

Grading State Disclosure 2004

Evaluating states' efforts to bring sunlight to political money

A Report by the California Voter Foundation,
with the Center for Governmental Studies
and the UCLA School of Law

A Publication of the Campaign Disclosure Project,
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Grading State Disclosure is a study of the Campaign Disclosure Project, which seeks to bring greater transparency and accountability to money in state politics through assessments of state disclosure programs as well as the development of a model state campaign finance disclosure law. The Campaign Disclosure Project is a collaborative effort of the UCLA School of Law, the Center for Governmental Studies and the California Voter Foundation and is sponsored by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts.

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Executive Summary

A second nationwide assessment of state-level campaign finance disclosure programs has found that 33 states again received passing grades, and 17 states failed the evaluation and have unsatisfactory campaign disclosure programs. The overall numbers of states passing and failing in 2004 is the same as in 2003, although two states which failed last year received passing grades this year, and two that passed last year received an F in 2004.

Twenty-one states have better grades in Grading State Disclosure 2004 than in last year's assessment, and overall, states made the most substantial progress in the grading categories of Disclosure Content Accessibility and Online Technical and Contextual Usability. While the same number of states failed the assessment this year as in 2003, the quality of disclosure across the country did improve, even in some of those states with low grades. Forty-three states made at least one improvement in their campaign finance disclosure practices, while seven states made no measurable improvements, including Arizona, Connecticut, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Grading State Disclosure is a 3-year study by the Campaign Disclosure Project—a collaboration of the California Voter Foundation, the Center for Governmental Studies and the UCLA School of Law—and is supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts. The study is the first comprehensive, comparative study of candidate campaign finance disclosure laws and practices in the 50 states; the 2004 assessment presents findings from a second round of state evaluations. This year's findings provide a review of nationwide and state-by-state changes over the past year. The states that have improved the most since 2003 are: Tennessee, Georgia, California, Indiana and Florida. Although the findings reveal a significant amount of progress, only eight states received grades in the A or B range, indicating that the vast majority of the states still have room to improve campaign finance disclosure for state-level candidates.

Grading State Disclosure 2004 evaluated four specific areas of campaign finance disclosure: state campaign disclosure laws; electronic filing programs; accessibility of campaign finance information; and the usability of state disclosure web sites. Of the 33 passing states, only two received overall grades in the A range. The top-ranked state, Washington, received an A, and California was a close second with an A-. Other top states include: Florida (B+), Georgia (B), Illinois (B), Michigan (B), Rhode Island and Ohio (B-, tied), Texas (C+) and Alaska and Kentucky (C+, tied). Seventeen states received F grades.

Significant findings include:

- 50 states require disclosure of a contributor's name and address.
- 28 states require disclosure of a contributor's occupation and employer.
- 34 states require late contribution reporting.
- 39 states require independent expenditures to be reported.
- 21 states have mandatory electronic filing for statewide and/or legislative candidates.
- 17 states offer voluntary electronic filing for statewide and legislative candidates.
- 12 states have no electronic filing program.
- 47 states post campaign finance data on their web sites.
- 30 states provide searchable databases of contributions online.
- 20 states provide searchable databases of expenditures online.
- 20 states provide summaries of total amounts raised and spent by current candidates.
- 3 states—Montana, South Carolina and Wyoming—have no campaign finance data available on

their web sites.

Significant improvements since 2003 include:

- 2 states added electronic filing programs.
- 3 states removed an opt-out provision from their mandatory electronic filing programs.
- 3 states converted voluntary electronic filing programs to mandatory electronic filing programs for statewide and/or legislative candidates.
- 7 states improved how quickly campaign finance data is available online.
- 4 states added searchable databases of campaign contributions to their disclosure agency web sites.
- 4 states added searchable databases of campaign expenditures to their disclosure agency web sites.
- 3 states added features that allow campaign finance data to be downloaded in an Excel-compatible format.
- 8 states added or made enhancements to summary campaign finance analysis information on their web sites.

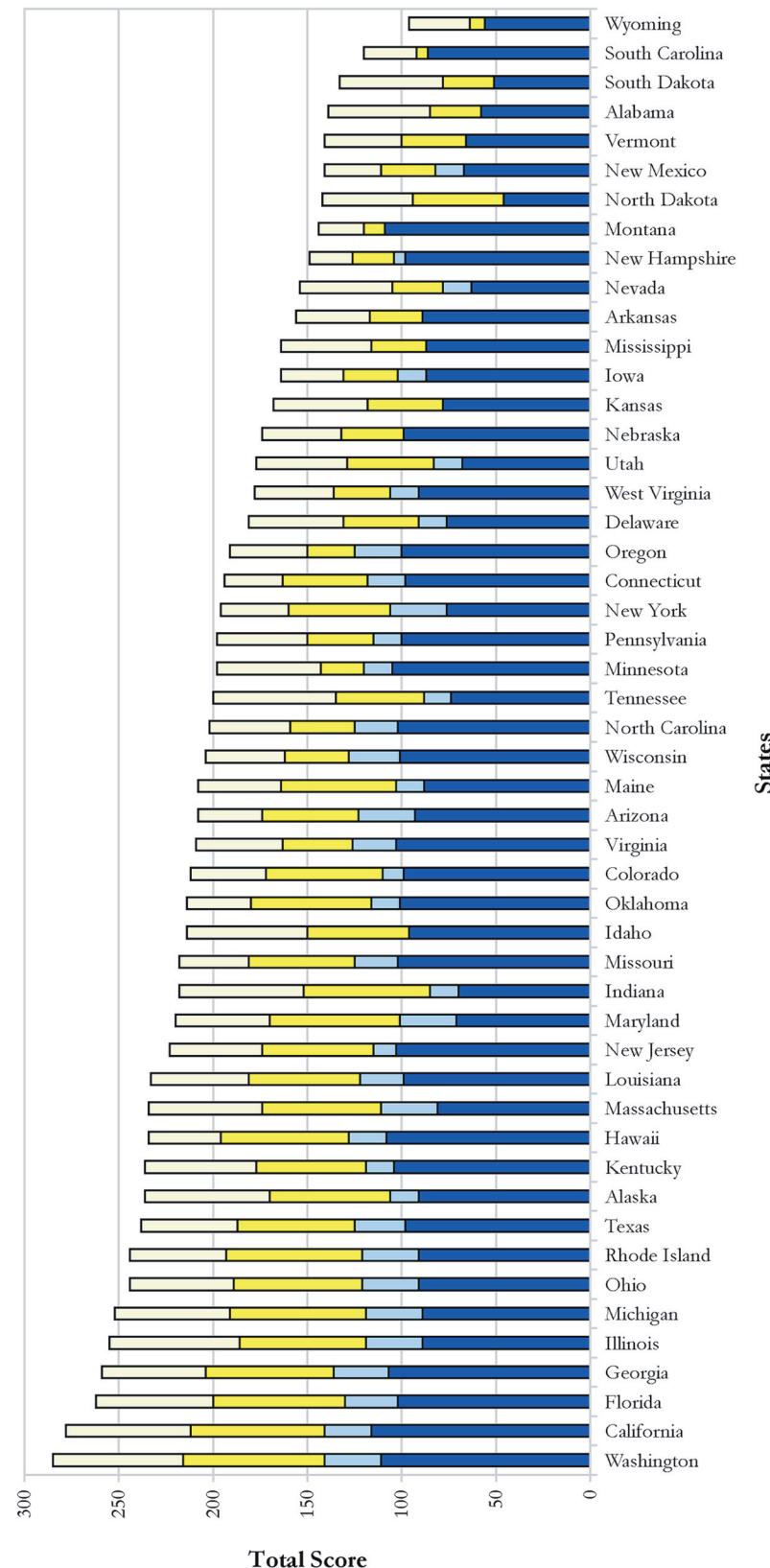
Grades were based on criteria developed by the Project partners, the Project's Advisory Board and a panel of expert judges, who also assisted with the grading process. The Project set a high, but not impossible, standard for state campaign finance disclosure programs. The grades were based on a state's performance in the area of candidate disclosure only; lobbying, conflict of interest, ballot measure and party organization disclosure were not evaluated.

Assessments of each state were based on legal research, web site visits and research, web site testing by outside evaluators and responses from state disclosure agency staff and activists working on campaign financing at the state level.

Comparative State Performance

Legend:

- Law Score
- E-file Score
- Access Score
- Usability Score



Campaign Finance Disclosure in the States: An Overview

State Campaign Finance Disclosure Laws

Number of states that require reporting of last-minute contributions: 34

Number of states that require a contributor's occupation and employer to be disclosed: 28

 Number that require a contributor's occupation to be disclosed, but not employer: 6

 Number that require a contributor's employer to be disclosed, but not occupation: 2

 Number of states that do not require contributor occupation or employer information: 14

Number of states that require expenditures to be described in campaign disclosure reports: 48

Number of states that require both a descriptive code and a plain language description of each expenditure: 9

 Number of states that require a plain language expenditure description only: 38

 Number of states that require descriptive expenditure codes only: 1

Number of states that require disclosure of subvendor expenditures made on behalf of a campaign: 20

 Number of states that require independent expenditures to be disclosed: 39

 Number of states that require last-minute independent expenditures to be disclosed: 21

Number of states that direct their disclosure agencies to conduct "desk reviews" of campaign finance reports: 30

Number of state that direct their disclosure agencies to conduct field audits of campaign finance reports: 13

Electronic Filing of Campaign Finance Reports

Number of states that require candidates to electronically file campaign disclosure reports: 21

Number of these 21 states that require electronic filing by both legislative and statewide candidates: 15

Number of these 21 states that have an electronic filing mandate for statewide candidates and a voluntary electronic filing program for legislative candidates: 6

 Number of states with a voluntary electronic filing program: 17

 Number of states with no electronic filing program: 12

Disclosure Data - Access and Usability

Number of state disclosure web sites that tell the public what data can and cannot be found on the site: 22

Number of sites that provide information about campaign finance restrictions and disclosure reporting requirements: 45

 Number of sites that provide only information about disclosure reporting requirements: 5

 Number of state disclosure agencies that post campaign finance data on the Internet: 47

 Number of state disclosure agencies that post no campaign finance data on the Internet: 3

 Number of state disclosure web sites with searchable, online databases of contributions: 30

 Number of state disclosure web sites with searchable, online databases of expenditures: 20

 Number of searchable expenditure databases in states without electronic filing: 0

 Number of states where disclosure data can be sorted online: 20

Number of states with electronic filing that allow the public to download disclosure data from the agency's web site: 24

Number of states without electronic filing that allow the public to download data from the agency's web site: 3

State-by-State Grade and Ranking Chart

State	Grade	Rank	Law Grade	Law Rank	E-Filing Grade	E-Filing Rank	Accessibility Grade	Accessibility Rank	Usability Grade	Usability Rank
Alabama	F	47	F	47	F	39	F	42	C-	16
Alaska	C+	10	C	25	F	22	B	12	B+	3
Arizona	D+	23	C+	24	A+	1	D+	24	F	42
Arkansas	F	40	C	29	F	39	F	41	F	38
California	A-	2	A	1	B	14	A	4	B+	3
Colorado	C-	21	B-	17	F	37	B-	15	F	37
Connecticut	D	31	B-	20	D	20	D-	28	F	46
Delaware	D-	33	D	38	F	22	F	29	D	20
Florida	B+	3	B	10	A	11	A	5	B-	8
Georgia	B	4	B+	5	A	10	A-	7	C	12
Hawaii	C+	12	A-	4	D	20	A-	7	F	39
Idaho	C-	19	B-	23	F	39	C-	22	B	7
Illinois	B	5	C	29	A+	1	B+	10	A-	1
Indiana	C-	17	F	42	F	22	B+	10	B+	3
Iowa	F	38	C-	33	F	22	F	38	F	44
Kansas	F	37	D	37	F	39	F	29	D	20
Kentucky	C+	10	B	7	F	22	C+	20	C+	11
Louisiana	C+	14	B-	17	C	16	C+	18	D+	17
Maine	D+	23	C	32	F	22	B-	17	F	30
Maryland	C	16	F	41	A+	1	A-	6	D	20
Massachusetts	C+	12	D+	36	A+	1	B	14	B-	10
Michigan	B	6	C	29	A+	1	A	2	B-	9
Minnesota	D	28	B+	6	F	22	F	46	C	12
Mississippi	F	38	C-	33	F	39	F	38	D	25
Missouri	C-	17	B	10	C	16	C	21	F	40

State-by-State Grade and Ranking Chart (continued)

State	Grade	Rank	Law Grade	Law Rank	E-Filing Grade	E-Filing Rank	Accessibility Grade	Accessibility Rank	Usability Grade	Usability Rank
Montana	F	43	A-	3	F	39	F	48	F	49
Nebraska	F	36	B-	17	F	39	F	36	F	32
Nevada	F	41	F	46	F	22	F	42	D	23
New Hampshire	F	42	B-	20	F	38	F	47	F	50
New Jersey	C	15	B	8	F	36	C+	18	D	23
New Mexico	F	45	F	44	F	22	F	38	F	47
New York	D	30	D	38	A+	1	C-	22	F	41
North Carolina	D+	26	B	10	C	16	F	33	F	31
North Dakota	F	44	F	50	F	39	D	25	D	25
Ohio	B-	7	C	25	A+	1	A-	7	C	12
Oklahoma	C-	19	B	13	F	22	B	12	F	42
Oregon	D	32	B	15	B	14	F	45	F	35
Pennsylvania	D	28	B	15	F	22	F	32	D	25
Rhode Island	B-	7	C	25	A+	1	A	2	D+	18
South Carolina	F	49	C-	35	F	39	F	50	F	48
South Dakota	F	48	F	49	F	39	F	42	C	12
Tennessee	D	27	D-	40	F	35	D-	26	B	6
Texas	C+	9	B-	20	A-	12	B-	15	D+	18
Utah	F	35	F	43	F	22	D-	27	D	25
Vermont	F	45	F	45	F	39	F	33	F	35
Virginia	D+	22	B	8	C	16	F	31	D-	29
Washington	A	1	A-	2	A+	1	A+	1	A-	1
West Virginia	F	34	C	25	F	22	F	37	F	32
Wisconsin	D+	25	B	13	A-	12	F	33	F	32
Wyoming	F	50	F	48	F	39	F	49	F	45

I.

Introduction

- The Grading Process
- The Grading Criteria
- Methodology

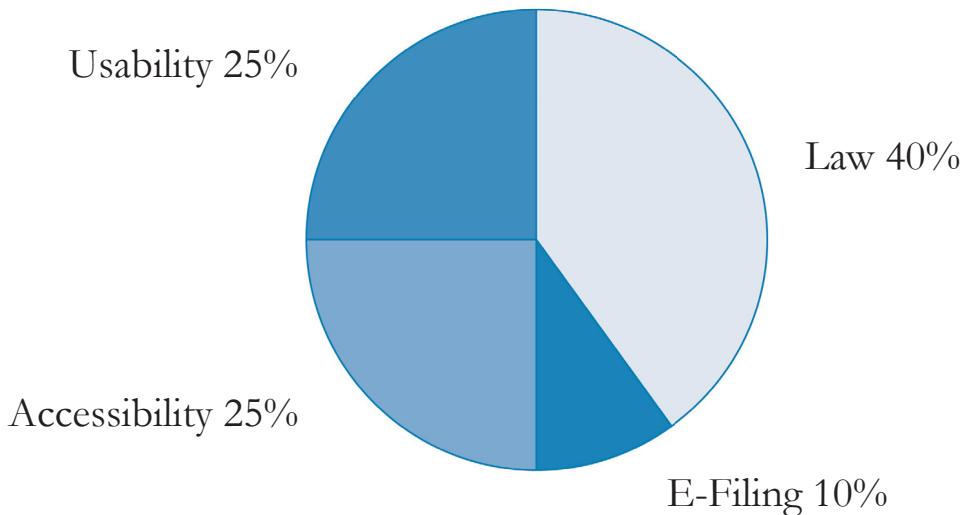
The 2004 Presidential election season has been marked by a substantial upswing in voter participation, accompanied by an increased demand by citizens for access to the information needed to cast an informed vote. A primary component of that decision-making process is information about money in politics. Political contributions play a significant role in the campaigning process, providing the dollars necessary for candidates to reach out to voters both in person and through a variety of media. Campaign finance reporting enables voters to find out which groups are backing those who seek their votes. Even after politicians are elected and begin serving in office, access to information about money in politics is important. When state governments are faced with tough regulatory and budgetary decisions, the winners and losers are often engaged in making campaign contributions, and the public has a right to know about those financial transactions.

While many states have strong campaign finance disclosure laws, information about campaign finance regulations and disclosure requirements – and the disclosure records themselves – are not always disseminated in formats that are useful to the public. More states are offering campaign filings in online databases that give the public quick access to the details of candidates' campaign finance activity, but others still display campaign records in a way that inhibits meaningful analysis of the records or makes it difficult to inspect them at all. Access to contextual information, such as summary reports of total candidate fundraising and thorough explanations of state disclosure requirements, is just as important and provides voters with the background necessary to understand the implications of individual campaign finance reports.

The Campaign Disclosure Project seeks to bring greater transparency and accountability to money in state politics through assessments of state disclosure programs as well as the development of a model state campaign finance disclosure law. The Campaign Disclosure Project is a collaborative effort of the UCLA School of Law, the Center for Governmental Studies and the California Voter Foundation (CVF) and is supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts.

The Grading Process

Grading State Disclosure Criteria was written and developed by the California Voter Foundation in consultation with the Grading State Disclosure judges, the Campaign Disclosure Project Advisory Board and project partners. The Project set a high, but not impossible, standard for state campaign finance disclosure programs. Efforts were made to balance the concerns of practitioners and government officials against the very important need for timely, complete and effective disclosure. The criteria used



for this first round of grading will be applied in subsequent years, so that changes and improvements in state level campaign disclosure can be measured over time.

