn.us/tap</a>
Nevada	<a href="http://openbudget.nv.gov/OpenGov/ViewHomePage.aep">http://openbudget.nv.gov/OpenGov/ViewHomePage.aep</a>
New Hampshire	<a href="http://www.nh.gov/transparentnh/">www.nh.gov/transparentnh/</a>
New Jersey	<a href="http://www.yourmoney.nj.gov">www.yourmoney.nj.gov</a>
New York	<a href="http://www.seethroughny.net">www.seethroughny.net</a>
Oregon	<a href="http://www.oregon.gov/transparency/Pages/index.aspx">http://www.oregon.gov/transparency/Pages/index.aspx</a>
Rhode Island	<a href="http://www.transparency.ri.gov">www.transparency.ri.gov</a>
Vermont	<a href="http://www.vttransparency.org">www.vttransparency.org</a>
Virginia	<a href="http://vaperforms.virginia.gov/">http://vaperforms.virginia.gov/</a>



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- <sup>2</sup> <http://www.frontiergroup.org/reports/fg/following-money-2013>
- <sup>3</sup> <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/i/9-f/9-f-mrg.htm>
- <sup>4</sup> <http://www.uspirg.org/reports/usp/following-money-2012>
- <sup>5</sup> <http://www.frontiergroup.org/reports/fg/following-money-2013>
- <sup>6</sup> [http://uspirg.org/sites/pirg/files/reports/Following%20the%20Money%20vUS%20v2\\_0.pdf](http://uspirg.org/sites/pirg/files/reports/Following%20the%20Money%20vUS%20v2_0.pdf)
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- <sup>27</sup> Gerard Ward. Deputy Director. Council on Virginia's Future. 28 Mar. 2014.
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- <sup>29</sup> <http://www.nh.gov/transparentnh/where-the-money-goes/index.htm>
- <sup>30</sup> <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/LBA/Budget/OperatingBudget.aspx>
- <sup>31</sup> <http://www.mmb.state.mn.us/citizen-budget>
- <sup>32</sup> <http://www.nh.gov/transparentnh/where-the-money-comes-from/index.htm>
- <sup>33</sup> <http://www.maine.gov/osc/finanrept/revenue.shtml>
- <sup>34</sup> <http://www.yourmoney.nj.gov/transparency/revenue/>
- <sup>35</sup> <http://opendoor.ky.gov/transparency/Pages/Citizen-Tax-Calculator.aspx>
- <sup>36</sup> <http://www.nh.gov/transparentnh/where-the-money-goes/index.htm>
- <sup>37</sup> <http://www.nh.gov/transparentnh/search/index.htm>
- <sup>38</sup> <http://www.mmb.state.mn.us/fin/budget>
- <sup>39</sup> <http://www4.egov.nh.gov/paytransparency/>
- <sup>40</sup> <http://www.mmb.state.mn.us/citizen-people>
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