

# Grading State Disclosure 2003

*Evaluating states' efforts to bring sunlight to political money*

A Report by the California Voter Foundation,  
with the Center for Governmental Studies  
and the UCLA School of Law

A Publication of the Campaign Disclosure Project,  
Sponsored by a Grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts

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Grading State Disclosure is a study of the Campaign Disclosure Project, which seeks to bring greater transparency and accountability to money in state politics through assessments of state disclosure programs as well as the development of a model state campaign finance disclosure law. The Campaign Disclosure Project is a collaborative effort of the UCLA School of Law, the Center for Governmental Studies and the California Voter Foundation and is sponsored by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts.

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## Executive Summary

A nationwide assessment of state campaign finance disclosure has found that 33 states received passing grades, while 17 states do not have satisfactory campaign finance disclosure programs and failed the assessment.

Grading State Disclosure is a study by the Campaign Disclosure Project – a collaboration of the California Voter Foundation, the Center for Governmental Studies and the UCLA School of Law – and is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts. The study is the first comprehensive, comparative study of candidate campaign finance disclosure laws and practices in the 50 states. While there are signs of progress and some innovative practices throughout the country, the study found that a vast majority of the states still have significant room to improve campaign finance disclosure programs for political candidates.

Thirty-three states received passing grades in the study, which evaluated four specific areas of campaign finance disclosure: state campaign disclosure laws; electronic filing programs; accessibility of campaign finance information; and the usability of state disclosure web sites. Of the passing states, only two received grades in the A or B range. The top-ranked state, Washington, received an A- and the second-ranked state, Illinois, received a B. Rounding out the top ten were Massachusetts, Ohio, Texas, Hawaii, Florida, New Jersey, California and Michigan, all of which received grades in the C range. Seventeen states received F grades.

Significant findings include:

- 29 states require disclosure of a contributor's occupation and employer.
- 35 states require late contribution reporting.
- 49 states require a description of an expenditure.
- 40 states require independent expenditures to be reported.
- 20 states have some type of mandatory requirement for electronic filing of campaign finance reports.
- Of the 20, twelve states require electronic filing by candidates for both statewide and legislative office, and eight require electronic filing for statewide candidates only.
- 16 states allow voluntary electronic filing by candidates for statewide and legislative office.
- 14 states have no electronic filing program.
- 47 states post campaign finance data on their web sites.
- 3 states – Montana, South Carolina and Wyoming – have no campaign finance data available on their web sites.
- 27 states provide searchable databases of contributions online.
- 17 states provide searchable databases of expenditures online.
- 48 states provide some information about campaign finance restrictions and disclosure reporting requirements online.
- 2 state disclosure agencies, in Arkansas and Delaware, provide no explanatory information about campaign finance laws on their web sites.

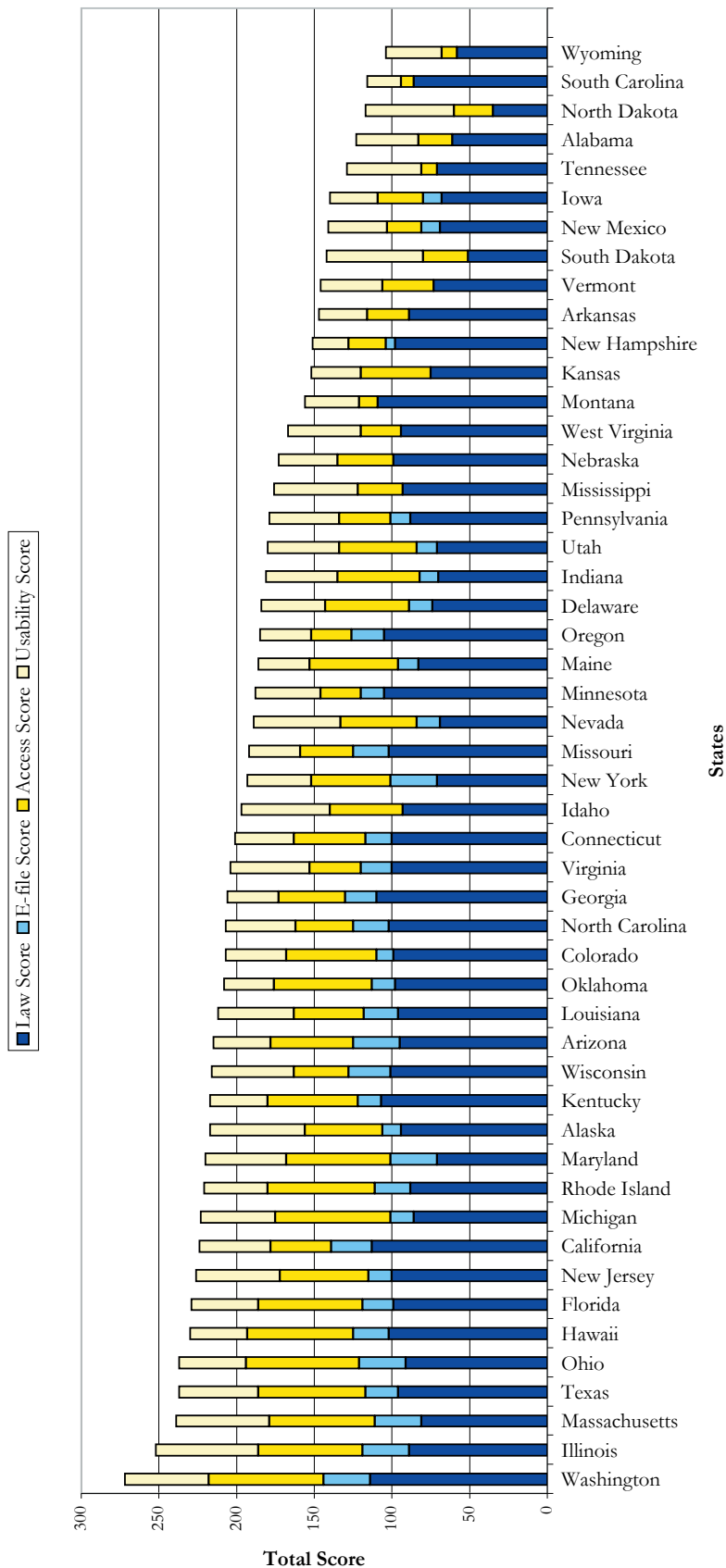
The findings of the study show that many changes could be made to improve state disclosure programs in each of the categories that were researched. States that performed well in one or two of the categories often performed very poorly in the other categories, and as a result did not receive good grades. In

particular, significant progress can be made in the areas of accessibility to campaign finance information and web site usability. Half of the states failed in both data accessibility and web site usability and no state received an A in usability.

Grades were based on criteria created by the Project partners, the Project's Advisory Board and a panel of expert judges, who also assisted with the grading process. The Project set a high, but not impossible, standard for state campaign finance disclosure programs. The grades were based on a state's performance in the area of candidate disclosure only; lobbying, conflict of interest, ballot measure and party organization disclosure were not considered.

Assessments of each state were based on legal research, web site visits and research, web site testing by outside evaluators and responses from state disclosure agency staff and activists working on campaign financing at the state level.

Comparative State Performance



## Campaign Finance Disclosure in the States: An Overview

### State Campaign Finance Disclosure Laws

- Number of states that require reporting of last-minute contributions: 35
- Number of states that require a contributor's occupation and employer to be disclosed: 29
  - Number that require a contributor's occupation to be disclosed, but not employer: 5
  - Number that require a contributor's employer to be disclosed, but not occupation: 2
- Number of states that do not require contributor occupation or employer information: 14
- Number of states that require expenditures to be described in campaign disclosure reports: 49
- Number of states that require both a descriptive code and a plain language description of each expenditure: 9
  - Number of states that require a plain language expenditure description only: 39
  - Number of states that require descriptive expenditure codes only: 1
- Number of states that require disclosure of subvendor expenditures made on behalf of a campaign: 22
  - Number of states that require independent expenditures to be disclosed: 40
  - Number of states that require last-minute independent expenditures to be disclosed: 23
- Number of states that direct their disclosure agencies to conduct "desk reviews" of campaign finance reports: 26
- Number of states that direct their disclosure agencies to conduct field audits of campaign finance reports: 16

### Electronic Filing of Campaign Finance Reports

- Number of states that require candidates to electronically file campaign disclosure reports: 20
- Number of these 20 states that require electronic filing by both legislative and statewide candidates: 12
- Number of these 20 states that have an electronic filing mandate for statewide candidates and a voluntary electronic filing program for legislative candidates: 8
  - Number of these 20 states that offer candidates an "opt out" clause: 3
  - Number of states with a voluntary electronic filing program: 16
  - Number of states with no electronic filing program: 14

### Disclosure Data - Access and Usability

- Number of state disclosure web sites that tell the public what data can and cannot be found on the site: 25
- Number of sites that provide information about campaign finance restrictions and disclosure reporting requirements: 44
  - Number of sites that provide no information about campaign finance restrictions or disclosure requirements: 2
- Number of sites with information about either campaign finance restrictions or disclosure requirements, but not both: 4
  - Number of state disclosure agencies that post campaign finance data on the Internet: 47
  - Number of state disclosure agencies that are posting no campaign finance data online: 3
- Number of state disclosure web sites with searchable, online databases of contributions: 27
  - Number of state disclosure web sites with searchable databases of expenditures: 17
  - Number of searchable expenditure databases in states without electronic filing: 0
  - Number of states where disclosure data can be sorted online: 20
- Number of states with electronic filing that allow the public to download disclosure data from the agency's web site: 22
  - Number of states without electronic filing that allow the public to download data from the agency's web site: 2

Thanks to Harper's magazine for permission to use its "index" format.

## State-by-State Grade and Ranking Chart

State	Grade	Rank	Law Grade	Law Rank	E-Filing Grade	E-Filing Rank	Accessibility Grade	Accessibility Rank	Usability Grade	Usability Rank
Alabama	F	47	F	47	F	37	F	45	F	30
Alaska	C-	13	C+	23	F	31	D	20	B-	3
Arizona	C-	16	C+	22	A+	1	C-	17	F	36
Arkansas	F	41	C	28	F	37	F	39	F	47
California	C	9	A	2	B	9	F	28	D-	19
Colorado	D+	19	B-	15	F	35	C+	12	F	32
Connecticut	D+	23	B	12	F	20	D-	24	F	33
Delaware	D-	31	D-	37	F	21	C-	16	F	27
Florida	C	7	B-	15	D	17	B+	8	F	24
Georgia	D+	21	A-	3	D	17	F	27	F	41
Hawaii	C	6	B	8	C	10	A-	6	F	36
Idaho	D	24	C+	25	F	37	D-	23	C	5
Illinois	B	2	C	28	A+	1	B+	8	B+	1
Indiana	D-	32	F	43	F	31	C-	17	D-	19
Iowa	F	45	F	46	F	31	F	36	F	47
Kansas	F	39	D-	36	F	37	D-	25	F	45
Kentucky	C-	13	B+	5	F	21	C+	12	F	36
Louisiana	C-	17	B-	20	C	14	D-	25	D	15
Maine	D-	29	D+	34	F	28	C	14	F	41
Maryland	C	12	F	39	A+	1	B+	8	D+	12
Massachusetts	C+	3	D+	35	A+	1	A-	6	B-	4
Michigan	C	10	C-	32	F	21	A+	1	D	16
Minnesota	D-	28	B+	6	F	21	F	40	F	26
Mississippi	F	35	C+	25	F	37	F	36	C-	8
Missouri	D	26	B	8	C	10	F	32	F	41

## State-by-State Grade and Ranking Chart (continued)

State	Grade	Rank	Law Grade	Law Rank	E-Filing Grade	E-Filing Rank	Accessibility Grade	Accessibility Rank	Usability Grade	Usability Rank
Montana	F	38	A-	4	F	37	F	47	F	40
Nebraska	F	36	B-	15	F	37	F	30	F	33
Nevada	D	27	F	44	F	21	D	22	C	7
New Hampshire	F	40	B-	18	F	36	F	44	F	49
New Jersey	C	8	B	12	F	21	C	14	C-	8
New Mexico	F	44	F	44	F	31	F	45	F	33
New York	D	25	F	39	A+	1	D+	19	F	27
North Carolina	D+	19	B	8	C	10	F	29	D-	22
North Dakota	F	48	F	50	F	37	F	43	C	5
Ohio	C+	4	C	27	A+	1	A+	3	F	24
Oklahoma	D+	18	B-	18	F	21	B	11	F	45
Oregon	D-	30	B+	6	C-	15	F	40	F	41
Pennsylvania	F	34	C	30	F	28	F	33	D-	22
Rhode Island	C	11	C	30	C	10	A-	4	F	27
South Carolina	F	49	C-	32	F	37	F	50	F	50
South Dakota	F	43	F	49	F	37	F	36	B-	2
Tennessee	F	46	F	39	F	37	F	48	D	16
Texas	C+	4	B-	20	C-	15	A-	4	D+	13
Utah	D-	33	F	39	F	28	D	20	D-	19
Vermont	F	42	D-	38	F	37	F	33	F	30
Virginia	D+	22	B	12	D	17	F	33	D+	13
Washington	A-	1	A	1	A+	1	A+	1	C-	8
West Virginia	F	37	C+	23	F	37	F	40	D-	18
Wisconsin	C-	15	B	11	A-	8	F	31	C-	11
Wyoming	F	50	F	48	F	37	F	48	F	39

# I.

# Introduction

- The Grading Process
- The Grading Criteria
- Methodology

As states across the nation grapple with budgetary crises and begin to prepare for the 2004 Presidential election cycle, the disclosure of money in politics is more relevant than ever. Money plays a critical role in elections, providing the dollars necessary for campaign expenses. When state governments make decisions about which programs to cut, the winners and losers are often closely tied to political contributions. Good campaign finance disclosure allows the public to “follow the money” and make more informed voting choices as well as more easily determine which groups may be receiving greater access in the halls of government.

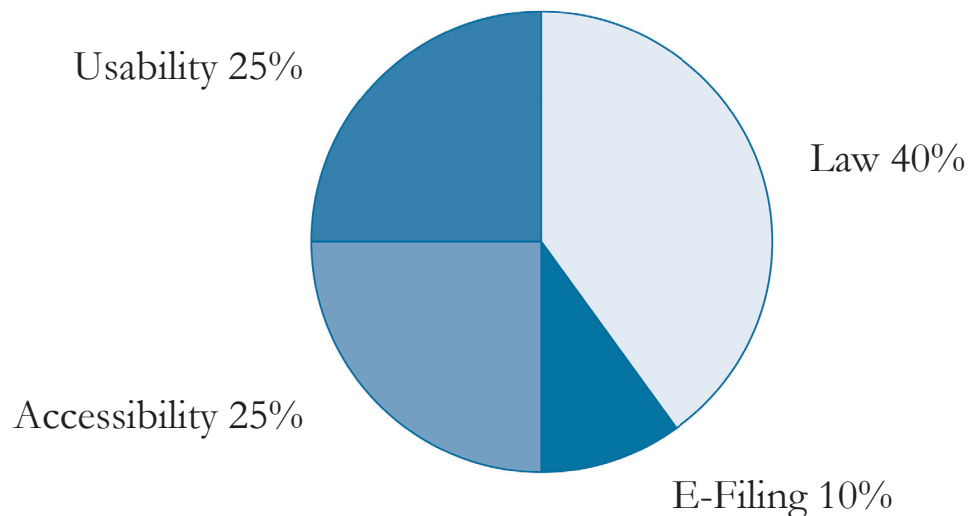
States are increasingly more timely in their dissemination of campaign finance information. Unfortunately, the data are often not provided in formats that help the public understand broader national trends in giving and spending, or connect state contributions and expenditures to national elections. The practice of passing soft money between state and national parties makes it difficult to shine light on the sources and uses of campaign contributions.

The Project seeks to bring greater transparency and accountability to money in state politics through assessments of state disclosure programs as well as the development of a model state campaign finance disclosure law. The Campaign Disclosure Project is a collaborative effort of the UCLA School of Law, the Center for Governmental Studies and the California Voter Foundation and is funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts.

## The Grading Process

The Grading State Disclosure Criteria was written and developed by the California Voter Foundation in consultation with the Grading State Disclosure judges, the Campaign Disclosure Project Advisory Board and project partners. The Project set a high, but not impossible, standard for state campaign finance disclosure programs. Efforts were made to balance the concerns of practitioners and government officials against the very important need for timely, complete and effective disclosure. The criteria used for this first round of grading will be applied in subsequent years, so that changes and improvements in state level campaign disclosure can be measured over time.

Four areas of performance make-up the grading criteria: Campaign Disclosure Laws; Electronic Filing Programs; Disclosure Content Accessibility; and Online Contextual and Technical Usability. The strength of a state's campaign disclosure law is worth 40 percent of its grade; the quality of electronic filing is worth ten percent of the grade; and accessibility to data and web site usability are each worth 25 percent.



A 300-point system was developed to score each state. Points were awarded based on a state's performance solely in the area of state-level candidate disclosure. Ranks were assigned based on points, and in several instances one or more states tied for a particular rank. This is especially the case in the Electronic Filing category, where multiple states were tied for both first and last place. Grades are based on each state's total point score, utilizing the following grading percentages:

- A: 90 – 100 % (Excellent)
- B: 80 – 89 % (Good)
- C: 70 – 79 % (Average)
- D: 60 – 69 % (Below Average/Passing)
- F: 59 % or lower (Failing)

In addition to an overall grade and rank, the states have also been graded and ranked in each of the four grading categories. In order to better measure progress over time, the grades are not curved, weighted or scaled.

## The Grading Criteria

In the criteria, significant weight was placed on the comprehensiveness of state Campaign Disclosure Laws. Good campaign disclosure laws require the reporting of detailed information about contributions and expenditures. In particular, the disclosure of some critical pieces of information – including a contributor’s occupation and employer, subvendor information for expenditures, and reporting of last minute contributions and independent expenditures – all enhance the public’s ability to access campaign finance data in a timely fashion. States require the disclosure of detailed contribution and expenditure information at varying thresholds, but the criteria did not evaluate the appropriateness of these thresholds (although they are mentioned in the findings for each state.)

Occupation and employer data for campaign contributors is crucial for categorizing donations or identifying efforts by large corporations and organizations to bundle their employees’ contributions. Information about subvendors, including credit card providers and campaign consultants, is important in order to capture campaign expenses that might otherwise go unreported. Reporting of last-minute contributions and independent expenditures, prior to an election, helps voters identify which individuals and organizations are conducting last-minute efforts to influence the outcome of the election. Strong enforcement and frequent reporting of campaign finances by candidates are also necessary components of meaningful disclosure laws.

In the Electronic Filing category, great value was placed on whether states have passed laws mandating the electronic filing of campaign finance disclosure information. The receipt of campaign finance data in an electronic format often leads to the availability of the information on the Internet. If data is submitted in an electronic format, the agency can post data online more quickly and in formats that allow for more meaningful analysis of campaign finance reports. Many states with electronic filing have created searchable databases of contributions and expenditures, or made data available in formats that can be sorted or downloaded. While voluntary electronic filing does lead to some expanded accessibility to campaign finance data, mandatory electronic filing is preferred because it is more likely to result in timely, comprehensive online disclosure.

The Disclosure Content Accessibility category evaluated the degree to which the content of disclosure reports is available to the public both on paper and on the Internet. The states’ efforts to make paper records accessible to the public, such as the ease of obtaining records from a distance, the cost of the records and the length of time it takes to obtain the records, was part of this assessment. Significant weight was placed on the use of the Internet to publish state campaign finance disclosure information, based on the Project’s belief that the Internet is the most effective and affordable way for state agencies to make campaign finance data accessible to the public.

In the criteria, importance was given to the scope of campaign finance data on disclosure web sites and the ways in which that data could be analyzed. This included the availability of features such as databases of contributions and expenditures that allow searching across all filers (both electronic and paper) and on a number of fields. Whether states allow the public to sort data by reordering categories of information, browse records, or download data so it can be analyzed offline, were factors. State disclosure sites were also evaluated for offering and explaining “smart search” features, such as partial name and “name sounds like” lookups.

Of equal importance to the accessibility of campaign finance records was Online Contextual and Technical Usability – the degree to which state disclosure web sites are technically and contextually “user-

friendly” to the public. This category was a combination of web research by Project staff and usability testing by outside testers. States that did well in usability were those that: have disclosure web sites that are easy to locate from the state’s home page; provide information explaining the state’s campaign finance laws, disclosure requirements and reporting periods; provide instructions for how to access the data on the site; publish analyses or overviews of campaign finance activity; publish both original and amended campaign finance reports; and give a clear explanation of which candidates and reports are online.