Four areas of performance make-up the grading criteria: Campaign Disclosure Laws; Electronic Filing Programs; Disclosure Content Accessibility; and Online Contextual and Technical Usability. The strength of a state's campaign disclosure law is worth 40 percent of its grade; the quality of electronic filing is worth ten percent of the grade; and accessibility to data and web site usability are each worth 25 percent.

A 300-point system was developed to score each state. Points were awarded based on a state's performance solely in the area of state-level candidate disclosure. Ranks were assigned based on points, and in several instances one or more states tied for a particular rank. This is especially the case in the Electronic Filing category, where multiple states were tied for both first and last place. Grades are based on each state's total point score, utilizing the following grading percentages:

- A: 90 – 100 % (Excellent)
- B: 80 – 89 % (Good)
- C: 70 – 79 % (Average)
- D: 60 – 69 % (Below Average/Passing)
- F: 59 % or lower (Failing)

In addition to an overall grade and rank, the states have also been graded and ranked in each of the four grading categories. In order to better measure progress over time, the grades are not curved, weighted or scaled.

The Grading Criteria

In the criteria, significant weight was placed on the comprehensiveness of state Campaign Disclosure Laws. Good campaign disclosure laws require the reporting of detailed information about contributions and expenditures. In particular, the disclosure of some critical pieces of information—including a contributor's occupation and employer, subvendor information for expenditures, and reporting of last minute contributions and independent expenditures—all enhance the public's ability to access campaign finance data in a timely fashion. States require the disclosure of detailed contribution and expenditure information at varying thresholds, but the criteria did not evaluate the appropriateness of these thresholds (although they are mentioned in the findings for each state.)

Occupation and employer data for campaign contributors is crucial for categorizing donations or identifying efforts by large corporations and organizations to bundle their employees' contributions. Information about subvendors, including credit card providers and campaign consultants, is important in order to capture campaign expenses that might otherwise go unreported. Reporting of last-minute contributions and independent expenditures, prior to an election, helps voters identify which individuals and organizations are conducting last-minute efforts to influence the outcome of the election. Strong enforcement and frequent reporting of campaign finances by candidates are also necessary components of meaningful disclosure laws.

In the Electronic Filing category, great value was placed on whether states have passed laws mandating the electronic filing of campaign finance disclosure information. The receipt of campaign finance data in an electronic format often leads to the availability of the information on the Internet. If data is submitted in an electronic format, the agency can post data online more quickly and in formats that allow for more meaningful analysis of campaign finance reports. Many states with electronic filing have created searchable databases of contributions and expenditures, or made data available in formats that can be sorted or downloaded. While voluntary electronic filing does lead to some expanded accessibility to campaign finance data, mandatory electronic filing is preferred because it is more likely to result in timely, comprehensive online disclosure.

The Disclosure Content Accessibility category evaluated the degree to which the content of disclosure reports is available to the public both on paper and on the Internet. The states' efforts to make paper records accessible to the public, such as the ease of obtaining records from a distance, the cost of the records and the length of time it takes to obtain the records, was part of this assessment. Significant weight was placed on the use of the Internet to publish state campaign finance disclosure information, based on the Project's belief that the Internet is the most effective and affordable way for state agencies to make campaign finance data accessible to the public.

In the criteria, importance was given to the scope of campaign finance data on disclosure web sites and the ways in which that data could be analyzed. This included the availability of features such as databases of contributions and expenditures that allow searching across all filers (both electronic and paper) and on a number of fields. Whether states allow the public to sort data by reordering categories of information, browse records, or download data so it can be analyzed offline, were factors. State disclosure sites were also evaluated for offering and explaining “smart search” features, such as partial name and “name sounds like” lookups.

Of equal importance to the accessibility of campaign finance records was Online Contextual and Technical Usability—the degree to which state disclosure web sites are technically and contextually “user-friendly” to the public. This category was a combination of web research by Project staff and usability testing by outside testers. States that did well in usability were those that: have disclosure web sites that are easy to locate from the state’s home page; provide information explaining the state’s campaign finance laws, disclosure requirements and reporting periods; provide instructions for how to access the data on the site; publish analyses or overviews of campaign finance activity; publish both original and amended campaign finance reports; and give a clear explanation of which candidates and reports are online.

Significant weight was placed on the availability of analyses of campaign finance activity, which give the public a better understanding of how one candidate’s fundraising and spending compares to another, and also how campaign finance trends change over time. Given the current budgetary situation in many states, however, resources may not allow for in-depth, comprehensive analyses. In those cases, a simple chart of total amounts raised and spent by individual candidates would serve a similar purpose.

Also of importance in the usability section of the criteria, was the posting and clear labeling of amended campaign finance reports on the web, with the retention of original filings online. Being able to view original and amended reports side-by-side helps the public determine when and what changes have been made to those reports.

The full Grading State Disclosure criteria are included in an appendix at the end of this report.

Methodology

Assessments of each state’s campaign finance disclosure program were based on legal research, web site visits and research, web site testing by outside evaluators and responses from disclosure agency staff and activists working on campaign financing at the state level.

The UCLA School of Law and the Center for Governmental Studies researched state campaign finance disclosure laws. The legal research was originally completed from June 2002 through March 2003. A second comprehensive examination of all fifty states’ disclosure laws was conducted from July 2003 through July 2004, with the purpose of identifying any changes in the state laws as of December 31, 2003. The second round of law research also resulted in a number of minor adjustments to some of the states’ law scores, because of discrepancies in the 2002 law data that were brought to light in the process of verifying and updating the research. Changes in state laws that were made or implemented in 2004 will be reflected in the next round of grades. Statutes, regulations, rules and forms were evaluated in each state.

The California Voter Foundation (CVF) conducted research on state electronic filing programs, accessibility to disclosure records and online contextual and technical usability through a variety of methods. Each state agency responsible for overseeing campaign finance was asked to respond to a questionnaire—either by phone interview or in writing. All 50 state agencies responded to this request for information in 2003; in 2004, 48 state agencies completed the questionnaire and two responded by stating that nothing had changed since 2003. CVF also sought input from activists working on campaign finance issues at the state level; 18 responded to CVF's questionnaire either by phone or in writing.

CVF researched campaign finance disclosure information on the web sites of each of the 50 states. The web site evaluation form created and used in 2003 to ensure uniformity in the research was also used in 2004, and each state web site was evaluated twice by CVF staff members between January and June 2004. Similar to the process undertaken by UCLA to update the law research, CVF's analysis of state disclosure programs in 2004 also revisited the 2003 data, making some small scoring adjustments to further improve the consistency of scoring across the states.

The UCLA School of Law conducted usability tests of state disclosure web sites in June 2004. The goal of the usability tests was to determine if the disclosure information provided on the Internet is accessible to the average citizen. Usability testers, recruited from the undergraduate student population at UCLA, were asked to perform specific tasks on each state's web site. The time and number of mouseclicks it took to complete each task were measured.

The tasks were as follows:

- Locate the state's disclosure web site starting from the state's homepage;
- Ascertain the total contributions received by the incumbent governor in his or her last campaign (testers were given a list of incumbent governors that included the year they were last elected); and,
- Provide the name and amount contributed by any individual contributor to the incumbent governor's last campaign.

The second measure of usability was a survey in which each tester was asked to evaluate his or her experiences on each site. The states were assigned randomly to testers, with each tester testing five different states. The experiment was administered five times to ten different students, and five different students tested each state. A more detailed explanation of the usability test is included as an appendix to this report.

Following the completion of the research and usability testing, CVF compiled preliminary scores for each state that were reviewed by the Grading State Disclosure Judges before final scores, grades and ranks were determined.

II.

Findings

- Campaign Disclosure Laws
- Electronic Filing Programs
- Disclosure Content Accessibility
- Online Contextual and Technical Usability

Thirty-three states received passing grades in Grading State Disclosure 2004, while 17 states failed the evaluation and were found to have unsatisfactory campaign finance disclosure programs. The overall numbers of states passing and failing in 2004 is the same as in Grading State Disclosure 2003, although two states which failed last year received passing grades this year, and two that passed last year received an F in 2004.

The 2004 assessment found that there has been significant progress in state-level campaign disclosure across the states. Twenty-one states improved their grades from those received in the 2003 study, while 24 remained the same and five states received a lower grade in 2004 than the previous year. Of the 17 states that received failing grades in Grading State Disclosure 2003, 15 received failing grades in this year's study as well, and two passed. Two states which passed in 2003 failed in Grading State Disclosure 2004.

The quality of campaign disclosure across the country improved in most states, even in some that received very low grades. Forty-three states (86%) made at least one improvement in campaign finance disclosure practices. Seven states—Arizona, Connecticut, Mississippi, Montana, New Jersey, Wisconsin, and Wyoming—made no measurable improvements in the 2004 study (although New Jersey made some improvements that will be reflected in next year's grade.)

Washington state received the highest grade, an A, while California ranked second overall, with an A-. Six states received grades in the B range; thirteen states received grades in the C range, and twelve states received grades in the D range. Seventeen states received failing grades. (See the attached charts for a

complete listing of grades and ranks.)

The most improved states were: Tennessee, with a seemingly insignificant grade change from an F to a D, but a very impressive gain in rank from 46th to 27th; Georgia, with a grade change from a D+ to a B, and an improvement in rank from 21st to 4th; California, with a grade change from a C to an A- and a change in rank from 9th to 2nd; Indiana, with a change in grade from a D- to a C-, and a change in rank from 32nd to 17th; and Florida, with a change in grade from a C to a B+ and an improvement in rank from 7th to 3rd.

The top-ranking states overall are: Washington (A); California (A-); Florida (B+); Georgia (B); Illinois (B); Michigan (B); Rhode Island and Ohio (B-, tied for 7th); Texas (C+); and Alaska and Kentucky (C+, tied for 10th).

The lowest-ranking states (all of which received an F), in rank order from 41 to 50, are: Nevada; New Hampshire; Montana; North Dakota; New Mexico and Vermont (tied for 45th); Alabama; South Dakota; South Carolina; and Wyoming.

Campaign Disclosure Laws

Of the four categories assessed in the Grading State Disclosure study, states across the country again performed best in the area of Campaign Finance Disclosure Laws. Four states' laws received grades in the A range, and there were more B grades (19) in this category than in any other. Twelve Cs and five Ds round out the passing states; ten states failed the disclosure law assessment.

- 28 states require a contributor's occupation and employer to be disclosed.
- 6 states require only a contributor's occupation to be disclosed.
- 2 states require only a contributor's employer to be disclosed.
- 14 do not require disclosure of either occupation or employer.
- 34 states require late contribution reporting.
- 49 states require a description of an expenditure.
- 20 states require subvendor information to be reported.
- 39 states require independent expenditures to be reported.
- 21 states require last-minute independent expenditure reporting.
- 30 states conduct mandatory desk reviews.
- 13 states conduct mandatory field audits.

Significant Changes Since 2003:

- 1 state added independent expenditure reporting (Iowa).
- 1 state added in-kind contribution reporting requirements (North Dakota).
- 1 state added mandatory desk review of campaign finance disclosure reports (South Carolina).
- 2 states added or enhanced reporting of a contributor's occupation and employer (Texas and North Dakota).

States with the strongest disclosure laws, in rank order from one to ten, are: California; Washington; Montana; Hawaii; Georgia; Minnesota; Kentucky; New Jersey and Virginia (tied for 8th); and Florida,

Missouri and North Carolina (tied for 10th).

States with the weakest disclosure laws, in rank order from 41 to 50, are: Maryland; Indiana; Utah; New Mexico; Vermont; Nevada; Alabama; Wyoming; South Dakota; and North Dakota.

The study again found that all states require disclosure of some itemized contributor information, and in almost all states there is a threshold for the reporting of those contribution details. Every state except South Dakota requires reporting of the date a contribution was made. Twenty-eight states require the disclosure of the occupation and employer of contributors, and an additional eight states require one or the other, but not both. Thirty-three states require cumulative contribution reporting. Last-minute contributions must be disclosed prior to an election in 34 states.

Disclosure of loan details is weaker across the states. Every state except North Dakota and South Dakota at least requires the disclosure of the date a loan was made to a campaign. However, only 33 states require disclosure of the loan guarantor, 14 states require disclosure of the loan interest rate, and 13 require reporting of the due date. Disclosure of in-kind contributions is required in all states except Indiana; North Dakota added this provision to its law this year.

Forty-nine states require the reporting of some level of detail for campaign expenditures, with North Dakota still being the one exception. Twenty-one states have no threshold for disclosure of expenditures, and candidates must disclose each expenditure regardless of amount. All 49 states that require expenditure disclosure also require descriptions of expenditures, either through plain-language descriptions, the use of descriptive codes, or both. Forty-six states require the date of an expenditure to be reported. South Dakota is the only state of the 49 with expenditure disclosure that does not require reporting of vendor name. Twenty states require reporting of subvendor information, such as a breakdown of credit card or consulting bills. While 39 states require the reporting of independent expenditures, only 21 states require last-minute independent expenditures to be reported before the election. Of those states that require independent expenditure reporting, only six do not require disclosure of who will benefit from the expenditure.

Campaign disclosure laws are most beneficial to the public when they are enforced, and many states do a great disservice to their citizens by lacking adequate enforcement. Thirty states conduct mandatory desk reviews of campaign finance disclosure filings, but only 13 states conduct mandatory field audits of campaign finance-related receipts and documents. While all 50 states have either civil or criminal enforcement mechanisms for compliance with campaign finance disclosure requirements, only 39 states have both forms of enforcement. Forty-nine states impose penalties for late filing of campaign contribution reports; only Alabama does not have this provision in its law.

Electronic Filing Programs

Several states have made significant advances in the area of electronic filing of campaign finance reports since Grading State Disclosure 2003. Currently, over 75 percent of the states have an electronic filing program in place, and in 21 states that program is mandatory for statewide and/or legislative candidates. Thirteen states received grades in the A range for Electronic Filing Program, more than in any other category; however, the 29 states receiving failing grades indicate there is still significant progress to be made. Two states received a B, four states received Cs, and four received Ds. The failing states include those with completely voluntary electronic filing programs, because of the value placed on mandatory

electronic filing in the Grading State Disclosure criteria.

- 38 states have an electronic filing program for candidate campaign finance reports.
- 21 states have some type of mandatory requirement for electronic filing of campaign finance reports.
- 15 of these states require electronic filing by candidates for both statewide and legislative office.
- 6 states require electronic filing for statewide candidates only.
- 17 states have voluntary electronic filing for candidates for statewide and legislative office.
- Of the 38 states with an electronic filing program, 30 reported having adequate funds and 8 states reported insufficient funds.
- 12 states have no electronic filing program.

Significant Changes Since 2003:

- 2 states that previously had no electronic filing program have added a voluntary program (Tennessee and West Virginia).
- 1 state converted a completely voluntary electronic filing program to one that is mandatory for all statewide and legislative candidates (Michigan).
- 2 states that previously required electronic filing for statewide candidates only, now have mandatory electronic filing for legislative candidates as well (Georgia and Rhode Island).
- 3 states with mandatory electronic filing programs eliminated waivers that had previously allowed candidates to opt-out of mandatory electronic filing (Florida, Oregon and Texas).

States with the strongest electronic filing programs, all receiving an A+ and tied for first place in this category, are: Arizona, Illinois, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, Ohio, Rhode Island and Washington.

States with no electronic filing (all tied for the last place rank) are: Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming.

The study found that 38 states have programs in place for electronic filing of campaign finance information, which is up from 36 in 2003. Twenty-one states have mandatory requirements for electronic filing of campaign finance reports. Of the 21, fifteen states require electronic filing by candidates for both statewide and legislative office, and six require electronic filing for statewide office candidates, but offer voluntary programs for legislative candidates. The thresholds that trigger mandatory electronic filing vary by state and type of candidate, and range in amount from zero (Arizona) to \$250,000 (Connecticut).

In 2003, Florida, Oregon and Texas provided waivers that allowed candidates to opt-out of mandatory electronic filing by issuing statements that they were either unable to file by this method, or were not using computers to maintain their campaign finance records. These waivers have been removed, closing a significant loophole in all three states' electronic filing programs.

In addition to the 21 states that require electronic filing, 17 states offer voluntary electronic filing programs for statewide and legislative candidates. Though these states still received failing grades in this category, their ranks indicate that they are performing substantially better than those states with no electronic filing program. Tennessee and West Virginia added electronic filing this year; while both

programs are voluntary, their creation represents progress in this area and lays the groundwork for what may eventually become mandatory electronic filing programs.

All of the states with electronic filing programs, with the exception of New Hampshire, offer candidates some form of training and/or technical assistance. Thirty-four states provide either a free web-based filing system or free filing software, and thirty five states offer a standard filing format for campaign finance reporting.

Adequate funding is a critical component of electronic filing programs; in addition to the resources necessary to develop such a program, disclosure agencies also need funding to provide support, training, and outreach to candidates, and to maintain the programs and keep pace with changing technology. State legislatures often provide funds to get a program started, but then do not allocate funding for ongoing program maintenance or enhancements. In this situation, e-filing programs end up competing with the other priorities of the disclosure agency. Four states reported a decrease in the funding available for their e-filing programs this year, and South Carolina, which passed legislation requiring the establishment of a program, had not yet made funds available for that purpose at the close of the project's research period. Six states reported increased levels of funding for electronic filing this year, including three with recently implemented programs or programs slated for implementation in the near future.

Twelve states (Alabama, Arkansas, Idaho, Kansas, Mississippi, Montana, North Dakota, Nebraska, South Carolina, South Dakota, Vermont and Wyoming) still have no electronic filing programs.

