

# OHIOCHECKBOOK.com

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What is OhioCheckbook.com?

OhioCheckbook.com is a first-of-its-kind government transparency website that shows taxpayers exactly how their tax money is being spent. This initiative sets a new national standard for transparency in state and local government.

In March 2015, the U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG) released their annual “Following the Money 2015” report and Treasurer Josh Mandel earned Ohio the number one transparency ranking in the country for providing online access to government spending data. Ohio was prominently featured in the report after climbing from 46th to 1st in spending transparency as a result of Treasurer Mandel’s release of OhioCheckbook.com. Ohio received a perfect score of 100 points – the highest score in the history of the U.S. PIRG transparency rankings.

In April 2016, U.S. PIRG released their “Following the Money 2016” report and Treasurer Mandel once again earned Ohio the number one transparency ranking in the country for the second consecutive year. Due to the launch of OhioCheckbook.com, Ohio again received the highest perfect score of 100 points – marking the second time in two years Ohio received the highest possible score in the history of the U.S. PIRG transparency rankings.

### Has this information been placed online ever before?

No. This is the first time in Ohio history that all state expenditures have been posted online for citizens to search, download, compare and analyze.

### What is the Treasurer's Transparency Project?

The [Treasurer's Transparency Project](#) is designed to make government more open and accountable to taxpayers by allowing Ohioans to follow their tax dollars and see how public money is being spent. The goal of this project is to shine a light on the true costs of government, so that taxpayers

and their elected representatives can make more informed decisions on state spending. In addition to Ohio's Online Checkbook, the Treasurer's office has also put online a [Government Employee Salary Database](#), [Interactive State Property Map](#), [County Investment Reports](#), and the [Daily Ledger Report of State Funds](#).

### **Why did the Treasurer's Office create OhioCheckbook.com?**

Treasurer Mandel believes that Ohioans have the right to know how their tax dollars are being spent. He's spearheading this effort in order to empower citizens to hold politicians and bureaucrats accountable for government spending. By shining sunlight on state spending and decisions made deep in the bureaucracy, the online checkbook enables taxpayers to help root out waste, fraud and abuse.

### **What can I do with the information I find on OhioCheckbook.com?**

If you find something interesting that you want to share or inquire more about, you can click the "Share" button while viewing any table or graph to share on your Facebook or Twitter accounts or to send an email. Each transaction also has contact information for the corresponding agency that made the expenditure should you want to request additional information directly from that agency.

### **Where does the checkbook expenditure data come from?**

State spending data comes from the Ohio Administrative Knowledge System (OAKS), which is the state's accounting system. Local government and school data is provided by participating local governments and schools.

### **How often is the checkbook expenditure data updated?**

State spending posted on OhioCheckbook.com is current through December 31 of Fiscal Year 2018 (December 31, 2017). State spending is updated monthly.

### **How many expenditure records are in the online checkbook?**

There are more than 6 billion records and 173 million transactions totaling

\$644 billion of state spending in the online checkbook.

### **Where can I find an overview of the state's budget and finances?**

Click here to view the state's [2017 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report \(CAFR\)](#). For a summary overview click here to view the [2017 Popular Annual Financial Report](#), or here for the [FY2018-2019 Budget Highlights](#) or here for the [FY2018-2019 Budget Fact Sheet](#).

### **Why are Expense Types separated into groups of "FY2008 - 2014" and "FY2015 - present" when listed in the predictive search bar results?**

In Fiscal Year 2015, State Accounting reorganized expense codes and their descriptions for state spending by eliminating and consolidating hundreds of expense codes ("Expense Codes" are the most detailed spending descriptions on OhioCheckbook.com, "Expense Categories" and "Expenses Types" remain unchanged). As a result, the 888 "Expense Codes" displayed on OhioCheckbook.com for FY2014 data have been reduced to 433 "Expense Codes" for FY2015 data.

Some expense codes remained unchanged (for example the expense code for "Fuel"). Some expense codes were lumped together to create a new expense code (for example FY2014 expense codes for "Motor Vehicle & Other Insurance", "Aircraft Insurance", and "Watercraft Insurance" are now all classified as simply "Vehicle Insurance" in FY2015.)

### **Does the state use credit cards? Are those purchases found on OhioCheckbook.com?**

Yes. A number of agencies utilize state credit cards for some purchases and those purchases are included in the online checkbook.

### **Why does some expenditure data list the vendor as "Contact Agency for more information"**

Some expenditure data may be considered private, confidential, or protected under state or federal law. Information appearing to be private, confidential, or protected by law may not be displayed. For such expenditures, you may contact the agency for more information, but please be advised that the Agency may be prohibited from releasing additional

information.

