Drawing on internationally accepted criteria developed by multilateral organizations, the Open Budget Survey uses 109 equally weighted indicators to measure budget transparency. These indicators assess whether the central government makes eight key budget documents available to the public online in a timely manner and whether these documents present budget information in a comprehensive and useful way.

Each country receives a composite score (out of 100) that determines its ranking on the Open Budget Index – the world’s only independent and comparative measure of budget transparency.

What is Australia’s OBI score in 2017?

Australia’s score of 74 out of 100 is substantially higher than the global average score of 42 and moderately higher than the average score of 68 for the members of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) participating in the survey.
Transparency alone is insufficient for improving governance. Public participation in budgeting is vital to realize the positive outcomes associated with greater budget transparency.

To measure public participation, the Open Budget Survey assesses the degree to which the government provides opportunities for the public to engage in budget processes. Such opportunities should be provided throughout the budget cycle by the executive, the legislature, and the supreme audit institution.

The questions assessing participation in the Open Budget Survey 2017 were revised to align them with the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency’s new principles on public participation, which now serve as the basis for widely accepted norms on public participation in national budget processes. Therefore, data on the extent of public participation in budgeting in the Open Budget Survey 2017 cannot be compared directly to data from earlier editions.

How does public participation in Australia compare to other countries in the region?

Australia’s score of 41 out of 100 indicates that it provides limited opportunities for the public to engage in the budget process. This is higher than the global average score of 12.

To what extent do different institutions in Australia provide opportunities for public participation?

Key Budget Documents

Pre-Budget Statement: discloses the broad parameters of fiscal policies in advance of the Executive’s Budget Proposal; outlines the government’s economic forecast, anticipated revenue, expenditures, and debt.

Executive’s Budget Proposal: submitted by the executive to the legislature for approval; details the sources of revenue, the allocations to ministries, proposed policy changes, and other information important for understanding the country’s fiscal situation.

Enacted Budget: the budget that has been approved by the legislature.

Citizens Budget: a simpler and less technical version of the government’s Executive’s Budget Proposal or Enacted Budget, designed to convey key information to the public.

In-Year Reports: include information on actual revenues collected, actual expenditures made, and debt incurred at different intervals; issued quarterly or monthly.

Mid-Year Review: contains a comprehensive update on the implementation of the budget as of the middle of the fiscal year; includes a review of economic assumptions and an updated forecast of budget outcomes.

Year-End Report: describes the situation of the government’s accounts at the end of the fiscal year and, ideally, an evaluation of the progress made toward achieving the budget’s policy goals.

Audit Report: issued by the supreme audit institution; this document examines the soundness and completeness of the government’s year-end accounts.
The Open Budget Survey examines the role that legislatures, supreme audit institutions, and independent fiscal institutions play in the budget process and the extent to which they are able to provide effective oversight of the budget. These institutions play a critical role — often enshrined in national constitutions or laws — in planning budgets and overseeing their implementation.

These indicators were revised to better assess the role of formal oversight institutions in ensuring integrity and accountability in the use of public resources. Therefore, data on the role and effectiveness of oversight institutions in the Open Budget Survey 2017 should not be compared directly to data from earlier editions.

To what extent does the legislature in Australia provide budget oversight?

The legislature provides limited oversight during the budget cycle. This score reflects that the legislature provides limited oversight during the planning stage of the budget cycle and adequate oversight during the implementation stage of the budget cycle.

Oversight by an Independent Fiscal Institution

Australia’s Parliamentary Budget Office serves as the independent fiscal institution (IFI). Its independence is set in law, and it reports to the legislature. It publishes its own fiscal forecasts and its own cost estimates of some new policy proposals.

While IFIs are not yet widespread globally, they are increasingly recognized as an important source of independent, nonpartisan information. IFIs take a variety of different institutional forms. Common examples include parliamentary budget offices and fiscal councils. For more information, see Lisa von Trapp, Ian Lienert, and Joachim Wehner, “Principles for Independent Fiscal Institutions and Case Studies,” OECD Journal on Budgeting, March 2016 (special issue), pp. 9-24.

To what extent does the supreme audit institution in Australia provide budget oversight?

The supreme audit institution provides adequate budget oversight.

The main barriers to effective legislative oversight are:

■ A debate on budget policy by the legislature does not take place prior to tabling of the Executive’s Budget Proposal.
■ The Executive’s Budget Proposal is not provided to legislators at least two months before the start of the budget year.
■ A legislative committee does not examine in-year budget implementation.

How can Australia improve transparency?

Australia should prioritize the following actions to improve budget transparency:

■ Publish a Pre-Budget Statement.
How can Australia improve participation?
Australia should prioritize the following actions to improve public participation in its budget process:
- Actively engage with individuals or civil society organizations representing vulnerable and underrepresented communities during the formulation and monitoring of the implementation of the national budget.
- Provide more feedback to the public on how its inputs have been used when it participates in the budget process.

How can Australia improve oversight?
Australia should prioritize the following actions to make budget oversight more effective:
- Ensure the legislature holds a debate on budget policy prior to the tabling of the Executive’s Budget Proposal and approves recommendations for the upcoming budget.
- Ensure a legislative committee examines in-year budget implementation and publishes a report presenting its findings and recommendations.

Further Information
Visit openbudgetsurvey.org for more information, including:
- The Open Budget Survey 2017: Global report
- Data explorer
- Methodology report
- Full questionnaire

METHODOLOGY

The Open Budget Survey uses internationally accepted criteria developed by multilateral organizations from sources such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) and the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency (GIFT).

It is a fact-based research instrument that assesses what occurs in practice through readily observable phenomena. The entire research process took approximately 18 months between August 2016 and January 2018 and involved about 300 experts in 115 countries. The Open Budget Survey 2017 assesses only events, activities, or developments that occurred up to 31 December 2016. The survey was revised somewhat from the 2015 version to reflect evolving methods for disseminating budget information and to strengthen individual questions on public participation and budget oversight. A discussion of these changes can be found in the Open Budget Survey Global Report (see link below).

Survey responses are typically supported by citations and comments. This may include a reference to a public document, an official statement by the government, or comments from a face-to-face interview with a government official or other knowledgeable parties.