Disclosure Content Accessibility

Nearly half of the states (21) made some positive changes in the Disclosure Content Accessibility category, which saw the second-highest number of improvements across the states. There were two more grades in the A range and four more B grades this year than in 2003. In this year's assessment, nine states received A grades for Disclosure Content Accessibility, and eight states received B grades. Six states received C grades, and five states received D grades. Twenty-two states received failing grades in this category. Montana, South Carolina, and Wyoming still do not post any campaign finance reports on their web sites, and rank the lowest of all the states in terms of access to campaign finance data. Other states that received failing grades either have very little data online, or provide it in formats that make it difficult to access.

- 47 states post campaign finance data on their disclosure web sites.
- 30 states provide searchable databases of contributions online.
- 20 states provide searchable databases of expenditures online.
- 8 states post only scanned images of campaign finance reports.
- 27 states allow campaign finance data to be downloaded from their websites in Excel-compatible format.
- 3 states have no campaign finance data available on their web sites.
- 32 states post campaign finance data online within 48 hours.

Significant Changes Since 2003

- 4 states added online searchable databases of contributions.
- 4 states added online searchable databases of expenditures.

- 1 state removed a searchable database of contributions and expenditures from its disclosure web site (Nevada).
- 3 states reduced the search capabilities featured on their web sites.
- 7 states improved how quickly campaign finance data is posted online.
- 3 states added features that allow campaign finance data to be downloaded from the web.

States that provide the best access to campaign finance records, in rank order from one to ten, are: Washington; Michigan and Rhode Island (tied for 2nd); California; Florida; Maryland; Hawaii, Georgia and Ohio (tied for 8th); Indiana and Illinois (tied for 10th).

States with the weakest access to campaign finance records, in rank order from 41 to 50 are: Arkansas; Alabama, Nevada and South Dakota (tied for 42nd); Oregon; Minnesota; New Hampshire; Montana; Wyoming; South Carolina.

The most encouraging patterns identified in the area of Disclosure Content Accessibility are an increase in the number of online searchable campaign finance databases, and a decrease in the lag time between when campaign finance reports are filed and when they become available online for public viewing. Six states added or made improvements to searchable databases on their disclosure agency web sites: California and Missouri added searchable databases of both contributions and expenditures; North Dakota and Tennessee added searchable databases of contributions; and Alaska and Georgia added searchable databases of expenditures to complement their existing contributions databases.

While online accessibility generally improved across the states, three states lost ground in this area in 2004. The database of campaign contributions and expenditures that was online in Nevada in 2003 had been part of a pilot program, and is no longer available online. The agency is revisiting its electronic filing and disclosure program, and plans to re-introduce the database with enhanced capacity. Delaware's searchable database contained no current records for 2004; the most recent data available related to the 2002 election. Throughout this project's research window, Texas' database was unable to perform a search across all filers, even though the interface is designed to allow such a search. The Texas Ethics Commission traced the problem to a server capacity issue and has recently restored the full search capabilities, but the state's grade in this category suffered as a result in 2004.

The quality and comprehensiveness of the campaign finance data available online vary widely depending on the state. Twenty-seven states post campaign finance data from all reports by all candidates. Of these, 21 states allow site visitors to view all of the data in a digital format, while the other six feature digital campaign finance data for electronic filers and provide either summary totals or scanned PDF documents for reports filed on paper. Two states post very minimal campaign finance data online: New Hampshire offers data for statewide candidates only, and Oregon posts only summary information, (but is working toward making all filings available online).

Forty-three of the states posting campaign finance data on the web provide some itemized contribution and expenditure data, while four states allow viewing of itemized contributions only. Forty states provide an index of all reports available for an individual candidate. In general, states do a good job of posting campaign finance data online in a timely manner. Thirty-two states post all campaign finance records to the Internet within 48 hours, while four more post all data within five days. Five states post e-filed data immediately but have delays of up to two weeks for paper reports, and Hawaii and Maine post electronic filings immediately but do not post paper reports for more than two weeks. Four states, Alaska, Indiana, Kansas and Minnesota, often take more than one week to post any records on the Internet.

The study found that 30 states provide searchable databases of campaign contributions on their web sites, and 20 provide expenditure databases. Of the 20 states with no searchable databases, at least five allow users to download campaign finance data in Excel-compatible format from the disclosure web site. Analysis of these findings reveals the important role of mandatory electronic filing in creating comprehensive public access to campaign finance data. States with mandatory electronic filing programs are somewhat more likely to have a searchable database of contributions than states with voluntary electronic filing programs (81% vs 59%); and much more likely than states with no electronic filing program (81% vs 25%). Mandatory e-filing has an even greater impact on the availability of an expenditure database: 67% of states with mandatory electronic filing have an expenditure database, compared to only 35% of states with voluntary electronic filing. None of the states without electronic filing offer a searchable database of campaign expenditures online.

The three states with no electronic filing that offer searchable campaign contribution databases online—Idaho, Kansas and North Dakota—illustrate that even in states without electronic filing, disclosure agencies are capable of providing user-friendly access to campaign finance data in a digital format if they make it a priority. Agency staff in all three states data-enter contribution information from all candidates' reports, in order to create the contribution databases.

While the Disclosure Content Accessibility category is heavily focused on access to disclosure records via the Internet, the study also looked at access to disclosure records on paper. In most states (41), it is relatively easy for the public to obtain paper copies of campaign finance records through a simple request by phone, fax or e-mail. In nine states, significant barriers to accessing paper records exist, or requests for paper records take more than one week to be processed. In South Carolina the barriers to access are especially troubling considering that the disclosure agency offers no campaign finance data online.

The cost of paper records ranges significantly across the states, from as little as three cents per page in Ohio, to as much as one dollar per page in Alabama, Nevada and South Dakota. In 14 states the cost of paper records is less than \$.10 per page; in ten states paper records cost more than \$.25 per page. A number of states will also e-mail data or compile it on a disk or CD and mail it upon request; New Mexico and Rhode Island recently added this option. Generally this service is provided free of charge or for the cost of the disk, although a handful of states charge a large fee for data compiled on a CD.

Online Contextual and Technical Usability

Online Contextual and Technical Usability was the only category in which nearly all states performed poorly in Grading State Disclosure 2003, so it was encouraging to find that in 2004 it was the category in which the states improved most. Forty states made at least one positive change to the usability of their disclosure web sites in 2004, and a number made significant advancements in this area.

In 2003, no state received a grade in the A range in this category; this year Illinois and Washington both received an A-. Eight states received B grades, up from four last year, and six states received C grades. Thirteen states received D grades and twenty-one states received failing grades. The high number of states receiving low grades in this category indicates there is still substantial opportunity for states to improve the technical usability of their websites, and to provide the contextual information required for the public to make sense of campaign finance reports.

- 20 states publish current campaign finance analyses online, including lists of total amounts raised and spent for individual candidates in the most recent election. Of these, 16 states also include historical analyses.
- 2 states publish historical campaign finance analyses online, but do not provide similar analyses for the most recent election.
- 28 states do not provide any compilations of summary data online.
- 45 states provide information about campaign finance restrictions online; all 50 states post information about disclosure reporting requirements online.
- 43 states feature a list of candidates for the most recent or current elections on their disclosure web site.
- 7 states do not provide candidate lists on their disclosure web sites.
- 22 states provide comprehensive information regarding which disclosure reports are available online.
- 13 states provide no information regarding which disclosure reports are available online.
- 39 disclosure web sites are easily located from the state homepage.

Significant Changes Since 2003

- 8 states added or made improvements to summary campaign finance analysis information on their web sites.
- 22 states made it easier to locate the campaign finance disclosure web site from the state homepage.
- 5 states improved instructions for accessing campaign finance records.
- 4 states improved their explanations of which reports can be found on their web sites.

States with the best contextual and technical web site usability, in rank order from one to ten, are: Illinois and Washington (tied for 1st); Alaska, Indiana and California (tied for 3rd); Tennessee; Idaho; Florida; Michigan; and Massachusetts.

States with the weakest contextual and technical web site usability, in rank order from 41 to 50, are: New York; Arizona and Oklahoma (tied for 42nd); Iowa; Wyoming; Connecticut; New Mexico; South Carolina; Montana; and New Hampshire.

The most common areas of improvement within the Online Contextual and Technical Usability category were: summary campaign finance data; terminology; ease of locating the disclosure web site; instructions; candidate lists; and explanations of which reports are available online. As noted above, 40 states made at least one improvement in web site usability, although some states also had negative changes that outweighed their gains in this category.

Perhaps the most important technical usability aspect of online campaign disclosure is ensuring that visitors can easily locate the disclosure agency's web site. In last year's study, this proved to be difficult in the majority of the states. Twenty-two states made it easier in 2004 to locate the disclosure web site by browsing or conducting a search of the state homepage. This improvement may be due partly to more prominent placement of links to disclosure information on state homepages during an election year. In 33 states it is easy to find the disclosure site through a search of the state web site, and in 21 states it is easy to locate disclosure records by navigating to the disclosure agency from the state homepage. In eleven states, members of the public are subject to a lengthy and potentially frustrating process of identifying the state agency responsible for providing access to campaign finance disclosure records.

The terminology used on a disclosure web site can make a critical difference in the accessibility of campaign finance data and usability of state web sites. Last year's study found that 40 percent of the state disclosure web sites had serious terminology problems. While only 12 percent of sites this year were found to use very confusing terminology, another 25 percent received only a "fair" rating in this category, showing there is still room for progress. A number of states made key changes in terminology that significantly improved the public's ability to locate and understand campaign finance reports. Maine, which changed the link to view campaign reports from "Maine Campaign Finance Electronic Filing" to "Search Campaign Finance Information" is a good example of an improvement in terminology.

A number of states made significant improvements in providing web site visitors with overviews of campaign finance data for current and past elections. Alaska and California, which had stopped providing summary analyses online following the introduction of electronic filing, reintroduced those resources to their web sites in a slightly different form in 2004. Twenty states now provide lists of total amounts raised and spent by all state candidates in the most recent election, giving citizens a way to quickly compare fundraising across candidates and gain a better understanding of political money trends in their states. Of the states that provide current summary data, sixteen also provide historical overviews. Two additional states provide historical data on total amounts raised and spent by candidates, but offer no summary data for current elections.

Grading State Disclosure 2004 found that all fifty state disclosure agencies post information about campaign finance reporting requirements online, and forty-five feature some information about campaign finance restrictions, such as contribution and expenditure limits. The most significant improvement in this area happened in Delaware, which previously lacked contextual information about state disclosure laws altogether. Arkansas and Indiana added comprehensive information about disclosure reporting requirements to their disclosure web sites.

Also in the area of contextual usability, the study found that 22 states provide adequate information to help site visitors understand what campaign finance data is available on their disclosure web sites. Data history information typically includes which types of filers' reports are online, the timeframe covered by the online records, and which specific filings are available for each candidate. Fifteen states provide some of this contextual information, but do not give site visitors a complete picture of which reports they may or may not be able to access through the site. Thirteen states provide inadequate or no information about which reports are available on the disclosure agency website.

Grading State Disclosure 2004 also evaluated disclosure agency web sites on the availability of both original and amended filings online, as well as on how clearly amended filings are labeled as such. Twenty-five states make both original and amended reports available on the Internet; however, two of those states, Alabama and Arkansas, do not clearly label amended reports. Of the 27 states that do not retain original filings online after amendments have been posted, only four—Maryland, Maine, North Dakota and Pennsylvania—clearly indicate that a filing has been amended.

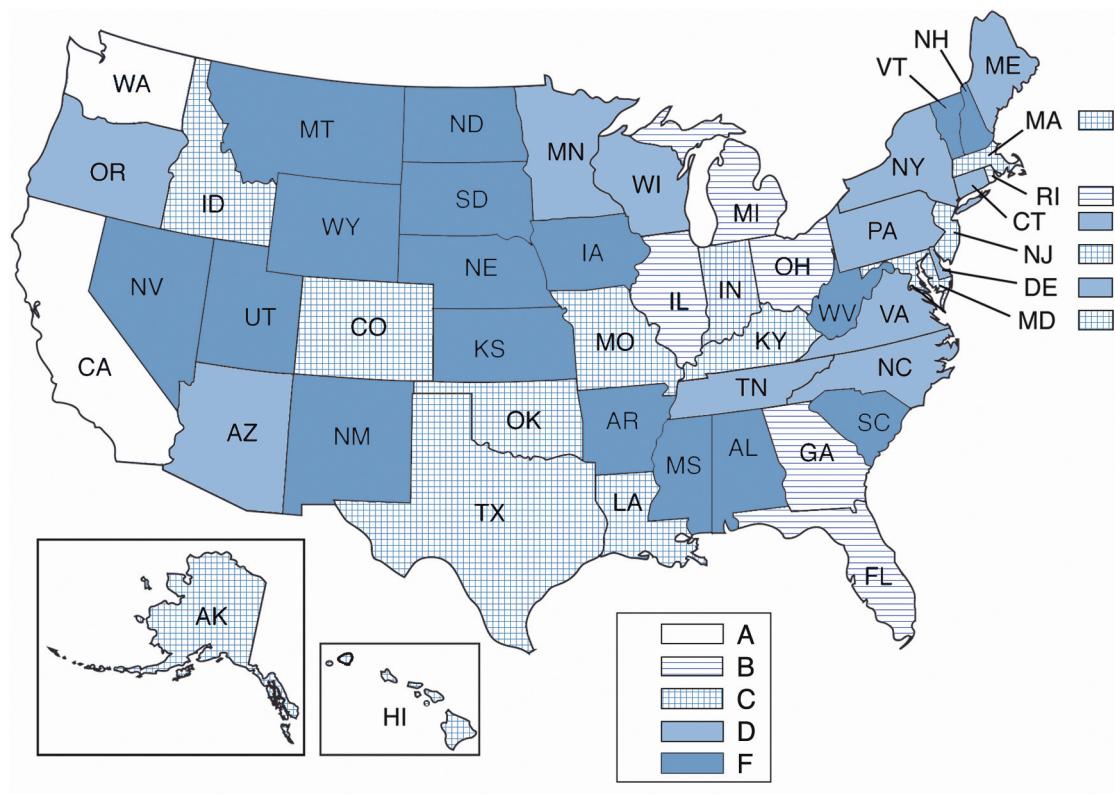
Comprehensive lists of candidates in current or recent elections were found to be available in 39 of the 50 states. This makes it easier for people researching disclosure data to view candidate reports in the larger context of the election, and to compare the reports of various candidates running for the same office. Four additional states provide lists that name candidates but are missing other information, such as party affiliation or office sought. Seven states provide no candidate lists, or even archived election results, which can serve a similar purpose.

The number of improvements made across the country in the Online Contextual and Technical Usability category in 2004 was encouraging, and hopefully points to additional progress in 2005. While improving the usability of state disclosure web sites does require some money and a certain level of commitment from a state disclosure agency, it does not require an act of the legislature or the implementation of an entirely new program. Even minimal changes in the amount of contextual information provided online, clarification of terminology, and minor revisions to a web site's structure can affect the usability of a web site significantly and can result in dramatic improvements in the accessibility of campaign finance information.

III.

State-by-State Summaries

U.S. Map of Grading State Disclosure 2004 Study Results



Alabama

Grade	F
Rank	47

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	47
Electronic Filing Program	F	39
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	42
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	C-	16

Alabama has made significant progress in web site usability, but its extremely low disclosure law rank and continued poor showing in the categories of electronic filing and Disclosure Content Accessibility mean the state is still among the worst performing in the country.

Alabama law requires candidates to file annual reports in non-election years and two campaign finance reports before an election. Candidates must provide details about contributors, but that information does not include occupation and employer. The law requires detailed reports about expenditures of \$100 or more, but subvendor information is not required. Candidates do not report last-minute contributions before the election, and there is no reporting of independent expenditures, both of which are significant weaknesses in the law. A lack of strong enforcement provisions also contributes to the low grade. There has been some support in Alabama for electronic filing, but there is still no program in place.

The Secretary of State's web site features campaign finance records dating back to 1990, but those statements are available only as scanned images posted in PDF, and there are no searchable or sortable records on the site. Summary information for each report is displayed in HTML, but the interface for viewing the rest of the data is a bit cumbersome, with each report section displayed as a separate file. Using this system, it could take a person hours to view all of the reports for just one or two candidates. Access to paper disclosure records on file at the agency is good, but at \$1.00 per page, the cost of copying records is prohibitive.

Alabama's strength lies in the contextual and technical usability of its disclosure web site, and even that could be improved. The site includes a list of candidates for office, information about the state's disclosure requirements, and a good explanation of which records are available online. However, it is still lacking a simple list of total amounts raised and spent by candidates, which would give site visitors a quick overview and a better understanding of how a particular candidate's fundraising activity compares to that of other candidates in the same contest. Alabama's web site performed much better in the usability testing in 2004, likely due to the fact that it became easier to locate the agency's web site from the State of Alabama homepage. Usability testing results were the main reason for the state's jump from an F to a C- in the usability category.

Alaska

Grade	C+
Rank	10

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C	25
Electronic Filing Program	F	22
Disclosure Content Accessibility	B	12
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	B+	3

Significant improvement in the area of Disclosure Content Accessibility has improved Alaska's overall grade and rank, but an average campaign disclosure law and a lack of mandatory electronic filing keep the state in the C range.

Alaska law requires candidates to file campaign finance reports once during non-election years and twice before an election. Candidates must provide detailed information about all contributors, including occupation and employer for those who give \$100 or more. Independent expenditures must be reported within ten days of being made, but last-minute independent expenditures are not reported until after the election. Alaska's electronic filing program remains voluntary for statewide and legislative candidates; the Alaska Public Offices Commission (APOC) says the program is adequately funded this year, and they are working on developing a web-based filing system.

Accessibility of campaign finance data in Alaska has advanced significantly, resulting in a B in the Disclosure Content Accessibility category, an improvement over last year's D. The contributions database can now be searched by zip code and employer, although still not by date (one can limit the search to a particular year, but cannot search by exact date.) The biggest change is the addition of an expenditures database that allows searches by vendor name and expenditure purpose, but not amount or date. Both databases are comprehensive and contain data going back to 1998. To further improve access to disclosure data, the agency could add the missing fields to the search interfaces, improve ease of access to paper records, and shorten the amount of time it takes for records to be posted online.