Significant weight was placed on the availability of analyses of campaign finance activity, which give the public a better understanding of how one candidate’s fundraising and spending compares to another, and also how campaign finance trends change over time. Given the current budgetary situation in many states, however, resources may not allow for in-depth, comprehensive analyses. In those cases, a simple chart of total amounts raised and spent by individual candidates would serve a similar purpose.

Also of importance in the usability section of the criteria, was the posting and clear labeling of amended campaign finance reports on the web, with the retention of original filings online. Being able to view original and amended reports side-by-side helps the public determine when and what changes have been made to those reports.

The full Grading State Disclosure criteria are included in an appendix at the end of this report.

## Methodology

Assessments of each state’s campaign finance disclosure program were based on legal research, web site visits and research, web site testing by outside evaluators and responses from disclosure agency staff and activists working on campaign financing at the state level. The Project researched, but did not score states on, whether state electronic filing programs have been implemented on schedule based on findings from prior research conducted in 1999. (Please see “Digital Sunlight: A Look Back, a Look Ahead” for an analysis of progress made by the states in electronic filing.)

The UCLA School of Law and the Center for Governmental Studies researched state campaign finance disclosure laws. The legal research was conducted from July 2002 through March 2003 and was based on state laws as of December 31, 2002. Changes in the laws that were made or implemented in 2003 will be reflected in the next round of grades. Statutes, regulations, rules and forms were evaluated in each state. Upon completion of the research, the Project sent the research findings to officials in each state for verification and any discrepancies identified by the state officials were evaluated.

The California Voter Foundation (CVF) conducted research on state electronic filing programs, accessibility to disclosure records and online contextual and technical usability through a variety of methods. Each state agency responsible for overseeing campaign finance was asked to respond to a questionnaire – either by phone interview or in writing. All 50 state agencies responded to this request for information. CVF also sought input from activists working on campaign finance issues at the state level; 18 responded to CVF’s questionnaire either by phone or in writing. CVF researched campaign finance disclosure information on the web sites of each of the 50 states. A web site evaluation form was created to ensure uniformity in the research and each state web site was evaluated twice by CVF staff members between January and June 2003.

The UCLA School of Law conducted usability tests of state disclosure web sites in May and June 2003.

The goal of the usability tests was to determine if the disclosure information provided on the Internet is accessible to the average citizen. Usability testers, recruited from the undergraduate student population at UCLA, were asked to perform specific tasks on each state's web site. The time and number of mouseclicks it took to complete each task were measured.

The tasks were as follows:

- Locate the state's disclosure web site starting from the state's homepage;
- Ascertain the total contributions received by the incumbent governor in his or her last campaign (testers were given a list of incumbent governors that included the year they were last elected); and,
- Provide the name and amount contributed by any individual contributor to the incumbent governor's last campaign.

The second measure of usability was a survey in which each tester was asked to evaluate his or her experiences on each site. The states were assigned randomly to testers, with each tester testing five different states. The experiment was administered twice to thirty different students, and six different students tested each state. A more detailed explanation of the usability test is included as an appendix to this report.

Following the completion of the research and usability testing, CVF compiled preliminary scores for each state that were reviewed by the Grading State Disclosure Judges before final scores, grades and ranks were determined.

## II.

# Findings

- Campaign Disclosure Laws
- Electronic Filing Programs
- Disclosure Content Accessibility
- Online Contextual and Technical Usability

Thirty-three states received passing grades in the Grading State Disclosure study, while 17 states were found to have less than satisfactory campaign finance disclosure programs and failed the assessment. Washington state received the only grade in the A range, and Illinois received the only B. Fifteen states received grades in the C range, and 16 received grades in the D range. (See the attached charts for a complete listing of grades and ranks.)

The top ten states overall are: Washington (A-), Illinois (B), Massachusetts (C+), Ohio (C+), Texas (C+), Hawaii (C), Florida (C), New Jersey (C), California (C), and Michigan (C).

The bottom ten states (all of which received an F), in rank order from 41 to 50, are: Arkansas, Vermont, South Dakota, New Mexico, Iowa, Tennessee, Alabama, North Dakota, South Carolina, and Wyoming.

The findings of the study show that while many states have good campaign finance disclosure laws and are doing an adequate job of making campaign finance information available to the public, there is still room for improvement across the country in all four of the disclosure categories of the study, and particularly in the areas of Disclosure Content Accessibility and Online Contextual and Technical Usability.

## Campaign Disclosure Laws

Of the four categories assessed in the Grading State Disclosure study, states across the country performed best in the area of Campaign Finance Disclosure Laws. Four state laws received grades in the A range, and there were more B grades, 17, in this category than in any of the others. Twelve Cs and five Ds round out the passing states; twelve states failed the disclosure law assessment.

- 29 states require a contributor's occupation and employer to be disclosed.
- 5 states require only a contributor's occupation to be disclosed.
- 2 states require only a contributor's employer to be disclosed.
- 35 states require late contribution reporting.
- 49 states require a description of an expenditure.
- 22 states require subvendor information to be reported.
- 40 states require independent expenditures to be reported.
- 23 states require last-minute independent expenditure reporting.
- 26 states conduct mandatory desk reviews.
- 16 states conduct mandatory field audits.

States with the strongest disclosure laws, in rank order from one to eight, are: Washington; California; Georgia; Montana; Kentucky; Minnesota and Oregon (tied); and Hawaii, Missouri and North Carolina (tied).

States with the weakest disclosure laws, in rank order from 39 to 50, are: Maryland, New York, Tennessee and Utah, (tied); Indiana; Nevada and New Mexico (tied); Iowa; Alabama; Wyoming; South Dakota; and North Dakota.

The study found that all states require disclosure of some itemized contributor information, and in almost all states there is a threshold for the reporting of those contribution details. (Contributions below the threshold are reported in aggregate, but not itemized.) Twenty-nine states require the disclosure of both occupation and employer information for contributors, and an additional seven states require one or the other, but not both. Last-minute contributions must be disclosed prior to the election in 35 states.

Every state but North Dakota requires the reporting of campaign expenditures, and 21 states have no threshold for disclosure of individual expenditures, instead requiring campaigns to itemize each expense even for amounts as low as one dollar. All 49 states that require expenditure disclosure also require descriptions of expenditures, either through a plain-language description, the use of a descriptive code or both. Twenty-two states require reporting of subvendor expenses, such as a breakdown of credit card or consulting bills. While 40 states require the reporting of independent expenditures, only 23 states require last-minute independent expenditures to be reported before the election.

Some would argue that a state's campaign finance disclosure laws are only as good as their enforcement provisions; to that end the study found that many of the states are lacking. Twenty-six states conduct mandatory desk reviews of campaign finance disclosure filings, and 16 states conduct mandatory field audits of campaign finance-related receipts and documents. Some states that do not require such reviews by law, do conduct them anyway, but in general, enforcement is an area of campaign disclosure law that could be improved in most states.

## Electronic Filing Programs

While over two-thirds of the states have electronic filing programs in place, there is still a lot of progress to be made in this area. Seven states received A+ grades in the Electronic Filing category, one state received an A-, and one received a B. Seven states received C grades, and three received Ds. Thirty-one states received Fs, more than in any other category. The failing states include some with voluntary electronic filing, due primarily to the value the Grading State Disclosure criteria places on mandatory electronic filing.

- 20 states have some type of mandatory requirement for electronic filing of campaign finance reports.
- Of the 20, twelve states require electronic filing by candidates for both statewide and legislative office, and eight require electronic filing for statewide candidates only.
- Three states – Florida, Oregon and Texas – will waive or allow candidates to opt-out of the mandatory electronic filing requirement.
- 16 states allow voluntary electronic filing by candidates for statewide and legislative office.
- 14 states have no electronic filing program.
- Of 36 states with an electronic filing program, 28 say they have adequate funding for their programs and 35 offer some type of training or technical assistance to electronic filers.

States with the strongest electronic filing programs, in rank order from one to ten, are: Arizona, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio and Washington (tied); Wisconsin; California; and Hawaii, Missouri, North Carolina and Rhode Island (tied).

States with no electronic filing (all tied for the last place rank) are: Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

The study found that 36 states have programs in place for electronic filing of campaign finance information. Twenty states have mandatory requirements for electronic filing of campaign finance reports. Of the 20, twelve states require electronic filing by candidates for both statewide and legislative office, and eight require electronic filing for statewide office candidates, but offer voluntary programs for legislative candidates. The thresholds that trigger mandatory electronic filing vary by state and type of candidate, and range in amount from zero (Arizona) to \$250,000 (Connecticut). Three of the 20 states with mandatory electronic filing will waive or allow candidates to opt-out of the electronic filing requirement. Florida and Oregon will grant waivers if a candidate states he or she is unable to file electronically, and Texas allows candidates to opt-out if they state they do not use computers to keep track of campaign finances.

In addition to those states with mandates for electronic filing, 16 states offer voluntary electronic filing programs for statewide and legislative candidates. Fourteen states have no electronic filing; however one of those states, South Carolina, recently passed sweeping campaign finance legislation that includes a legal requirement for electronic filing, and will have a program in place soon.

Regarding the adequacy of funding for electronic filing programs, the study found that of the 36 state agencies that have programs in place, a majority, 28, receive enough funding to successfully carry out those programs. Another encouraging finding is that 35 of the 36 states with electronic filing provide some level of training and/or technical support to filers, with only New Hampshire reporting that it does

not offer that service.

The study found that most states that require candidates to file reports electronically also provide free filing software or a web-based filing system. Just four of the 20 states with an electronic filing requirement do not, and those are California, Florida, Oregon, (all of which have put forth a standard filing format and refer filers to approved outside software vendors), and Virginia, which charges \$35 for its filing software. Web-based filing systems seem to be the preference of states with voluntary electronic filing, whereas states with mandatory electronic filing tend to offer either free software or a combination of software and web-based filing.

## Disclosure Content Accessibility

Disclosure Content Accessibility is an area in which a majority of states have significant room to improve. Seven states received A grades for Disclosure Content Accessibility, and four states received Bs. Seven states received Cs, and eight states received D grades in this category. Nearly half the states, 24, failed the accessibility assessment; Montana, South Carolina, and Wyoming were found to have no disclosure data at all on their web sites, and the others that failed have either very little data or provide it in formats that make it difficult to access.

- All 50 state disclosure agencies have a site on the World Wide Web.
- 47 states post campaign finance data on their web sites.
- 3 states – Montana, South Carolina and Wyoming – have no campaign finance data available on their web sites.
- 27 states provide searchable databases of contributions online.
- 17 states provide searchable databases of expenditures online.

States with the best accessibility to campaign finance information, in rank order from one to eight, are: Washington and Michigan (tied); Ohio; Rhode Island and Texas (tied); Massachusetts and Hawaii (tied); and Florida, Illinois and Maryland (tied).

States with the weakest accessibility to campaign finance information, in rank order from 40 to 50 are: Oregon, Minnesota and West Virginia (tied); North Dakota; New Hampshire; New Mexico; Alabama; Montana; Tennessee and Wyoming (tied); and South Carolina.

The study found that over half the states provide searchable databases of campaign contributions on their web sites, and 17 provide expenditure databases, although the quality and comprehensiveness of those databases vary widely depending on the state. One surprising finding was that states with voluntary electronic filing programs are just as likely to have an online contributions database as those states with mandatory electronic filing. Although the searchable databases in states with mandatory electronic filing are more comprehensive than those in states with voluntary electronic filing, this was nonetheless an encouraging finding and a sign that states with voluntary programs are inclined to make the most of the data they receive.

The best campaign finance databases include: itemized data for all filers; the five searchable fields of contributor name, amount, date, employer, and zip code; “smart search” features and innovative database functions; the ability to sort and/or download search results; clear and thorough instructions for how to use the systems; and explanations of data content and history.

Florida's top-rated comprehensive database offers a "name sounds like" search option, a "contribution totals" feature that gives quick summary figures, and a complete "How to Use the Campaign Finance Database" section. Michigan's system allows searches for both "zip code matching" and "zip codes between", and by type of campaign statement (i.e. pre-primary, post-general election). Maryland offers simple and advanced search screens, allows the user to specify a case sensitive or case insensitive search, and gives the total amount of all transactions for a particular search at the top of the results page.

Users of Rhode Island's database can opt for details or just summary information for each transaction returned by a search, and people searching Washington's database can limit transactions returned to those relating to a particular office or party. Illinois provides customized tips for each type of search (i.e. candidates, contributions, expenditures), and Ohio includes "output/printing hints" for its database, which also allows search results to be sorted on six fields at once.

The average and below-average databases typically fall short because they lack at least one, if not more, of the characteristics that define above-average systems. Examples include systems with records from a very small percentage of filers (Nevada, Oklahoma), databases with just one searchable field (Connecticut, Georgia, New York, Utah), and databases that are lacking either "smart search" features (Delaware, Utah) or instructions for how to use the system (Maine). Some databases also have significant technical usability problems; for example, Delaware, Hawaii, Louisiana, and Oklahoma all have search fields that are case sensitive, but do not explain that to site users.

Many states – regardless of whether they provide searchable databases – offer complete campaign finance reports that can be browsed in HTML or PDF formats. The quality of browsable files varies as much as the quality of databases, with some states posting scanned, handwritten documents that are difficult to read, and others posting very user-friendly HTML displays of the filings. Twenty states allow users to sort campaign finance data, either in a database or within an HTML display of reports, and 24 give site visitors the option of downloading records in Excel, comma-separated files, or a similar format that allows the data to be analyzed offline. A number of states will also e-mail data or compile it on a disk and mail it upon request.

While many people turn to computers for campaign finance information, some still need to access disclosure records on paper (the only option in states that have no data online), so the Project also assessed how easy it is to get disclosure reports the old-fashioned way. The study found that, with a couple of exceptions, it is fairly easy for people across the country to get copies of paper campaign finance records. The cost of records ranges quite a bit, from as little as three cents per page in Ohio, to as much as one dollar per page in Alabama. In Tennessee, a person who wants to view records must first disclose his or her name, address, and other personal information, which is then made available to the candidate whose records were viewed.

## Online Contextual and Technical Usability

States across the country have the most room for improvement in the contextual and technical usability of their disclosure web sites. No state received an A in the usability category, and only four states received Bs (the highest being Illinois, with a B+). Seven states received Cs and twelve received D grades. Twenty-seven states failed, indicating substantial opportunity for progress in this category.

- 10 states publish campaign finance analyses online, including lists of total amounts raised and spent for individual candidates in the most recent election.
- 6 states publish historical campaign finance analyses online, but do not provide similar analyses for the most recent election.
- 34 states do not provide a compilation of summary data online.
- 48 states provide some information about campaign finance restrictions and disclosure reporting requirements online.
- 2 state disclosure agencies, in Arkansas and Delaware, provide no explanatory information about campaign finance laws on their web sites.

States with the best contextual and technical web site usability, in rank order from one to eight, are: Illinois; South Dakota; Alaska; Massachusetts; Idaho and North Dakota (tied); Nevada; and Mississippi; New Jersey and Washington (tied).

States with the weakest contextual and technical web site usability, in rank order from 41 to 50, are: Georgia, Maine, Missouri and Oregon (tied); Kansas and Oklahoma (tied); Arkansas and Iowa (tied); New Hampshire; and South Carolina.

The most encouraging pattern identified by the study in the area of contextual usability is the widespread inclusion of information about state disclosure requirements and laws on disclosure agency web sites. Forty-eight states – all but Arkansas and Delaware – have detailed information about campaign finance requirements on their sites. Some states feature this information as part of a Frequently Asked Questions section and others post complete disclosure guides and publications. A number of states, including Alaska, Hawaii and Washington, provide nice tables of contents for the text of their disclosure laws, which makes it very easy to locate and browse sections of the campaign finance code.

The study found that several states with good disclosure guides inadvertently limit accessibility to that information online by directing publications to candidates as opposed to the general public, with labels like “Handbook for Treasurers” (Florida) or “Candidate Guide” (Kentucky), instead of more universal publication titles like “Guide to Disclosure” (Illinois) or “Summary Guide to Candidacy and Campaign Finance Laws” (Maryland).

A number of states split contextual information about campaign finance requirements between two or three state agency web sites, as opposed to putting it all alongside the actual disclosure data. For example, in California, the Secretary of State’s office is responsible for receiving and disseminating campaign finance disclosure reports and publishes campaign finance data on its site, but the text of the disclosure law is located on the web site of the Fair Political Practices Commission, which is responsible for the enforcement of disclosure laws. The absence of clearly visible links between the two sites makes it difficult for people looking at disclosure data to find the text of the law.

While it may not seem like the most important element of a disclosure web site, another thing almost every agency does well is make its contact information (including agency mailing address, phone, fax and email address) very easy to find online. Every state disclosure agency except Michigan featured complete contact information either directly on the front page of its web site, or through a “contact us” link. Often the only reason people visit a state agency web site is to get contact information, so it is encouraging to see this information featured prominently on 49 of 50 disclosure sites.

Overall, states do not do a good job of providing site visitors with overviews of campaign finance data

for current and past elections, such as compilations of fundraising statistics or simple lists of candidates and how much money they each raised and spent during a particular election. Ten states do provide lists of total amounts raised and spent by all state candidates in the most recent election, giving citizens a way to quickly compare fundraising across candidates and gain a better understanding of political money trends in their states.

Six state disclosure web sites have compilations of fundraising statistics for past elections, but not for the most recent election. In five of the six states (Alaska, California, Kentucky, Missouri and North Carolina), the discontinuation of summary reports coincided with the introduction of electronic filing and the posting of itemized data online. Agencies may think that such reports are unnecessary once detailed data is accessible on the Internet. Or, it is possible that resources, previously available for producing summary reports, are now being employed in the implementation of electronic filing programs.

Also in the area of contextual usability, the study found that half of the states provide good information to help site visitors understand which candidates' reports and specific data are available on their disclosure web sites. Some states do a particularly good job of describing the history of the data on the site. For example, New Jersey states that scanned campaign records are available "beginning with the 29-day pre-election reports for the 1999 primary election", and New York explains that "electronic filings are available for each filing period commencing on July 15, 1999". Maryland explains that agency staff manually enter reports from paper-filers into the campaign finance database, and Iowa makes clear that "Summary and Schedules A, B, D, E, F, and G are available for viewing via the Internet by committees that file electronically".

Other states excel at helping site visitors determine more specifically the scope of records online for one particular candidate. For example, in Utah, site visitors can view a chart that lists each candidate and shows exactly which of his or her reports have been filed and are available on the web. Visitors to Kentucky's site will see an asterisk in the report index of a particular candidate if a campaign finance filing has been received, but has not yet been processed for display on the Internet. In North Dakota, the names of candidates are followed either by a "Contributions" link, for those whose reports can be viewed online, or "NR", indicating there is no report available on the web. Alaska publishes a "reports filed but not published" list, and a "delinquent reports" list, to help site visitors identify the reason a particular candidate's report is missing.

The flip side of the finding, however, is that in 25 states it can be hard, if not impossible, to figure out which campaign finance reports are being published online. Many states provide no information at all to explain the data history of their systems or spell out exactly which candidates' reports are being posted. Some disclosure agency web sites have multiple interfaces for viewing campaign finance records, and in those cases, it is even more crucial that the state thoroughly explain whose records can be found in which system. Connecticut, Hawaii, Missouri, and West Virginia each have two systems for viewing campaign finance reports, depending on whether they were filed electronically or on paper. Connecticut does provide a chart listing each of the candidates for statewide office and where most of his or her records can be found, and West Virginia's site tells visitors they "may have to search both systems to find all reports". Hawaii and Missouri are lacking similar explanations to help people locate reports in the different systems.

Importance was placed on the availability of both original and amended filings on disclosure web sites, and also on how clearly amendments were labeled online. Only 23 states received full credit in the study

for this particular criterion, posting both original and revised filings and identifying amended reports with either an “A” for amendment, or language such as “this report supercedes previous reports for the pre-general filing period.” Seven states received partial credit for their handling of amended reports, and 20 states received no credit, meaning amended reports are simply unavailable online or original reports are removed from the web in cases where amendments have been filed and posted online.

Comprehensive lists of candidates in current or recent elections were found to be available in 26 of the 50 states, making it easier for people researching disclosure data to view committee reports in the larger context of the election, and to compare the reports of various candidates running for the same office. Fifteen additional states provide lists that name candidates but are missing other information, such as party affiliation or office sought. Nine states provided no candidates lists, or even archived election results, which would have served a similar purpose.

