United States

Open Budget Index 2006

The United States scores 81 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. The United States’ performance indicates that the government provides citizens with extensive information on the central government’s budget and financial activities; however there is some room for improvement.

The executive’s budget proposal is one of the most important documents released during the budget year. The United States’ proposal provides extensive information to the public, scoring 81 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 score is high, but suggests that there is still 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. The United States provides extensive information in its in-year reports as well as a comprehensive mid-year review. This document provides 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, but some improvement is needed for the report to be on par with the level of information provided in the rest of the budget documents. The United States makes its audit report public and provides information on whether the audit report’s recommendations are successfully implemented.

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. The United States’ score on the Open Budget Index suggests that the public’s access to information could be improved. The researchers also found that opportunities for citizen participation are many. For example, the legislature holds public hearings on the budget in which the public can participate; however some hearings are not as extensive as others.

Open Budget Index Highlights

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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