Alaska's biggest strength is still the usability of its disclosure web site, which again ranked third in the country. The APOC web site was upgraded in 2004, and continues to offer a wealth of contextual information. Most importantly, the agency has added current summary information to the site, available through the "overview" menu, that gives visitors quick access to total amounts raised and spent by state-level candidates. Historical overviews are also available. If the state wanted to raise its grade from a B+ to an A, it could provide more detailed instructions for how to use the databases, improve terminology on the site, and work to get the APOC site listed more prominently on the State of Alaska web site.

Arizona

Grade	D+
Rank	23

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C+	24
Electronic Filing Program	A+	1
Disclosure Content Accessibility	D+	24
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	42

Arizona slipped seven places in the overall rankings in 2004, mainly because the state made no improvements in the categories of law, accessibility and usability, while other states moved forward in those areas. Arizona's strength is still its mandatory electronic filing program.

Arizona law requires candidates to file one campaign finance report in non-election years and two reports before an election. Candidates must report detailed information, including occupation and employer, about contributors who give \$25 or more. All expenditures, regardless of amount, must be disclosed, but subvendor information does not have to be reported. A major weakness in the state's disclosure law is that neither last-minute contributions nor last-minute independent expenditures must be reported until after an election. Electronic filing is mandatory for all statewide and legislative candidates in Arizona.

There have been few changes in accessibility of campaign finance data in Arizona in the last year. The usefulness of the contributions database on the Secretary of State's web site is limited by the fact that it is not possible to conduct a search on the amount, employer or zip code fields. The web site still lacks an expenditures database, and does not offer data that can be sorted online or downloaded. Furthermore, access to paper disclosure records is hampered by the requirement that one sign a Public Records Request Act form before being allowed to view the reports, something very few states require.

The Secretary of State's web site continues to be plagued by a number of usability and terminology problems, which again are reflected in the state's low usability testing score. For example, information about the state's disclosure law is found through a link called "campaign contributions and expenses"; that is in fact the title of the campaign finance law, but a link such as "Arizona's campaign finance law" might be more indicative of what is available there. Especially considering the usability problems, the lack of a "data history" document (explaining exactly whose records are available online, what data is removed from the Internet display, what time period the data covers,) is also a problem for those trying to access and make sense of the campaign finance records.

Arkansas

Grade	F
Rank	40

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C	29
Electronic Filing Program	F	39
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	41
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	38

Arkansas' low rank and overall F persist in spite of its C in the law category, mainly because of continued poor accessibility of campaign finance information, another F in web site usability—even though improvements have been made in that area—and a lack of electronic filing.

Arkansas requires candidates to file campaign finance reports quarterly in non-election years and monthly in election years. Candidates must file detailed contributor information, including occupation and employer, for contributions of \$50 or more and detailed expenditure information for payments of \$100 or more, although subvendor information is not required. A major weakness in the state's disclosure law is that the filing schedule allows last-minute contributions and independent expenditures to be hidden from voters until after the election. The state has not made progress toward electronic filing.

The strength of the Secretary of State's web site is that it contains all state candidates' campaign finance reports dating back to 1996, and those reports are scanned and posted relatively quickly. However, the usefulness of the reports is severely limited because they are only available in PDF, which means that itemized data cannot be searched, sorted, or downloaded. Making even a portion of the campaign finance records—statewide candidates, for example—available in a more accessible format would be a major improvement. The agency does well in providing the public with access to paper copies of disclosure records, however at \$.25 per page the cost is at the higher end of what other states are charging.

While Arkansas has made improvements to the usability of its disclosure web site and now ranks at 38 rather than 47, the site is still well below the standard for Contextual and Technical Usability set by the top states in the study. There are still no lists of the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates, and there is no thorough explanation of whose records and which reports are available online. On the bright side, the agency has added information about the state's disclosure requirements and campaign finance restrictions, a site restructuring resulted in better terminology, and it became much easier to locate the campaign disclosure site from the state's main web site.

California

Grade	A-
Rank	2

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	A	1
Electronic Filing Program	B	14
Disclosure Content Accessibility	A	4
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	B+	3

California has the strongest campaign finance disclosure law and the second best campaign finance disclosure program in the country. Major improvements in Disclosure Content Accessibility and web site usability account for the state's climb from a C to an A- overall.

California law requires candidates to file two or more reports in non-election years and two reports before an election, in addition to ongoing 24-hour reports of contributions of \$1,000 or more in the 90 days preceding an election. Candidates must disclose detailed information about contributors who give \$100 or more, including occupation and employer. Both donors and candidates must report last-minute contributions prior to an election. Candidates must file detailed expenditure information for payments of \$100 or more, and must report how their subvendors spent payments of \$500 or more. Independent expenditures must be reported and last-minute independent expenditures of \$1,000 or more must be reported within 24 hours. Electronic filing is mandatory for statewide and legislative candidates who reach a \$50,000 threshold.

The reason for California's much-improved grade and rank in accessibility of disclosure data is the addition of searchable databases of contributions and expenditures, which debuted on the Secretary of State's web site in July of 2003. The databases, while not comprehensive (paper filers' information is not data-entered as is done in a number of other states,) do offer site visitors the ability to search and sort on a number of fields and across all electronic filers. For some reason, conducting an expenditure search requires the user to first choose an expenditure code, effectively limiting the usefulness of the search; eliminating that requirement would be a further improvement.

While the Secretary of State's office isn't publishing the kind of comprehensive campaign finance analyses it made available in the 1990s, it is possible to use the new database to generate a list of candidates and the total amounts raised and spent by each, which is a big reason California's usability grade improved from a D- to a B+. Other contextual information is still lacking, however, such as a summary of the state's campaign finance restrictions and disclosure law. Terminology could be improved, particularly the text of the link to the searchable databases, which is called "Advanced Reports". Many visitors to the Cal-Access web site instead click on the "Campaign Finance" link, (where complete reports can be browsed) and end up missing the best part of the web site. Finally, California's usability testing score improved substantially, perhaps because it became easier to locate the disclosure site from the main state homepage.

Colorado

Grade	C-
Rank	21

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B-	17
Electronic Filing Program	F	37
Disclosure Content Accessibility	B-	15
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	37

Colorado has made few changes to its disclosure program in the past year. Its strengths still lie in the areas of Campaign Disclosure Law and Disclosure Content Accessibility; a lack of progress in web site usability, and a poorly funded, voluntary electronic filing program are the cause of its overall C- grade.

Colorado's disclosure law requires candidates to file quarterly campaign finance statements in non-election years and four reports before each election. Candidates must disclose detailed information about contributors who give \$20 or more, along with contributor's occupation and employer for those who give \$100 or more. Last-minute contributions and independent expenditures must be reported before an election. Weaknesses in the law include enforcement and disclosure of loan details. Colorado has voluntary electronic filing, but there is not adequate funding for the program.

Although Colorado's grade in the Accessibility category improved slightly, its rank dropped because other states have made more progress in this area. The Secretary of State's web site offers comprehensive searchable databases of contributions and expenditures, but those systems are still missing a few important search fields, including contributor's zip code and employer, and expenditure purpose. The site also features browsable versions of both electronically filed and paper-filed reports, and most data is online within two days of being filed. Access to records in formats other than on the Internet, such as on paper or CD-Rom, could be improved, with high cost being an issue in both cases.

Lack of contextual information and poor terminology online are still big problems for Colorado. While the disclosure web site does provide visitors with information about the state's campaign finance law and restrictions, it does not adequately describe which records are available online, and also does not provide a simple overview of candidate spending and fundraising totals. Terminology could be improved. For example, a link called "File and Search Campaign Finance Documents" and another link called "Campaign Finance Filing and Inquiry" both go to the same report search page, but from different sections of the web site. Fixing those kinds of inconsistencies would make the site easier to navigate. Colorado's usability testing scores improved slightly, likely because it became easier to locate the disclosure site from the main state site.

Connecticut

Grade	D	
Rank	31	

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B-	20
Electronic Filing Program	D	20
Disclosure Content Accessibility	D-	28
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	46

A poor performance in Online Contextual and Technical Usability and a lack of improvement in access to disclosure data contribute to Connecticut's overall D and rank of 31, which puts its campaign finance disclosure program in the bottom half of all of the states.

Connecticut law requires candidates to file quarterly statements in non-election years and two statements before an election. Candidates must provide information about contributors who give \$30 or more and a contributor's occupation and employer are required for contributions greater than \$100. Candidates and committees must itemize all expenditures and subvendor information is required. A major gap in the law is that neither last-minute contributions nor last-minute independent expenditures are disclosed until after the election. Electronic filing is mandatory for statewide candidates who reach a \$250,000 threshold, but is voluntary for legislative candidates.

Connecticut again received a D- for Disclosure Content Accessibility, because very few, if any, improvements have been made in the last year. The Secretary of the State's web site features a searchable database of contributions, but it contains only electronically filed reports, which represent just five percent of the filings online. The other 95 percent are accessible through the "File-It" system of scanned records, and cannot be searched or sorted. The disclosure portion of the site would be much easier to navigate if the two interfaces for viewing reports—CFIS and File-It—were integrated and the data organized by candidate, rather than by filing method. Currently, a site visitor might start in the CFIS system and go through five screens before arriving at a screen that says, "This committee has not reported its financial transactions electronically; please go to the File-It system to review the hard copy reports filed for this Committee." There is no searchable database of expenditures for the e-filed records, and none of the electronic data can be downloaded, despite the agency's previous plans to make this enhancement.

The state's poorest performance comes in the area of web site usability. Connecticut still has an F and its rank in this subcategory dropped from 33 to 46, mainly due to a very low usability testing score and the fact that other states have made significant improvements. There is almost no information about campaign finance restrictions and disclosure requirements, and there are no lists of candidates' spending and fundraising totals to help site visitors quickly compare candidates' activity.

Delaware

Grade D-	Rank 33	

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	D	38
Electronic Filing Program	F	22
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	29
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D	20

Delaware's improved usability grade—up from an F in 2003—was balanced out by a significant drop in its Disclosure Content Accessibility grade, leaving the state again with a D- overall.

Delaware law requires candidates to file campaign finance reports annually in non-election years and two times before an election. Candidates must report detailed information about contributors who give \$100 or more, but are not required to list a contributor's occupation or employer. Last-minute contributions do not have to be reported before an election. Details about expenditures of \$100 or more must be reported, but subvendor information is not required. Independent expenditures must be reported, but last-minute independent expenditures are not disclosed until after the election. Delaware's electronic filing program is well-established, but remains voluntary for both statewide and legislative candidates. The disclosure agency reported that it has plans to make e-filing a more user-friendly, and thus more attractive, option.

A lack of records for the current election (or even the 2002 election) in the agency's online campaign finance database, which Commissioner of Elections staff described as being "under construction", is the main cause of Delaware's drop from a C- to an F in Disclosure Content Accessibility. All of the most recent campaign finance reports are instead available as scanned images, which means they cannot be searched, sorted, or downloaded in a format that enables data analysis. Hopefully, the agency's plans to improve both the filing process and the display of online records will be implemented soon and will result in improved Internet accessibility. In the meantime, it may be easier for interested parties to request copies of disclosure records on paper, either from their local library or directly from the Commissioner of Elections.

Although Delaware has improved in Online Contextual and Technical Usability, the state earned a D in this category and could make some additional progress. Information about campaign finance restrictions and disclosure requirements is now available online, but the site still lacks a "data history" document that describes which records are online, and overview information to give visitors a better understanding of how one candidate's fundraising activity compares to the others. The Commissioner of Elections web site has been redesigned, but still has terminology and technical usability problems. It became easier to locate the disclosure site from the main state web site, which may have caused the slight increase in Delaware's usability testing score.

Florida

Grade	B+
Rank	3

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	10
Electronic Filing Program	A	11
Disclosure Content Accessibility	A	5
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	B-	8

Florida has improved in all four Grading State Disclosure categories—most significantly in the area of web site usability—and now ranks third in the nation, behind only Washington and California.

Florida law requires candidates to file quarterly statements in both non-election and election years, and two statements before each election. Details about contributors must be reported, including occupation, but not employer, for contributions of more than \$100. Candidates must report details, including subvendor information, about all expenditures. Independent expenditures must be reported; last-minute independent expenditures are prohibited by law. All candidates who file with the Department of State must submit reports electronically, and routine waivers are no longer permitted, which accounts for Florida's improved Electronic Filing grade.

Florida does an excellent job of making campaign finance information available to the public. The comprehensive searchable databases of contributions and expenditures on the Department of State web site can serve as a model for other states, and include a number of innovative features and search options, as described in Grading State Disclosure 2003. The site also includes an interface for viewing each candidate's filing history and for browsing complete filings, rather than searching for specific bits of information. All campaign finance data for candidates is posted on the disclosure agency's web site within three days of being filed.

Florida has improved dramatically in Online Contextual and Technical Usability, moving from an F to a B-, due in part to significant improvement in the state's usability testing scores and the fact that it became easier to locate the disclosure site from the main Florida web site. The state continues to provide a detailed "data history" section, addressing such topics as data quality, what type of information the database contains, whose records are in the system, and when records are posted. The search interface can be used to generate a list of all candidates for a particular office and the total amounts raised by each, although site visitors may overlook this feature because nothing indicates the database can be used to generate such a list.

Georgia

Grade	B
Rank	4

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B+	5
Electronic Filing Program	A	10
Disclosure Content Accessibility	A-	7
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	C	12

Major improvement in the areas of Electronic Filing, Disclosure Content Accessibility and Online Contextual and Technical Usability account for Georgia's B and overall rank of 4, which is up from a rank of 21 in 2003.

Georgia still has one of the best campaign finance disclosure laws in the country. Candidates file semi-annual statements in non-election years and more than three statements before an election. A contributor's name, address, occupation, and employer must be disclosed for any contribution of \$101 or more. Candidates must report details about all expenditures of \$101 or more, but subvendor information is not required. Last-minute independent expenditures and contributions greater than \$1,000 must be reported prior to an election. Georgia has mandatory electronic filing for statewide candidates who reach a threshold of \$20,000, and legislative candidates who reach a threshold of \$10,000.

Access to campaign finance data has improved dramatically in Georgia, enough to raise the state's grade in that subcategory from an F to an A-. Mandatory e-filing for legislative candidates—new in 2003—means that more reports are now searchable online and are also made available on the Internet more quickly. The Secretary of State's web site features a searchable database of contributions, which now allows searches not only on contributor name, but also on amount, date of contribution, and contributor's zip code and employer. Perhaps the most important improvement in Disclosure Content Accessibility is the addition of a searchable database of expenditures that can be searched by vendor name and expenditure amount. Data can now be downloaded from the site as well. All of these changes combine to make Georgia the third most improved state in the Disclosure Content Accessibility category.

The usability of the disclosure web site has gotten better, but with a C, there is still room for improvement. The site does not provide any overview information about campaign financing in Georgia and needs a "data history" description to help site users determine exactly which records are available online. Campaign finance reporting periods are not included in the browsable reports display, and information about campaign finance restrictions and disclosure requirements is lacking. It has become easier to locate the Secretary of State's site from the main state web site, which may have contributed to Georgia's much-improved usability testing score. Other highlights in usability are improved terminology and a comprehensive list of candidates online.

Hawaii

Grade	C+
Rank	12

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	A-	4
Electronic Filing Program	D	20
Disclosure Content Accessibility	A-	7
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	39

An improvement in Hawaii's law grade was offset by a drop in its grade for Electronic Filing Program, leaving the state with an overall C+, only a slight improvement over 2003. A continued poor performance in web site usability, while other states made lots of progress, caused Hawaii's overall rank to drop.

Hawaii's campaign disclosure law ranks fourth in the nation. Candidates must file semi-annual statements in non-election years and three statements before an election. Candidates are required to disclose details about contributions of \$100 or more, but a contributor's occupation and employer are only required for contributions of \$1,000 or more. Last-minute contributions of \$500 or more must be reported up to three days before the election. Disclosure of expenditure details (including subvendor) and loan information are both particularly strong. Independent expenditures must be reported and last-minute independent expenditures must be disclosed before an election.

Hawaii's electronic filing program is mandatory for statewide candidates who reach a threshold of \$5,000, but still voluntary for legislative candidates. A bill that was part of the governor's 2004 legislative package would have required e-filing for legislative candidates, but it stalled in the House. The Campaign Spending Commission hopes to have web-based filing in place by 2006, even though it described funding for the electronic filing program as inadequate.

There were few changes in the accessibility of disclosure records. The state's disclosure web site contains a mix of electronically filed and paper-filed campaign finance reports, with the timeliness of the data dependent upon the method of filing. Electronic records are posted almost immediately, but it can take one to two months for paper-filed records to be scanned and made available online. Although Hawaii's databases of contributions and expenditures allow sorting, downloading, and searching on variety of fields, the technical problems that plagued them last year persist. Access to paper copies of disclosure records from the agency is excellent.

Hawaii again received a low grade for web site usability, which is not surprising given there were few changes made in this area. While it did become easier to locate the Commission's web site from the main state site, Hawaii's usability testing score was not affected by that improvement. The disclosure site has even less overview information in 2004 than it did last year, because a web page listing total spending by 2002 gubernatorial candidates was removed. There is still no explanation of whose records are available online and where to find them, which is a problem considering the multiple access points for disclosure reports.

Idaho

Grade	C-
Rank	19

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B-	23
Electronic Filing Program	F	39
Disclosure Content Accessibility	C-	22
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	B	7

Significant improvement in Online Contextual and Technical Usability and a change in Idaho's Disclosure Content Accessibility grade resulted in an improved rank and an overall grade of C- for the state's campaign disclosure program.