In a majority of the states, it is difficult to locate the campaign finance disclosure agency by browsing the state’s home page or conducting a search of the state’s web portal. The best state search engine is New York’s, which delivers just one result for a search of the term “campaign finance”, with a link straight to the New York State Board of Elections homepage. Many state search engines return hundreds of results often linking mostly to campaign finance related legislation, or press releases from various agency offices (North Carolina’s official state search engine even linked to articles on a local newspaper’s web site.)

Finding a disclosure site by browsing the state web portal can be frustrating because the names of the state agencies responsible for overseeing campaign financing vary by state; often it is the Secretary of State, but sometimes it is an independent State Ethics Commission or Board of Elections. Some disclosure agency names are unique but still fairly intuitive, such as Massachusetts’ Office of Campaign and Political Finance, or Hawaii’s Campaign Spending Commission. Some are more obscure, such as the Alaska Public Offices Commission, and can be difficult to find online unless the state provides a subject index with an entry for “campaign finance” or “online campaign disclosure” (which Alaska does.) Other states with subject indexes are Washington, with a “State Services” index that includes an entry for “Campaign Financing Reporting”, and Mississippi, with its topical directory including an entry for “Campaign Finance Disclosures”.

Once a person finds a campaign finance agency’s web site, he or she is likely to encounter unfamiliar terminology or unclear language that may make it difficult navigate the site and locate disclosure information and records. The study found that 40 percent of the state disclosure web sites have serious terminology issues; the other 60 percent have adequate terminology, but only a handful can be described as having excellent terminology throughout the site.

Sometimes link titles do not reflect the content of what is located in that section of the web site, such as the “Maine Campaign Finance Electronic Filing” link, which is in fact the entry point for candidates to log into the electronic filing system, but is also what site visitors need to click in order to access the searchable campaign finance databases. On Kentucky’s web site, Frequently Asked Questions and disclosure reporting dates are somewhat buried in a section ambiguously titled “information library”, and on Nebraska’s site, itemized expenditure data is in a section called “miscellaneous transactions”. Some of the terminology problems identified in the study may seem minor when taken individually, but the overall usability of a disclosure web site can be brought down significantly by the use of imprecise language throughout a site.

In the usability testing conducted by the UCLA School of Law, three states – Alaska, North Dakota

and Utah – were outstanding. Testers who were unfamiliar with those states' web portals were able to quickly locate the disclosure web sites, find the amounts received by the governor in the last campaign, and identify at least one campaign contributor. Further evidence of the quality of these states' disclosure sites lies in the fact that the researchers retrieved consistent information in all three tasks. At the other end of the usability spectrum are Missouri and South Carolina. Most of the testers had great difficulty locating those states' disclosure agencies online, if they found them at all, and could not locate campaign contributor information on either state's site.

The results of the usability testing show that the most difficult task for usability testers was finding a state's campaign disclosure agency web site. Testers would start at the state's homepage and search for five to ten minutes for a clear indication of where they might go for campaign finance information, sometimes locating the disclosure web site and sometimes finding nothing. Surveys completed by the testers following their research indicated that most disclosure web sites are 'somewhat confusing' (43%) or 'very confusing' (25%), and only ten percent of the sites were rated 'excellent' or 'near excellent'.

One major advantage of the World Wide Web as an information resource, is that it is dynamic. The Project is aware that changes are already underway on state disclosure web sites since the close of the study research period, with some states, including California and Oklahoma, adding new search capabilities, and others giving their disclosure sites a facelift and possibly even more substantial changes. The Project is optimistic that improvements will continue to be made in the Contextual and Technical Usability of state disclosure web sites in the coming year and that grades in that category, which saw the most room for improvement, will in fact be higher in the next Grading State Disclosure report.

## Digital Sunlight: A Look Back, a Look Ahead

Since the early 1990's, local, state and federal disclosure agencies have been developing and fine tuning electronic filing programs and moving toward Internet disclosure of campaign finance reports, in an effort to improve public access to campaign disclosure data. In 1999, the California Voter Foundation (CVF) conducted a nationwide survey of states' progress toward Internet disclosure of money in politics, examining efforts to require and implement electronic filing of campaign disclosure reports, and evaluating the quality and scope of state agency campaign finance disclosure web sites.

The Campaign Disclosure Project's 2003 "Grading State Disclosure" survey builds and expands upon CVF's 1999 Digital Sunlight Awards research, to include an examination of each state's disclosure laws and a more in-depth look at the content, quality and usability of state disclosure web sites. Not only is the 2003 Grading State Disclosure criteria more detailed than that used in the Digital Sunlight Awards study, but the bar has also been set higher with increased expectations of what government agencies and legislatures can do to make campaign finance information more accessible to the public online.

While the two studies differ in a number of ways, there are some basic questions that were asked in both. Comparing the answers to these questions provides a good overview of how much progress has been made nationwide in state campaign finance disclosure programs over the past four years.

### *Electronic Filing Programs*

By 1999, 17 states had enacted laws to require electronic filing by statewide and/or legislative candidates. Seven of those states – Connecticut, Florida, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maryland, New York, and Washington – had mandatory electronic filing programs up and running by 1999. The other ten were in the process of phasing in mandatory electronic filing requirements, often by first implementing voluntary programs. Those states are Arizona, California, Illinois, Massachusetts, Missouri, North Carolina, Oregon, Texas, Virginia and Wisconsin. Another 15 states were offering voluntary electronic filing or were making plans to do so in the near future. Eighteen states had made no progress toward electronic filing at that time.

The 2003 research shows that each of the ten states that had enacted but had not implemented a mandatory electronic filing law by 1999, did in fact establish an electronic filing program and generally stayed on schedule for phased-in implementation (although states in which electronic filing requirements were enacted via the initiative process were less likely to implement programs on time).

Implementation appears to have been successful for the most part. Despite earlier concerns that electronic filing would be an onerous task for filers, no states have repealed their electronic filing mandates since 1999. However, three states – Florida, Oregon and Texas – continue to provide "opt-out" provisions in the law that allow candidates to file reports on paper by submitting statements saying they are not able to file electronically.

In addition to the states that have implemented existing requirements since 1999, Georgia, Michigan, Rhode Island and South Carolina have passed new laws mandating electronic filing, and Colorado, Delaware and Nevada now have voluntary electronic filing programs. South Carolina's electronic filing requirement was signed into law in June 2003, so its program is just getting underway. Many states have generally expanded and improved their electronic filing programs over the last four years as well.

Thirteen states have made no progress toward electronic filing since 1999: Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho,

Kansas, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Tennessee, Vermont, West Virginia and Wyoming.

### *Campaign Disclosure Web Sites*

Over the past four years, progress toward improving public access to campaign finance information through state disclosure web sites has been mixed, but generally the states are moving in the right direction. Most encouraging, is the fact that today every state disclosure agency at least has a presence on the Internet, as opposed to 1999, when several agencies did not have web sites at all.

Another improvement is an increase in the number of states providing campaign finance data online. In 1999, many states provided little or no campaign finance data on the Internet, but today just three states – Montana, South Carolina, and Wyoming – have no data on their web sites. South Carolina's new electronic filing requirement will help move that state quickly toward online disclosure of campaign finance data. Several states that had limited or no data on the web in 1999, now have summary data or are making images of scanned paper disclosure reports available online. These states include Arkansas, Iowa, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Vermont, West Virginia, Wisconsin and Tennessee.

A handful of states that previously scanned and published disclosure reports online, but provided no way to search that data, today have searchable campaign contribution databases. Georgia, Kentucky, Maine, Nevada, and Washington have all added contribution databases to their web sites since CVF last evaluated those sites.

Several states expanded the scope and type of campaign finance data accessible online, and others improved the functionality of their databases and overall usability of their web sites. For example, in 1999, Arizona was suppressing information about contributors' occupation and employer from its online display of campaign finance records; now that information is available. Illinois' online database used to feature only contributions of \$500 or more, but now features all itemized contributions. Massachusetts' online database featured only contributions to statewide candidates in 1999; now it includes contributions to legislative candidates as well.

Examples of improvement in web site functionality and usability include Ohio's online contributions database, which was incredibly slow and frustrating to use in 1999, but now is much faster and more user-friendly. Alaska improved in this area as well. In 1999, the only option for viewing data on Alaska's disclosure web site was to search a contributions database; now the public can also browse lists of all contributions contained in individual disclosure reports.

Unfortunately, some states have made little or no progress in terms of accessibility to campaign finance data on the Internet, including two states that were previously on the cutting-edge of online campaign finance disclosure. Hawaii and Louisiana – whose databases were designed by the same technology consultant and were at one time considered among the best available – have been surpassed in this area by other states whose newer databases are more user-friendly and technologically advanced. Although Hawaii's overall rank in the 2003 Grading State Disclosure study is high, its web site received a failing grade for contextual and technical usability; Louisiana, a "Digital Sunlight Award" recipient, received Ds for both content accessibility and usability in the 2003 study.

States that show the least amount of improvement in the areas of electronic filing and accessibility to

disclosure data on the Internet include Alabama, Montana, and Wyoming. States that show the most overall improvement include Delaware, Georgia, Maryland and Rhode Island.

Though it varies widely from state to state and there are some that still lag behind, overall the 50 states have succeeded in moving more campaign finance data into the “digital sunlight” and have made progress toward better electronic filing programs and more comprehensive electronic filing mandates.

## The New York City Campaign Finance Board: A Local Campaign Finance Disclosure Program

Although the Grading State Disclosure project is a study of campaign finance disclosure programs at the state level, there are also some excellent programs at the local level. For several years now, many cities around the country have been engaged in electronic filing and Internet disclosure programs – most notably, Los Angeles, New York, San Francisco and Seattle. These local programs provide good models for successful online disclosure at any level of government.

New York’s program dovetails with the city’s public campaign financing program. Candidates who receive public funds are required to electronically file campaign finance disclosure statements. The program is run by the New York City Campaign Finance Board (NYCCFB). This local agency is also responsible for educating New York City voters, distributing public matching funds to candidates, auditing campaign disclosure reports and organizing campaign debates.

At the heart of New York City disclosure is an electronic filing software program called C-SMART (Candidate Software for Managing and Reporting Transactions) that is provided free to city candidates. The first version of the software became available in 1993, and it has been upgraded three times since then. With each upgrade, NYCCFB has enhanced the software’s functionality and ensured the software is both technologically up-to-date and stays current with the city’s campaign finance laws.

The software is personalized for each filer, which helps facilitate more accurate disclosure. C-SMART also comes equipped with a few “bells and whistles” that are helpful to both the filer and the disclosure agency. For example, the software will generate error messages that warn filers when they omit data that is required in order to receive public matching funds for their contributions, thus helping candidates avoid delays in public funds payments and penalties for incomplete disclosure reports. The software also allows filers to extract data and utilize it in other programs in order to conduct other campaign fundraising activities such as generating thank-you letters to donors. Another beneficial feature simplifies the filer’s data entry needs by automatically filling in address information for preexisting donors.

NYCCFB began placing candidate data on the Internet in 1998; the web site, [www.nyccfb.info](http://www.nyccfb.info), currently features campaign finance information dating back to 1989. The agency’s press secretary reviews the disclosure web site to help ensure its user-friendliness. The database includes contributions and expenditures for candidates who have filed electronically; however, candidates who do not participate in the public financing program, such as current New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg, do not have to file electronically and therefore their campaign data is not included in the online database.

NYCCFB reports that 80 - 90 percent of candidates are participating in the city’s electronic filing program. Visitors to the site can search databases of contributions as well as expenditures. The database

search features tell the user how many records a query has retrieved before displaying that information, which allows users to narrow their search criteria in case their query was too broad. Itemized contribution reports provide each donor's occupation and address, the donor's employer and address, and the name of any intermediary who facilitated the contribution. Other data contained in the disclosure reports, such as information about loans, partners and subcontractors, can be searched as well. Itemized data can be downloaded for offline sorting and analyzing.

New York City's electronic filing program has helped journalists analyze campaign finance data and more easily identify trends to report to the public. Since the agency started putting reports online, requests for paper documents have sharply declined. NYCCFB reports that electronic filing has also greatly enhanced the agency's ability to conduct audits of disclosure reports.

# III. State-by-State Summaries



## Alabama

Grade	F
Rank	47

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	47
Electronic Filing Program	F	37
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	45
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	30

Alabama's grade and rank show that the state has significant room to improve its campaign finance disclosure program. The grade reflects a weak campaign disclosure law and significant inadequacies on its campaign finance web site.

Alabama's law requires candidates to file annual reports in non-election years and two campaign finance reports before an election. Candidates are required to disclose details about contributors who give \$100 or more, but occupation and employer do not have to be reported. Candidates do not have to report late contributions. Candidates must file detailed information about expenditures of \$100 or more, but subvendor information is not required. In addition, there is no reporting of independent expenditures. Alabama has no electronic filing program.

The state scans campaign finance reports and makes them available on its web site in PDF format, but there are no searchable databases of contributions or expenditures. Although statements are posted on the site in a timely manner and reports date back to 1992, campaign finance information can still be difficult to access. Many campaign finance reports are hard to read because they appear sideways and the site does not provide a mechanism for rotating them online – the only way to view them easily is to download and look at the PDF files offline in an alternate viewer, such as Adobe Acrobat Reader.

The site provides some good contextual information, including an explanation of the state disclosure laws and campaign finance restrictions, and a list of candidates for recent or upcoming elections. However some important additions could improve it, such as lists of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates and clear labeling of both disclosure reporting periods and amendments to campaign finance reports. Despite its limitations, Alabama's web site performed reasonably well in the usability testing, with four out of six usability testers identifying identical amounts of contributions to the governor.

## Alaska

Grade	C-
Rank	13

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C+	23
Electronic Filing Program	F	31
Disclosure Content Accessibility	D	20
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	B-	3

Although Alaska has some good information on its web site and does very well when compared to many other states, it has room to improve its campaign finance disclosure program, particularly in Electronic Filing and Disclosure Content Accessibility.

Alaska's law requires candidates to file campaign finance reports once during non-election years and two times before an election. Candidates must provide detailed information about contributors, including his or her occupation and employer, for those who give \$100 or more. As of September 14, 2003, a new state law removes the \$100 threshold and requires all contributions to be itemized. Independent expenditures must be reported within ten days of being made, but late independent expenditures (made within ten days preceding an election) are not reported until after the election. Although Alaska has an electronic filing program, it is voluntary for statewide and legislative candidates and the program is not adequately funded.

Alaska does a fair job of making campaign finance disclosure information available to the public, but it could do better. While the state publishes all campaign finance reports on its disclosure web site (reports from candidates who do not file electronically are data-entered by staff), accessibility to this data could be improved. Alaska does feature a searchable database of contributions on its web site, but it is somewhat confusing to use because there are two ways to do searches; an expanded search in which it is possible to search by donor, amount and date, but not by a contributor's employer or zip code, and a more limited search in which one can only search by contributor. An explanation of the differences between the two searches would be helpful. Other drawbacks include campaign finance reports that are not always available in a timely manner, a lack of downloadable files and no searchable database of expenditures.

Alaska's biggest strength lies in the usability of its web site – it ranked third in the nation in this category. The state provides a good explanation of its laws governing campaign finance disclosure and restrictions. The site also offers some unique overview information, including lists of delinquent and unpublished campaign finance reports and overall statistics about campaign finance reporting in the state. While the site features overviews of campaign financing activity for past elections, there are no such overviews for elections after 1999. Usability testers found the site easy to use, with six out of six locating the disclosure web site, and reporting the same number for total amounts received by candidates for governor.

## Arizona

Grade	C-
Rank	16

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C+	22
Electronic Filing Program	A+	1
Disclosure Content Accessibility	C-	17
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	36

Relative to most other states, Arizona has a good campaign finance disclosure program, with mandatory electronic filing and a fair amount of campaign finance data available on its web site. However, the contextual and technical usability of its web site could be better.

Arizona law requires candidates to file one campaign finance report in non-election years and two reports before an election. Candidates must report detailed information, including occupation and employer, about contributors who give \$25 or more. Last-minute contributions do not have to be reported until after an election. Candidates are required to disclose all expenditures, no matter how small, but subvendor information does not have to be reported. Also, last-minute independent expenditures do not have to be reported prior to elections. Arizona has one of the strongest electronic filing programs in the country. It was enacted through a 1998 initiative and mandates electronic filing by all statewide and legislative candidates.

The state makes all campaign finance reports available on its web site as soon as they are filed. However, it could be easier for the public to research campaign contributions and expenditures. There is a searchable database of contributions, but it is only possible to search by the name of the contributor and the date of the contribution. It is not possible to search by the amount of the contribution or the contributor's employer. Although candidates have to disclose a contributor's full address, the state does not publish any information about a contributor's address on the Internet, so it is not possible to search by the zip code where a contributor resides. The data cannot be sorted online or downloaded for sorting and analyzing offline, and the web site does not have a searchable database of expenditures.

Arizona could improve the usability of its site, especially its contextual information. Currently, the site does not feature lists of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates, or an explanation of which filers appear on the site, and does not retain original campaign finance disclosure filings online when amendments have been filed. The terminology on the site could also be clearer. The usability testing score reflects the weaknesses of the site, as it was difficult for testers to locate information for which they were searching.

## Arkansas

Grade	F
Rank	41

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C	28
Electronic Filing Program	F	37
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	39
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	47

Despite its low rank and grade, Arkansas has a stronger campaign finance disclosure law than many other states; its overall grade is a reflection of a lack of electronic filing, poor accessibility of campaign finance information and poor web site usability.

Arkansas requires candidates to file campaign finance reports quarterly in non-election years and monthly in election years. Candidates must file detailed contributor information, including occupation and employer, for contributions of \$50 or more and detailed expenditure information for payments of \$100 or more, although subvendor information is not required. Last-minute contributions do not have to be reported prior to an election. Independent expenditures must be reported, but last-minute independent expenditures are not required to be reported before an election.

Arkansas does not have an electronic filing program, but the Secretary of State scans all campaign finance reports and posts them on its web site in a PDF format. The state does a good job of posting campaign finance data in a timely manner, within a few days of the filing deadline, and has reports on its site dating back to 1996. However, many of the campaign finance reports are of poor quality and often hard to read – some files are difficult to download and others have small fonts, sloppy handwriting or blurry images – making it hard to access the information. There are no searchable databases of contributions or expenditures, limiting the public's ability to analyze campaign finance information and compare the activity of candidates.

The usability of Arkansas' web site is also very weak. The state could improve the contextual information on the site, including lists of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates, a better explanation of campaign finance restrictions in the state, and details about what records can be found on the web site and how the site can be used. It is also very hard to locate the disclosure agency's site from the state home page.

Secretary of State -- <http://www.sosweb.state.ar.us/>

## California

Grade	C
Rank	9

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	A	2
Electronic Filing Program	B	9
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	28
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D-	19

California's campaign finance disclosure program is better than those in a majority of the other states. It has one of the strongest campaign finance disclosure laws in the nation, but weaknesses on its disclosure web site, present at the time research was conducted, brought down its grade and rank.

California law requires candidates to file two or more reports in non-election years and two reports before an election. Candidates must disclose detailed information about contributors who give \$100 or more, including occupations and employers. Both donors and candidates must report last-minute contributions prior to an election. Candidates must file detailed expenditure information for payments of \$100 or more, and must report how their subvendors spent payments of \$500 or more. Independent expenditures must be reported and last-minute independent expenditures of \$1,000 or more must be reported within 24 hours. All statewide and legislative candidates who reach a \$50,000 threshold are required to file electronically.

Campaign finance information is available on California's web site for all candidates who file electronically and it can be browsed, sorted and downloaded. However, at the time of the Project's research, California did not have searchable databases of contributions or expenditures on its site and it was only possible to browse reports for one candidate at a time. In July 2003, the Secretary of State launched searchable databases of contributions and expenditures on its web site. California will be given credit for the databases in the next round of disclosure grades.

The state could make improvements to the usability of its web site. From 1991 to 1998, the state provided very good analyses of campaign financing trends in elections, but publication of these reports ended after 1998. Reinstating the campaign financing summary reports and posting them online could improve the site. In addition, campaign finance data and contextual information cannot be found in the same place online. Currently, campaign finance data can be found on the Secretary of State's site, while most contextual information – including explanations of the state's campaign finance restrictions and the text of the law – is on the Fair Political Practices Commission's site. Despite some of the weaknesses on its disclosure web site, California did well in the usability testing. The testers were able to find the disclosure web site within five minutes and four out of six testers were able to find campaign finance information for which they were looking.

## Colorado

Grade	D+
Rank	19

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B-	15
Electronic Filing Program	F	35
Disclosure Content Accessibility	C+	12
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	32

While it is ranked in the upper half of the states, Colorado's campaign finance disclosure program has room for improvement. Its strengths lie in its law and efforts to make campaign finance information accessible to the public, but, Colorado's electronic filing program and web site usability could be significantly better.

