



Minnesota Open CheckBook

Open Government

State of Minnesota

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Executive Summary

Government transparency and fiscal accountability are important principles in managing Minnesota state government. It is part of a national trend of governments: being more open with information about spending to assure taxpayer money is well spent. In fact, many states are developing searchable data and websites that allow the public, media, and interested groups to view financial information in searchable and downloadable formats. Only a few years ago, it was apparent that Minnesota needed to get up-to-speed on the trend.

In 2014, the [U.S. Public Interest Research Group](#) (U.S. PIRG), a consumer protection group, gave Minnesota a grade of “D+” in providing online access to government spending data. The U.S. PIRG said Minnesota was “lagging” in its efforts to provide checkbook-level spending to taxpayers.

Minnesota Management & Budget (MMB), the agency responsible for providing systems for daily business operations and information access and analysis, created Minnesota Open CheckBook. The open checkbook is designed to provide a current picture of the state’s operating budget, as well as daily expenditures made by state agencies-directly from the state’s accounting system. Information is updated nightly - showing budgeted amounts available to agencies, amounts budgeted in specific categories, purchase orders, contracts, grants and actual payments made for goods and services.



The effort was a huge boost in transparency into Minnesota state finances. In fact in the [2015 U.S. PIRG report](#), Minnesota went from a “D+” to a “B,” making it number four in the top 10 most improved transparency websites from 2014 – 2015.

You can find Minnesota’s Open Checkbook at <http://mn.gov/mmb/transparency-mn/>.

Concept

One of Minnesota Management and Budget's goals was to make Minnesota's state government finances and operations more transparent and accountable to citizens. To that end, MMB created TransparencyMN, a single site designed to provide access to information about how tax dollars are spent to support state government programs. One component of that site is Minnesota Open CheckBook.

Oracle Business Intelligence Enterprise Edition had previously been selected as the software to access data from the new SWIFT Data Warehouse, a storage site for a variety of state data. (MN Open CheckBook also uses this software.) MN Open CheckBook provides the public with direct access to state government spending information from SWIFT by making access to the state's operating budget and associated expenditure records available online. In addition it provides access to information contained in SWIFT about state contracts, grants and purchase orders. The application integrates and provides access to very complex data contained in SWIFT through an understandable, easily used interface. This allows users to search, drill and easily download the results of searches.

In meetings with MMB and the Minnesota Department of Administration, it was determined that there needed to be five separate content areas: Budgets, Payments, Contracts, Grants and Purchase Orders. Requirements were determined for each content area, along with logic to be used in securing private data about individuals.

Using an iterative process, the Minnesota Open CheckBook application was developed and each content area was prototyped. These prototypes were reviewed by MMB and the Minnesota Materials Management Division of the Department of Administration and refined as requested.



