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To: Senate President Pro Tempore Tim Ashe and Speaker of the House Mitzi Johnson
Senators Kitchel & White and Representatives Toll & Copeland-Hanzas
From: Doug Hoffer, Vermont State Auditor
Date: 25 March 2019
Subject: Government transparency
Cc: Secretary of Administration, Susanne Young

State government is a large and complicated enterprise. People understand the basic mission (i.e., public safety, health & well-being, infrastructure, etc.), but, for most, the inner workings are largely obscure. Some Vermonters try to learn about state government by seeking the documents that describe the mission, funding, and performance of state agencies. These documents include: budgets, performance reports, strategic plans, and information about contracts with vendors, among others.

These documents are necessary for citizens to understand and evaluate the work of state government. Therefore, I think the State has an obligation to make this type of information easily accessible.

To assess the extent to which the State provides easy access to these materials, my office examined the websites of 38 state entities. Specifically, we looked for each entity's budget, performance data, and information about contracts for goods and services.

Our initial review found that fewer than half of the entities in our sample provided up-to-date documents on their websites. Even though some documents are located elsewhere, a citizen unfamiliar with state government may not find them without a direct link. Some departments provide relevant documents, but they are out of date.

We shared our preliminary findings with the Agency of Administration, and Secretary Young responded by asking all agencies and departments to include links on their websites to Finance & Management's Spotlight page, which includes information on budgets, performance, and contracts, as well as links to JFO for reports to the legislature and other budget data.

We reviewed the changes subsequent to Secretary Young's request. Initially, only 12 of the 38 entities featured current budget information on their site. It is now up to 24 along with another 7 that have links to Spotlight (31 of 38). This is a substantial improvement. Five entities have budget information that is not current and, therefore, were not included in the 'yes' category (see the table below).

There was improvement for performance data as well. We initially found that 16 entities posted performance information on their web sites, and they have now been joined by 7 others with links to Spotlight (totaling 24 of 38).

Information about contracts was the weakest category, with only 7 entities providing that information at the outset. But, here too there is progress, as 8 others now offer links to Spotlight. With only 15 of 38 entities offering contract information on their websites, there's still much room for improvement.

Other observations and suggestions:

- Budgets: Some agency budgets include budget information for the departments within the agency, but the department websites do not always tell readers where to look. Providing a link to the parent agency site would be helpful.
- Performance Data:
 - The AOA performance measure report includes data from most state entities. However, some departments produce more information than is shown in that report. Therefore, it would be helpful for the AOA report to include links back to the various departments for additional information if available.
 - Some departments include performance data in their budget submissions, but do not make it clear to readers. A short note on the website would be helpful.
- Some documents are not easy to find, which argues for prominent placement and consistency across agencies and departments.

See the Table below.

Erratum: The original memorandum mistakenly listed Human Resources as not having performance data on its website or a link to Spotlight. The Table below has been corrected.

I would like to thank John DosSantos for his assistance with this work.

Entity	Budget	Performance Report	Contracts
Agency of Administration	L	L	Y
BGS	L	L	Y
Finance & Management	Y	Y	Y
Human Resources	Y	Y	N
Tax	NC	N	N
Agency of Agriculture	Y	Y	N
Agency of Commerce	Y	P	N
Community Development	Y	P	N
Economic Development	Y	P	N
Housing	Y	P	N
Tourism & Marketing	Y	P	N
Agency of Digital Services	N	N	N
Agency of Education	Y	Y	N
Agency of Human Services	Y	Y	N
Children & Families	Y	Y	Y
Corrections	Y	Y	Y
DAIL	L	Y	L
Health	L	L	L
Health Access	Y	Y	Y
Mental Health	Y	Y	L
Agency of Natural Resources	NC	N	N
Environ. Conservation	NC	NC	N
Fish & Wildlife	Y	Y	N
Forests, Parks & Rec.	NC	NC	N
Agency of Transportation	Y	Y	Y
Motor Vehicles	N	N	N
Attorney General	Y	N	L
Auditor of Accounts	Y	Y	Y
Financial Regulation	Y	L	L
Green Mountain Care Board	L	L	Y
Judiciary	Y	Y	N
Labor	NC	N	N
Legislature	Y	Y	N
Public Safety	L	L	L
Public Service	Y	L	L
Secretary of State	Y	N	N
Treasurer	L	Y	L
Veteran's Home	Y	Y	N
Totals			
Y - Yes	24	17	9
L - Link	7	7	8
P - Partial	0	5	0
NC - Not Current	5	2	0
N - No	2	7	21