Colorado's law requires candidates to file quarterly campaign finance statements in non-election years and four reports before each election. Candidates must disclose detailed information about contributors who give \$20 or more and a contributor's occupation or employer is required for contributions of \$100 or more. Last-minute contributions must be reported before an election. Independent expenditures must be reported and last-minute independent expenditures must also be reported before an election. Colorado's voluntary, rather than mandatory, electronic filing program, along with a lack of both adequate funding and a standard filing format, brings down its grade in this category.

One of Colorado's strengths is its effort to make campaign finance information accessible to the public. Campaign finance data is available on the campaign disclosure web site within 24 hours of being filed. The site features electronically filed reports and scanned-in versions of reports filed on paper. It also has comprehensive searchable databases of contributions and expenditures, containing records that were either data entered by agency staff or electronically filed by candidates. There are some technical problems with the site, however, and it is not possible to search the contributions by zip code or employer, to search the expenditures by description, or to download the data for analyzing offline.

While there is a lot of data on Colorado's disclosure web site, there are also a number of significant usability and terminology problems that limit the value of the information. The usability of the site is weakened by a lack of important contextual information, such as a list of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates, and an explanation of which candidates records are featured on the web site. Also, original filings are not retained online when amendments are added to the site. Colorado's usability testing scores reflect the weaknesses in the usability of its web site.

## Connecticut

Grade	D+
Rank	23

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	12
Electronic Filing Program	F	20
Disclosure Content Accessibility	D-	24
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	33

Connecticut's campaign finance disclosure program is ranked in the upper half of all of the states. Despite its fairly strong campaign finance disclosure law, Connecticut does poorly in Electronic Filing, Disclosure Content Accessibility and web site usability.

Connecticut law requires candidates to file quarterly statements in non-election years and two statements before an election. Candidates must provide information about contributors who give \$30 or more and a contributor's occupation and employer are required for contributions greater than \$100. Last-minute contributions do not have to be reported prior to the election. Candidates and committees must itemize all expenditures and subvendor information is required. Although independent expenditures must be reported, last-minute independent expenditures are not disclosed until after Election Day. Electronic filing is mandatory for statewide candidates, but the high threshold of \$250,000 means that campaign finance data about some significant candidates for statewide office may not be easily accessible to the public. Electronic filing is voluntary for legislative candidates.

Although it received a passing grade in Disclosure Content Accessibility, Connecticut could vastly improve its efforts to make campaign finance data available to the public. The state posts campaign finance data on its web site in a timely fashion and has a database of contributors online, but the database only allows searches by the name of a contributor. There is no searchable database of expenditures. Data cannot be sorted or downloaded for searching offline. One helpful feature on the web site is an option to browse data by zip code or employer, within the campaign finance records of one candidate.

The usability of the web site is also lacking. There is no information about Connecticut's campaign finance laws or lists of total amounts raised and spent by statewide and legislative candidates. Connecticut could improve its online usability by putting contextual information on the same web site as its campaign finance data. Currently, campaign finance data is located on the Secretary of State's site, but contextual information is on the State Election Enforcement Commission's page. Having the information on separate web sites makes it hard for the public get a complete picture of campaign financing in the state. The usability testing scores for this site are average and show room for improvement.

## Delaware

Grade	D-
Rank	31

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	D-	37
Electronic Filing Program	F	21
Disclosure Content Accessibility	C-	16
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	27

With low scores in almost every category, Delaware has significant room to improve its campaign finance disclosure program. The state received passing grades only for its law and Disclosure Content Accessibility.

Delaware law requires candidates to file campaign finance reports annually in non-election years and two times before an election. Candidates must report detailed information about contributors who give \$100 or more, but are not required to list a contributor's occupation or employer. Last-minute contributions do not have to be reported before an election. Details about expenditures of \$100 or more must be reported, but subvendor information is not required. Independent expenditures must be reported, but last-minute independent expenditures are not disclosed until after the election. Electronic filing is voluntary for both statewide and legislative candidates.

Delaware does an average job of making campaign finance data accessible to the public. A combination of electronically filed and scanned-in paper campaign finance records are made available on the state disclosure agency's web site as soon as they are filed. Searchable databases of contributions and expenditures are featured on the site, but they only contain information from electronically filed records. The state does not offer campaign finance records to the public in any digital format other than the Internet and it is not possible to download data for analyzing offline.

The state's disclosure web site did well in the usability testing, but poor contextual information brought down Delaware's overall usability score. There is no information about the state's disclosure law and requirements online, and there are no lists of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates. The site does include a complete list of candidates, but is lacking other information to help the public determine whose campaign finance reports are available on the Internet, such as a general explanation of the contents of the campaign finance database.

Department of Elections -- <http://www.state-de.us/election/>

## Florida

Grade	C
Rank	7

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B-	15
Electronic Filing Program	D	17
Disclosure Content Accessibility	B+	8
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	24

Florida ranked in the top ten in the study even though it only received an overall grade of a C. Its strengths lie in its Campaign Disclosure Law and accessibility to campaign finance information. Improvements could be made to its electronic filing program and the contextual and technical usability of its web site.

Florida law requires candidates to file quarterly statements in non-election years and two statements before each election. For each contribution, details about contributors are required to be reported and a contributor's occupation must be disclosed for contributions of more than \$100. Candidates do not report information about a contributor's employer. Candidates must report details, including subvendor information, about all expenditures. Independent expenditures must be reported, but last-minute independent expenditures are not disclosed before the election. Florida has a mandatory electronic filing program, but this mandate is automatically waived by the Division of Elections for candidates who state that they are unable to file electronically.

Florida does a very good job of making campaign finance information available to the public. All campaign finance data is posted on the disclosure agency's web site within one week of being filed. Since campaign finance data is either electronically filed or data-entered by agency staff, all the data is available in the searchable databases of contributions and expenditures on the site. Florida's databases also have a unique feature in which it is possible for site users to search by "name sounds like". In addition, there is an option to search for the total amount raised by an individual candidate in a particular election year, and an option to download search results.

The contextual usability of Florida's site could be better, partly because it does not offer complete reports for individual candidates that can be browsed. The lack of browsable reports means it is not possible to see when amendments have been made to campaign finance reports. The site does not offer a list of committees with the total amounts raised and spent by each candidate in recent elections. The usability testing also reflected the poor usability of the site.

## Georgia

Grade	D+
Rank	21

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	A-	3
Electronic Filing Program	D	17
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	27
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	41

Ranked at 21, Georgia's campaign finance disclosure program is in the top half of all states. However, its overall grade of a D+ shows that it has significant room for improvement, particularly in the areas of Disclosure Content Accessibility and Online Contextual and Technical Usability.

One of Georgia's biggest strengths is its campaign finance disclosure law, which is one of the best in the nation. Candidates are required to file semi-annual statements in non-election years and more than three statements before each election. A contributor's name, address, occupation, and employer must be disclosed for any contribution of \$101 or more. Candidates must report details about all expenditures of \$101 or more, but subvendor information is not required. Independent expenditures and last-minute independent expenditures greater than \$1,000 must be reported. Last-minute contributions of more than \$1,000 are also required to be reported prior to an election. Georgia has a mandatory electronic filing program for statewide candidates who reach a threshold of \$20,000 and a voluntary electronic filing program for legislative candidates. On January 1, 2003, electronic filing became mandatory for all legislative candidates who reach a threshold of \$10,000. This change in the law will be reflected in the next round of disclosure grades.

Georgia does a fair job of making campaign finance data available to the public and has significant room for improvement. The Secretary of State posts a combination of electronically filed and paper filed campaign finance reports on its web site, but it can take up to a week before they are online. The web site features a searchable database of contributions from the electronically filed reports, but it is only possible to search by the name of the contributor. The state does not offer a searchable database of expenditures or downloadable campaign finance reports.

The usability of the web site could also be improved. The site does not provide any overview information about campaign financing in Georgia and does not clearly label campaign finance reporting periods. The explanation of the state's campaign finance law and the terminology used on the site could also be better. In addition, it is hard to find the disclosure site from the state's home page and the site may not work well with an older computer or a dial-up modem. Georgia's performance in the usability testing was poor, with only two of six usability testers able to locate the campaign disclosure page.

## Hawaii

Grade	C
Rank	6

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	8
Electronic Filing Program	C	10
Disclosure Content Accessibility	A-	6
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	36

As the sixth-ranked state, Hawaii currently has one of the best campaign finance disclosure programs in the nation. Nonetheless, its grades in Electronic Filing and Online Contextual and Technical Usability show that it has room for improvement.

Hawaii has a fairly strong campaign disclosure law. Candidates must file semi-annual statements in non-election years and three statements before an election. Candidates are required to disclose details about contributions of \$100 or more, but a contributor's occupation and employer are only required for contributions of \$1,000 or more. Last-minute contributions of \$500 or more must be reported up to three days before the election. Candidates must itemize all expenditures, including subvendor information. Independent expenditures must be reported and last-minute independent expenditures must be reported within the last 10 days before an election. Hawaii has a mandatory electronic filing program for statewide candidates who reach a threshold of \$5,000, but electronic filing is voluntary for legislative candidates.

Hawaii does a good job of posting campaign finance information on the disclosure agency's site in a timely manner. Electronically filed campaign finance reports are available on the site as soon as they are filed and paper records are scanned onto the site within a week of being received. The site does provide databases of contributions and expenditures that contain data from electronically filed reports and are searchable on a number of fields. Searching can be confusing, however, because there are two databases on the site, HERTS1 and HERTS2, with no explanation about what can be found in each. NIC Technologies is the contractor for the HERTS databases, which contain many of the same usability problems as other NIC state disclosure databases, such as the case sensitivity of search fields that is not explained to site visitors. In addition, since electronic filing is voluntary for legislative candidates, there is not a lot of information available in the database for those candidates.

Hawaii's poorest performance was in web site usability, especially contextual usability. Although the total amounts raised and spent by the two major party gubernatorial candidates is posted on the site, this type of summary information could be expanded to include all statewide and legislative races. The site also does not explain what records are and are not available online and there are no complete instructions about how to use the databases. Hawaii's usability testing scores reflect the poor usability of the web site and show substantial room for improvement.

## Idaho

Grade	D
Rank	24

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C+	25
Electronic Filing Program	F	37
Disclosure Content Accessibility	D-	23
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	C	5

Although it received a passing grade and ranked in the top half of the states, Idaho has significant room to improve its campaign finance disclosure program. Idaho's biggest weaknesses are in the areas of Electronic Filing and Disclosure Content Accessibility.

Idaho has an average campaign disclosure law. Candidates are required to file one statement in non-election years, one statement before each primary and two statements before each general election. Candidates must disclose contributors' names and addresses for contributions greater than \$50, but information about contributors' occupations and employers is not required. Last-minute contributions must be reported within 48 hours. Expenditures of \$25 or more must be reported and subvendor information is required. Independent expenditures and last-minute independent expenditures must be disclosed prior to an election. Idaho has no electronic filing program for statewide or legislative candidates.

Considering the limited staff and financial resources of the disclosure agency, the fact that Idaho has a comprehensive database of contributions is impressive. The Secretary of State's staff data enters the contributions to create the database, which allows site visitors to search by contributor name and contribution amount, but not by the date the contribution was made or the contributor's zip code or employer. There is a lack of uniformity in the data; for example, a search for Boise Cascade Corporation returns four different results depending on whether the name is listed in itemized records as "Corporation," "Corp." with a period, "Corp," with a comma, or "Corp" with no punctuation. There is no searchable database of expenditures. For those seeking access to paper copies of original campaign finance reports, the agency suggests printing the information from the web site and discourages requests for hard copies of original reports. Paper records cost 25 cents per page.

The usability of Idaho's web site is fair, but some improvements could be made in this area as well. The filing periods could be provided in an index of campaign finance reports and the agency web site could be easier to find from the state's homepage. One significant problem on the site is that a visitor who clicks on the "campaign finance reports" link from the main Secretary of State page, will go straight to the disclosure reports and may miss important contextual information that is only available on the Election Department page. Directing database users through the Election Department page would fix the problem. The usability scores for Idaho's site also indicate that there is room for improvement.

## Illinois

Grade	B
Rank	2

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C	28
Electronic Filing Program	A+	1
Disclosure Content Accessibility	B+	8
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	B+	1

Illinois has one of the best campaign finance disclosure programs in the nation. However, its overall B grade shows that Illinois has some room for improvement, particularly in its campaign finance disclosure law.

Illinois law requires candidates to file semi-annual reports in non-election years and three reports before an election. Candidates must disclose information about contributors who give more than \$150, but a contributor's occupation and employer is only required for contributions greater than \$500. Last-minute contributions of \$500 or more, made in the last 30 days before the election, must be disclosed within 2 business days. Expenditures greater than \$150 are required to be disclosed, but subvendor information does not have to be reported. There is no independent expenditure reporting. Electronic filing is required when a candidate reaches a threshold of \$25,000 or more (on July 1, 2003, the threshold was lowered to \$10,000).

Illinois does a very good job of making campaign finance information accessible to the public. The state makes campaign finance data available on its web site within 5 days of being filed. Detailed campaign finance information is available for all electronic filings, but only summary information is available for paper filers. There are databases of contributions and expenditures that can be searched across all filers for individual contributors, and for dates and amounts of contributions and expenditures. The state could improve the site by also offering its data in a downloadable format to enable searching and sorting offline.

The contextual and technical usability of Illinois' web site is the best in the nation. The site features a very clear "Guide to Disclosure" with details about campaign finance restrictions and reporting requirements, the text of the disclosure law, as well as information about proposed amendments to disclosure rules. There is also a "Money and Elections Report" that provides the public with an overview of campaign financing in Illinois, and clear and thorough instructions appear throughout the site. Both original filings and clearly labeled amendments are available; a comprehensive list of candidates and other contextual information help the public understand which reports and data are included in the campaign finance database. Even though the site is rich in contextual information and it ranked first, Illinois received a B+ grade in this category, which is due largely to the difficulty of locating the disclosure agency's web site from the state homepage.

## Indiana

Grade	D-
Rank	32

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	43
Electronic Filing Program	F	31
Disclosure Content Accessibility	C-	17
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D-	19

Although it received a passing grade, Indiana has significant room to improve its campaign finance disclosure program, particularly in the Campaign Disclosure Law and Electronic Filing Program categories.

Indiana law requires candidates to file one report in non-election years and one report before an election. Candidates must disclose information about individuals who contribute \$100 or more; for contributions of \$1,000 or more a contributor's occupation, but not employer, is also required. Last-minute contributions of over \$1,000 must be reported within 48 hours of an election. Expenditures of over \$100 must be reported, but subvendor information does not have to be disclosed. Independent expenditures are not required to be reported. Indiana has voluntary electronic filing for both statewide and legislative candidates.

Indiana does a fair job of making campaign finance data available to the public. Disclosure agency staff manually enter statements that have been filed on paper into a database, and it can take up to two weeks for the campaign finance information to be posted on the web site. Indiana's comprehensive searchable databases of contributions and expenditures contain itemized data dating back to 1998. The databases would be better if they allowed the public to search for an expenditure by description, to sort records online and to download data for analysis offline.

In terms of web site usability, Indiana is one of only a few states that does a really good job of informing the public what campaign finance information can be found there, through a page including answers to questions such as "what does the database contain?", "whose records are included?", and "when are records available?". Some significant gaps exist in Indiana's web site, however; the state could add a list of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates, and lists of candidates for recent or current elections. Usability scores for Indiana's web site reflect the need for improvement. Testers found individual contributor information, but none of the summary numbers matched.

## Iowa

Grade	F
Rank	45

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	46
Electronic Filing Program	F	31
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	36
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	47

Iowa's rank and grade show a disclosure program that has significant room for improvement, particularly in its law and the usability of its web site.

Iowa law requires candidates to file one statement in non-election years and two statements before an election. For contributions of \$25 or more, candidates must disclose a contributor's name and address, but occupation and employer are not required. Last-minute contributions do not have to be reported prior to an election. Expenditures of five dollars or more must be disclosed, but subvendor information does not have to be reported. Independent expenditures are not required to be reported. Electronic filing is voluntary for statewide and legislative candidates.

The campaign finance data featured on Iowa's disclosure web site is all in PDF format and includes a mixture of statements generated from electronically filed data and paper statements that have been scanned and posted to the site. There are no searchable databases of contributions or expenditures. Unfortunately, the usefulness of electronically filed reports is limited by posting them in PDF format because the data cannot be sorted. Some other states that do not have campaign finance databases do post electronically filed reports in a more useful format, such as Excel or HTML, thus allowing users to sort and even download the data.

The usability of the web site also has significant room for improvement. While there is a good explanation of the campaign finance restrictions in the state, the site lacks other useful contextual information. There are no lists of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates and there is no explanation of which filers' reports appear on the site and which do not. It would also be helpful if the site used clearer terminology. For example, the text of Iowa's campaign finance disclosure law appears on the web site, but the link to get to it has the title "Chapter 56". Iowa's site performed poorly in the usability test because the testers found the site difficult to use.

Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board -- <http://www.state.ia.us/government/iecdb>

## Kansas

Grade	F
Rank	39

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	D-	36
Electronic Filing Program	F	37
Disclosure Content Accessibility	D-	25
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	45

With its rank of 39 and overall grade of an F, Kansas has significant room to improve its campaign finance disclosure program, especially in the areas of Electronic Filing and Online Contextual and Technical Usability.

Kansas has a below average campaign finance disclosure law. Candidates must file one report in non-election years and one report before each election. Candidates must disclose information about contributors who give more than \$50 and a contributor's occupation must be reported for contributions greater than \$150. Last-minute contributions are not required to be reported. Detailed information, including subvendor information, must be disclosed for expenditures greater than \$50. Independent expenditures must be reported up until twelve days before an election, but last-minute independent expenditures do not have to be disclosed until after an election. Kansas does not have an electronic filing program.

Overall, Kansas' effort to make campaign finance data accessible to the public is below average. Considering that the Governmental Ethics Commission staff goes to the trouble of data-entering information from the receipts schedules filed by candidates, there could be a better search interface and better access to the itemized data online. There is a database of contributions, but it is only possible to search for the donor and amount of a contribution. The data cannot be sorted online or downloaded for analysis offline, and disclosure records are not available in any other digital format. The site states that expenditure information is entered, but none is available online.

The site's usability also needs improvement. Even though statistical summaries of campaign finance data for legislative elections are available by e-mail from the agency, that information is not provided on the site. A list of candidates for current elections is featured on the site, but it does not include party affiliation. There is also no information about whose reports are online, no instructions about how to use the site and no listing of reporting periods. In addition, original campaign finance filings are not retained online when amendments are made to them. Despite the need for improvement, Kansas did fairly well in the usability testing. All usability testers found the disclosure web site and most found the campaign contribution data.

## Kentucky

Grade	C-
Rank	13

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B+	5
Electronic Filing Program	F	21
Disclosure Content Accessibility	C+	12
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	36

Even though it received a C-, Kentucky's rank of 13 shows that its campaign finance disclosure program is better than that of many other states. Its biggest strength lies in its law, but it has significant weaknesses in Electronic Filing and in the usability of its web site.

Kentucky has one of the strongest campaign finance disclosure laws in the country. Candidates are required to file quarterly in non-election years and more than two times in election years. Candidates must provide itemized information, including a contributor's occupation and employer, for contributions over \$100. Prior to an election, last-minute contributions do not have to be reported (except for gubernatorial candidates, who must report last-minute contributions within 24 hours). Detailed information about expenditures greater than \$25, including subvendor information, must be disclosed. Independent expenditures over \$500 must be reported, but last-minute independent expenditures are not reported prior to an election. Kentucky's electronic filing program is adequately funded, training and technical assistance are offered to filers and web-based filing is available, but electronic filing is voluntary for both statewide and legislative candidates, bringing down its grade in this category.

Kentucky does a good job of making campaign finance data accessible to the public. All campaign finance data is available in a searchable database of contributions on the web site because staff from the Kentucky Registry of Election Finance data enter campaign finance information for candidates who do not file electronically. Unfortunately the data entry takes time and paper filed records are often not available on the site until 10 days after they have been received. The database allows searches by contributor's name, zip code and employer, contribution amount and date. The data can be downloaded for analysis offline, but it is not possible to sort data online and there is no searchable database of expenditures.