Significance

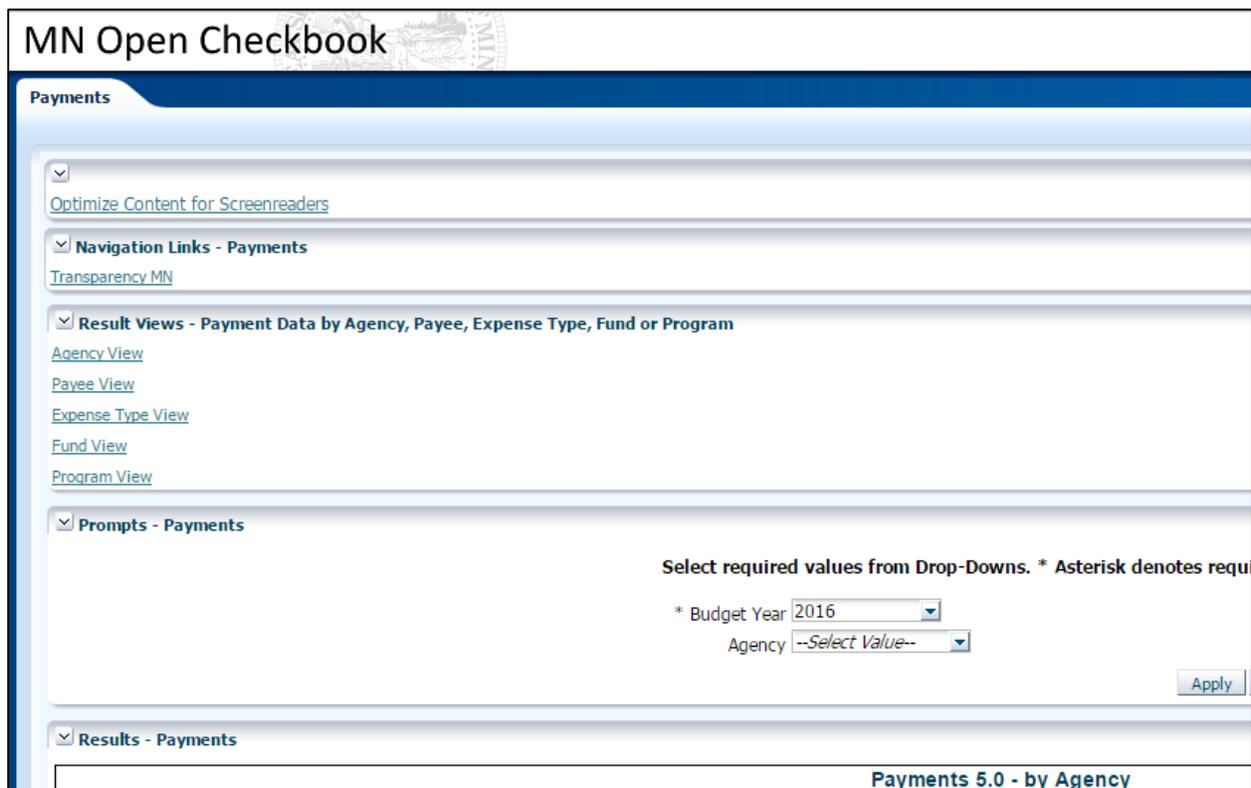
Most states have transparency websites. These efforts began in 2009 under the reporting requirements American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), which was designed to promote economic recovery following the great recession.

Minnesota's efforts began about the same time. The effort was known as Minnesota Transparency Accountability Project (TAP). At that time MMB's website provided detail, not only on federal ARRA projects in Minnesota, but also provided initial direct access to

payment and professional-technical contract data for FY 2007-11 under the state's old accounting system (MAPS).

The accounting system was replaced and the new system, SWIFT, began operation in FY 2012. As part of the SWIFT development project, Minnesota state statute was amended in 2009 (MS 16A.056 - Searchable Database) requiring direct access to accounting data for appropriation, expenditures, payments, contracts, grants, tax expenditures, and state audits.

The system meets the [MN.IT Services priority](#) of delivering digital services to citizens.



The screenshot displays the 'MN Open Checkbook' website interface, specifically the 'Payments' section. The page features a blue header with the title 'MN Open Checkbook' and a sub-header 'Payments'. Below the header, there are several collapsible sections:

- Optimize Content for Screenreaders**: A link for accessibility.
- Navigation Links - Payments**: Includes a link for 'Transparency MN'.
- Result Views - Payment Data by Agency, Payee, Expense Type, Fund or Program**: Offers multiple view options: 'Agency View', 'Payee View', 'Expense Type View', 'Fund View', and 'Program View'.
- Prompts - Payments**: Contains a search filter section with the instruction 'Select required values from Drop-Downs. * Asterisk denotes required'. It includes two dropdown menus: '* Budget Year' (set to '2016') and 'Agency' (set to '--Select Value--'). An 'Apply' button is located to the right of these dropdowns.
- Results - Payments**: A section for displaying search results, currently showing 'Payments 5.0 - by Agency'.

Impact

MN Open Checkbook makes complex financial information accessible and understandable to citizens, providing information on how their tax dollars are spent in a concise and user-friendly format. Both detailed and summary financial information is available to the public. A robust user interface is provided that allows users to search, drill and download this information. Minnesota's transparency ranking by the USPIRG was increased from a D+ to a B, making it number 4 in the top 10 most improved transparency websites from 2014 – 2015 as a direct result of this project.