Norway scores 72 percent out of a possible 100 percent on the Open Budget Index 2006. The Index evaluates the quantity of information provided to citizens in the seven key budget documents that all governments should make public during the course of the budget year. Norway’s performance indicates that the government provides citizens with substantial information on the central government’s budget and financial activities, but that there is some room for improvement.

The executive’s budget proposal is one of the most important documents released during the budget year. Norway’s proposal provides substantial information to the public, scoring 74 percent out of a possible 100 percent of the information needed to present the public with a comprehensive picture of the government’s financial activity. This suggests that there is some room for improvement.

Governments should report to citizens regularly during the budget year on their spending, revenue collection and borrowing with in-year reports. Norway provides substantial information in its in-year reports and its mid-year review. This document should provide the public with updates on what can be expected for the second half of the budget year. The executive releases a year-end report in a timely manner, which facilitates comparisons between enacted levels and actual outcomes; however, the year-end report needs some improvement to be on par with the level of information provided in the rest of the budget documents. Norway makes its audit report public and provides information on whether the audit report’s recommendations are successfully implemented, though some details are excluded.

Citizens require both access to information, and opportunities during the budget’s consideration to use that information, to ensure their informed participation in budget debates. Norway’s score on the Open Budget Index suggests that the public’s access to information could be improved. The researcher also found that opportunities for citizen participation are fair. For example, the legislature does hold public hearings on the budget in which the public can participate, though they are not extensive.

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The International Budget Project was established as part of the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington, DC-based non-partisan non-profit research organization, in 1997 to support civil society organizations around the world interested in strengthening public budget processes, institutions and outcomes. For more information on the IBP and the Open Budget Initiative 2006, please visit www.openbudgetindex.org