The contextual usability of Kentucky's web site is very poor. The site has some historical data about campaign financing, but no lists of total amounts raised and spent by candidates in recent or current elections. It appears that annual campaign finance activity reports are required by law, but the last such report is for 2001. In addition, the site does not explain which campaign finance records are and are not on the site and the disclosure reporting periods are not clearly labeled. Kentucky's scores in the usability testing reflect the poor usability of the site. Only two of six usability testers were able to locate disclosure agency's web site from the state homepage and it took more than ten minutes to do so. Most testers could find no information about the governor's campaign finances.

## Louisiana

Grade	C-
Rank	17

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B-	20
Electronic Filing Program	C	14
Disclosure Content Accessibility	D-	25
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D	15

Louisiana's campaign disclosure program falls into the top half of the states, but could be better. Its most significant strength lies in its law and its weaknesses lie in Disclosure Content Accessibility and web site usability.

Louisiana has a better than average campaign disclosure law. Candidates are required to file annual reports in non-election years, four reports before a primary election and one report before a general election. The names and addresses of contributors must be disclosed for all contributions, however contributors' occupations and employers do not have to be reported. Last-minute contributions are also required to be disclosed prior to an election. For expenditures, vendors' names and addresses and subvendor information must be disclosed. Independent expenditures and last-minute independent expenditures are required to be reported before an election. Louisiana requires statewide candidates who reach a threshold of \$50,000 to file electronically, but legislative candidates have voluntary electronic filing.

Louisiana could improve its Disclosure Content Accessibility. All campaign finance reports are available on the state's web site. Electronically filed reports are posted as soon as they are filed and paper reports are scanned-in and posted when time permits. Louisiana's NIC Technologies databases, containing only electronically-filed reports, are especially difficult to use because they are case sensitive and there are no instructions explaining that. If a user is not aware of the case sensitivity of the database, he or she cannot find reports, making it a significant usability problem. While this is a problem with all of NIC's databases, it is particularly challenging in Louisiana because the Governor's report was filed in all-capital letters and is inaccessible through the database unless the user knows to enter search terms in all capital letters. When it was first created several years ago, the NIC database was one of the better campaign finance database systems, however, technology has advanced and this system has not kept pace.

In addition, while the state does a fair job of making its web site user-friendly, it could be improved. There are no lists of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates and there is also no list of candidates for recent or current elections. Despite the shortcomings of its site, Louisiana did well in the usability testing. All usability testers found the state ethics site and campaign finance data; most were unable to find summary campaign information.

## Maine

Grade	D-
Rank	29

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	D+	34
Electronic Filing Program	F	28
Disclosure Content Accessibility	C	14
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	41

While it received a passing grade, Maine's campaign finance disclosure program shows significant room for improvement, particularly in the areas of Electronic Filing and web site usability.

Maine law requires candidates to file two statements in non-election years and one statement six days before an election, except for gubernatorial candidates, who are required to file two pre-election statements. Detailed information, including a contributor's occupation, is required to be reported for contributions greater than \$50. Last-minute contributions must be reported before an election. Details about all expenditures, including subvendor information, must be disclosed. Expenditure disclosures do not include a vendor's name, however. Independent expenditures and last-minute independent expenditures must also be reported prior to an election. Although its electronic filing program receives adequate funding, provides some technical assistance to candidates and offers web based filing and a standard filing format, the fact that electronic filing is voluntary for statewide and legislative candidates brings down Maine's grade in this area.

Maine does an average job of making campaign finance data accessible to the public, and all campaign finance filings are available on the state's web site. Electronically filed reports are available immediately and information from paper records is data entered by agency staff within a month of being filed. All campaign finance reports can be searched in databases of contributions and expenditures. Maine does offer a unique feature on its web site – in addition to contributor and expenditure searches, it is possible to search for a particular name or word across all types of filings, including candidate, PAC, lobbyist and party committees.

The usability of Maine's web site could be much better. The terminology on the site could be improved; for example the link to the campaign finance database is called "Maine Campaign Finance Electronic Filing Link", which is not a clear description of what can be found there. In addition, there are no lists of total amounts raised and spent by candidates to give the public an overview of campaign financing in the state, no information to help the public determine which candidates' reports appear on the site and no list of candidates for current or upcoming elections. Also, there are no instructions for how to use the site and it may be hard to use with a dial-up modem or a computer with limited RAM.

Usability scores for Maine's site also show that there is substantial room for improvement. Usability testers found the campaign finance web site and easily found individual contributor information, but they did not locate summary campaign information.

## Maryland

Grade	C
Rank	12

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	39
Electronic Filing Program	A+	1
Disclosure Content Accessibility	B+	8
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D+	12

Despite its C grade, Maryland's overall ranking of twelve reflects the relative strength of its campaign finance disclosure program. While it ranks among the top states in Electronic Filing and Disclosure Content Accessibility, Maryland's disclosure law and web site usability have significant weaknesses and bring down its overall grade.

Maryland law requires candidates to file annual reports in non-election years and one report before an election. Detailed information must be disclosed for all contributions greater than \$51, but a contributor's occupation and employer do not have to be reported. Last-minute contributions do not have to be disclosed before an election. Details about all expenditures, except subvendor information, must be reported. In addition to the usual expenditure information, the number of the check used to pay the expenditure must be reported. Independent expenditures are not required to be disclosed. Electronic filing is required for statewide and legislative candidates who reach a threshold of \$5,000.

Maryland does a very good job of making its campaign finance data accessible to the public. The state makes all campaign finance data available in searchable databases of contributions and expenditures on its web site within twelve hours of being filed. State Board of Elections staff data enter information from all paper filed records. The state could improve the contextual information with clearer terminology. Maryland had a fair performance in the usability testing with three out of six testers finding the disclosure site, but none was able to find summary data.

Although improvements can be made to Maryland's web site, it does have some interesting and innovative features that are worth highlighting. The "Campaign Fund Report Statistics" page gives useful overview information including the combined total contributed to all committees, broken down by in-state and out-of-state contributors. Another unusual feature is the publication of campaign treasurers' e-mail addresses in the HTML display of campaign finance records. Contact information for treasurers can help people seeking answers to inconsistencies and irregularities in data filed by candidates, but many states remove this information from their online records. Finally, Maryland offers positive encouragement to site visitors with the note, "Feel free to experiment; you won't break anything."

## Massachusetts

Grade	C+
Rank	3

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	D+	35
Electronic Filing Program	A+	1
Disclosure Content Accessibility	A-	6
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	B-	4

As its rank at number three reflects, Massachusetts has one of the best campaign finance disclosure programs in the country. Unfortunately, its weak campaign finance disclosure law significantly brings down its overall grade.

Under Massachusetts law, candidates must file once in non-election years and once before each election. Detailed information must be provided for all contributions of \$50 or more, with occupation and employer disclosed for contributions greater than \$200. Information about all expenditures of \$50 or more must be disclosed, but subvendor information does not have to be reported. Independent expenditures must be disclosed but not last-minute independent expenditures, and last-minute contributions are not reported prior to an election. Electronic filing is mandatory for statewide and legislative candidates.

Massachusetts does a very good job of making campaign finance information accessible to the public. The state posts campaign finance data on its site as soon as it has been filed. It has nearly comprehensive databases of contributions and expenditures that are searchable on a number of fields, but not expenditure description. In addition, the databases allow users to sort search results on up to seven different fields simultaneously. Site visitors are also offered many different choices for viewing itemized campaign finance information by browsing, searching or downloading all of the files.

Massachusetts could make some small changes to improve the usability of its web site. The state does a very good job of providing an overview of campaign financing trends for statewide and legislative candidates and also does an excellent job of explaining which filers' reports are available online and which are not. The state could improve its list of candidates, which does not include information about the offices being sought, the districts or party affiliation. Unfortunately, the lack of information about candidates makes it difficult to conduct a search of either database because the site user needs to know the office being sought. The state could also improve the terminology on its site and list the reporting periods in candidates' filings.

## Michigan

Grade	C
Rank	10

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C-	32
Electronic Filing Program	F	21
Disclosure Content Accessibility	A+	1
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D	16

Although it received a C grade, Michigan's rank at number ten reflects a fairly strong campaign finance disclosure program. Michigan's biggest strength is its Disclosure Content Accessibility, but it has room for improvement in all of the other categories.

Under Michigan law, candidates must file one statement in non-election years and one statement eleven days before an election. Details of all contributions must be disclosed, with a contributor's occupation and employer reported for contributions greater than \$100. Last-minute contributions are required to be disclosed prior to an election. Expenditures of \$50 or more are required to be disclosed, but subvendor information does not have to be reported. Independent expenditures and last-minute independent expenditures are also required to be disclosed before an election. Although there is adequate funding, training and free software for electronic filing, Michigan currently has voluntary electronic filing for statewide and legislative candidates, which brings down its grade in this category. In 2004, electronic filing will become mandatory for both statewide and legislative candidates who reach a threshold of \$20,000.

Michigan's effort to make campaign finance data accessible to the public is, along with Washington State, the best in the country. All campaign finance data is available in databases of contributions and expenditures that allow for detailed searches, sorting and downloading of itemized records. Campaign finance records that are filed on paper are entered into the databases by disclosure agency staff. The site appears to function well for most users, though Macintosh users have a hard time accessing and using the site.

The usability of Michigan's web site has weaknesses, particularly in the contextual information. The web site does not feature lists of total amounts raised and spent by all candidates to help the public better understand campaign financing in Michigan. Also, Michigan is the only state that does not provide the disclosure agency's contact information on its web site. There is contact information featured on the site, but it is for the department of motor vehicles (also within the Secretary of State's office) and not for the campaign finance disclosure agency. In addition, there is no list of candidates for recent or upcoming elections and the disclosure reporting periods are not detailed in electronically filed reports. Also, the instructions describing how to use the site could be much more comprehensive. Michigan's usability testing scores reflect its shortcomings.

## Minnesota

Grade	D-
Rank	28

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B+	6
Electronic Filing Program	F	21
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	40
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	26

Minnesota barely received a passing grade, showing that its campaign finance disclosure program has significant room for improvement. Despite having one of the strongest campaign finance disclosure laws in the country, Minnesota received failing grades in Electronic Filing, Disclosure Content Accessibility and web site usability.

Minnesota law requires candidates to file an annual statement and one statement before each election. Details, including a contributor's occupation and employer, must be disclosed for contributions of \$100 or more. Last-minute contributions must be disclosed prior to an election. In addition, details about expenditures, including subvendor information, must be reported for expenditures of \$100 or more. Independent expenditures are required to be disclosed, but last-minute independent expenditures do not have to be reported before an election. Although there is adequate funding, training and free software for electronic filing, the fact that electronic filing is voluntary for both statewide and legislative candidates brings down Minnesota's grade in this category.

Minnesota has significant room for improvement in its efforts to make campaign finance data accessible to the public. Detailed information about contributions over \$100 is available on Minnesota's web site. While the state says this information is available in a searchable database of contributions, the system does not allow a search at all. Instead, a site visitor must browse through a list of every individual contributor in the system and choose one name in order to view that individual's campaign contributions. Even if a site user can get through this cumbersome process and locate an individual contributor, the only information available is the amount and date of the contribution, and the name of the candidate to whom the contribution was made – there is no other detail or identifying information, such as address or city, employer or occupation, for the contributor. It is not possible to sort or download the data. In addition, complete campaign finance reports are not available for browsing on the site.

The contextual usability of the site could also be significantly improved. There is some useful information on the site, including a good explanation of campaign finance laws in Minnesota, lists of recent changes to the law, an "Informal Chronology of Campaign Finance Legislation", and information about current administrative rules and opinions. The site also provides good summary data to give the public an overview of campaign financing in the state for the years 1998 - 2002. However, the terminology on the site is not very clear. In addition, amended data is not available on the site, and it may be difficult for the state to provide it without also adding an interface for browsing self-contained electronic reports (as opposed to the current system of searching for bits and pieces of data). The site could also provide instructions for how to use it and could be more accessible to people with slow computers.

## Mississippi

Grade	F
Rank	35

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C+	25
Electronic Filing Program	F	37
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	36
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	C-	8

Mississippi's overall rank and grade show that its campaign finance disclosure program has significant room for improvement, especially in Electronic Filing and Disclosure Content Accessibility.

Mississippi has an average campaign finance disclosure law. Candidates must file one statement in non-election years and four statements before an election. Candidates must disclose information about contributors, including occupations and employers, for those who give more than \$200. Last-minute contributions are required to be reported prior to an election. Information about expenditures over \$200 must be reported, but subvendor information is not required to be disclosed. Independent expenditures must be disclosed, but last-minute independent expenditures are not required to be reported before an election. Mississippi does not have an electronic filing system for statewide or legislative candidates.

The state has significant room for improvement in making campaign finance disclosure records available to the public. Mississippi's lack of even voluntary electronic filing contributes to its poor performance in this category. While there are scanned campaign finance reports on its web site, the absence of a database means that campaign finance information may only be accessed in limited ways.

Mississippi performed better in web site usability. There is fairly good contextual information on its web site, including thorough explanations of the state's campaign finance laws. The terminology on the site is very clear and there is good information about which campaign finance reports are posted online and which candidates are running for office. The site could be improved with lists of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates and by retaining original campaign finance reports online even after amendments have been posted. Mississippi did well in the usability testing.

## Missouri

Grade	D
Rank	26

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	8
Electronic Filing Program	C	10
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	32
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	41

Although it received a passing grade, Missouri's campaign finance disclosure program has significant room for improvement. While it has one of the strongest campaign finance disclosure laws in the country, Missouri's poor performance in Disclosure Content Accessibility and web site usability brings down its overall grade.

Missouri law requires candidates to file quarterly reports in non-election years and one report before each election. Contributor information, including occupation and employer, must be disclosed for all contributions greater than \$100. Last-minute contributions greater than \$250, received within the last twelve days prior to an election, must be reported within 48 hours of being received. Details about expenditures greater than \$100 must also be disclosed, but subvendor information is not required to be reported. Electronic filing is mandatory for statewide candidates and voluntary for legislative candidates.

Missouri does not make campaign finance data very accessible to the public. Although Missouri has electronic filing, it does not have databases of contributions or expenditures online and there is no sorting or downloading of data available. There are scanned reports available, but they can be difficult to view because the site requires the use of proprietary software, called Acorde, which does not work on some computers.

Missouri could also improve the usability of its web site. There is some good contextual information on the site, including some historical campaign finance trend information and an explanation of the campaign finance laws in the state. Unfortunately, the campaign finance overview information is not available for elections that were held after 1999. It is also difficult to determine which campaign finance records can be found on the site. The technical usability of the site has some weaknesses, including a lack of instructions about how to use it and poor searching and navigating functions on the main state web site that make it hard to find the disclosure agency's site. Missouri's campaign disclosure site failed the usability test. Some usability testers were able to locate the Missouri Ethics web site, but could not find or access any data on contributions.

## Montana

Grade	F
Rank	38

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	A-	4
Electronic Filing Program	F	37
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	47
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	40

Despite having one of the strongest campaign finance disclosure laws in the country, Montana's campaign finance disclosure program received a failing grade, in large part because it is one of only three states in the nation that does not provide any campaign finance data on its web site. The only way for the public to access campaign finance data is to obtain it from the state agency either in person or by ordering reports over the phone. The state has significant weaknesses in Electronic Filing, Disclosure Content Accessibility and web site usability.

Montana law requires candidates to file twice in non-election years and four times before an election. Contributor information, including occupation and employer, must be disclosed for contributions of \$35 or more. Last-minute contributions of \$200 or more must be disclosed within 24 hours for statewide candidates (\$100 and 48 hours for other candidates). Details, including subvendor information, must be reported for all expenditures. Independent expenditures, but not last-minute expenditures, must be reported before the election. Montana has no electronic filing program for statewide or legislative candidates.

Despite the lack of campaign finance data, there is some good contextual information on Montana's web site. There is a good explanation of campaign finance restrictions and the text of the law is nicely indexed and linked from the site. In addition, the site does make it clear that there is no campaign finance data available on the site. The site would be better if it provided lists of total amounts raised and spent by state candidates and a list of candidates for current or upcoming elections. The use of a subject index on the state homepage, with a listing specifically for "campaign finance", makes it very easy for the public to locate the disclosure agency's web site. The search feature on the Montana state web site also works very well. The state did poorly in usability testing primarily because no data is available on its web site.

## Nebraska

Grade	F
Rank	36

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B-	15
Electronic Filing Program	F	37
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	30
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	33

Although Nebraska has a relatively strong campaign finance disclosure law, its overall campaign finance disclosure program is very weak. The state performed poorly in Electronic Filing, Disclosure Content Accessibility and Online Contextual and Technical Usability.

Under Nebraska law, candidates must file one campaign finance statement in non-election years and two before each election. Details for contributions greater than \$250 must be reported, but a contributor's occupation and employer are not required to be disclosed. Last-minute contributions of \$1,000 or more must be reported within two days. Details must be disclosed for expenditures greater than \$250, but subvendor information is not required. Independent expenditures of \$250 or more must be disclosed, and last-minute independent expenditures (of \$1,000 or more) must be reported within two days. Nebraska has no electronic filing program for statewide or legislative candidates.

Nebraska does a poor job of making campaign finance data accessible to the public. Even though state agency staff enter all campaign finance records into a database in their office, there are no searchable databases of contributions or expenditures featured on the web site and it is not possible to sort or download the data. It is possible to view campaign finance records on the site in a static form. Since the state goes to the trouble of data entering all campaign finance records, it is unfortunate that there are no features on the site that allow users to manipulate the data.

The usability of the web site could also be improved. There is some good contextual information on the site, including an explanation of state campaign finance restrictions and a list of candidates for recent or upcoming elections. The site does not list disclosure reporting periods in each campaign finance report and does not clearly explain which campaign finance reports are available on the web site. It also does not retain original campaign finance reports online once amendments have been posted.

In terms of technical usability, the site is difficult to find from the state homepage, in part because the name of the agency doesn't necessarily indicate that it would be the right place to locate campaign finance information. There could also be clearer terminology on the disclosure site. For example, information about itemized expenditures has the label "miscellaneous transactions" rather than "expenditures". Despite some of its shortcomings, Nebraska's site did well in the usability testing.

## Nevada

Grade	D
Rank	27

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	44
Electronic Filing Program	F	21
Disclosure Content Accessibility	D	22
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	C	7

Nevada's campaign finance disclosure program barely received a passing grade in the study. The state has significant room to improve, particularly in its law and Electronic Filing program.

Under Nevada law, candidates who raise more than \$10,000 must file an annual statement in non-election years and all candidates must file one report before an election. Detailed information about contributors who give more than \$100 must be reported, but occupations and employers are not required. Last-minute contributions do not have to be disclosed before an election. Details about expenditures greater than \$100 must be reported, but subvendor information does not have to be included. Independent expenditures must be reported, but last-minute independent expenditures are not required to be disclosed before an election. Although the state adequately funds its electronic filing program and provides technical training and a standard filing format to its filers, Nevada received an F in this category because its program is voluntary.

Nevada could make campaign finance data more accessible to the public. The agency posts campaign finance reports for all statewide candidates and some legislative candidates on its web site within 24 hours of being filed. In late 2002, the state launched an online searchable database, called the "On-line Contributions and Expenses Reporting Pilot Program" that contains contributions and expenditures. Unfortunately, the database only contains a handful of records and has limited search options. Also, it is not possible to sort the data online or to download it for sorting offline.

The usability of the disclosure site is fairly good. There is good contextual information to help the public understand campaign financing in Nevada and the state does a good job – through its interface for viewing reports and lists of candidates – of helping site visitors determine the scope of the data available online. However, it could be improved with the addition of lists of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates and the timeframe of reporting periods in the index of a candidate's reports. Nevada did well in the usability testing, reflecting the relatively good usability of its site.

## New Hampshire

Grade	F
Rank	40

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B-	18
Electronic Filing Program	F	36
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	44
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	49

With an overall score of F, New Hampshire's campaign finance disclosure program has significant room for improvement. The state has a better than average campaign finance disclosure law, but has weaknesses in Electronic Filing, Disclosure Content Accessibility and Online Contextual and Technical Usability.

New Hampshire law requires candidates to file campaign finance statements twice in non-election years and five times in election years. Information about contributors who give \$25 or more must be disclosed; a contributor's employer and occupation must be reported for contributions greater than \$100. Last-minute contributions of \$500 or more must be disclosed within 24 hours. All expenditures must be reported, but subvendor information is not required. Independent expenditures and last-minute independent expenditures must be reported before the election. New Hampshire has voluntary electronic filing for statewide and legislative candidates.

