

## Transparency in Government Spending: An Idea Whose Time Has Come for Florida

### Talking Points

1. Prior to the advent of the Internet, full disclosure as required by the 1966 Federal Freedom of Information Act might have been met by providing access to printed copies of government records after filing a formal request, but no longer.
2. “Transparency” in today’s digital age is defined by full and easy online access to pertinent information that is comprehensible to the average citizen — complete information in a single, searchable, structured database that is available to the public at no cost.
3. Fulfilling the first set of requirements set forth by the 2006 Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act, the website [www.usaspending.gov](http://www.usaspending.gov) (launched in December 2007) allows taxpayers to search and browse information on all federal grants and contracts over the amount of \$25,000.
4. As of 2007, five states — Kansas, Texas, Oklahoma, Hawaii, and Minnesota — have passed transparency legislation requiring the creation of searchable online databases that provide detailed information on government expenditures (specifics vary), and at least 17 other states have transparency legislation pending.
5. Since 2006, increased disclosure of state expenditures has also come about through gubernatorial executive orders — Texas, Missouri, South Carolina, Louisiana, and Alaska — as well as through actions of statewide office holders — New York (Attorney General), Nebraska (State Treasurer), and Illinois (State Comptroller).
6. Fears of outrageous costs to implement transparency have thus far been unfounded—for example, Kansas’ transparency site is projected to save the state well over the cost of implementation, and Missouri minimized costs using current state staff and IT resources.
7. Florida needs to build upon the recent steps that have been made in its long tradition of “government in the sunshine”: Governor Crist’s Commission on Open Government Reform and his Open Government Bill of Rights, Attorney General McCollum’s Government Accountability Project initiated in cooperation with the University of Florida, and Chief Financial Officer Sink’s postings of annual reports submitted by local governments.
8. Floridians would be best served by a single, searchable online database for state expenditures — including grants, contracts, and other government spending — that would allow taxpayers to perform searches down to the individual transaction level while at the same time providing access to the actual expenditure document — the grant, contract, purchase order, check, etc.
9. Local government entities should also be required to disclose detailed information on their expenditures on their own website using the same format as the state site. This requirement should apply to all local government entities, but in cases of compliance issues with smaller districts, could be phased in.
10. Ideally, a statewide portal would provide access to the state expenditure information, while at the same time serving as a clearing house for the local information.
11. At a minimum, the following information should be disclosed for each expenditure, both at the state and local level: recipient (with principal location/residence), amount, date, expending government entity, purpose of the expenditure, funding source, and a hyperlink to the actual expenditure document.