

IOWA TRANSPARENCY NEWSLETTER



Now you see it, now you don't *Government employee salaries disappearing from state transparency website*

by Mark Cavers and Kristina Rasmussen of Illinois Policy Institute

The problem

State employee salary information is disappearing from a government transparency website.

Graphic 1. Current portal only has salary information for 2010 and 2011

Search By Employee Name

Search by calendar year, last name (begins with) and/or first name (begins with) and/or agency.

Calendar Year: ✓ 2011, 2010, [All Years]
Agency: _____
Last Name: _____
First Name: _____ **Search**

Source: Illinois Transparency and Accountability Portal, September 2011¹

Graphic 2. Portal previously included salary information for 2008 and 2009

Search By Employee Name

Search by calendar year, last name (begins with) and/or first name (begins with) and/or agency.

Calendar Year: ✓ 2009, 2008, [All Years]
Agency: _____
Last Name: _____
First Name: _____ **Search**

Source: Illinois Transparency and Accountability Portal, August 2009²

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The Illinois Transparency and Accountability Portal – available at accountability.illinois.gov – is a spending database that was launched by state government in 2009. Billed “as a single point of reference to review how their tax dollars are being spent to support state government programs,” it

previously posted information must be kept on the website.

It is unclear why older salary information is being removed while other agency expenditure details from past years remain on the website. The Portal’s “Employee FAQ” indicates

Graphic 3. Current Portal Has Agency Expenditures for Fiscal Years 2009-2012

Search By Agency for Expenditures

Fiscal Year (ending June 30th): ✓ 2012, 2011, 2010, 2009, [All Years]

Agency payments for Fiscal Year 20...

Click on an agency name to view payme... by category

Source: Illinois Transparency and Accountability Portal, September 2011³

includes information on a variety of state expenses, including employee pay and agency expenditures.

Although agency expenditures going back to fiscal year 2009 remain available on the website, state employee salaries for calendar year 2008 and 2009 have been removed from the website (this information previously had been available to database users). Now, only state employee salary information from 2010 and 2011 is searchable.

The law authorizing the Illinois Transparency and Accountability Portal requires the state to maintain all current state employee salary and agency expenditure information.⁴ The law is silent on whether

the site will be updated as new information becomes available, but makes no explanation to when and why past information is removed.⁵

Much of the value in expenditure and salary data comes from being able to track trends over multiple years. For example, an interested citizen could go on the Portal and compare how much the Department of Aging spent on travel in fiscal years 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012 year-to-date. But for salary information, that same citizen could only see Department of Aging salary amounts from 2010 and 2011. Why should salary information from 2008 and 2009 – which was once available to visitors – be removed and not allowed to aggregate over time?

Recent research has indicated that Illinois government employee total compensation has been outpacing that of private employees over the last 15 years.⁶ Access to detailed historical information, including pay, job title and seniority, is key to understanding the gap

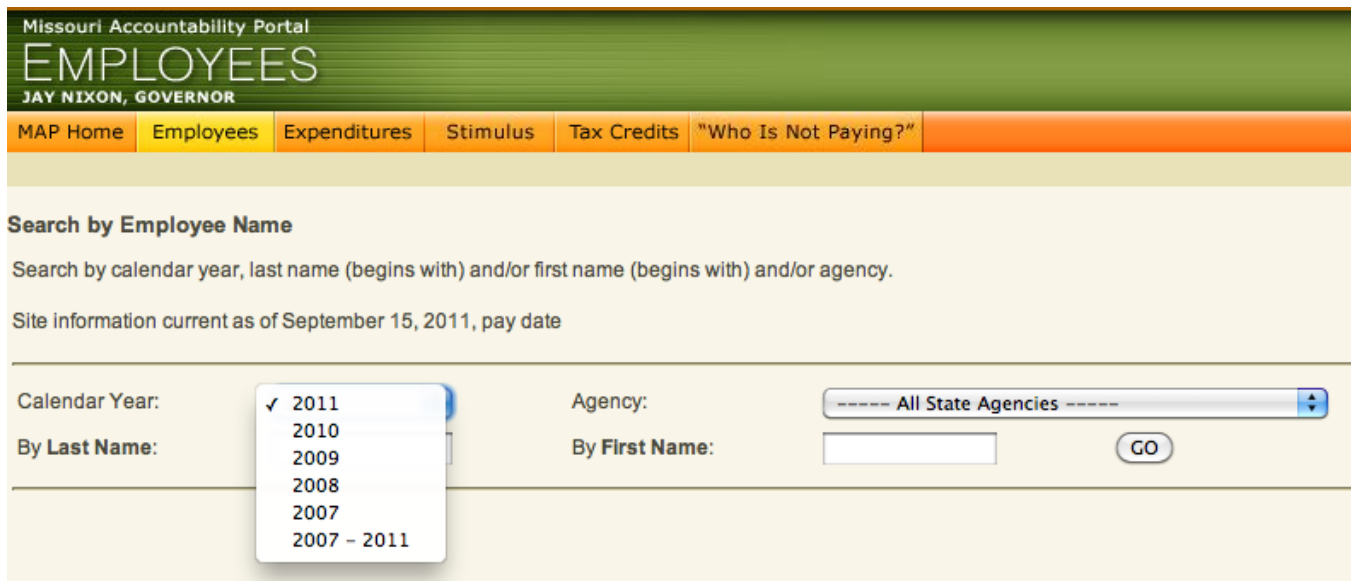
between public sector and private sector pay.