New Hampshire has a lot of room for improvement in its efforts to make campaign finance data accessible to the public. While it does not offer searchable databases of contributions or expenditures, it does scan paper records and post them to the site in a timely manner. Unfortunately, the reports that appear on the web site are often incomplete, missing part of the street address, city or zip code. Also, the agency has changed from offering .gif images of campaign finance reports (1998 - 2001) to offering .tiff images (2002 filings), which require the user to download software in order to view the reports. The benefit of the .tiff is that it allows for a higher quality image, but the disadvantage is that the file type is not usually supported by standard Internet browsers; either way the public is looking at scanned images of paper-filed, mostly handwritten documents. In addition, reports were not available on the site for the current governor, even though the former governor's reports, as well as those for other current statewide office holders, were available. No campaign finance information is on the site for state legislative candidates.

The state could also improve the usability of its disclosure web site. The site's contextual information gives the public some understanding of campaign financing in New Hampshire, but could be better. The site does not have lists of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates in New Hampshire, there is no explanation of what reports can be found online and there are no instructions about how to use it. In addition, New Hampshire's web site failed the usability test. Only two out of six usability testers found the disclosure site and it took more than eight minutes for each to get there. No usability tester was able to find individual contributor information.

## New Jersey

Grade	C
Rank	8

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	12
Electronic Filing Program	F	21
Disclosure Content Accessibility	C	14
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	C-	8

New Jersey's rank of eight shows that it has one of the best campaign finance disclosure programs in the country. However, its C grade shows that it has room to improve, particularly in Electronic Filing and web site usability.

New Jersey has a relatively strong disclosure law, however, the state's threshold for itemized contributions is the highest in the nation and results in a lack of information about many smaller contributions. Details about contributions of \$400 or more – including occupation and employer – must be disclosed by candidates. Candidates have to file last-minute contribution reports listing contributions of \$800 or more before the election. Candidates must file four statements in non-election years and two statements before each election. Details, including subvendor information, must be reported for all expenditures. Independent expenditures of \$800 or more must be disclosed and last-minute independent expenditures (in the last 13 days before the election) must be reported within 48 hours of the expenditure. New Jersey's electronic filing program is adequately funded and technical assistance, free software and a standard filing format are available to candidates. The fact that electronic filing is voluntary for statewide and legislative candidates brings down the state's grade in this category.

New Jersey does an average job of making campaign finance information accessible to the public. The Election Law Enforcement Commission scans all campaign finance records onto the web site and reports dating back to 1999 are available. In addition, members of the public can easily order paper campaign finance records in person, by mail or fax, but at 50 cents per page, the cost of records is prohibitive. New Jersey does offer a searchable database of contributions; however, it is not possible to search by a contributor's employer or to limit a search to just one candidate. There is no searchable database of expenditures.

Despite featuring some excellent contextual information to help the public understand campaign financing in New Jersey, the overall usability of the disclosure web site could be better. One of the best features on the site is the summary information that provides an overview of campaign financing trends in New Jersey, including reports called "Trends in Legislative Financing" that cover the years 1977-1987 and 1987-1997. The site could be improved with the clear labeling of campaign finance reporting periods in report indexes and in the body of reports. In addition, scanned-in reports are hard for some members of the public to view because the site requires special software, which the agency acknowledges does not function on all computers. New Jersey's usability testing scores are average and show room for improvement, reflecting some of the shortcomings of the site. Usability testers were able to find the state's web site, but had difficulty installing the special software needed to view campaign finance reports.

## New Mexico

Grade	F
Rank	44

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	44
Electronic Filing Program	F	31
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	45
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	33

New Mexico's disclosure program ranks close to the bottom in the nation, showing that there is significant room for improvement in the state's efforts to make campaign finance data accessible to the public.

Candidates for office in New Mexico file one campaign finance statement before the primary and two statements before the general election, the second of which is due five days before Election Day. In addition, an annual statement is due in both election and non-election years. Candidates must provide detailed information about all contributors, including a contributor's occupation for those who have given \$250 or more. Last-minute contributions of \$500 or more for legislative candidates and \$2,500 or more for statewide candidates must be reported within 24 hours. All expenditures must be disclosed, but subvendor information is not required. Another important gap in New Mexico's disclosure law is the lack of independent expenditure reporting. Electronic filing of campaign statements is voluntary for all statewide and legislative candidates. The state does provide candidates with free filing software, even though funding for electronic filing was described by agency staff as inadequate.

New Mexico could do a lot to improve the accessibility of campaign finance records housed at the Secretary of State's office and to make its disclosure web site more substantive and user-friendly. There is no searchable campaign finance data on the site; instead, paper reports are scanned and made available online as images, which limits the usefulness of the information. It can take a long time for reports to be posted to the site, and viewing them requires special software that displays records improperly or not at all on some computers. One good feature of the site is its comprehensiveness – scanned reports cover all state-level candidates, include both original reports and amendments, and date back to the 1998 primary election.

The usability of the disclosure web site could also be improved, especially contextual information. For example, the site does not adequately describe the scope of the records it contains – there is no statement of exactly whose reports are there, and individual reports do not include the time period during which contributions were collected and expenditures were made. To help the public better understand campaign finance trends in the state, the agency could add an overview of the information reported by all candidates; if resources do not allow for an in-depth, comprehensive analysis, then a simple chart of total amounts raised and spent by individual candidates would be useful.

Usability testing results for New Mexico reflect the weaknesses of its site. Testers could not access the data to find out how much money was raised by the governor or locate the names of individual contributors.

## New York

Grade	D
Rank	25

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	39
Electronic Filing Program	A+	1
Disclosure Content Accessibility	D+	19
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	27

New York's low performance in the disclosure law category and its F in the area of web site usability bring the state's overall grade down to a D, in spite of a strong electronic filing program and relatively good marks for accessibility of campaign finance data.

New York's campaign disclosure law requires that candidates file two statements in non-election years and two statements before each election. Candidates must disclose detailed information about contributors who give \$99 or more, but occupation and employer information is not required. Expenditures of \$50 or more, including details about payments to subvendors, must be reported. Last-minute contributions of \$1,000 or more must be disclosed within 24 hours, but there is no equivalent reporting for last-minute independent expenditures. New York has mandatory electronic filing for all candidates who reach a threshold of \$1,000, and gives candidates free software and the option to file some reports over the web.

Relative to other states, New York does a good job of making campaign finance information accessible to the public, but with a D+ in this category there is definitely room for improvement. Campaign finance reports are posted to the web site within a few days of being filed, and the site includes a searchable database of campaign contributions. Unfortunately, the only searchable field is the contributor's name; other fields, such as date and amount of contribution and contributor's zip code, are displayed in the records but are not searchable. What hurts New York's grade the most in the area of access to data, however, is the lack of an expenditure database – itemized expenditures can be browsed online when viewing a complete report, but cannot be searched.

The Board of Elections could also improve the contextual information on its web site to give the public a better understanding of the “big picture” of disclosure in New York. The state loses points because it does not offer a compilation of summary amounts raised and spent by state-level candidates. Also missing is information about disclosure reporting periods – reporting requirements are described elsewhere on the web site, but the timeframe that defines each report is not included with the report itself. To its credit, the agency does a great job telling the public exactly whose reports are available on its web site, maintaining a list of both the active and inactive committees whose information is in the contribution database and stating specifically that the data go back to July 15, 1999.

The technical usability of New York's disclosure web site is good, and the main state web site does a great job directing those seeking official campaign finance data to the Board of Elections web site, through a search on the state portal. Typing in “campaign finance” to the search window on the state homepage returns just one search result with the name of the disclosure agency and a link directly to its homepage.

## North Carolina

Grade	D+
Rank	19

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	8
Electronic Filing Program	C	10
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	29
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D-	22

North Carolina's campaign disclosure program ranks in the top 25 states in the nation, in large part due to the strength of its disclosure law. The state's lack of an electronic filing requirement for legislative candidates and its poor showing in the area of web site usability, bring down its overall grade and rank.

The state has a fairly comprehensive campaign disclosure law, requiring quarterly filing of campaign finance statements in election years, and semi-annual filing in non-election years. Candidates must collect and report detailed information about contributors, including occupation and employer for those who give more than \$100. Last-minute contributions of \$1,000 or more must be reported within 48 hours. Expenditures greater than \$50, including subvendor details for media expenditures, must be disclosed. Independent expenditures over \$100 must be disclosed at least ten days before an election, but there is no last-minute independent expenditure reporting. Electronic filing is mandatory for state candidates above the \$5,000 threshold, and voluntary for legislative candidates; filing software is available for free from the State Board of Elections.

North Carolina has significant room for improvement in its efforts to make campaign finance information accessible to the public. It is one of six states with mandatory electronic filing that does not offer searchable databases of campaign finance information. Instead it offers browsable reports, which cannot be sorted or searched online. Another barrier to accessibility is in the display of the records on the Board's web site, with several entry points for campaign finance information and two completely different systems for looking up the data. Site visitors are likely to question whether they have seen everything available on the site, assuming they can see the records at all and do not have trouble using the proprietary report-viewing software.

Technical usability problems go beyond the confusion of the two systems for looking at campaign finance reports. To begin with, someone who doesn't know that campaign finance information is the responsibility of the Board of Elections might find it difficult to locate the agency's web site from the state web portal, and when they do get there, may run into confusing terminology that makes navigating the site difficult. For example, a section called "contribution/expenditures", where one might expect to find actual campaign contributions and expenditures, instead contains a section called "contribution and expenditure limits".

The state does slightly better providing contextual information on the disclosure web site, but again, could improve. From 1990-1998 the agency published an analysis of campaign finance activity for each election cycle and has archived these analyses online; but for some reason, similar overview reports are not available for elections held since 1998. The result is a lack of information about recent campaign

finance trends that might help citizens grasp the larger picture of state-level disclosure in North Carolina. (Downloadable itemized campaign finance data is available going back to 1992, which is nice, but is not a substitute for a good overview report.) A better explanation of exactly what data is on the site, and more in-depth information about campaign finance restrictions and disclosure requirements, would also improve North Carolina's grade in web site usability.

State Board of Elections -- <http://www.sboe.state.nc.us>

## North Dakota

Grade	F
Rank	48

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	50
Electronic Filing Program	F	37
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	43
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	C	5

North Dakota's F and overall rank of 48 can be attributed to the fact that it has the weakest campaign disclosure law in the country, does poorly in making campaign finance data available to the public and lacks an electronic filing program. The only reason it does not come in last overall is that the Secretary of State's web site is easy to use, provides some context for understanding disclosure in the state, and does contain some campaign finance data, (as opposed to the states ranked 49 and 50 in the study, which do not publish any campaign finance records on the Internet.)

Candidates for office in North Dakota must file one statement prior to each election, plus an annual report in both election and non-election years. Candidates are required to disclose information about contributors who give more than \$200, but that information does not include the contributor's occupation or employer, or the details of loans given to campaigns. Last-minute contributions of \$500 or more must be reported within 48 hours. Expenditures, independent expenditures and last-minute independent expenditures are not required to be disclosed.

To improve accessibility to the campaign finance data that is disclosed by candidates in the state, North Dakota could expand upon the static lists of itemized contributions currently available on its disclosure web site. Putting the same records – which are already in an electronic format thanks to the agency having data-entered information from the paper filings – into a database or other format that allows searching, sorting and downloading, would give the public the ability to utilize this information in a much more meaningful way.

North Dakota performs best in the area of web site usability, using clear terminology and providing information on its web site to help the public understand campaign financing in the state. An explanation of the law, a comprehensive list of candidates, and a format that clearly shows the universe of reports available on the site all contribute to a number five ranking in this category. The site could be improved, however, with the addition of an analysis or summary of campaign finance information, a better explanation of the disclosure reporting periods, and a format for viewing all of a particular candidate's reports from the same index page (as opposed to the current system, which organizes reports by date and requires a lot of moving around the site in order to see all the filings for one candidate over multiple years.)

## Ohio

Grade	C+
Rank	4

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C	27
Electronic Filing Program	A+	1
Disclosure Content Accessibility	A+	3
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	24

Ohio does a great job of making campaign finance data accessible to the public, and its ability to do so is in part due to its mandatory electronic filing law. High scores in both categories contribute to Ohio's high rank in the study, which might have been even higher if it were not for an average disclosure law and a web site that is lacking in the area of Online Contextual and Technical Usability.

Ohio's disclosure law requires candidates to file annual reports in non-election years and two reports before each election. Details about all contributions, except those under \$25 that were collected at political fundraising events, must be disclosed. Occupation and employer information must be disclosed for contributors giving over \$100. Last-minute contributions of \$2,500 or more (\$500 or more for Supreme Court candidates) must be reported within two business days, but this requirement does not apply to legislative candidates. All expenditures (not including subvendor details) must be reported, and for expenditures of \$25 or more a copy of the canceled check or receipt must be attached to the report. Independent expenditures must be disclosed, but there is no last-minute independent expenditure reporting.

Electronic filing of reports is mandatory if a candidate reaches a threshold of \$10,000, but legislative candidates can opt-out until March 2004 by paying a data-entry fee. The Secretary of State provides free web-based filing, and also accepts filings via e-mail in an approved standard filing format.

The Secretary of State's disclosure web site makes it easy to research the campaign finance records of candidates in the state. The comprehensive site includes a database of contributions with the option of searching on a number of key fields including contributor's name, employer and zip code, contribution date and amount. A searchable database of expenditures is equally user-friendly and rich in data; records in both systems go back to 1990 for statewide office candidates and 1995 for state legislative candidates. The agency's unique Campaign Finance File Transfer Page was developed "to allow users to obtain large sets of data faster than the normal query process" and offers pre-queried files – such as all contributions by all candidates in a given year – that are updated daily. Detailed and helpful instructions answer most of the questions site visitors might have about either the databases or the pre-queried files.

While it can serve as a model in the area of data accessibility, the contextual usability of Ohio's disclosure web site could be improved. Some things are done well; for example, the site uses clear terminology, provides a good explanation (called "data history") of which reports and data are online, and adequately describes campaign finance restrictions and disclosure requirements in the state. However, there is no overall summary information comparing total amounts raised and spent by different filers, so it is difficult to get a good idea of how one candidate's fundraising might compare to the rest, without spending

a lot of time downloading and analyzing the data. Also missing from the report indexes and reports themselves are the timeframes of each report (which are described elsewhere on the site, but would be more helpful if featured with the data.)

Despite some of the site's shortcomings, Ohio did well in the usability testing. Some researchers, however, had difficulty locating the disclosure agency's site from the state homepage, and some didn't make it past the File Transfer page to the searchable databases. In years past, the site was found to be extremely slow, which happily is no longer the case for most site visitors; those with older computers or slower connections may still find it hard to access the data.

Secretary of State -- <http://www.state.oh.us/sos/>

## Oklahoma

Grade	D+
Rank	18

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B-	18
Electronic Filing Program	F	21
Disclosure Content Accessibility	B	11
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	45

While its D+ grade might not indicate it on the surface, Oklahoma's campaign finance disclosure program has the potential to be much better. With a reinstatement of its mandatory electronic filing rule and a few changes to its disclosure law and web site, Oklahoma could climb closer to the top in the study.

The state's campaign finance disclosure law is above average and requires active candidates to file quarterly reports every year, plus an additional report each election. Candidates must disclose details, including occupation and employer, about contributors who give more than \$50. Last-minute contributions of \$500 or more must be reported within 24 hours. All expenditures must be disclosed, including detailed subvendor information. Independent expenditures must be disclosed as well, and last-minute independent expenditures of \$500 or more must be reported within 24 hours. Oklahoma once had a mandatory electronic filing program, established by administrative rule in 1997, but that rule was changed by an act of the legislature and electronic filing is now voluntary.

Oklahoma does a good job of making campaign finance data accessible to the public. The strength of its disclosure web site is that it contains searchable contribution and expenditure databases. The weakness is that those databases are populated with information from electronically filed reports only, which, combined with the change in the electronic filing rule, results in a wealth of data from the 1998 election, but just a handful of reports since then. Most reports are filed on paper and are not scanned for the web. The paper reports are only available on paper through the Oklahoma Ethics Commission's offices. The state's B grade in this category reflects the fact that the foundation for providing online access to campaign finance data is there – what the state needs to do next is start filling in the structure with actual reports, and it appears changes are already underway. Recently the Ethics Commission unveiled a new system for electronic filing of campaign finance reports; hopefully this will result in a larger number of reports available for viewing online.

Web site usability is clearly the area in which Oklahoma has the most room for improvement. The state's searchable campaign finance databases were first developed in 1997 and problems apparent from the beginning, although relatively minor, have not been addressed. Case sensitive search fields and a search results page that first lists every committee in the system before returning any data, are just two examples of usability problems for which there is a relatively simple fix. A lack of instructions for using the system makes those and other technical difficulties even more frustrating. Not surprisingly, Oklahoma's disclosure web site failed the usability test. Contextual usability could be improved with clearer terminology, the addition of lists of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates, and a better explanation of exactly whose reports are on the web site.

## Oregon

Grade	D-
Rank	30

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B+	6
Electronic Filing Program	C-	15
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	40
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	41

Although Oregon has a strong disclosure law and mandatory electronic filing of campaign finance reports, it received a barely passing grade. Oregon's performance was poorest in Disclosure Content Accessibility and web site usability.

Oregon's disclosure law ranked sixth in the study and requires candidates to file two statements before each election, plus one statement in non-election years. Candidates must disclose information about contributors who give \$50 or more, including their occupations and employers. Last-minute contributions of more than \$500 and independent expenditures of more than \$1,000 must be reported before the election. All expenditures must be disclosed and some subvendor information is required. Oregon requires electronic filing for any campaign that reaches a threshold of \$50,000, but this mandate is waived if the filer submits a form stating they are unable to file reports in an electronic format. Starting in 2004, these waivers will no longer be permitted.

While the Secretary of State does post some campaign finance data on its disclosure web site, no significant improvements have been made since electronic filing began several years ago and large holes in the online information remain. The site offers an HTML display of summary figures raised and spent by all state level candidates, for all election-related reports going back at least a decade. However, the only itemized contribution and expenditure data on the web site (displayed as scanned-in images) is either from late contribution reports or from reports filed during the legislative session; with a legislature that normally meets just six months out of every two years, there isn't much information there. Why the agency posts the details contained in these reports, but not the details of regular election filings, is unclear but may be related to what agency staff described as inadequate funding for its electronic filing and online disclosure program.

Contextual information on the Secretary of State's web site is good but could be expanded to give the public a better overall understanding of campaign disclosure in Oregon. A comprehensive campaign finance manual on the site describes Oregon's disclosure requirements and campaign finance restrictions, and is especially helpful in conjunction with the full text of the state's disclosure law, which is also on the site. What's missing though, is a simple list of all candidates and how much money they raised and spent in each election, which should be easy to compile from the individual candidate reports on the site that already contain those summary figures.

Technical usability scores for the agency's web site were also low and usability testers had trouble finding campaign finance data for the current governor, further indicating room for improvement in site design and user-friendliness.

## Pennsylvania

Grade	F
Rank	34

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C	30
Electronic Filing Program	F	28
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	33
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D-	22

Pennsylvania's average disclosure law is the high point of campaign finance disclosure in the state, with scores in the areas of Electronic Filing, accessibility to data, and web site usability in the D and F range.

Pennsylvania law requires candidates to file two reports before each election, plus an annual report in non-election years. Candidates must disclose details about contributors who give \$50 or more, and occupation and employer information is required for contributions over \$250. Last-minute contributions of \$500 or more must be disclosed within 24 hours. Every expenditure must be disclosed, but subvendor information is not required. Independent expenditures are reported, as are last-minute independent expenditures of \$500 or more. Pennsylvania has voluntary electronic filing for both statewide and state legislative candidates and offers a web-based filing system free of charge.

Pennsylvania has significant room for improvement in its efforts to make official campaign finance information accessible to the public in a meaningful way. Reports for all statewide and legislative candidates are posted on the Department of State's web site within a few days of being filed and go back to 1998, but they can only be browsed, not searched. Considering the amount of electronic data on the site, it is surprising there are not more options for analyzing it online.

Fortunately, there is an alternative to the official disclosure site. Since 1994, Pennsylvania State Representative Greg Vitali, a strong advocate for online disclosure of campaign finance data, has published a web site at [www.pacampaigns.com](http://www.pacampaigns.com) with a database of campaign finance records for statewide and state legislative candidates. The purpose of Rep. Vitali's effort is to demonstrate the ease and low cost of posting such information online, and he has vowed to maintain his web site until the state adds similar functionality to its official site.

For those without access to a computer, viewing reports in person or asking for copies of the reports from the disclosure agency are the only options for obtaining campaign finance information. Unfortunately, paper records are difficult to access given the requirement that a request to view the records be made in writing, and it may take one to two weeks to get copies.