Idaho's campaign disclosure law requires candidates to file one statement in non-election years, one statement before each primary, and two statements before each general election. Candidates must disclose contributors' names and addresses for contributions greater than \$50, but contributors' occupation and employer information is not required, which is a significant weakness in the law. Last-minute contributions must be reported within 48 hours. Expenditures of \$25 or more must be reported and subvendor information is required. Independent expenditures, including those made at the last minute, must be disclosed prior to an election. Idaho does not have an electronic filing program.

Idaho's comprehensive, searchable contributions database is an achievement, given that all campaign finance reports are manually entered by the Secretary of State's staff in order to create the system. However, lack of uniformity in the data continues to be a problem and seriously diminishes the value of the records. For example, the Qwest Corporation's Political Action Committee was listed 16 different ways in the database (including "Qwest-Idaho", "Qwest PAC", and the misspelled "Qwest Idasho PAC"); such inconsistencies are the reason why the Campaign Disclosure Project's model campaign finance disclosure law recommends the use of contributor ID codes. The state would do better in Disclosure Content Accessibility if it had an online expenditures database, something that would be fairly easy to add since itemized expenditure data is already in an electronic format. The Secretary of State reports it has new major additions planned for the site, which hopefully will include an expenditures database.

Significant improvements were made in Online Contextual and Technical Usability during the past year, bringing Idaho's grade in this subcategory up to a B. The strength of the disclosure site is its contextual information, including overviews of candidate campaign finance activity going back to 1994, a good description of which records are available online, and information about disclosure requirements and campaign finance restrictions. The Secretary of State's homepage was redesigned, and it became easier to locate the site from the main Idaho web site, both of which may have contributed to Idaho's improved score in the usability testing.

Illinois

Grade Rank	B 5

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C	29
Electronic Filing Program	A+	1
Disclosure Content Accessibility	B+	10
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	A-	1

While its rank dropped from two to five, Illinois still has one of the best campaign finance disclosure programs in the country. The state's campaign disclosure law remains an area of weakness, however, and prevents the state from achieving an overall A.

Illinois law requires candidates to file semi-annual reports in election and non-election years, plus one report before an election. Candidates must disclose information about contributors who give more than \$150, but a contributor's occupation and employer is only required for contributions greater than \$500. Last-minute contributions of more than \$500 must be disclosed within 2 business days. Expenditures greater than \$150 are required to be disclosed, but subvendor information does not have to be reported and there is no independent expenditure reporting. Legislation signed by the Governor in August of this year changed some provisions of Illinois' Campaign Financing Act and may improve the state's law grade in 2005. Electronic filing is required for statewide and legislative candidates who reach a threshold of \$10,000.

The State Board of Elections offers an excellent interface for browsing reports online, as well as model campaign finance databases for searching both contributions and expenditures on a wide variety of fields. Mandatory electronic filing allows the state to make most campaign finance data available online immediately. Data accessibility could be further enhanced with the addition of downloadable data and the availability of detailed information for paper filers online (the site now includes only summary numbers for those filers.) Another reason for the B+ grade, rather than an A, is that access to disclosure records on paper could be made easier and more affordable (copies are \$.25 per page.)

The contextual and technical usability of Illinois' disclosure web site is still, along with Washington, the best in the nation. Information about disclosure requirements and the state's campaign finance law, good terminology and thorough instructions, and overview information to give the public a sense of campaign finance trends, all contribute to the number one rank in this category. There is even a campaign finance Q&A movie available on the site, which is an archive of a live, call-in, streaming webcast seminar conducted in January, 2004. That innovative resource is primarily designed for candidates, but also serves activists, journalists, and others interested in following the money in Illinois. It is still somewhat difficult to locate the agency's web site from the main state homepage, but even so, the state's usability testing score improved slightly.

Indiana

Grade	C-
Rank	17

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	42
Electronic Filing Program	F	22
Disclosure Content Accessibility	B+	10
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	B+	3

Indiana improved significantly in Disclosure Content Accessibility and especially in web site usability, but still gets an overall C- because of a low grade in electronic filing and a weak campaign disclosure law that ranks among the ten worst in the country.

Indiana law requires candidates to file one report in non-election years and one report before an election. Candidates must disclose detailed information about individuals who contribute \$100 or more, including occupation for contributions of \$1,000 or more. Contributors' employer information is not required. Last-minute contributions over \$1,000 must be reported within 48 hours of an election. Expenditures over \$100 must be reported, but subvendor information is not included and independent expenditures are not disclosed. Indiana is the only state in the nation that does not require reporting of in-kind contributions. Electronic filing is voluntary for both statewide and legislative candidates.

Access to campaign finance data in Indiana improved in 2004, with several enhancements to the existing online searchable databases. It is now possible to search for an expenditure by purpose, and the revised interface includes so-called "smart search" features. Results from a search of the comprehensive system can now be sorted. The fact that the Secretary of State's office manually enters data from paper-filed reports means that it can take up to two weeks for campaign finance records to be posted online, but pre-election filings are usually available within one week.

Indiana's most significant improvement came in Online Contextual and Technical Usability. Its grade in this category jumped from a D- to a B+, and the state now shares the number three rank for usability with Alaska and California. The redesigned disclosure web site includes additional information about the state's disclosure requirements and does a better job labeling reporting periods within candidates' reports. The site still includes an excellent data history section, handles amended filings well, and uses clear terminology. It became easier to locate the disclosure site from the main Indiana web site, which may account for the state's much-improved usability testing score. To further improve in this category, the agency could add a simple list of total amounts raised and spent by all candidates, to give site visitors a better overview of campaign finance activity in the state.

Iowa

Grade	F
Rank	38

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C-	33
Electronic Filing Program	F	22
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	38
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	44

While the state's law has improved and changes have been made to the Iowa Ethics and Campaign Disclosure Board's (IECDB) web site, Iowa still received an F overall and has significant room for improvement, especially in Disclosure Content Accessibility and web site usability.

Iowa law requires candidates to file one statement in non-election years and two statements before an election. For contributions of \$25 or more, candidates must disclose a contributor's name and address, but occupation and employer are not required. Last-minute contributions do not have to be reported prior to an election. Expenditures of five dollars or more must be disclosed, but subvendor information does not have to be reported. The law changed in 2003 to require disclosure of independent expenditures, including reporting of last-minute independent expenditures prior to the election. A bill to make electronic filing mandatory was introduced in the House during the 2004 session but did not pass, so e-filing is still voluntary for all state candidates.

There has been very little change in accessibility of campaign finance records in Iowa, and the state's disclosure web site is still lacking searchable databases of contributions and expenditures. This is the case even though some candidates are filing electronically and their data is in a format that could easily be made available for searching; at the very least, the agency could post those electronic records in HTML rather than PDF, so they can be sorted online. On the positive side, disclosure records are posted to the IECDB site quickly, and the site is comprehensive.

Iowa's disclosure web site has been redesigned, is now easier to navigate and includes some important new contextual information, but a drop in the state's usability testing score resulted in another F for Online Contextual and Technical Usability. The agency has added information to help site visitors determine whose records are available online, and now posts a list of total amounts raised and spent by all legislative candidates. The site contains good information about campaign finance restrictions and disclosure requirements, and the terminology has improved with the site redesign. Weaknesses in this category include disclosure reports that do not show reporting period dates, poor labeling of amended reports, and a lack of historical overview information.

Kansas

Grade	F
Rank	37

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	D	37
Electronic Filing Program	F	39
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	29
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D	20

Kansas has made few improvements to its campaign finance disclosure program in the last year, and all of its category grades still fall in the D and F range, indicating there is significant room for improvement.

Kansas law requires candidates to file one report in non-election years and one report before each election. Candidates must disclose information about contributors who give more than \$50, including a contributor's occupation for contributions greater than \$150. Contributors' employer information is not required. Details, including subvendor information, must be disclosed for expenditures greater than \$50. Independent expenditures must be reported up until twelve days before an election, but last-minute independent expenditures do not have to be disclosed until after the election. Last-minute contributions are also not reported prior to the election. Kansas does not have an electronic filing program.

It became more difficult to access campaign finance data in Kansas during 2004, and the state's grade in this area fell from a D- to an F. The primary reason for the drop was an increase in the cost of paper disclosure records from \$.25 to \$.50 per page, and an increase in the amount of time—up to eight weeks—it takes for records to be posted online after they are filed. The database of contributions on the Governmental Ethics Commission web site can still only be searched by donor name and date of contribution, (not by amount, donor's zip code or occupation,) and expenditure information is not available online. A major weakness in Disclosure Content Accessibility is the inability to browse complete filings online.

The state's only area of improvement was in Online Contextual and Technical Usability. Lists of candidates on the disclosure web site now include party affiliation, and the state's usability testing score improved, due in part to the fact that it became easier to locate the Governmental Ethics Commission site from the main Kansas web site. Because of these improvements, Kansas' rank in this category climbed from 45 to 20. Summary information for candidates can be found through the "quick statistics" menu on the disclosure site, although the format makes it difficult to quickly compare total amounts raised and spent. The site still lacks in contextual information, however, and would benefit from the addition of a comprehensive data history page and more thorough instructions for accessing the campaign records.

Kentucky

Grade	C+
Rank	10

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	7
Electronic Filing Program	F	22
Disclosure Content Accessibility	C+	20
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	C+	11

Kentucky's improved rank and grade reflect a number of changes that have been made to the state's campaign finance disclosure program, most significantly in Online Contextual and Technical Usability.

Kentucky candidates are required to file quarterly in non-election years and at least three times prior to an election. Candidates must provide itemized information, including a contributor's occupation and employer, for contributions over \$100. Last-minute contributions do not have to be reported before the election (except for gubernatorial candidates, who must report last-minute contributions within 24 hours). Detailed information about expenditures greater than \$25, including subvendor information, must be disclosed. Independent expenditures over \$500 must be reported, but last-minute independent expenditures are not reported prior to an election. Kentucky's electronic filing program is voluntary for both statewide and legislative candidates.

Kentucky again received a C+ for Disclosure Content Accessibility, but its overall rank in this category dropped as other states made progress. Kentucky's strength in accessibility of campaign finance records is its comprehensive searchable database of contributions. The system allows searches on a variety of fields and results can be downloaded in an Excel-compatible format. The speed with which paper-filed reports get posted continues to be a problem, with some reports taking ten days to become available. Mandatory electronic filing would improve the timeliness of online data, and would also make it easier for the Registry to add a searchable database of expenditures to its web site.

The state's biggest gain was in the area of web site usability, with the most important change being the addition of current overview information for statewide and legislative candidates, available through the "Office" section of the searchable database. Other significant improvements include a new data history page and an extensive online tutorial for the searchable database. The site also includes good information about disclosure requirements and campaign finance restrictions, as well as a comprehensive list of candidates. There was a substantial increase in Kentucky's usability testing score, which may be related to the fact that it became easier to locate the Registry's web site from the state home page. Combined, these contextual and technical usability changes caused a jump from an F to a C+ in this category.

Louisiana

Grade	C+
Rank	14

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B-	17
Electronic Filing Program	C	16
Disclosure Content Accessibility	C+	18
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D+	17

Louisiana's rank improved slightly in 2004, but its overall grade remained in the C range and its web site usability grade is a D+, indicating there is still room for improvement in the state.

Louisiana requires candidates to file annual reports in non-election years, four reports before a primary election and one report before a general election. The names and addresses of all contributors, but not their occupations and employers, must be disclosed. Disclosure of expenditure information, including independent expenditures, is strong in Louisiana. Candidates must disclose last-minute contributions and independent expenditures prior to the election. Electronic filing is required for statewide candidates who reach a threshold of \$50,000, and is voluntary for legislative candidates.

Louisiana's Disclosure Content Accessibility rank improved in 2004, and the Board of Ethics web site does feature searchable campaign finance databases, but the significant technical problems with those systems described in Grading State Disclosure 2003 still present a barrier for people searching for data online. While all reports are available on the site, the contributions and expenditures databases include only electronically filed reports, which the agency estimated to be about ten percent of the filings. Access to records filed on paper is more difficult; getting copies from the agency costs \$.25 per page and takes one week, which is also how long it takes the Board of Ethics to scan and post those records online. Louisiana's strength in Disclosure Content Accessibility is that the basic structure of its databases is good —now it just needs to fine-tune those systems and work to populate them with a larger percentage of candidates' reports.

Louisiana shows the most room for improvement in the area of Online Contextual and Technical Usability, and is lacking basic information necessary to give people a better overall picture of disclosure in the state. For example, there is no chart showing the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates, and the site does not feature a list of candidates. It can be difficult to locate the Board of Ethics web site from the main state homepage, and the site lacks a thorough explanation of whose records are available there. In spite of the weaknesses of the site, Louisiana's usability testing score improved in 2004. Strengths in this category include comprehensive information about campaign finance restrictions and disclosure requirements, good terminology, and clear labeling of amended reports.

Maine

Grade	D+
Rank	23

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C	32
Electronic Filing Program	F	22
Disclosure Content Accessibility	B-	17
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	30

Although Maine's overall D+ shows the state has significant weaknesses in campaign finance disclosure, improvements have been made, particularly in the area of web site usability, and more are on the way.

Maine law requires most candidates to file two statements in non-election years and one statement six days before an election; gubernatorial candidates must file an additional pre-election statement. Candidates must report detailed information for contributions greater than \$50, including the contributor's occupation, but not employer. Last-minute contributions have to be reported before an election. Details about all expenditures, including subvendor information, must be disclosed. Independent expenditures and last-minute independent expenditures must also be reported prior to an election. Maine has a voluntary electronic filing program for statewide and legislative candidates, and the agency reported success in increasing the number of e-filers over the past year.

Maine's strengths in Data Content Accessibility lie in the comprehensiveness of its disclosure web site and the structure of its campaign finance databases, which allow searches on a number of fields and offer downloadable files. Electronically filed reports are added to the online database immediately, but information from reports filed on paper takes up to one month to become available online. Fortunately, access to copies of paper-filed records is excellent in Maine, although at \$.20 per page the cost is higher than what many other states charge. Maine's grade in this category rose from a C in 2003, to a B- in 2004. The state could improve further by shortening the amount of time it takes to post campaign finance data on the Internet, and providing a mechanism for sorting information online.

More telling than Maine's repeat F in Online Contextual and Technical Usability is its rank in this category, which climbed from 41 to 30 after the Commission on Governmental Ethics and Election Practices made a number of improvements to its web site. For example, the terminology used throughout the site has become clearer, and there is now a comprehensive candidate list available online. It is also now easier to locate the agency's web site from the main state homepage. Two of the more important items that are still missing include an overview of candidate campaign finance activity and a data history explanation. Further improvements are coming, however. The Commission recently redesigned its web site, and although that change did not occur within the research window for this study, it should improve the state's performance in this category in 2005.

Maryland

Grade	C
Rank	16

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	41
Electronic Filing Program	A+	1
Disclosure Content Accessibility	A-	6
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D	20

There was no change to Maryland's score and grade in 2004, but its overall rank dropped from 12 to 16 as other states made improvements. Maryland's campaign disclosure law and the usability of its disclosure web site are still the state's main weaknesses.

Maryland law requires candidates to file annual reports in non-election years and one report before an election. Candidates must disclose detailed information for all contributions greater than \$51, but a contributor's occupation and employer do not have to be reported and last-minute contributions do not have to be disclosed before an election. Details about all expenditures, except subvendor information, must be reported. Maryland is one of eleven states that does not require the disclosure of independent expenditures, which is a significant weakness in the law. Electronic filing is mandatory for statewide and legislative candidates who reach a threshold of \$5,000.

Access to campaign finance data in Maryland is excellent, and the state ranks sixth in the nation in this category. All campaign finance reports are available and searchable through the databases of contributions and expenditures on the State Board of Elections web site. There is a summary at the top of the search results page showing not only the total number of records retrieved, but also the total amount of the contributions or expenditures, and the smallest and largest amounts. Records can be sorted online or downloaded, and there is an interface for browsing complete reports. Access to paper copies of reports is also good, although at \$.25 per page the cost is somewhat prohibitive.

Maryland has significant room to improve in the area of Online Contextual and Technical Usability. While there is some interesting statistical information on the disclosure web site, there is still no simple list comparing candidates' total fundraising and spending figures. Original filings are not retained online after amendments have been posted, and browsable reports do not include the complete reporting periods. Strengths in this area include a comprehensive candidate list, good information about disclosure requirements and campaign finance restrictions, and a section called "Understanding the Campaign Finance Database" that gives site visitors a better sense of the scope of the records available online.

Massachusetts

Grade	C+
Rank	12

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	D+	36
Electronic Filing Program	A+	1
Disclosure Content Accessibility	B	14
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	B-	10

There have been few changes to Massachusetts' disclosure program in the past year and the state again received a C+, but its overall rank fell from three to twelve because other states have made considerable progress.

Under Massachusetts law, candidates must file one report in non-election years and one before each election. Candidates are required to provide detailed information for all contributions of \$50 or more, including occupation and employer for those who give more than \$200. Information about all expenditures of \$50 or more must be disclosed, but subvendor information does not have to be reported. Independent expenditures must be disclosed but there is no pre-election reporting of either last-minute independent expenditures or last-minute contributions. Electronic filing is mandatory for statewide candidates who reach a \$50,000 threshold and legislative candidates who reach a \$5,000 threshold.

Along with its electronic filing program, Massachusetts' strength lies in Disclosure Content Accessibility. The Office of Campaign and Political Finance web site features databases of contributions and expenditures that allow "smart searches" and sorting on a number of fields. Adding a zip code field to the contributor search, along with description and amount fields to the expenditures search, would enhance the databases. Access to paper copies of reports is average compared to other states and could be improved.

Massachusetts' web site usability grade is still a B-, but its rank fell as other states made significant strides in usability. Summary information comparing the campaign finance activity of both current and past candidates is the highlight of the site's contextual information. A component of the database called "Report Status" and a list of the most recently filed campaign reports help site visitors determine whose reports are available online. The list of candidates has improved, but is still missing party affiliation information. Massachusetts's score in the usability testing was average and was the main reason the state received a B rather than an A in this category.