Expense Types that may not include vendor name include Patient Compensation - PPS, Counseling & Day Report Services - PPS, Habilitation Services - PPS, Witness Fees - PPS, Major Prize Payments up to \$5,000, Major Prize Payments in Lump Sum, Major Prize Installments by Lottery Commission, Drugs, Sexual Assault Kits - Hospitals, Income Tax Refund - Interest, State Assistance Subsidy, Volunteer Firefighters Dependents, Volunteer Firefighters Disabled, Rendered Judgments & Settlements, Compensatory Damages, Negotiated Grievance Settlement, Indemnification Payments, Medical Reparations, Reparations (Non-Reportable), Reparations for Services, Attorney Fees Awarded, Accrued Interest on Judgments, Liability Payments & Settlements, Tax Refunds, Refunds other then Tax.

### **Are individual state employee salaries listed on OhioCheckbook.com?**

Individual salaries of state employees are not listed in the online checkbook but can be found on the [Treasurer's Government Employee Salary Database](#).

### **What does it mean when "Agency Journal" is listed as the payee?**

An "Agency Journal" is either the sum of all payroll expenses for a pay period or an Agency correcting accounting chart fields that do not affect a particular vendor.

### **What is the difference between an Expense Category, Expense Type and Expense Code?**

You can narrow your spending search by selecting the type of expense being made. Select from the Expense Category (the broadest spending description), followed by Expense Type, and then Expense Code (the most specific spending description). For example, *Category: Equipment >> Type: Construction Equipment >> Code: Bulldozers*.

### **What is the Compare tool?**

The Compare tool allows you to compare spending of other agencies, other expense categories or certain expenses over a period of time. Be sure to

click on the "Year-to-Year" button on any graph to see historical spending dating back to FY2008.

### **What do the "\$", "%" and "Vs. Average" buttons do when I am looking at Compare results?**

When viewing Compare results, the "\$" button displays expenditure data in dollars spent. For example, the Department of Transportation spent approximately \$37 million on motor vehicles in FY2014.

The "%" button displays the selected expenditures as a percentage of total expenditures made for an entire fiscal year. For example, the Department of Transportation spent approximately 1.19% of all its FY2014 expenditures on motor vehicles.

The "Vs. Average" button is the average state expenditures of the selected Compare items for an entire fiscal year. For example, in FY2014 the average state agency spent \$399,189 or 0.093% of its total spending on motor vehicles.

### **What is the difference between a Voucher ID and a Check Number?**

A Voucher ID number is an agency-specific eight digit number that records an authorized transaction with a vendor. There may be multiple transactions (vouchers) grouped into a single vendor payment (check). In these instances, such information is provided to you when you are looking at the check image of a single transaction on the online checkbook.

### **Why do I only see a partial list of expenditures on some of my searches?**

For some searches, the number of results may be too large to display in full. In those instances, the online checkbook will display a random sample of 1,000 expenditures for viewing. At any point, you can click on the "Export" button to download the full list of expenditures.

### **I found a negative value for an amount paid. How is that possible?**

A negative value would reflect a revenue source to the selected agency, most likely a returned payment or accounting correction.

## **Can I export into a spreadsheet the expenditure data found on OhioCheckbook.com?**

Yes. All data contained in the online checkbook may be exported in a .csv file by clicking the "Export" button found above all data tables.

## **How long will it take for me to download a .csv file of expenditure data?**

The size of the file and your internet connection will determine the speed your file downloads.

## **Can I download expenditure data in Microsoft Excel?**

Yes. Depending on the version of the software, however, some rows of information may not appear. For example, Excel 2010 will display no more than 1,048,576 rows of information.

## **Why does my Excel download not list the date of each transaction?**

If the file is opened in Excel, the "Transaction Date" rows may not appear to be populated. Simply highlight the column, click on "Format Cells" and select a date format. This will allow you to view all transaction dates.

## **Can I do a bulk download of a year's worth of expenditures?**

Yes. You can download an entire year's worth of expenditure data by clicking on the "View By" button below the pie chart on the main page and then "View Transactions" and "Export Transactions" or by clicking below.

[FY2017](#)

[FY2016](#)

[FY2015](#)

[FY2014](#)

[FY2013](#)

[FY2012](#)

[FY2011](#)

[FY2010](#)

[FY2009](#)

## FY2008

### **What web browser should I use to best view OhioCheckbook.com?**

OhioCheckbook.com is most compatible with Internet Explorer (version 9 or higher), Mozilla Firefox and Google Chrome.