Pennsylvania did well in the usability testing, reflecting the testers' ability to easily find the official disclosure web site and locate itemized contribution data online. The Department of State site uses clear terminology and provides good descriptions of campaign finance restrictions and disclosure requirements in the state, but lacks other important contextual information. For example, reporting periods are not included in the body of the campaign finance reports on the site, making it difficult to determine the time periods of each filing. There is no "data history" description to explain exactly

whose reports are online and there are no lists of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates. Amended reports are made available and are clearly labeled, but in cases where amendments have been filed the original filings have been removed, making it more difficult for site visitors to determine which information has changed in the newer filing.

Department of State -- <http://www.dos.state.pa.us>

## Rhode Island

Grade	C
Rank	11

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C	30
Electronic Filing Program	C	10
Disclosure Content Accessibility	A-	4
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	27

Rhode Island's high grade in disclosure content accessibility helps boost its rank to eleven overall, but it has some room for improvement. The state has an average Campaign Disclosure Law and poor web site usability.

Candidates are required by law to file quarterly statements in non-election years and two statements before each election, with the last statement filed seven days before Election Day. Details, including information about a contributor's employer, must be disclosed for contributors who give \$100 or more. Last-minute contributions are not required to be disclosed, except by statewide candidates receiving matching funds, who must file contribution reports daily in the last seven days before an election. Expenditures over \$100 must be disclosed, but subvendor information is not required to be reported. Independent expenditures are disclosed, including those made at the last-minute. Rhode Island has mandatory electronic filing for statewide candidates but electronic filing is voluntary for legislative candidates until 2004. The state provides free, web-based filing software and technical assistance for candidates who use the electronic filing system.

Rhode Island has come a long way since 1999, when there was no campaign finance data available on its web site and the state received a "Dark Skies" rating in the California Voter Foundation's Digital Sunlight Awards study. Today the official disclosure web site contains databases of contributions and expenditures from electronically filed records that are searchable on a number of fields. The site also features records for each candidate that can be browsed online in PDF format.

There are some terminology and technical usability problems with the data portion of the web site that made it difficult to locate data in some instances and resulted in a poor usability test score, but for the most part the site works well and is easy to navigate. To help people make sense of the wealth of data online, Rhode Island could increase the contextual information on its web site. The site does provide a good explanation of the state's disclosure requirements and law, and includes enough detail about individual filings for researchers to determine whose reports are online and whose are not included in the system. Rhode Island lost points in this category because reporting periods are not labeled in an index of a particular candidate's reports, and there are no lists of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates.

## South Carolina

Grade	F
Rank	49

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C-	32
Electronic Filing Program	F	37
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	50
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	50

South Carolina came in next to last place in the study, primarily due to its lack of electronic filing of campaign finance reports and the absence of any official campaign finance data on the Web.

The state is on the brink of major improvements in online disclosure of campaign finance information, however, with a bill (H3206) signed by Governor Mark Sanford in June, 2003 that will make sweeping revisions to the state's campaign finance law and requiring candidates to file campaign reports electronically. These changes will be included in the study's next round of research; South Carolina's grade and rank should improve significantly next year.

South Carolina ranked 50<sup>th</sup> in accessibility to disclosure data and campaign finance reports, and currently does not publish any campaign finance data on the Internet, or make it available on disk or CD-Rom. With a trip or phone call to the State Ethics Commission, South Carolinians can get copies of the paper-filed campaign finance records, but at 50 cents per page the cost is high and may pose an additional barrier to public access. Hopefully, this situation will change quickly once electronic filing of campaign data is implemented.

There are some simple things the state could do to improve the contextual information on its web site right now, such as adding a comprehensive list of candidates or recent election results to its site (which will be more important when there is actually campaign finance data there to research). A list of committees with the total amounts raised and spent in the last election would be helpful as well. One unique piece of contextual information on the disclosure web site is a page that lists committees that have failed to properly file campaign reports, along with the amounts they have been fined by the Commission.

The Ethics Commission appears to be doing the best it can considering it has been handicapped by poor disclosure laws and limited resources. In its report to the legislature last summer, the Commission recognized the need for Internet disclosure of campaign data and named the development of an electronic filing system as one of its two "key strategic goals". Now that electronic filing will be required by law, the Commission is more likely to get the funding it needs to implement that goal.

South Carolina's disclosure web site failed the usability test mainly because there is no data there. Only a small number of testers were able to find the disclosure site from the state's main homepage.

## South Dakota

Grade	F
Rank	43

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	49
Electronic Filing Program	F	37
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	36
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	B-	2

While South Dakota has significant room for improvement in its efforts to make campaign finance data accessible to the public, it does a good job of providing the public with contextual information and a usable web site. Its near-last rank in the disclosure law category and lack of electronic filing, though, result in an F overall.

South Dakota's campaign disclosure law ranked 49<sup>th</sup>, ahead of only neighboring North Dakota. The law requires candidates to file one statement annually, plus one statement before each election. Candidates must report details about contributors who give \$100 or more, including information about a contributor's employer, but not occupation. Last-minute contributions of \$500 or more must be disclosed within 48 hours. Expenditures are reported, but detailed subvendor information is not required. Independent expenditures are not reported.

The state's official disclosure web site contains up-to-date itemized campaign finance data for all statewide and state legislative candidates for the most recent election cycle, plus summary data going back to 1994. Unfortunately, all of the itemized records are in the form of scanned images of paper-filed reports – some handwritten – which means there is little opportunity for meaningful analysis of the data.

South Dakota offers good contextual information on its disclosure web site, including an explanation of campaign finance laws and reporting requirements, a comprehensive list of candidates from the most recent election, and a format that helps people determine which reports have been filed and are available online. Clear terminology throughout the web site enhances its usability. The state could improve contextual usability by posting campaign finance report summaries for more recent elections on its disclosure site – currently the site features reports showing total amounts raised and spent by state candidates from 1994 - 2000, but similar reports do not exist (at least not online) for the 2002 election. The clear labeling of disclosure reporting periods, both in the index of a candidate's reports and within the report itself, would also boost South Dakota's grade in this category.

South Dakota received a near-perfect score for technical usability. The Secretary of State's web site is easy to navigate, and the state did very well in the usability testing; all testers quickly found South Dakota's disclosure web site from the state homepage and easily located individual contributor data.

## Tennessee

Grade	F
Rank	46

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	39
Electronic Filing Program	F	37
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	48
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D	16

Tennessee's overall F grade and low rank in the study can be attributed to a Campaign Disclosure Law that is deficient in a number of important areas, a lack of electronic filing and a near-bottom rank in the category of accessibility to campaign finance data.

The law requires state-level candidates in Tennessee to file one statement before each election, and annual statements in non-election years. Candidates must disclose details about contributors who give more than \$100, but contributors' occupations and employers do not have to be reported. Last-minute contributions over \$5,000 must be disclosed within 72 hours. Expenditures greater than \$100 must be reported, but subvendor information (such as a breakdown of credit card expenses) is not required. Independent expenditures are reported, but last-minute independent expenditures are not disclosed before an election.

Accessing campaign finance records in Tennessee is extremely difficult, and there are no filings available on the official disclosure web site. The absence of data is due to a provision of Tennessee's disclosure law that requires people who want to view campaign finance records to first complete a form stating their name, address, home and business phone numbers, driver's license number, and name of the candidate whose records they wish to view. These forms are collected by the Registry of Election Finance and made available to the elected officials whose reports have been accessed.

Tennessee is the only state in the nation with such a system for inspecting or obtaining copies of campaign finance records, and many see the "inspection notice provision" as a major barrier to data accessibility. The Registry of Election Finance itself in its 2002 annual report to the governor and general assembly recognized that the effect of the provision has been "to deter some citizens from reviewing elected officials' reports" and has urged a change in the law.

The state avoids the rank of 50 for Disclosure Content Accessibility only because the Registry publishes a report online that includes the total amounts raised and spent by all statewide and legislative candidates, giving site visitors at least one tool for gaining a better understanding of money trends in Tennessee politics. Additionally, the law requires the agency to data-enter the contents of the campaign filings, so the records do eventually end up in an electronic format and a disk is available for purchase, provided the inspection form is completed.

Relative to other states, Tennessee has good contextual information on its disclosure web site, including an explanation of the campaign finance requirements in the state, the text of the disclosure law, and a comprehensive list of candidates. The D grade in the combined contextual and technical usability category reflects the minimal amount of campaign finance data on the site, and a mid-range score in the usability testing.

Tennessee Registry of Election Finance -- <http://www.state.tn.us/tref/>

## Texas

Grade	C+
Rank	4

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B-	20
Electronic Filing Program	C-	15
Disclosure Content Accessibility	A-	4
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D+	13

Texas' campaign disclosure program did very well in the study, ranking among the top five states in the nation. Texas received an A- in the area of Disclosure Content Accessibility, but its D+ in web site usability and overall C+ grade is an indication that even top-ranked states have room to improve.

The state's campaign disclosure law is above average. Candidates must file two pre-election reports, the last due eight days before the election, plus two reports in non-election years. Details about contributors who give more than \$50 must be reported, but occupation and employer information is required only for judicial campaigns. Last-minute contributions of \$1,000 or more to a statewide or state senate candidate (\$200 or more for a state representative) must be disclosed within 48 hours of being made. Expenditures of over \$50 must be reported, but subvendor information does not have to be disclosed. Independent expenditures and last-minute independent expenditures must be reported at varying thresholds. Texas has mandatory electronic filing for candidates who reach a threshold of \$20,000, unless the filer states that his or her committee does not use a computer for campaign data. The state does provide filers with free software and web-based filing, and offers training for the system as well.

Texas does an excellent job of making campaign finance information accessible to the public. The Ethics Commission web site contains at least some data for every candidate; complete reports are there for electronic filers, summary data only is posted for paper filers. The site features searchable databases of both contributions and expenditures with search results that can be sorted and downloaded, plus self-contained filings for downloading or browsing online. To raise its A- accessibility grade to an A, the state could add detailed data for paper filers to its site and increase the speed with which campaign finance reports are posted to the disclosure web site. Electronic filings are generally available within two days of the filing deadline; however, sometimes they are not posted until the reports for all candidates seeking the same office have been submitted, which can delay the availability of reports for weeks.

Texas has good contextual information on its disclosure web site compared to many other states, but could improve in a number of ways. On the positive side, a format for viewing filings allows site visitors to see clearly the whole universe of reports filed by each candidate, and there are also compilations of total amounts raised and spent by each candidate in elections from 1996 to 2002. On the negative side, disclosure reporting periods are not included in the index of each candidate's reports, original filings are not retained in cases where amendments have been filed (they now replace originals online) terminology is not very clear, and web site design could be improved.

Texas' performance in the usability testing was mixed. All testers found the Ethics Commission site from the state homepage within two minutes, but many were not able to retrieve summary data or individual contributor information at all, perhaps due to the confusion of the site having multiple interfaces for searching along with some navigation and terminology problems.

Texas Ethics Commission -- <http://www.ethics.state.tx.us>

## Utah

Grade	D-
Rank	33

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	39
Electronic Filing Program	F	28
Disclosure Content Accessibility	D	20
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D-	19

Although it received a passing grade overall, Utah has significant room to improve its campaign finance disclosure program. Its most significant weaknesses are in its law and electronic filing program.

Under Utah law, candidates are not required to file campaign finance reports in non-election years, but must file two reports before each election. Details about contributors who give \$50 or more must be disclosed, but occupation and employer information is not required. Last-minute contributions do not have to be disclosed prior to an election. All expenditures must be reported; however, subvendor information is not required. In addition, independent expenditures are not required to be reported before an election. Electronic filing is voluntary for statewide and legislative candidates.

Utah ranked in the top 20 for accessibility to disclosure content, but still has room for improvement in this area. The official disclosure web site published by the State Elections Office (under the purview of the Lieutenant Governor's office) includes itemized contributions and expenditures for every statewide and legislative candidate; agency staff data enter records from paper filers. The database of contributions is comprehensive, but could be improved to include an expanded contributor search (currently the only searchable field is contributor name), and the addition of complete reports for each candidate, instead of just lists of contributions and expenditures that span several reporting periods. The web site does not feature a searchable database of expenditures.

Utah could also improve the usability of its campaign finance disclosure web site. Although the site features some good contextual information, more could be added to give site visitors a better framework for understanding campaign disclosure in Utah. The disclosure site has an innovative feature to help visitors to the disclosure site determine which reports have been filed and are available online for each candidate, but the site is still lacking a more general and complete description of what and whose data is available online. There is summary campaign data showing total amounts raised and spent by all candidates in each race since 1998, but the amounts for individual candidates are not broken out, which would be a more useful tool for comparing various candidates' activities. Some terminology on the site could also be changed to help improve usability. For example, labels for some features on the site are confusing or misleading, such as the heading "Search Reports" which actually allows browsing of contributions made to candidates, and the link "Candidate Contributor Summary", which goes to the searchable database of contributors.

## Vermont

Grade	F
Rank	42

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	D-	38
Electronic Filing Program	F	37
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	33
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	30

With a ranking in the bottom ten states, Vermont has significant room to improve its campaign finance disclosure program. Vermont's highest grade in any category is a D- for its law; it received Fs in every other category.

Vermont requires candidates to file one non-election year report and two reports before each election. Candidates must disclose information about contributors who give more than \$100, but occupation and employer information is not required and last-minute contributions do not have to be reported. All expenditures must be disclosed, including subvendor information. Independent expenditures do not have to be disclosed. Vermont has no electronic filing for statewide or legislative candidates.

Vermont has much room to improve its efforts to make campaign finance information accessible to the public. Campaign finance reports are posted on the Secretary of State's web site within ten days of being filed and they are available as either scanned images or HTML pages. There are no databases of itemized contributions or expenditures. One outstanding feature of the web site is a database of historical campaign finance data for elections dating back to 1916. The database is unique to Vermont (no other state had anything comparable) and allows the user to select the year of an election and see how much each candidate spent in a race and whether they won or lost. This gives the public a great deal of information about campaign financing trends in the state.

The usability of the web site could also be significantly better. The site uses clear terminology, provides an explanation of the state's campaign finance restrictions and has a comprehensive list of candidates for the most recent election. The agency could improve the site by explaining which reports are included online, clearly labeling reporting periods, and posting both original filings and amendments on the Web. The disclosure site was difficult to find from the state web portal, and Vermont's usability testing scores indicate that there is substantial room for improvement.

## Virginia

Grade	D+
Rank	22

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	12
Electronic Filing Program	D	17
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	33
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D+	13

Virginia is ranked in the top 25 states, but its grade of D+ shows that its campaign finance disclosure program needs work. Virginia's strength lies in its Campaign Disclosure Law and its most significant weakness is in Disclosure Content Accessibility.

Virginia law requires candidates to file two statements in non-election years, two statements before primary elections and four statements before general elections. Information about contributors who give more than \$100 must be reported, including information about a donor's occupation and employer. Last-minute contributions of \$1,000 or more for statewide candidates (\$500 for other candidates) must be reported by the next business day. All expenditures must be disclosed, including credit card details, but no other subvendor information is required. Independent expenditures must be reported, but last-minute independent expenditures do not have to be disclosed prior to an election. Virginia has mandatory electronic filing for statewide candidates and voluntary electronic filing legislative candidates.

Virginia has considerable room to improve its efforts to make campaign finance information accessible to the public. Disclosure reports are posted to the web site in a timely manner, but the site does not feature searchable databases of contributions or expenditures. Although it is buried in the web site, some site visitors might stumble across a non-functioning interface for searching reports, which is confusing because there is no explanation for why the site would continue to include a feature that is no longer operating.

The usability of the site is below average. However, the contextual information on the site is good, with an explanation of the law, information about what reports are online, clear labeling of reporting periods on the candidate filings, and the use of clear terminology throughout the site. There is a comprehensive list of candidates for current elections; however, it could be easier to view. The site could be improved with the addition of lists of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates and the posting of both of original campaign finance reports and amendments. It could also be easier for the public to locate the Board of Elections site from the state homepage.

## Washington

Grade	A-
Rank	1

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	A	1
Electronic Filing Program	A+	1
Disclosure Content Accessibility	A+	1
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	C-	8

Washington has the best campaign finance disclosure program in the country. With an overall grade of an A-, there are some minor improvements that can be made to the program, particularly in web site usability. Nonetheless, Washington's program is a good model for other states to follow.

Washington's far-reaching campaign disclosure law ranked number one in the study. The state requires candidates to file monthly reports year-round, and two additional reports before each election. Candidates disclose information about contributors who give more than \$25, including occupation and employer for contributions greater than \$100. Last-minute contributions of \$1,000 or more must be reported by the donor within 24 hours and the candidate within 48 hours. Expenditures of \$50 or more must be disclosed and subvendor information is required. Independent expenditures of \$1,000 or more occurring within 21 days of an election have to be reported within 24 hours; otherwise independent expenditures must be disclosed within five days of being made. Washington mandates electronic filing for any candidate that reaches a threshold of \$25,000 and provides campaigns with free filing software and technical assistance.

Washington does an excellent job of making campaign finance data accessible to the public – it received an A+ in this section of the criteria. The state fulfills requests for paper copies of campaign finance records the same day an order is placed and charges a very reasonable price of ten cents per page. It is also possible for the public to obtain campaign finance records on CD-Rom or Zip disk for ten dollars or less depending on the format requested. Campaign finance reports are posted to the web site as soon as they are received and are a combination of scanned-in and electronically filed documents. The site features contribution and expenditure databases of electronically filed records that are searchable across multiple fields.

The contextual information on Washington's web site is also good, but there is room for improvement in this category. The state provides an overview of campaign financing trends, explains campaign finance restrictions, describes which reports are and are not on the web site, and posts both original filings and amended reports. The site could be improved with the inclusion of reporting periods in the indexes of a candidate's reports and in the reports themselves. In addition, some of the terminology on the site could be clearer, particularly the titles of the web site sections. Washington provides a subject index on the state homepage, which is an excellent feature to help members of the public locate the Public Disclosure Commission's site, and contributes to good overall technical usability.

## West Virginia

Grade	F
Rank	37

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C+	23
Electronic Filing Program	F	37
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	40
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D-	18

Although West Virginia received an F, it did get a C+ for its Campaign Disclosure Law and ranked 18<sup>th</sup> in usability. West Virginia's most significant weaknesses lie in Electronic Filing and Disclosure Content Accessibility.

West Virginia requires candidates to file annual non-election year reports and two reports before each election. Details must be disclosed about all contributors, but occupation and employer information is only required for contributions of \$250 or more. Last-minute contributions are not disclosed until after the election. All expenditures must be reported, but subvendor information does not have to be disclosed. Independent expenditures and last-minute independent expenditures have to be disclosed prior to an election. West Virginia does not have electronic filing.

West Virginia has significant room to improve its efforts to make campaign finance information accessible to the public. Paper records are scanned and posted to the web site within four days of being received. It is possible to browse an index of a candidate's reports and view itemized transactions within a report, but there are no searchable databases of contributions or expenditures on the site. The state will provide a disk with scanned copies of campaign finance reports to members of the public upon request.

West Virginia's site is a bit difficult to use, given that there is not much information on it. Reports for each election year are available in different places and users have to search on more than one screen to find reports for candidates. It might be better to provide a comprehensive list of candidates by office and then link to reports from that list. The site does provide some good contextual information to the public, including an explanation of the state's campaign finance restrictions and law, a comprehensive list of candidates for recent elections, an explanation of which campaign finance reports are online, and the posting of both original filings and amended reports. The clear labeling of disclosure reporting periods within candidates' reports, and lists of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates could make the site better.

## Wisconsin

Grade	C-
Rank	15

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	11
Electronic Filing Program	A-	8
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	31
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	C-	11

Although it ranked 15<sup>th</sup> in the nation for campaign finance disclosure, Wisconsin's grade of C- shows that it has significant room for improvement. It has a strong Electronic Filing program, but its failing grade in Disclosure Content Accessibility brought down Wisconsin's overall grade and rank.

Wisconsin law requires candidates to file semi-annual reports in non-election years and one report before each election. Candidates must disclose information about contributors who give more than \$20, with occupation and employer information required for contributions greater than \$100. Expenditures of more than \$20 must be reported, but subvendor information is not required. Last-minute contributions of \$500 or more must be disclosed within 24 hours. Independent expenditures and last-minute independent expenditures must be disclosed prior to an election. Wisconsin has mandatory electronic filing for statewide and legislative candidates who reach a threshold of \$20,000.

Wisconsin has significant room to improve its efforts to make campaign finance information accessible to the public. Campaign finance reports are posted on the web site within one day of being received, but itemized reports are only available for electronic filers and they can only be browsed or sorted, not searched. Late contribution reports are scanned and posted onto the site. Wisconsin is one of six states with mandatory electronic filing that does not offer searchable databases of campaign finance data online. The lack of databases limits the usefulness of the campaign finance information that is on the site.