Michigan

Grade	B
Rank	6

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C	29
Electronic Filing Program	A+	1
Disclosure Content Accessibility	A	2
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	B-	9

Michigan implemented mandatory electronic filing in 2004, raising its grade in that category from an F to an A+, and its overall grade from a C to a B. The state's campaign disclosure program is now among the top six in the nation, with a particularly strong showing in the area of Disclosure Content Accessibility.

Michigan law requires candidates to file one statement in non-election years and one statement eleven days before an election. Details of all contributions must be disclosed, including occupation and employer for contributions above \$100. Last-minute contributions are required to be disclosed prior to an election. Expenditures of \$50 or more are required to be disclosed, but subvendor information is not reported. Independent expenditures and last-minute independent expenditures are also required to be disclosed before an election. Electronic filing is now mandatory for both statewide and legislative candidates who reach a threshold of \$20,000.

Michigan ranks second in the country (tied with Rhode Island) for accessibility of campaign finance records, and is one of only four states that received full credit for its searchable contribution and expenditure databases. The databases are excellent and contain some unique search capabilities, including the ability to search for a range of zip codes, and for a particular type of get-out-the-vote activity expense. Reports filed on paper—a number that is dwindling with the new electronic filing requirement—are available only as images on the Secretary of State's web site and are not entered into the searchable databases.

The state's Online Contextual and Technical Usability grade jumped from a D to a B- in 2004, largely due to a much-improved usability testing score. Specific improvements to the disclosure web site include the addition of full contact information for the Bureau of Elections and more complete information about the state's disclosure requirements. A comprehensive list of candidates and a good description of which records are available online also contribute to the high rank in this category. The addition of current and historical overview information showing total amounts raised and spent by all state candidates would further improve Michigan's usability grade.

Minnesota

Grade	D
Rank	28

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B+	6
Electronic Filing Program	F	22
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	46
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	C	12

There have been few changes to Minnesota's campaign disclosure program in the past year, but a much-improved score in the usability testing brought up the state's Online Contextual and Technical Usability grade from an F to a C, and helped improve its overall grade from a D- to a D.

Minnesota's disclosure law, which ranks sixth in the nation, requires candidates to file one report annually and one report before each election. Details must be disclosed for contributions of \$100 or more, including a contributor's occupation and employer. Last-minute contributions must be disclosed prior to an election. Details about expenditures, including subvendor information, must be reported for expenditures of \$100 or more. Independent expenditures are required to be disclosed, but last-minute independent expenditures do not have to be reported prior to an election. Minnesota has a voluntary electronic filing program for statewide and legislative candidates.

Minnesota's biggest weakness is in access to campaign finance records, and the state's rank has dropped in this category. The same problems that were described in *Grading State Disclosure 2003*—namely a cumbersome system for viewing campaign contributions and the unavailability of complete filings online—remain and are the reason for the state's poor grade in Disclosure Content Accessibility. It takes up to three weeks for the contributions data to be posted on the Internet, and there is no expenditure data available online. Redesigning the Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board site will take time and resources, but there are things that could be changed relatively easily. For example, it would not take much effort to replace the pull-down list of all contributors in Minnesota with a search field where the partial name of a contributor could be typed.

Although there were no significant changes to the state's disclosure web site in 2004, Minnesota's grade in the area of web site usability rose significantly due to a much better score in the usability testing. Even so, the site still lacks important contextual information, such as a thorough explanation of which candidates' contribution information is available online. More importantly, because of the design of the campaign finance records section, it is still difficult for those with slow computers or Internet connections to make use of the data. The addition of browsable campaign finance reports would not only enhance accessibility, but would also improve the state's usability grade, because some components of Online Contextual and Technical Usability are dependent upon the availability of browsable filings.

Mississippi

Grade	F
Rank	38

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C-	33
Electronic Filing Program	F	39
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	38
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D	25

Mississippi has made few changes to its campaign finance disclosure program in the past year, but a substantial drop in its usability testing score caused a corresponding drop in its Online Contextual and Technical Usability grade, and also caused the state's overall rank to fall from 35 to 38.

Mississippi law requires candidates to file one statement in non-election years and four statements before an election. Candidates must disclose detailed information, including occupation and employer, about contributors giving more than \$200. Last-minute contributions are required to be reported prior to an election. Information about expenditures over \$200 must be reported, but subvendor information is not required to be disclosed. Independent expenditures must be disclosed, but last-minute independent expenditures are not reported prior to an election. The Secretary of State co-sponsored a bill in 2004 (HB 1244) to require electronic filing of disclosure reports. The bill was passed by the legislature but vetoed by the Governor, and Mississippi still does not have an electronic filing program.

The state's F grade in the area of access to campaign finance records is again the biggest weakness for Mississippi, providing considerable room for improvement in this category. Reports for all statewide and legislative candidates, going back to 1995, are scanned and available on the Secretary of State's web site. The system for accessing reports is easy to use and filings are posted online fairly quickly, but the lack of any electronic data on the agency's web site greatly impacts Mississippi's Disclosure Content Accessibility grade. Access to paper copies of reports is excellent.

Mississippi's grade in the area of web site usability fell from a C- to a D, not because of significant changes to the disclosure web site, but because of a drop in the state's usability testing score. Strengths in Online Contextual and Technical Usability include comprehensive information about disclosure requirements and campaign finance restrictions, a complete list of candidates, and a good description of which campaign finance filings are available online. The addition of overview information to help the public easily compare the total amounts raised and spent by various candidates, along with better handling of amended reports online, would improve Mississippi's performance in this category.

Missouri

Grade	C-
Rank	17

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	10
Electronic Filing Program	C	16
Disclosure Content Accessibility	C	21
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	40

Major improvements in the area of Disclosure Content Accessibility brought Missouri's overall grade up to a C- from last year's D. There were no changes in the law and electronic filing categories, and the state's biggest weakness is still web site usability.

Missouri law requires candidates to file quarterly reports in non-election years and one report before each election. Detailed contributor information, including occupation and employer, must be disclosed for all contributions greater than \$100. Last-minute contributions must be reported prior to the election. Details about expenditures greater than \$100 must also be disclosed, but subvendor information is not reported. Independent expenditures are reported, but last-minute independent expenditures are not disclosed prior to the election. Electronic filing is mandatory for statewide candidates who reach a \$15,000 threshold, and voluntary for legislative candidates. The General Assembly considered a bill (HB 1150) to make e-filing mandatory for legislative candidates, but the legislation did not become law.

With the addition of searchable databases of contributions and expenditures to the Missouri Ethics Commission web site, the state made major advancements in the accessibility of campaign finance records. Contributions can now be searched by contributor name, employer, and contribution amount; expenditures can be searched by vendor name and expense amount. Adding date and zip code fields to the contributor search, and date and expenditure purpose fields to the expenditure search, would further improve the new system. Access to paper-filed reports on the Internet is still somewhat impeded by the proprietary software which must be used in order to view those reports and which doesn't work well for all site visitors. Access to paper copies of campaign filings from the Ethics Commission is very good.

Online Contextual and Technical Usability is still the category in which Missouri performs the worst, having again received an F. The disclosure web site features some historical comparisons of candidates' campaign finance activity, but is lacking the same information for current elections. Instructions are limited, and the candidate list does not include a candidate's party affiliation. It is still very difficult to locate the Ethics Commission web site from the main state homepage, which contributes to the very low score Missouri again received in the usability testing.

Montana

Grade	F
Rank	43

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	A-	3
Electronic Filing Program	F	39
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	48
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	49

The bright spot in Montana's campaign finance disclosure system is the state's campaign disclosure law, which ranks third in the nation. Failing grades in Electronic Filing, Disclosure Content Accessibility and web site usability put the state in the bottom ten overall.

Montana law requires candidates to file twice in non-election years and four times before an election. Candidates must report detailed information for all contributions of \$35 or more, including occupation and employer. Last-minute contributions of \$200 or more must be disclosed within 24 hours for statewide candidates (\$100 or more and 48 hours for other candidates). Disclosure of expenditure information is good, and subvendor details must be provided. Independent expenditures must be reported, but those made at the last-minute are not disclosed until after the election. Montana does not have an electronic filing program, although the issue is being discussed by the Governor's Commissioner of Political Practices Advisory Council, and there has been movement within the agency toward the development of an online filing system.

The Commissioner of Political Practices' web site is one of three disclosure sites in the country that has no campaign finance data whatsoever. That fact makes it even more important for the state to provide easy access to paper copies of disclosure records, and it does an excellent job in that area. Outstanding access to paper records is what gives Montana a slight edge in Data Content Accessibility over the other two states that have no data online, Wyoming and South Carolina, which are ranked 49th and 50th in this category.

There is some good contextual information online, including a description of the state's campaign contribution limits and a comprehensive manual summarizing the state's disclosure reporting requirements. Unfortunately for members of the public trying to access that contextual information, it became more difficult this year to locate the agency's web site from the main Montana homepage. That difficulty may explain why the state's usability testing score fell this year, causing Montana's rank in this category to drop to 49 (from last year's 40.)

Nebraska

Grade	F
Rank	36

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B-	17
Electronic Filing Program	F	39
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	36
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	32

There has been little movement since 2003 in the campaign finance disclosure arena in Nebraska, a fact that is underscored by the state's unchanged overall grade and rank. Nebraska's strength still lies in its campaign finance disclosure law, and its most significant weakness in Disclosure Content Accessibility.

Nebraska law requires candidates to file one campaign finance statement in non-election years and two before each election. Details for contributions greater than \$250 must be reported, but a contributor's occupation and employer are not required to be disclosed. Last-minute contributions of \$1,000 or more must be reported prior to the election. Details must be disclosed for expenditures greater than \$250, but subvendor information is not required. Independent expenditures of \$250 or more must be disclosed, and large last-minute independent expenditures must be reported before the election. There is no electronic filing of campaign finance reports in Nebraska.

Nebraska again received an F for Disclosure Content Accessibility, even though the Accountability and Disclosure Commission web site contains all campaign finance filings. Reports are posted to the site quickly, but the format makes it extremely difficult to analyze the campaign finance data. Records are displayed in computer-generated PDF files following data entry of reports by agency staff, which makes the lack of searchable databases of contributions and expenditures all the more surprising. There is no reason why data that is already computerized should be displayed online in a static format, rather than a searchable database, downloadable Excel-compatible files, or at the very least a sortable HTML format.

There is significant room for improvement in Nebraska in the area of web site usability, most notably in contextual usability. The disclosure web site lacks summary information to give the public a better overview of candidates' fundraising and spending totals. Also missing is an in-depth explanation of whose records are available online and what time period is covered by the reports. For user-friendliness and ease of navigation, the Accountability and Disclosure Commission web site design needs to be unified. Page backgrounds vary widely in color and pattern, some to the point of being distracting; instead of focusing on the information on the page, the site user focuses on taking in each new page design and trying to understand the structure of the site. It became easier to locate the disclosure web site from the main Nebraska homepage, which likely contributed to the slight increase in the state's usability testing score.

Nevada

Grade	F
Rank	41

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	46
Electronic Filing Program	F	22
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	42
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D	23

Nevada's overall grade dropped from a D- to an F in 2004, accompanied by a drop in rank from 27 to 41, mostly due to the removal of a searchable database pilot project from the Secretary of State's web site. The state's poor showing in general is caused by campaign finance disclosure laws that rank in the bottom five in the country.

In Nevada, candidates who raise more than \$10,000 must file an annual statement in non-election years, and all candidates must file one report before an election. Candidates must report detailed information about contributors who give more than \$100, not including occupation and employer. Details about expenditures greater than \$100 must be reported, but subvendor information does not have to be disclosed. Independent expenditures must be reported, but neither last-minute independent expenditures nor last-minute contributions are disclosed prior to the election. The Secretary of State's office is in the process of revising its voluntary electronic filing program, and is making changes based on feedback received from users of the pilot program.

Nevada lost ground in Disclosure Content Accessibility when the disclosure agency removed from its web site a searchable database of electronically filed reports that was part of a pilot project started in 2002. Even though that system contained a relatively few number of reports in 2003, its presence was a sign of progress and the state did get credit for the search interface. Now records are available only as scanned PDF documents, and those cannot be sorted or downloaded. Also inhibiting access is the fact that reports are organized by date, rather than candidate, so it is not possible to browse a complete index of one candidate's filings. Access to paper copies of filings is good, although at \$1.00 per page, the cost is prohibitive and also is the highest fee charged in the nation (two other states charge the same amount.)

Nevada did best in the area of web site usability, though its grade in this category dropped from a C to a D. Again, removal of the electronic filings database likely contributed to the state's poor performance in usability, because the database had included good data history information that is no longer available. Strengths in Online Contextual and Technical Usability include thorough information about disclosure requirements and campaign contribution limits, a comprehensive candidate list, and clear labeling of amended filings. Basic summary data of total amounts raised and spent by all state candidates is not available online.

New Hampshire

Grade	F
Rank	42

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B-	20
Electronic Filing Program	F	38
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	47
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	50

Low ranks and grades in three of the four Grading State Disclosure categories resulted in another overall F for New Hampshire, which has seen few changes to its campaign finance disclosure program over the last year.

New Hampshire's strength is its disclosure law, which requires candidates to file campaign finance statements twice in non-election years and five times in election years. Candidates are required to report detailed information for contributors who give at least \$25, including occupation and employer for those who give more than \$100. Last-minute contributions of \$500 or more must be disclosed within 24 hours. All expenditures must be reported, but subvendor information is not required. The state requires reporting of independent expenditures, and those made at the last minute must be reported before the election. New Hampshire has voluntary electronic filing for statewide and legislative candidates.

New Hampshire is among the worst five states in Disclosure Content Accessibility and there is significant room for improvement. The disclosure agency web site is still offering filings in a TIFF format that requires special software to view and is inaccessible to some site visitors. No other disclosure agency in the country use the TIFF format to display scanned filings, and New Hampshire would better serve the public by moving to the more universally accessible PDF format. The disclosure web site contains reports only for statewide candidates; reports for candidates for the 400-seat House of Representatives are not available online and can either be viewed in person at the Secretary of State's office or copies can be requested from that agency.

New Hampshire is now the worst performing state in the nation in the Online Contextual and Technical Usability category, even though the Secretary of State's homepage has been redesigned. It received the lowest score possible in the usability testing. A serious problem on the site is the lack of information about which candidates' reports are available online and where to find them. This is particularly a problem when it comes to the Governor's reports, which are located in the "Political Action Committee Filings" section, rather than the section labeled "Candidate Filings". Nothing on the site states that in order to find a candidate's reports a site visitor may need to look in the PAC section; in fact the terminology suggests otherwise and likely prevents many people from locating some reports that are available.

New Jersey

Grade	C
Rank	15

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	8
Electronic Filing Program	F	36
Disclosure Content Accessibility	C+	18
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D	23

New Jersey again received an overall C and its rank fell from 8 to 15, but the state's campaign disclosure law is now among the top ten in the country, and changes are on the way in each of the other three categories.

New Jersey law requires candidates to file quarterly statements in both non-election and election years, plus two statements before each election. Candidates report detailed information for contributions of \$300 or more (down from \$400), including occupation and employer. Last-minute contributions must be reported prior to the election. Details, including subvendor information, must be reported for all expenditures. Independent expenditures must be disclosed and last-minute independent expenditures have to be reported prior to the election. Electronic filing is still voluntary in New Jersey, however the Election Law Enforcement Commission (ELEC) has proposed mandatory e-filing for publicly-funded gubernatorial candidates beginning with the 2005 election, and is considering an e-filing requirement for legislative candidates.

New Jersey's Disclosure Content Accessibility grade improved only slightly in 2004, but many significant improvements are coming, according to the disclosure agency. The ELEC web site currently features a comprehensive database of contributions, as well as complete filings that have been scanned and can be browsed. The cumbersome FileNet software currently required to view the scanned reports is being replaced with a more accessible system, which alone will be a huge step forward. There are also plans to offer a "quick download" option, enhanced search capability for the contributions database, and a new searchable database of expenditures. When those changes are put into place, the result will be a state that is providing excellent access to campaign finance records, both on paper and through the Internet.

The weakest part of New Jersey's disclosure program after Electronic Filing is in Online Contextual and Technical Usability, and the state's grade in this category dropped from a C- to a D. But changes are anticipated in web site usability as well; the Election Law Enforcement Commission is currently undertaking a study of its web site, and states that many features are in the process of being changed, added, and enhanced. For example, the agency plans to provide a list of all candidates and committees, add filing period information to browsable reports, and post current summaries of amounts raised and spent by all candidates.

New Mexico

Grade	F
Rank	45

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	44
Electronic Filing Program	F	22
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	38
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	47

Minor improvements in Disclosure Content Accessibility were balanced out by a drop in New Mexico's score for web site usability, leaving the state with another overall F and nearly the same rank as in 2003.

New Mexico's disclosure law requires candidates to file once before the primary and twice before the general election. An annual statement is due in both election and non-election years. Candidates must provide detailed information about all contributors, including a contributor's occupation (but not employer) for those giving at least \$250. Last-minute contributions of \$500 or more for legislative candidates and \$2,500 or more for statewide candidates must be reported prior to the election. All expenditures must be disclosed, but subvendor information is not required, and there is no disclosure at all of independent expenditures. Electronic filing, which is currently voluntary for all statewide and legislative candidates, will become mandatory in 2006. The legislature considered a bill (HB 501) to move that date up to 2004, but it was held up in the Senate.

