

WISPIRG: New report: Wisconsin receives 'A' for government spending transparency website

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MADISON – Wisconsin receives an “A” for its government spending transparency website, according to “[Following the Money 2018: How the 50 States Rate in Providing Online Access to Government Spending Data](#),” the eighth report of its kind by the WISPIRG Foundation and Frontier Group. Wisconsin’s spending transparency website ranked third best in the nation (tied with Minnesota), and was outperformed only by Ohio and West Virginia.

“Following the Money” grades each state’s transparency website from “A” to “F,” based on its content and user-friendliness. This year, for the first time, researchers worked with focus groups to see how well ordinary Americans could navigate the sites. With that new standard, most states’ grades dropped from our previous report. The report found that many states’ websites lack features that make them intuitive for users, such as a full search function, standardized data descriptions and interactive tools.

“When states are transparent about how they spend tax dollars, we all win: the state saves money, it can operate more efficiently and effectively, and citizens can feel more confident in their government,” said WISPIRG Foundation Director Peter Skopec. “That’s why Wisconsin should continue to invest in accessible, comprehensive, online spending data.”

While Wisconsin emerged as a leading state in the report’s analysis, there is room for improvement. Like most states, Wisconsin would benefit from looking toward new frontiers of state spending transparency. Wisconsin should:

- Work with city governments to bring checkbook-level spending transparency to

the local level.

- Continue to prioritize improving its disclosures about spending through special districts, quasi-public agencies, and public-private partnerships. This includes implementing recommendations of 2017's [legislative audit of the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation \(WEDC\)](#), which found that “WEDC cannot be certain about the numbers of jobs created or retained as a result of its awards.”

Wisconsin officials reported that the state’s transparency portal cost \$160,000 plus existing staff time at launch, and costs approximately \$174,442 to maintain annually. Wisconsin’s transparency website can be accessed at www.openbook.wi.gov.