



SPENDING TRANSPARENCY

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THE PROBLEM: Missouri’s local governments are not required to make their spending data accessible to the public.

THE SOLUTION: “*Checkbook*” transparency.

Local governments should be required to make their spending data a matter of public record—not only easy to access but easy to search as well. In the summer of 2018, the Treasurer’s office retooled the state’s transparency portal and included this kind of expenditure information for state spending, and legislation passed earlier in 2018 now requires school districts to provide similar spending information in a similar format. If the state and its school districts can be transparent, then cities, counties, and other taxing districts can be transparent, too.

WHO ELSE DOES IT? Most states have transparency tools that touch on spending, but few are as comprehensive as Ohio’s Online Checkbook, which includes state and local spending in its records.

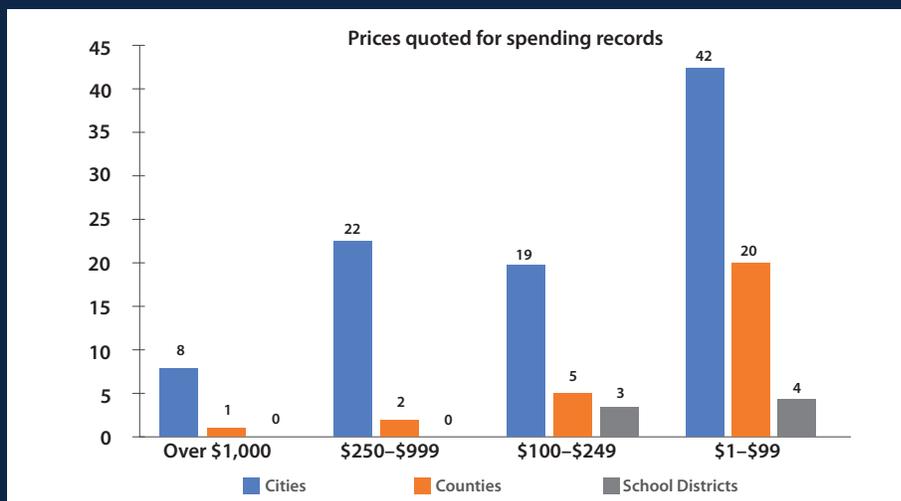
THE OPPORTUNITY: Missouri can improve government transparency and accountability by ensuring that all of Missouri’s local entities, most of which are free from in-depth state oversight, can at least be scrutinized by the public. Modern technology allows for government to crowd-source the task of keeping government honest, and while a checkbook transparency portal should never be viewed as a replacement for formal audits, it can serve as an intermediate step that ensures government actors at every level are spending taxpayer money appropriately.

KEY POINTS

- Missouri’s local governments are not required to keep their expenditure records electronically. This can make records less accessible and more expensive to request.

QUOTES FOR SPENDING RECORDS: CITIES, COUNTIES, AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS

Show-Me Institute researchers submitted Sunshine Law requests for spending information to cities, counties, and school districts throughout the state. The prices quoted for those records varied widely.



- The cost and ease of access to your local government’s spending records should not depend on where you live.
- Adding local governments and special taxing districts to the Treasurer’s spending transparency portal would allow taxpayers to monitor how their tax dollars are spent from the convenience of their electronic devices.
- The Missouri State Treasurer’s spending transparency portal needs to be made more robust through the inclusion of the date that expenses were incurred, the addresses of vendors, and a map feature so that viewers can visualize where money is being spent. In addition, data from the site should be downloadable into an Excel file.

SHOW-ME INSTITUTE RESOURCES

Blog Post: “Show-Me Institute Rolls Out Municipal Checkbook Project”

Blog Post: “Missouri’s Checkbook: 2000–2017”

Video: “The Cost of Transparency”