New Mexico made a number of small changes in the area of Disclosure Content Accessibility, but they were not significant enough to bring up the state's grade in that category. For example, disclosure reports are posted online more quickly now, and the cost of getting paper copies of reports decreased to \$.10 per page. But there are still problems with the display of reports on the Secretary of State's web site. While the scope is comprehensive, browsing the filings requires use of the agency's viewing software, which doesn't function on all computer platforms, and the interface provided for identifying reports requires that the site visitor know either the reporting date or the name of the candidate. Because the records are presented in a static format, they cannot be searched, sorted or downloaded.

New Mexico's usability testing score fell in 2004, which is likely due to increased difficulty in locating the disclosure web site from the State of New Mexico homepage. The drop in the state's usability score was substantial enough to knock New Mexico's Online Contextual and Technical Usability rank down from 33 to 47. Also contributing to the F are a lack of summary information comparing total campaign finance activity by all candidates, an inadequate description of whose records are available online, and poor labeling of reporting periods on the disclosure reports.

New York

Grade	D
Rank	30

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	D	38
Electronic Filing Program	A+	1
Disclosure Content Accessibility	C-	22
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	41

New York again received an overall D for its campaign disclosure program, but its rank dropped from 25 to 30 because of improvements made in the rest of the country. The state's strongest category is again Electronic Filing, and its weakest performance is still in the area of web site usability.

New York law requires candidates to file twice in non-election years and twice before each election. Candidates must provide detailed information about contributors who give \$99 or more, but neither occupation nor employer information is disclosed. Last-minute contributions of \$1,000 or more must be disclosed prior to the election. Expenditures of \$50 or more, including subvendor information, must be reported, but there is no disclosure of independent expenditures. Electronic filing is mandatory for all statewide and legislative candidates who file with the State Board of Elections, and the agency reported that it is in the process of enhancing its web-based filing system to include all types of statements.

While its Disclosure Content Accessibility grade improved slightly, New York's rank in this category dropped from 19 to 22, as other states moved forward with significant advancements in data accessibility. The strength of the State Board of Elections web site is that it features a searchable database of contributions that is both comprehensive (paper-filed records are manually entered into the system) and up-to-date. However, the system lacks search capability, as described in this study last year, and there is no corresponding database of expenditure information. The two most important changes that could be made to New York's disclosure web site are adding an expenditures search and increasing the number of fields by which the contributions data can be searched.

Online Contextual and Technical Usability is the category in which New York has the most significant room for improvement. While the disclosure site does include a comprehensive list of candidates, a thorough description of whose reports are online, and information about the state's disclosure requirements, it is still missing important overview information to help people easily compare the campaign finance activity of various candidates. Additionally, New York's score in the usability testing dropped in 2004. The agency recently redesigned its web site, but not until after the close of this project's web site review period, so the redesign will be evaluated as part of Grading State Disclosure 2005.

North Carolina

Grade	D+
Rank	26

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	10
Electronic Filing Program	C	16
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	33
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	31

North Carolina's campaign disclosure program has changed very little in the past year, but a poor showing in the usability testing caused its Online Contextual and Technical Usability grade to drop from a D- to an F, and improvements around the country have caused the state's overall rank to drop from 17 to 26.

North Carolina law requires candidates to file semi-annually in non-election years, and to file one statement prior to each election. Candidates must report detailed information about contributors, including occupation and employer, for those who give more than \$100. Last-minute contributions of \$1,000 or more must be reported prior to the election. Expenditures greater than \$50, including subvendor details for media expenditures, must be disclosed. Independent expenditures must be disclosed, but there is no last-minute independent expenditure reporting. Statewide candidates reaching a \$5,000 threshold must file reports electronically, but e-filing is still voluntary for legislative candidates.

Access to campaign finance data is still North Carolina's biggest deficiency, although the Board of Elections has indicated that changes are coming. The state is one of only four that requires at least some candidates to file electronically but has no searchable data on the Internet. All campaign finance reports can be browsed online in either PDF or HTML depending on filing method, and it is possible to download a file containing itemized contribution and expenditure information for candidates in the 2000 and 2002 election cycles. The lack of a search interface, however, means that analyzing the records or even extracting a single piece of information could be a large undertaking. The good news is that the agency reports it is working to implement a searchable database.

North Carolina also has significant room for improvement in the area of web site usability, which was underscored by a drop in the state's usability testing score in 2004. Some changes have been made in the past year, including enhanced instructions for browsing campaign filings, and better labeling of reporting periods within the campaign finance reports, but many things that would provide the public with context for the disclosure records are still missing. Most importantly, there is no compilation of summary amounts raised and spent by current state candidates (although historical summaries are available). The site also needs a data history document with information about which candidates' records are available and what time period is covered by the online data.

North Dakota

Grade	F
Rank	44

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	50
Electronic Filing Program	F	39
Disclosure Content Accessibility	D	25
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D	25

Though there have been improvements, North Dakota's campaign disclosure law is still the worst in the country, making it difficult for the state to move beyond its overall F. The Secretary of State's office has made some changes to its web site, most notably in the area of Disclosure Content Accessibility, and more are expected. If Grading State Disclosure measured "Effort", North Dakota would have an A in that category.

North Dakota made some changes to its campaign disclosure law in 2003, but the state's law score was so low to begin with that the improvements were not enough to boost its last place rank in this area. Candidates file annually and once before each election, and must disclose information about contributors who give more than \$200. The law changed to require reporting of occupation and employer, but only for those giving \$5,000 or more, which excludes the majority of contributors. More significant is the new requirement for disclosure of in-kind contributions. Last-minute contributions of \$500 are reported prior to the election, but there is still no disclosure at all of loans, expenditures, and independent expenditures. An electronic filing system is under construction.

Substantial progress in the area of access to campaign finance records caused a jump in North Dakota's grade in this category from an F to a D. Perhaps more telling is the increase in its rank from 43 to 25. The Secretary of State's web site now features a database of contributions that can be searched across all filers by donor name and zip code, includes "smart search" features, and offers results in either an HTML display or a downloadable file. It is also now possible to browse an index of a particular candidate's reports. The addition of a searchable database of expenditures would further enhance access to records in North Dakota.

North Dakota's score in the usability testing dropped down into the average range (from a top score last year), which was the main reason the state's Online Contextual and Technical Usability grade fell from a C to a D in 2004. Strengths in web site usability are the extensive amount of information concerning the state's campaign finance restrictions and disclosure requirements, a complete candidate list, and the use of clear terminology throughout the site. A simple list of candidates' total fundraising and spending amounts, and the labeling of reporting periods in browsable campaign finance reports, would help improve the contextual usability of the Secretary of State's web site.

Ohio

Grade	B-
Rank	7

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C	25
Electronic Filing Program	A+	1
Disclosure Content Accessibility	A-	7
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	C	12

Ohio experienced a big jump in its Online Contextual and Technical Usability grade and rank in 2004, which caused the state's overall grade to improve from a C+ to a B-. Other states advanced in the areas of law, electronic filing, and web site usability while Ohio's performance in those categories was fairly static, causing the state's overall rank to drop from four to seven.

Under Ohio law, candidates must file once in non-election years and twice before each election. Detailed information about contributors must be disclosed, including occupation and employer information for those who give over \$100. Large last-minute contributions, not including those made to legislative candidates, must be reported prior to the election. All expenditures must be reported, but subvendor information is not disclosed. Independent expenditures must be reported, but there is no last-minute independent expenditure reporting. Electronic filing is mandatory for candidates reaching a \$10,000 threshold.

Ohio's strength, along with its electronic filing program, is in Disclosure Content Accessibility. The Secretary of State's web site features comprehensive databases of contributions and expenditures that are filled with both current and historical campaign finance data. Search results can be sorted on six fields and downloaded, and the web site offers a special section for downloading large amounts of data in previously queried files. The site also features an interface for browsing complete campaign finance filings by candidate. New information about the process by which the state fulfills requests for paper copies of records resulted in a slight drop in Ohio's score in this category.

The usability of Ohio's disclosure web site improved significantly in 2004, and the state's grade in the Online Contextual and Technical Usability category rose from an F to a C. The availability of a comprehensive list of candidates, and the fact that it became easier to locate the disclosure web site through a search of the main Ohio web site, contributed to the increase. Ohio could add the reporting periods to browsable campaign finance reports, clearly label amended reports and retain original filings online, and work with the main state web department to include the term "campaign finance" in the "Government" menu on Ohio's homepage to improve further in this area.

Oklahoma

Grade	C-
Rank	19

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	13
Electronic Filing Program	F	22
Disclosure Content Accessibility	B	12
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	42

The quality of Oklahoma's campaign disclosure web site improved significantly in 2004, although the changes have barely impacted the state's overall grade, which moved up to a C- from last year's D+. Oklahoma again earned an overall rank of 19 for its campaign disclosure program.

Oklahoma law requires candidates to file quarterly reports in both election and non-election years, plus one report before each election. Candidates must disclose detailed information about contributors who give more than \$50, including occupation and employer. Last-minute contributions of \$500 or more must be reported within 24 hours. All expenditures must be reported, including detailed subvendor information. Independent expenditures must be disclosed as well, and last-minute independent expenditures of \$500 or more must be reported prior to the election. The Ethics Commission is considering reinstating mandatory electronic filing beginning in 2005, but for now the program is voluntary.

Oklahoma debuted a new campaign disclosure web site in 2004, called OkCIDS, which is tied to an updated electronic filing system and replaced the state's original online disclosure database. While the upgrade did not improve Oklahoma's Disclosure Content Accessibility grade—the old system also satisfied the project's criteria for database functionality and received full credit—the OkCIDS web site is a big improvement in both design and technical operation. The new database is still not comprehensive, however; while there are more campaign filings in the OkCIDS system than were previously available, paper filers' information is limited to summary figures, and complete paper-filed reports are only accessible through the Oklahoma Ethics Commission office.

Oklahoma made no progress in the area of Online Contextual and Technical Usability in 2004, perhaps because its focus was on changes to the electronic filing process and improvements in the area of accessibility to campaign data. The state's grade and rank in the web site usability category are still very low. While there are now more complete instructions for viewing campaign filings online, the disclosure web site is still lacking summary information comparing total amounts raised and spent by different filers, a comprehensive list of candidates, and a detailed description of whose records are available in the OkCIDS database.

Oregon

Grade	D
Rank	32

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	15
Electronic Filing Program	B	14
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	45
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	35

Oregon introduced a new system for viewing campaign finance records online, but the change did not occur until late September 2004, and the state will not receive credit for the improvement until next year's Grading State Disclosure report. For now, Oregon's only gain came in the area of Electronic Filing, and its overall grade is still in the D range.

Candidates in Oregon are required to file once in non-election years and twice before each election. Detailed information about contributors who give \$50 or more must be disclosed, including their occupations, but not employers. Last-minute contributions of more than \$500 and independent expenditures of more than \$1,000 must be reported before the election. Candidates are required to report all expenditures, including some subvendor information. Electronic filing is mandatory for any state candidate reaching a threshold of \$50,000, and the waivers that were given last year to those who said they were unable to e-file are no longer permitted.

The Secretary of State appointed a panel to examine access to campaign finance data in Oregon, and its preliminary report recognized the need for change. As noted above, the agency's web site now features an interface for browsing complete campaign finance reports in PDF format, but that enhancement was made after this project's evaluation period and Oregon's Disclosure Content Accessibility grade is unchanged. The state's 2005 grade will reflect the expansion. Oregon's strengths in this category are still the speed with which information is posted to the Internet, and access to paper copies of reports, which is excellent compared to many other states. The most serious shortcoming is the lack of a searchable database, and that feature is so far not included on the recently updated disclosure site.

Oregon's second F came in the Online Contextual and Technical Usability category, and was caused by an inadequate description of whose records are available online, and the lack of browsable filings at the time of the study's research. Having no browsable reports online means the state cannot receive credit for the labeling of reporting periods in a report index, or the posting of both original and amended filings. It is also somewhat difficult to locate the Secretary of State's web site from the main State of Oregon web site, which contributed to the state's low usability testing score.

Pennsylvania

Grade	D
Rank	28

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	15
Electronic Filing Program	F	22
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	32
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D	25

Minor improvements in three Grading State Disclosure categories, along with an adjustment to Pennsylvania's law score, caused the state's overall grade to rise from an F to a D. There are still significant deficiencies in Pennsylvania's disclosure program, particularly in the area of Disclosure Content Accessibility.

Pennsylvania candidates must file once in non-election years and twice before each election. Candidates are required to disclose details about contributors who give \$50 or more, including occupation and employer for those giving over \$250. Last-minute contributions of \$500 or more must be disclosed prior to the election. Every expenditure must be disclosed, but subvendor information is not required. Independent expenditures are reported, and those made at the last minute must be reported before the election. Pennsylvania's law score was adjusted in 2004 based on new information about in-kind contribution reporting, which is the reason for the increase from a C to a B in this category. Electronic filing of campaign finance reports is voluntary for statewide and legislative candidates.

Although the agency posts all campaign finance reports on its web site in a format that allows browsing, sorting and downloading, there are still no searchable databases of contributions and expenditures online. Citizens, activists, reporters and others who are trying to pinpoint particular contributions can instead use Representative Greg Vitali's searchable database, which he offers as an alternative to the Department of State's site and maintains at www.pacampaigns.com. Access to paper copies of reports improved in 2004; requests must still be made in writing, but copies are available within two to five business days.

Pennsylvania's Online Contextual and Technical Usability grade improved slightly from a D- to a D, because the Department of State's web site now includes some information to help site visitors determine whose reports are available there and what time period is covered by the online records. The most important resource Pennsylvania could add to its disclosure web site is overview information, in the form of a list of candidates and how much each raised and spent in the current election cycle. Because campaign records are already in a digital format, such a list should be relatively easy to compile and feature online.

Rhode Island

Grade	B-
Rank	7

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C	25
Electronic Filing Program	A+	1
Disclosure Content Accessibility	A	2
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D+	18

Changes to Rhode Island's electronic filing mandate and a number two rank in Disclosure Content Accessibility bumped the state from a C to a B- overall, and turned its disclosure program into one of the ten best in the nation.

Rhode Island law requires candidates to file quarterly statements in non-election years, and three or more statements before each election. Candidates must disclose details for contributors who give \$100 or more, including their employers. Last-minute contributions are disclosed prior to the election only by statewide candidates receiving matching funds; other candidates report such contributions after the election. Expenditures over \$100 must be disclosed, but subvendor information is not reported. Independent expenditures are reported, and last-minute independent expenditures are disclosed before the election. Electronic filing is now required for all statewide and legislative candidates, resulting in a jump from a C to an A+ in the Electronic Filing Program category.

Rhode Island not only excels at providing the public with access to campaign finance records, but has improved in 2004 and now shares the number two spot in Disclosure Content Accessibility with Michigan. The Board of Elections web site features comprehensive databases of contributions and expenditures that are well designed and offer a variety of searching and sorting options. Data can be downloaded in an Excel-compatible format, and complete filings can be browsed through a user-friendly interface. Rhode Island also provides excellent access to paper copies of disclosure records.

Online Contextual and Technical Usability is the one area in which Rhode Island's performance falls below average, and its D+ grade—although it is up from last year's F—shows there is still room for improvement. There is still no overview information comparing amounts raised and spent by all candidates, a resource that is weighted heavily in the Grading State Disclosure criteria. Another important deficiency is an inadequate data history section to help people understand which reports can be found online. It became easier to locate the Board of Elections web site through a search of the main state site, which likely improved Rhode Island's usability testing score. Also contributing to the higher grade was the availability of an easily accessible and comprehensive list of state level candidates.

South Carolina

Grade	F
Rank	49

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C-	35
Electronic Filing Program	F	39
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	50
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	48

While significant changes were made to South Carolina's campaign finance law in 2003, the most important disclosure provisions do not go into effect until November 2004 and therefore did not give the state the boost that was expected to have come in this year's Grading State Disclosure report. The state again ranks second from the bottom, with an overall F.

Beginning this fall, candidates in South Carolina will be required to file quarterly reports in both election and non-election years, plus one report prior to each election. Candidates must file detailed information about campaign contributors, including a person's occupation (but not employer) after November 2004. Details about expenditures, including subvendor information, are reported, and the state requires the disclosure of independent expenditures. Disclosure of last-minute contributions and independent expenditures is not required, which is a significant weakness in the state's law. Although the 2003 campaign reform bill requires the State Ethics Commission to establish an electronic filing program, this has not yet happened; the agency describes the implementation of electronic filing as a "continued key strategic goal."

Not surprisingly, South Carolina again ranked 50th in the nation in Disclosure Content Accessibility, primarily because there is still no campaign finance data available on the State Ethics Commission web site. Contributing to the F in this category is the fact that access to records on paper is also weak. Records can be requested in person or by mail only, at a cost of \$.50 per page, and processing public requests for paper records can take a while, according to the agency.

South Carolina's web site usability is also poor compared to other states. It ranked 48th in Online Contextual and Technical Usability, lagging behind every state except Montana and New Hampshire. While the site uses clear terminology and provides good information about the state's disclosure requirements and campaign finance restrictions, other important information is lacking. South Carolina's disclosure web site once again failed the usability test, due to a lack of campaign finance reports online.

South Dakota

Grade	F
Rank	48

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	49
Electronic Filing Program	F	39
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	42
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	C	12

There have been few changes to South Dakota's campaign disclosure program in the past year, but a drop in the state's web site usability grade, combined with the fact that many other states have advanced considerably, caused South Dakota's overall rank to fall from 43 to 48. Especially in the areas of law and accessibility, there is much room for improvement.

South Dakota's campaign disclosure law is still among the worst in the country. Candidates are required to file once annually, and once prior to each election. South Dakota requires candidates to report details about contributors who give \$100 or more, but is the only state in the nation that does not require disclosure of the date a contribution was made. Information about a contributor's employer, but not occupation, must be disclosed. Last-minute contributions of \$500 or more must be disclosed prior to the election. Expenditures are reported, but the information required does not include subvendor details, and there is no reporting of independent expenditures. South Dakota does not have an electronic filing program.