Our solution

State leaders should opt for more transparency, not less. Once up, salary information should stay up. The law authorizing

the Illinois Transparency and Accountability Portal (Public Act 096-0225) should be amended to require that information presented on the website remain publicly available. Better yet, the state could add historical data going back five or ten years.

Graphic 4. Missouri Accountability Portal has salary information for 2007-2011

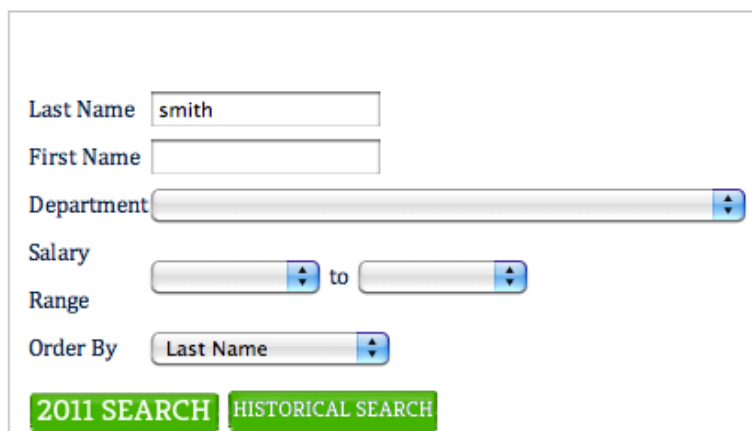


Source: Missouri Accountability Portal⁷

Graphic 5. Ohio Treasurer Database Has a Historical Salary Search to 2003

Transparency / State Salary

State Salary



Source: State Treasurer of Ohio, Treasurer's Transparency Project⁸

Why this works

Transparency encourages an active and involved citizenry, and helps to hold government accountable. Other states utilizing transparency databases keep salary data from previous years available online, and some even post information retroactively. For example, the Missouri Accountability Portal was launched in 2007, and information on state employee salaries from 2007 to 2011 is available on the site.

In Ohio, the State Treasurer recently created a new transparency website and teamed up with a public watchdog group to add historical

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payroll data going as far back as 2003.

Illinois' officials should replicate the best practices being utilized in states such as Missouri and Ohio by keeping historical state employee salary information available in the Illinois Transparency and Accountability Portal. This kind of proactive transparency is a key step towards ensuring the open and honest government that Illinoisans deserve.

Endnotes:

¹Illinois Transparency and Accountability Portal. "Search By Employee Name." Accessed September 19, 2011. <http://accountability.illinois.gov/Employees/Employee/Default.aspx>.

²Illinois Transparency and Accountability Portal. Accessed

via WayBackMachine.org for August 27, 2009. <http://web.archive.org/web/20090827191513/http://accountability.illinois.gov/Employees/Employee/Default.aspx>.

³Illinois Transparency and Accountability Portal. "Search By Agency for Expenditures." Accessed September 19, 2011. <http://accountability.illinois.gov/Expenditures/Agency/Default.aspx>.

⁴20 ILCS 405/405-335 (c)(1)-(2). <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/ilcs4.asp?DocName=002004050HArt.+405&ActID=235&ChapterID=5&SeqStart=100000&SeqEnd=-1>.

⁵Illinois Transparency and Accountability Portal. "Employee FAQ." Accessed September 19, 2011. <http://accountability.illinois.gov/Employees/FAQ.aspx>.

⁶Illinois Policy Institute. "Out of Sync: Government and Private Employee Compensation in Illinois." July 29, 2011. <http://www.illinoispolicy.org/uploads/files/publicemployeecompensationPP-FINAL.pdf>.

⁷Missouri Accountability Portal. "Search By Employee Name." Accessed September 19, 2011. <http://mapyourtaxes.mo.gov/MAP/Employees/>.

⁸State Treasurer of Ohio. "Treasurer's Transparency Project." Accessed September 19, 2011. <http://ohiotreasurer.gov/>

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