The usability of the site is average and could be improved. The site features a report that provides the public with an overview of campaign financing in the state, an explanation of the disclosure law, a comprehensive list of candidates for recent or current elections and information about which reports are on the site. The site uses clear terminology for explanations. The inclusion of disclosure reporting periods in indexes and in the body of campaign finance reports, and the posting of both original filings and amendments would make the site better. It is somewhat hard to locate the disclosure agency from the state's web portal, and once site visitors reach the Board of Elections homepage, they have to browse a very long list of election-related links and may have difficulty locating campaign finance information. Wisconsin's usability scores also indicate that there is room for improvement. Only two out of six usability testers were able to locate the governor's contribution totals. The usability testers were not able to find any individual contributions.

## Wyoming

Grade	F
Rank	50

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	48
Electronic Filing Program	F	37
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	48
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	39

Wyoming has the weakest campaign disclosure program in the country and is ranked at the bottom of all states in the study. Wyoming's most significant weaknesses lie in its law and Disclosure Content Accessibility.

Under Wyoming law, candidates must file two reports in non-election years and one report before each election. Contributions greater than \$25 must be reported, but a contributor's occupation and employer are not required. Last-minute contributions are not disclosed prior to an election. While expenditures have to be disclosed, candidates do not have to report them until after the election and subvendor information is not required to be reported. In addition, there is no reporting of independent expenditures. Wyoming has no electronic filing program for statewide or legislative candidates.

Wyoming is one of only three states that does not publish any campaign finance data on its web site. The only way the public can obtain this information is by getting paper copies of reports from the state. The state makes paper records accessible by allowing people to obtain copies in person or by fax, mail, e-mail or phone request. At 50 cents per page for the first ten pages of any request, the records are expensive. For large reports, the cost decreases to 15 cents per page for additional pages beyond the first ten.

The usability of the site is also very weak. There is a comprehensive list of candidates and an explanation of the law; however, there are no lists of total amounts raised and spent by state candidates. It is also somewhat difficult to find the disclosure agency's site from the state's homepage. Not surprisingly, Wyoming's site failed the usability test. None of the usability testers was able to find the state disclosure site or information about contributions to candidates.

# IV.

## Appendices

- Methodology of Usability Testing
- Grading State Disclosure Criteria
- Glossary
- Credits

### Appendix I – Methodology of Usability Testing

The usability tests determine if the disclosure information provided on the Web by state disclosure agencies is accessible to the average citizen. To do this we designed a test to answer the following question: “Can a non-expert find basic, informative data about campaign finances on the Internet in his or her state without undue difficulty or investment of time?”

Most usability tests compare a handful of web sites, and are concerned with minor differences between them (see Steve Krug’s “Don’t Make Me Think” (2000)). Web site designers might be concerned about the location of a task bar on a web page or the use of drop down menus. They hire testers to sit in front of computers and do simple tasks, and the web designers watch how they navigate around the site. The Grading State Disclosure usability test is different. We were not concerned with minor differences but with gross ones. Dozens of interfaces were compared across 50 states, and the test measured whether the overall design of a state’s web site—from architecture to jargon to database-facilitated access to information by the average voter. The two types of testing do share a common trait, however. In both types of testing it is not necessary to determine which design is optimal, only which design is better.

Two standard measures of usability were used. The first was a degree of difficulty measure, on the assumption that difficulty and accessibility are inversely related. Subjects were given three tasks to perform and the test measured the time and number of mouseclicks it took to perform each task. The three relatively simple tasks were devised, after some experimentation, to represent the minimum any citizen should expect from a campaign disclosure site. Subjects were asked to: (a) locate the state's disclosure web site starting from the state's homepage; (b) ascertain the total contributions received by the incumbent governor in his or her last campaign (subjects were given a list of incumbent governors that included the year they were last elected); and (c) provide the name and amount contributed by any individual contributor to the incumbent governor's last campaign.

The second measure of usability was a survey. After the third task was completed, each subject was given a short questionnaire and asked to evaluate his or her experiences on each state's web site. Subjects were asked to rate their level of confidence in their answers, whether the web site's disclosure terminology was understandable, and to provide a ranking (one to five) of their overall experience on the site. Subjects were also asked if any special software or unusual browser plug-ins were required to access the site's disclosure information.

Subjects were recruited from the undergraduate student population at UCLA, and the experiments were conducted at the California Social Science Experimental Laboratory (CASSEL) at UCLA. The experiment was administered twice to thirty students each time, for a total of sixty unique subjects. The states were assigned randomly to subjects, and each subject was assigned five states. Each state was tested by six different subjects. Limits were imposed on the amount of time a subject could take with each state and each subject was given no fewer than 25 minutes to complete the three tasks for each state. Each experiment lasted no longer than 150 minutes, and some subjects were finished after 90 minutes.

There were two concerns about the time and mouseclicks data that were collected: first, subjects might learn during the experiment and become more proficient with the later states than the earlier ones; second, there might be subject effects (level of competency, prior experience with disclosure web sites, etc.). To address these issues, a fixed-effects ordinary least squares model was constructed to control for subject differences, and included a variable to control for the order in which each state was tested by the subject. With these controls in place, each state's average time and number of mouseclicks was estimated for each of the three tasks. These scores were then combined into two separate indices (Cronbach's  $\alpha > .75$ ) and ranked. The survey data were also combined into a single index ( $\alpha = .77$ ) and ranked.

Each state could receive up to a total of 27 points for the usability test score. The distribution of scores in the three separate indices (time, clicks and survey) was examined and scores were assigned based upon the apparent thresholds in the distributions. The top-ranked states received six points each, the medium states received three points, and the lowest ranked states received zero points for each of the time and clicks indices. The remaining 15 points were assigned according to the survey responses, with a maximum of 15 and a minimum of three points assigned to each state. These three scores were then added together to create the usability test score for the state.

## Appendix II – Grading State Disclosure Criteria

The California Voter Foundation (CVF) utilized the criteria developed for its 1999 “Digital Sunlight Awards” project, as well as the grading model developed by Syracuse University’s State and Local Government Performance Project to inform the criteria and methodology for Grading State Disclosure.

### Grading Categories

- I. Campaign Disclosure Laws – 40%
- II. Electronic Filing Programs – 10%
- III. Disclosure Content Accessibility – 25 %
- IV. Online Contextual & Technical Usability – 25%

### Grading Categories Criteria

#### I. Campaign Disclosure Laws – 120 points/40%

Meaningful campaign disclosure requires comprehensive campaign disclosure laws. CDP has identified key disclosure requirements that are essential to public campaign disclosure:

##### 1. Disclosure Content (84 points)

###### 1.1 Contribution record (26 points)

- 1.1.1 Date (5 points)
- 1.1.2 Contributor name and address (5 points)
- 1.1.3 Contributor occupation (5 points)
- 1.1.4 Contributor employer (5 points)
- 1.1.5 Contributor ID number (if applicable) (3 points)
- 1.1.6 Cumulative amount (for the year or election) (3 points)

###### 1.2 Type of Contribution (21 points)

- 1.2.1 Loan - Date made (3 points)
- 1.2.2 Interest rate of Loan (2 points)
- 1.2.3 Loan Repayments (due date) (2 points)
- 1.2.4 Guarantors (2 points)
- 1.2.5 In-kind contribution disclosed (9 points)
- 1.2.6 Total for non-itemized contributions (3 points)

###### 1.3 Expenditure information (22 points)

- 1.3.1 Vendor name (5 points)
- 1.3.2 Subvendor information (3 points)
- 1.3.3 Description and/or expenditure codes (6 points)
- 1.3.4 Date (4 points)
- 1.3.5 Accrued Expenditure (4 points)

- 1.4 Independent expenditures (15 points)
  - 1.4.1 Are they reported? (6 points)
  - 1.4.2 Are last-minute independent expenditures reported? (3 points)
  - 1.4.3 Does report include who benefits? (3 points)
  - 1.4.4 Does report include cumulative amount? (3 points)
2. Enforcement (15 points)
  - 2.1 Does the state conduct mandatory reviews and/or field audits? (6 points)
  - 2.2 Enforcement mechanism: Criminal, civil, or both? (6 points) (3 points for either, 6 for both)
  - 2.3 Is there a penalty for late filings? (3 points)
3. Filing Schedule (21 points)
  - 3.1 Pre-election reporting (9 points) (points awarded will depend on the number of reports required before an election: 1 report = 3; 2 reports = 6; more than 2 = 9)
  - 3.2 Late contribution reporting? (6 points)
  - 3.3 Non-election year filing (6 points) (points awarded will depend on the number of reports required during non-election years: 2 or more reports = 6; one report = 4; no reporting = 0)

## II. Electronic Filing Programs – 30 points/10%

Electronic filing is key to timely online disclosure. If campaigns send disclosure data reports to state agencies in a digital format in the first place, it is feasible to place the data immediately on the Internet in ways that make it easy to search, browse or download. CVF will evaluate and assess state electronic filing programs based on the following criteria:

1. Electronic Filing Program (30 points)
  - 1.1 Does the state have an electronic filing program? (3 points)
  - 1.2 Is electronic filing mandatory for statewide candidates? (10 points) (if mandate covers all statewide candidates and the threshold is reasonable = 10 points; voluntary program = 2 points)
  - 1.3 Is electronic filing mandatory for legislative candidates (8 points) (If mandate covers all legislative candidates and the threshold is reasonable = 8 points; voluntary program = 1 point)
  - 1.4 Is there adequate funding for an electronic filing program? (3 points)
  - 1.5 Does the state provide training and/or technical assistance to filers? (3 points)
  - 1.6 Is filing software and/or web-based filing available? Is it free? Does the state have a standard filing format? (3 points)

## III. Disclosure Content Accessibility – 75 points / 25%

In this category, CVF will look at the degree to which content included in disclosure reports is accessible to the public.

### 1. Accessibility to Disclosure Records on Paper (12 points)

CVF will assess the degree to which paper records are available to the public. For each state, CVF will look at how the public gains access to paper records from state disclosure agencies, by answering the following questions:

- 1.1 What is the procedure the state uses to facilitate public access to paper disclosure reports? Can the public obtain them in more than one place? How long does it take for the state to respond to a request? (9 points)
- 1.2 How much do the paper records cost? (3 points) (10 cents or less per page = 3 points; 11-15 cents = 2 points; 16-25 cents = 1 point; more than 25 cents = 0 points)

### 2. Scope of Disclosure Records on the Internet (18 points)

- 2.1 Is the state publishing campaign finance data on the Internet? (3 points)
- 2.2 How quickly are the data made available on the Internet? How up to date is the information online? Is it instantly available as soon as it is reported? Is it available within 24 or 48 hours? Is it available within a week? Does it take longer than a week? (4 points)
- 2.3 What is the scope of the data online? Is data available for all disclosed reports, or just some? (6 points) (If all reports are online via e-filing or data entry = 6 points; mix of e-filed data and scanned reports = 3-5 points; all reports online in PDF = 2 points; some reports online in PDF = 1 point).
- 2.4 Does the site feature itemized contribution and expenditure data? (5 points)

### 3. Accessibility to Disclosure Records on the Internet (42 points)

- 3.1 Does the site offer a searchable database of itemized campaign contributions? (20 points) (if can search in one report for one candidate = 2 points; or if can search within all reports of one candidate = 4 points; or if can search across all filers = 10 points) (In addition, for the following fields: donor, amount, date, zip code, and employer – one point per searchable field for single candidate search of all reports; 2 points per searchable field for all filer search.) (Maximum points for searchable databases will be 2, 9 or 20 depending on scope of search capabilities.)
- 3.2 Does the site offer a searchable database of itemized campaign expenditures? (10 points) (if can search in one report for one candidate = 1 point; or if can search within all reports of one candidate = 2 points; or if can search across all filers = 5 points) (In addition, for the following fields: description/code = 2 points; vendor name = 1 point; amount = 1 point; date = 1 point; field search points will be awarded only if can search by all candidate's reports or across all filers; the same number of search field points will be awarded in either case). (Max. points for searchable databases will be 1, 7 or 10 depending on scope.)
- 3.3 Can you filter or limit the search? (i.e. ability to limit search to just one election cycle or one candidate) (1 point)
- 3.4 Are there any types of "smart search" features such as "name sounds like" or "name contains"? (1 point – no credit for "hidden" smart search capabilities)
- 3.5 Can the data be sorted online? (3 points)
- 3.6 Can the raw data be downloaded for sorting and analyzing offline? (3 points)
- 3.7 Can you browse an index of a particular candidate's reports? (2 points)
- 3.8 Can you browse itemized transactions within a report? (2 points)

## 4. Accessibility to Disclosure Records in Other Formats (3 points)

- 4.1 Are disclosure records accessible in other formats, i.e. on disk, CD-Rom, other? How much does it cost? Is it available from the state or an outside vendor? (3 points)

IV. Online Contextual & Technical Usability – 75 points/25%

Each state will be assessed on the usability of the state's campaign disclosure web site. Usability is divided into two categories: contextual and technical.

## 1. Contextual Usability (38 points)

Contextual usability means whether the web site provides essential background information that helps the public understand what the disclosure laws and campaign finance limits, if any, are, so that they can monitor campaign finance activities. When evaluating sites for contextual usability, the following questions will be answered.

- 1.1 How easy is it to find the disclosure agency's contact information? (2 points) (if it's on front page or featured on front page = 2 points; buried = 1 or no points; not there = 0 points)
- 1.2 Does the site provide information, such as summary campaign data and historical figures to give the public an overview of campaign financing trends? (8 points) (recent statewide info = 3 points; and/or recent legislative info = 3 points; and/or historical summaries for either = 2 points.)
- 1.3 Does the site provide information explaining the state's campaign finance restrictions? (3 points)
- 1.4 Does the site provide information explaining the state's disclosure requirements? (3 points)
- 1.5 Does the site provide a comprehensive list of candidates for recent or current elections? Does this list include offices and/or district numbers? Does it include party affiliation? (5 points) (List/office/party = 5 points; list and office or party = 3 points; list without office or party = 2 points)
- 1.6 Can the public determine which filers' reports are available online and which ones are not? (5 points)
- 1.7 Are the disclosure reporting periods clearly labeled? (3 points) (if filing period is featured in a report index = 3 points; if reporting periods are listed only inside the actual report = 2 point; if unavailable = 0 points).
- 1.8 Does the site use clear terminology to identify information? (3 points)
- 1.9 Are original filings and amendments available? Are amendments clearly labeled? (6 points) (Both original and all amended reports available online = 3 points; and/or amended reports are clearly labeled = 3 points)

## 2. Technical Usability (10 points)

Technical usability refers to the architecture of the disclosure web site. A site's structure, navigation, and database configuration have great impact on a site's overall "user-friendliness". When evaluating a site for technical usability are, the following questions will be answered:

- 2.1 How easy is it to find the disclosure site from the state home page? (4 points) (if you can

find it quickly through a search tool and through a topical or agency browsing feature = 4 points; otherwise 0 – 2 points)

2.2 Does the site provide instructions for how to use it? (3 points)

2.3 Can the features on the site be easily utilized with a dialup modem and/or a machine with limited RAM? (3 points)

### 3. Usability Testing (27 points).

One of the best ways to evaluate a disclosure web site's usability is to see how easy or difficult it is for someone to use the site. One of the challenges disclosure agencies have faced with their web sites is trying to meet the needs of both the high-end, advanced users and the low-end casual users. CVF and the UCLA School of Law will recruit a group of upper division social science students to help assess the usability of disclosure web sites. They would fall somewhere in the middle of the casual-to-advanced scale of users; interested in politics and familiar with technology, but not familiar with the politics in the states they will be evaluating.

To evaluate usability, the evaluators will answer the following seven questions:

1. Find the campaign disclosure webpage for this state. Copy the site URL into the space below.

2. From the list you were given, find the name of the Governor of this state. How much money did this person raise in their last election campaign? Enter that amount in the space below.

3. Find a list of contributors to the Governor's last campaign. Identify one contributor from that list. In the space below, provide the name of the contributor, the amount of the contribution, and any other identifying information (street address, city, zip code, occupation, employer, etc.)

Post-task survey (after each state):

4. How confident are you that you answered the three questions accurately? (1. Very confident 2. Somewhat confident 3. Not very confident 4. Not at all confident)

5. Was the disclosure terminology on this website easy to understand or was it confusing? (1. Very easy to understand 2. Somewhat easy to understand 3. Somewhat confusing 4. Very confusing)

6. On a scale of one-to-five, with one being Terrible and five being Excellent, how would you rate your overall experience on this disclosure site?

7. Did this site require any uncommon software, plug-ins or browser features in order to view the information? (1. Yes 2. No)

## Appendix III – Glossary

*Accrued Expenditure* – an expenditure that is not paid at the time a service is provided. Accrued expenditures are debts owed by the campaign to political consultants or other vendors for good or services such as direct mail or campaign signs.

*Amendment* – a correction or revision made to a campaign finance report.

*Committee* – an entity established by a candidate, political party or other organization for the purpose of raising and spending money and filing required campaign statements with detailed information about campaign contributions and expenditures.

*Desk Audit* – a review of a campaign finance disclosure report as it has been filed by a political committee. In a desk audit, documentation other than the actual campaign finance disclosure report, such as canceled checks, bank statements and vendor receipts, are not reviewed.

*Disclosure* – in the context of campaign financing, disclosure means making information about campaign contributions and expenditures known to the public.

*Electronic Filing* – the process by which political committees and candidates disclose campaign contributions and expenditures in an electronic format. Electronically filed campaign finance information can be submitted via a web-based filing system, e-mail or computer disk. Candidates typically use either a standard filing format provided by the state, or filing software provided by the state or an outside vendor.

*Field Audit* – an in-depth review of a campaign finance disclosure report and other documentation related to the campaign finance report, including canceled checks, bank statements and vendor receipts, to verify the accuracy of the report.

*Independent Expenditure* – an expenditure for a communication which expressly advocates the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate, but which is made independently of any candidate's campaign. An example of an independent expenditure is a campaign ad run by an issue organization in support of a specific candidate for office. (Source: Federal Election Commission)

*Itemized Data* – breakdowns of contributions received or expenses made by a committee, such as listings of individual contributions with the contributor's name, address, occupation, and employer. (By contrast, an example of unitemized data would be when a committee reports the total amount of all contributions under \$100, but does not provide detailed information about the individual transactions that make up that total figure.)

*Last-minute Contribution or Late Contribution* – a contribution (often large) that is received by a committee after the closing date for the final statement filed before the election, but before the election takes place. Many states require supplemental reporting of individual last-minute contributions made in the last days and weeks prior to Election Day.

*Last-minute Independent Expenditure or Late Independent Expenditure* – an independent expenditure that is received by a committee after the closing date for the final statement filed before the election, but before the election takes place. Many states require supplemental reporting of last-minute independent

expenditures made in the last days and weeks prior to Election Day.

*Loan Guarantor* – a person who guarantees that a loan to a campaign will be repaid. Often financial institutions will not lend money to a candidate or campaign unless there are private individuals who guarantee that they will repay the loan if the campaign cannot.

*Mandatory Review* – the process by which a state’s campaign finance filing agency, often the Secretary of State, is required to examine campaign statements that are filed with its office, typically either through desk or field audits.

*Reporting Period* – the specific time period covered by a particular campaign finance statement.

*Standard Filing Format* – a uniform or standard technical format set forth by a state government which committees or candidates can use to file campaign finance disclosure statements electronically. The standard format ensures that all candidates’ filings can be integrated into the state’s internal data system or system of Internet disclosure.

*Subvendor* – a third party, such as a political consultant, who makes an expenditure on behalf of a campaign. For example, when a political consultant receives funds from a campaign and purchases TV time for the campaign, the campaign must report the consultant’s expenditures if subvendor disclosure is required. Credit cards can also fall into the subvendor category because detailed information about expenditures can be found in credit card statements. If the campaign only listed the credit card company in its expenditure report, the public would not know the actual expenditures of the campaign.

*Subvendor Information* – detailed information, including name and address, about subvendors.

*Supplemental Filing* – a campaign finance report that is filed in addition to regular campaign finance filings. Supplemental filings are often last-minute contribution statements, independent expenditures statements, or last-minute independent expenditure statements.

*Threshold* – a monetary value at or above which a candidate must disclose campaign activity. The threshold can apply to the contribution amount that will trigger a campaign to disclose detailed information about a contributor. Or, the threshold can apply to the total amount of money raised or spent that will require a campaign to file campaign finance reports electronically.

## Appendix IV – Credits

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