Question of the Month: A Look at State Policies and Practices Regarding Public Employee Salaries

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Friday, July 27, 2012 at 04:55 PM

Stateline Midwest ~ April 2012 [2]

Question: Which states in the Midwest post the salaries of employees on their websites?

Answer: As part of websites created over the past five years to improve state-spending transparency, Illinois [3], Indiana [4], Ohio [5] and South Dakota [6] post the salaries of public employees. In Kansas [7], wages can be viewed by job title and agency.

According to the Center for Fiscal Accountability [8], a project of Americans for Tax Reform, making this information available is part of a broader effort by states to improve public access to information on how taxpayer dollars are spent.


The center says these actions reflect a national “spending transparency movement” that began in 2006 with the passage of federal legislation.

The U.S. Public Interest Group, which regularly reviews and grades states’ online transparency systems, says states have made tremendous strides in recent years, providing more and more data on spending. Greater transparency, PIRG says, can help restore public confidence in government.

The group’s latest report card, “Following the Money 2012 [12],” was released in March. It focuses on the availability of “checkbook-level” detail on government contracts, tax subsidies and grants to businesses.

Indiana was one of seven U.S. states given an “A” or “A-” for having easily searchable, detailed data on its website. On the flip side, Iowa was one of five states given an “F” for providing “limited or superficial information about government expenditures.”

Sunshine Review, a nonprofit organization dedicated to state and local government transparency, grades state websites based on a 10-point transparency checklist [13]. This list includes a review of websites to see if state budgets, government contracts, and taxes and fees are posted. But it also includes non-spending criteria — whether state audits are posted, for example, or whether
information on ethics rules and the process for reporting ethics violations is available.

According to Sunshine Review, Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin have the strongest websites in the region. Each state was given an A- and received low marks in only one category — for a lack of information on taxpayer-funded lobbying, a shortcoming that the group says exists in all 11 Midwestern states.

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