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Texas-Style Transparency

by [Rob Bluey \(blog/789\)](#) | July 8, 2008 at 5:18 PM

Last month I offered a [couple examples](#) (<http://www.thenextright.com/rob-bluey/state-think-tanks-serve-as-online-labs>) of the good work being done online by state-based think tanks. There's another noteworthy project to highlight today from Texas.

As one of the leading states in the area of government transparency, Texas is already a step ahead of most states when it comes to giving citizens access to information. But what the state lacked was a single source to find what's publicly available. Enter the [Texas Public Policy Foundation](#) (<http://www.texaspolicy.com/>).

The Austin-based foundation today launched [TexasBudgetSource.com](#) (<http://www.texasbudgetsource.com/>), which was designed to be a one-stop shop for spending data from state and local governments. The project's goal was to put in the hands of citizens the information they need to hold their elected officials accountable.

The foundation's president, Brooke Rollins, framed it this way:

Citizens become better informed voters when they can see how their tax dollars are being spent. Spending transparency also puts governments on notice that they can no longer get away with spending tax dollars in wasteful, duplicative, or self-serving ways.

Giving citizens access to this information is step No. 1. Now it's up to the good people of Texas to use it.

When I spoke to Talmadge Heflin, director of the foundation's Center for Fiscal Policy, he told me the new site is aimed at helping people interested in state government spending as well as those who want to know about their local school district. More than 150 school districts have already posted their check registers online, giving the public a glimpse at information never before seen. Heflin, a former chairman of the Texas House Appropriations Committee, said he hopes the website reduces the barriers to accessing such information.

Among the other resources available:

- A "spend-o-meter" keeps a running tab on how much Texas state government has spending during the current budget cycle.
- Links to online budget information (where available) of all 254 Texas counties and Texas' 25 largest cities.
- Links to the online check registers of more than 150 Texas independent school districts.

If you're attending the [RightOnline](#) (<http://www.rightonline.com/>) conference in Austin next week, you'll be able to learn a whole lot more about the project. Based on my initial review, it's certainly something other state-based think tanks ought to copy.

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Comments

Texas needs transparency - particularly at the local level ([/rob-bluey/texas-style-transparency#comment-3992](#))

Submitted by Peggy Venable on Tue, 07/08/2008 - 23:12.

We at Americans for Prosperity applaud what TPPF has done in setting up this website. Our citizen watchdogs can use this site and add to the information. It will be a valuable tool to hold government accountable.

This will be featured at our Defending the American Dream summit in Austin July 18 & 19 along with the online training to help those on the Right be more effective online.

www.DefendingTheDream.org/TX (<http://www.DefendingTheDream.org/TX>)