### **I received a tax refund from the state, is my name listed on OhioCheckbook.com?**

No. The only individual names that may appear in OhioCheckbook.com are state employees and individuals who are classified as state vendors.

### **Is there any state spending that is not found on OhioCheckbook.com?**

All state spending that is appropriated into a fund by the General Assembly is contained in the online checkbook.

### **Where can I find expenditure information on the state's economic development programs?**

The online checkbook includes expenditures made in furtherance of economic development. You can start your search by viewing the "Subsidies and Shared Revenue" Expense Category or clicking on the Popular Searches button and then "Development".

If you would like more information about the projected public benefit, actual public benefit, and funds recouped through clawback clauses of many of the programs, click the "Reports" button on the right panel on the homepage.

### **Where can I search awarded state contracts?**

Click [here](#) to visit the State of Ohio Procurement website to search for current state contracts: <http://procure.ohio.gov/proc/currentContracts.asp> .

### **Is there an OhioCheckbook.com mobile app?**

Yes! Click [here](#) to download the new [OhioCheckbook mobile app](#) for

smartphones and tablets. The [OhioCheckbook mobile app](#) was created in partnership with *Open the Books*.

### **Does the State have other Transparency Portals?**

Yes, click [here](#) to visit [www.ohio.gov/government/transparency](http://www.ohio.gov/government/transparency) for more information.

### **Are local governments and schools on OhioCheckbook.com?**

Yes, you can view all local governments and schools that have partnered with OhioCheckbook.com by clicking on the "Local Gov & Schools" tab in the upper right-hand corner of the page.

### **Does OhioCheckbook.com contain spending for quasi-public agencies?**

Yes, OhioCheckbook.com includes spending for all state-funded boards and commissions and all state-funded colleges and universities as well as quasi-public agencies, including: Accountancy Board of Ohio, Air Quality Development Authority, Architects Board, Arts Council, Athletic Commission, Board of Barber Examiners, Board of Career College & Schools, Board of Cosmetology, Board of Dietetics, Board of Engineers & Surveyors, Board of Nursing, Board of Optometry, Board of Orthotic Prosthetic Pedorthics, Board of Pharmacy, Board of Psychology, Board of Tax Appeals, Broadcast Educational Media Commission, Capital Square Review & Advisory Board, Casino Control Commission, Chemical Dependency Professionals Board, Chiropractic Examiners Board, Civil Rights Commission, Commission on Minority Health, Commission on Service & Volunteerism, Counselor & Social Workers Board, Dental Board, Elections Commission, Embalmers & Funeral Directors Board, Employment Relations Board, Environmental Board of Review, Ethics Commission, Expositions Commission, Facilities Construction Commission, Higher Education Facilities Commission, Hispanic/Latino Affairs Commission, Historical Society, Housing Finance Agency, Industrial Commission, Joint Committee on Agency Rule Review, Joint Legislative Ethics Committee, Joint Medicaid Oversight Committee, Judicial Conference of Ohio, Lake Erie Commission, Legislative Service Commission, Liquor Control Commission, Lottery Commission, Manufactured Home Commission, Medical Board, Motor Vehicle Repair Board, Occupational

Therapy, Physical Therapy & Athletic Trainers, Ohioana Library Association, Optical Dispensers Board, Petroleum Underground Storage Tank Release Compensation Board, Public Defender Commission, Public Utilities Commission, Public Works Commission, Racing Commission, Rehabilitation Services Commission, Respiratory Care Board, Sanitarian Registration Board, School for the Blind, School for the Deaf, Southern Ohio Agricultural & Community Development Foundation, Speech-Language Pathology & Audiology Board, State Library Board, Veterans Organizations, Veterinary Medical Board. Along with Belmont College, Bowling Green State University, Central Ohio Technical College, Central State University, Cincinnati State Technical & Community College, Clark State Community College, Cleveland State University, Columbus State Community College, Cuyahoga Community College, Edison State Community College, Hocking Technical College, James A Rhodes State College, Jefferson Technical College, Kent State University, Lakeland Community College, Lorain County Community College, Marion Technical College, Miami University, North Central Technical College, Northeast Ohio University College of Medicine, Northwest State Community College, Ohio State University, Ohio University, Owens State Community College, Rio Grande Community College, Shawnee State University, Sinclair Community College, Southern State Community College, Stark Technical College, Terra State Community College, University of Akron, University of Cincinnati, University of Toledo, Washington State Community College, Wright State University, Youngstown State University, and Zane State College.

**Who do I contact if I have a question about the data on OhioCheckbook.com?**

Call the Ohio Treasurer's office at 1-800-228-1102 or [click here](#).