The Secretary of State's web site offers access to all campaign finance reports filed by state candidates, but those filings are available only as PDF documents and cannot be sorted online or downloaded. The lack of any searchable data online results in another F in the Disclosure Content Accessibility category, even though reports are posted on the Internet quickly. Access to paper records is good, but South Dakota charges more than almost every other state in the country—\$1.00 per page—for copies.

South Dakota's usability testing score dropped significantly in 2004, which was the main reason for the drop in the state's Online Contextual and Technical Usability grade from a B- to a C. Otherwise, there have been few changes—positive or negative—in the usability of the Secretary of State's web site. The agency offers comprehensive information about contribution limits and disclosure requirements online, and now posts summary data so that site visitors can compare the campaign finance activity of 2002 legislative candidates. Other strengths in this area include a list of candidates with office and party affiliation information, and the inclusion of both original and amended reports.

Tennessee

Grade	D
Rank	27

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	D-	40
Electronic Filing Program	F	35
Disclosure Content Accessibility	D-	26
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	B	6

Tennessee made huge strides in the disclosure and accessibility of campaign finance data in 2004, and although the state's grade has only improved from an F to a D, the more telling change is in the state's rank, which jumped 19 places to number 27. Major improvements in the areas of electronic filing, web site usability, and especially Disclosure Content Accessibility, contribute to Tennessee's status as the overall most-improved state in the nation.

Tennessee law requires candidates to file once in non-election years, and once prior to each election. Candidates must report detailed information about contributors who give more than \$100, not including occupation and employer. Large, last-minute contributions must be disclosed within 72 hours. Expenditures greater than \$100 must be reported, but subvendor information is not required and there is no disclosure of independent expenditures. Tennessee now has an electronic filing system, but the fact that participation is voluntary means the state again received an F in the Electronic Filing Program category.

The Tennessee Registry of Election Finance, which has been entering campaign reports into an internal database for some time now, debuted a new online searchable database of contributions in June, bringing up the state's Disclosure Content Accessibility rank from 48 to 26. The change was enabled by a revision to Tennessee's disclosure law which struck the state's "inspection notice provision" and made it legal to display campaign finance data on the Internet. The reason the state's accessibility grade is still low is that the database can only be searched by contributor name and contribution date; the system does not allow the records to be sorted or downloaded, and there is no database of expenditure information. Perhaps these are enhancements that may come in the future as the agency fine-tunes and further improves its disclosure web site.

Tennessee's best performance was in Online Contextual and Technical Usability, in which the state received a B and a rank of six. The Registry of Election Finance web site is well designed and uses clear terminology throughout, and features a wealth of contextual information that is even more important now that campaign finance records are available online. Strengths include current and historical overview information comparing the fundraising and spending of all candidates, detailed instructions to accompany the new searchable database, and a good description of whose reports can be viewed through the disclosure web site. Tennessee's usability testing score improved significantly with the introduction of online campaign finance data.

Texas

Grade	C+
Rank	9

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B-	20
Electronic Filing Program	A-	12
Disclosure Content Accessibility	B-	15
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D+	18

Progress in the area of electronic filing was balanced out by a drop in Texas' Disclosure Content Accessibility grade, leaving the state with another overall C+ and a rank that fell from fourth place in 2003 to ninth in 2004.

Texas law requires candidates to file twice in non-election years, and at least three times before each election. Details about contributors who give more than \$50 must be reported, and all candidates must now disclose occupation and employer information. Last-minute contributions must be reported prior to the election. Candidates are required to report detailed information about expenditures of over \$50, not including subvendor information. Texas requires the reporting of independent expenditures, and last-minute independent expenditures must be disclosed prior to the election. Electronic filing is mandatory for candidates reaching a threshold of \$20,000, and the Ethics Commission will no longer grant routine waivers to filers who state they do not use computers to track campaign data.

Accessing Texas campaign finance records online became more difficult in 2004, and the state's grade dropped from an A- to a B- in this area. During the project's research window of January to June, 2004, it was not possible to perform a search across all filers' reports on the Texas Ethics Commission web site, which had offered this kind of searching capability in the previous year. Ethics Commission staff explained that an increase in the amount of data in the system had bogged down the server and rendered it unable to conduct such a search. The Ethics Commission upgraded its server in October and the site again gives visitors the more expanded search option, but the change did not occur in time to affect the state's grade for Disclosure Content Accessibility.

The Online Contextual and Technical Usability of the state's disclosure web site did not change in 2004. The addition of information about the state's campaign contribution limit was offset by a small drop in Texas' usability testing score, and the state again received a D+ in this category. The most important piece of contextual information on the web site is an overview of campaign finance activity showing total fundraising and spending figures for all filers. Other background information is still lacking, however, including a summary of the state's disclosure requirements and a thorough description of which candidates' reports are available on the Internet and what time period is covered by the online records.

Utah

Grade	F
Rank	35

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	43
Electronic Filing Program	F	22
Disclosure Content Accessibility	D-	27
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D	25

Minor changes to campaign finance disclosure practices in Utah caused the state's overall grade to slip from a D- to an F in 2004, and its uniformly low category grades demonstrate there is significant room for improvement in all areas of Utah's disclosure system.

Utah law does not require candidates to file campaign finance reports in non-election years, but does require two reports to be filed before each election. Candidates must disclose detailed information about contributors who give \$50 or more, not including occupation and employer. All expenditures must be reported, but subvendor information is not required. The state does require independent expenditure disclosure, but neither last-minute independent expenditures nor last-minute contributions are reported prior to the election. Utah's electronic filing program is well developed, but the state still received an F because e-filing is voluntary, rather than mandatory, for all statewide and legislative candidates.

There are still significant weaknesses in Utah in the area of accessibility of campaign finance records, most notably the absence of a searchable database of expenditures on the State Elections Office web site. Also contributing to the state's D- in Disclosure Content Accessibility is the inability to search records by contribution amount and date, or by contributor zip code. Adding the option to download data, giving site visitors a way to browse complete campaign filings rather than just lists of contributions and expenditures, and equipping the searchable database with "smart search" capability, are all things the disclosure agency can do to advance access to campaign data in Utah.

Utah's grade for Online Contextual and Technical Usability is still in the D range and its rank in this category fell slightly in 2004. The disclosure web site features comprehensive information about Utah's disclosure requirements, but does not include contribution limits. Terminology could be improved, and the State Elections Office could work with the State of Utah technology department to make it easier to locate the disclosure web site from the main state homepage. The most important usability resource still missing from the site is a simple list of all candidates and the amounts raised and spent by each. This information would greatly enhance the public's ability to put individual candidate fundraising totals in the larger context of what is typical of all candidates in a particular contest.

Vermont

Grade	F
Rank	45

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	45
Electronic Filing Program	F	39
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	33
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	35

Vermont has made only minimal changes to its campaign finance disclosure program in the past year, and still ranks among the poorest performing states in the country. A string of Fs in the four Grading State Disclosure categories resulted in an overall F and rank of 45, down from 42 in 2003.

Vermont's disclosure law, which ranks 45th in the nation, requires candidates to file once in non-election years and twice before each election. Candidates must disclose detailed information about contributors who give more than \$100, but occupation and employer are not disclosed. Last-minute contributions are not reported prior to the election. All expenditures must be disclosed, but subvendor information is not reported. Another weakness in the state's law is that independent expenditures do not have to be disclosed. Vermont does not have an electronic filing program for statewide or legislative candidates.

Vermont's strongest performance is in Disclosure Content Accessibility, but the state received an F in that category too. Accessing campaign finance records online can be difficult, primarily due to the interface for viewing reports on the Secretary of State's web site. Vermont is the only state in the country that makes reports accessible through a text search of all campaign documents, which functions like a "find" command in that you still have to browse the document to locate instances of the word having been returned. The problem with this system is most evident when trying to locate the reports of the current Secretary of State, Deborah Markowitz. A search for "Markowitz" turns up not only the Secretary's disclosure reports, but any filing in which another candidate has addressed correspondence to the Secretary. Providing one index page for each candidate that lists the history of that person's filings, and links to the complete reports, would be a major improvement over the system as it is currently configured.

There has been some progress in Online Contextual and Technical Usability, but an inadequate description of which candidates' records are available online, difficulty in locating the disclosure web site from the state's homepage, and a very low usability testing score keep Vermont from earning a passing grade in this category. Strengths in web site usability include both current and historical overview information comparing candidates' total fundraising and spending activity, a complete list of candidates, and comprehensive information about Vermont's disclosure requirements and contribution limits.

Virginia

Grade	D+
Rank	22

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	8
Electronic Filing Program	C	16
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	31
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	D-	29

Virginia received the exact same overall grade and rank in Grading State Disclosure 2004 as it received in 2003, in spite of a few changes—both positive and negative—to its campaign finance disclosure program.

Under Virginia law, candidates must file two statements in non-election years, two statements before the primary, and four before the general election. Candidates must report detailed information about contributors who give more than \$100, including occupation and employer. Last-minute contributions must be disclosed prior to the election. All expenditure information must be reported, including some subvendor details. Independent expenditures must be reported, but last-minute independent expenditures do not have to be disclosed prior to an election. Electronic filing is mandatory for statewide candidates and voluntary for legislative candidates, and the Virginia State Board of Elections says it now has adequate funding for the program.

Virginia performs worst in the area of Disclosure Content Accessibility, and again received an F in that category. Although the Board of Elections disclosure web site is comprehensive, and records for both electronic filers and paper filers are posted online quickly, the site still does not offer a functioning database for searching itemized contributions or expenditures. What it does offer is a searchable database of last-minute contributions, but that system is limited to contributions of more than \$500 made within 13 days of the election, and does not include the contribution and expenditure data filed in regular pre-election reports. Changes are in the works, however, and the Board of Elections says it will be debuting a more user-friendly and enhanced search engine in the near future.

While there is a fair amount of contextual information on Virginia's disclosure web site, the state's Online Contextual and Technical Usability grade suffers due to a lack of summary campaign finance information and an average usability testing score. Comprehensive information about Virginia's disclosure requirements, a list of candidates including office and party affiliation, and adequate information about whose records can be viewed on the Internet are the site's strong points. The disclosure agency's plans to make both original and amended campaign filings available online should improve Virginia's performance in web site usability.

Washington

Grade	A
Rank	1

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	A-	2
Electronic Filing Program	A+	1
Disclosure Content Accessibility	A+	1
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	A-	1

Washington again ranked number one in the country for disclosure of candidate campaign finance information. The state received high marks in every Grading State Disclosure category, and a substantial increase in Washington's usability testing score bumped its overall grade from an A- to an A in 2004.

Washington's disclosure law, ranked second in the nation, requires candidates to file monthly reports year-round, and two additional reports prior to an election. Candidates disclose detailed information about contributors who give more than \$25, including occupation and employer for those giving more than \$100. Last-minute contributions must be reported before the election. Detailed information, including subvendor, must be reported for expenditures of \$50 or more. Independent expenditures of \$1,000 or more occurring within 21 days of an election have to be reported within 24 hours; otherwise independent expenditures must be disclosed within five days of being made. Electronic filing is mandatory for candidates reaching a \$10,000 threshold, which is down from \$25,000 last year.

Contribution and expenditure databases that include "smart search" options and can be searched on a variety of fields, are the highlight of Washington's disclosure web site and earn the state its number one rank in Disclosure Content Accessibility. The databases are comprehensive (the agency manually enters itemized data from paper filers), and results can be sorted and downloaded. There is also an interface for browsing complete reports, for those who would like to get an overview of a particular candidate's activity. Washington is one of only five states in the country that received full credit for ease of access to paper copies of disclosure reports.

The usability of the Public Disclosure Commission's web site, particularly as measured by the project's usability testing, improved greatly in 2004. Washington's grade in this category jumped from a C- to an A-, and helped ensure another top ranking for the state overall. Strengths in Online Contextual and Technical Usability include summary information comparing the total amounts raised and spent by state candidates, in-depth information about Washington's disclosure requirements and contribution limits, and the availability of both original and amended campaign filings. Washington could improve its grade further with a better description of whose records are available online, and by adding reporting period dates to the display of complete filings.

West Virginia

Grade	F
Rank	34

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	C	25
Electronic Filing Program	F	22
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	37
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	32

West Virginia introduced electronic filing in 2004, but the change did nothing to improve the state's overall grade because the program is voluntary, although it did help boost West Virginia's overall rank from 37 to 34.

West Virginia's disclosure law is average and requires candidates to file once in non-election years and twice before each election. Detailed information must be provided for all contributors, but occupation and employer is reported only for those giving at least \$250. Last-minute contributions are not disclosed until after the election. All expenditures must be reported, but subvendor information is not disclosed. West Virginia requires independent expenditure reporting, and those made at the last minute must be disclosed before the election. The state now accepts campaign filings electronically via a web-based filing system, but candidates are not required to participate in the program.

West Virginia made few changes in the area of Disclosure Content Accessibility in the past year, and still does not offer data in a format that can be searched, sorted or downloaded. The Secretary of State's office reported that campaign finance filings are posted online more quickly now—within 24 hours, rather than four days—but all records are still available only in PDF. Perhaps the introduction of electronic filing will mean that some filings are available in a format that allows more meaningful analysis of the data. Access to paper copies of reports is good, except that the cost (\$.50 per page) is extremely high compared to most other states.

The state's Online Contextual and Technical Usability grade and rank dropped in 2004 because of a substantial corresponding drop in West Virginia's usability testing score. Otherwise, there was little change in the area of web site usability. Background information about the state's disclosure requirements and contribution limits is available on the Secretary of State's site, and the agency provides a complete explanation of which records are available online through an FAQ section. Still missing is a compilation of summary campaign finance activity by all state candidates, and the inclusion of reporting period dates in the index of a candidate's filings.

Wisconsin

Grade	D+
Rank	25

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	B	13
Electronic Filing Program	A-	12
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	33
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	32

Changes in the area of web site usability contributed to a slight drop in Wisconsin's overall grade, and the state's overall rank fell from 15 to 25 as other states made significant advancements in campaign finance disclosure.

Under Wisconsin law, candidates file two reports in non-election years and one report prior to each election. Candidates must disclose detailed information about contributors who give more than \$20, but only report occupation and employer for those giving more than \$100. Expenditures in excess of \$20 must be reported, but subvendor information is not required. Wisconsin requires the disclosure of independent expenditures, and both last-minute independent expenditures and last-minute contributions must be disclosed before the election. Electronic filing is mandatory for statewide and legislative candidates who reach a threshold of \$20,000.

Access to campaign finance data in Wisconsin is poor, mainly because the state is still one of only four in the country with mandatory electronic filing that does not provide the public with an online, searchable database of campaign finance records. Although the State Elections Board web site does allow site visitors to browse electronically filed reports, the site is not comprehensive because it includes only summary information for paper filers. In order to view complete paper filings one has to either visit the Elections Board or request copies from that office, a process which is fairly easy but could get expensive if numerous reports were needed.

Wisconsin's Online Contextual and Technical Usability grade fell from a C- to an F in 2004, because of negative changes in the area of technical usability. The state's usability testing score dropped substantially, which was likely due to the fact that it became more difficult to locate the disclosure web site from the State of Wisconsin homepage. The best contextual resource on the Board of Elections web site is a series of "Summary Data View" files that provide both historical and current overview information comparing state candidates' campaign finance activity. The disclosure agency also does a good job helping site visitors understand the universe of reports available online. If Wisconsin desired to improve in this category, it could add reporting period dates to the browsable campaign reports, and retain original filings online even after amendments have been posted.

Wyoming

Grade	F
Rank	50

Subcategories	Grade	Rank
Campaign Disclosure Law	F	48
Electronic Filing Program	F	39
Disclosure Content Accessibility	F	49
Online Contextual & Technical Usability	F	45

Wyoming again ranked 50th overall and continues to have the weakest campaign disclosure program in the country, with particularly low ranks in the areas of Campaign Disclosure Law and Disclosure Content Accessibility.

Wyoming law requires candidates to file once in non-election years and once prior to each election. Candidates must report detailed information about contributors giving more than \$25, not including occupation and employer. Last-minute contributions are not disclosed until after the election. While expenditure details have to be reported, candidates do not disclose that information until after the election, and subvendor information is not reported. Wyoming does not require the disclosure of independent expenditures. There has been some movement toward the establishment of an electronic filing program for state candidates, but a lack of funding has stalled these plans.

The Secretary of State's web site is one of three state-level disclosure web sites in the country that contains no campaign finance data at all. Access to campaign finance reports in Wyoming requires either visiting the Secretary of State in person to view filings, or requesting paper copies from that office. The size of the state means that driving to Cheyenne is not going to be an option for many people, and they will instead need to ask for copies to be mailed at a cost of \$.15 per page. Adding even summary campaign finance information to its disclosure web site would improve Wyoming's grade and, more importantly, would at least give the state's citizens access to the total amounts raised and spent by each candidate.

Wyoming received an extremely low score in the usability testing, because there are no campaign finance records available on the Internet, and that score contributed to its low rank and grade in the Online Contextual and Technical Usability category. The Secretary of State does provide some information about Wyoming's disclosure requirements and campaign finance restrictions online, which can be found on the agency's web site in the "Wyoming Campaign Guide."

IV.

Appendices

- Methodology of Usability Testing
- Grading State Disclosure Criteria
- Glossary
- 2003 Grade and Ranking Chart
- Credits

Appendix I — Methodology of Usability Testing

The usability tests determine if the disclosure information provided on the Web by state disclosure agencies is accessible to the average citizen. To do this we designed a test to answer the following question: “Can a non-expert find basic, informative data about campaign finances on the Internet in his or her state without undue difficulty or investment of time?”

Most usability tests compare a handful of web sites, and are concerned with minor differences between them (see Steve Krug’s “Don’t Make Me Think” (2000)). Web site designers might be concerned about the location of a task bar on a web page or the use of drop down menus. They hire testers to sit in front of computers and do simple tasks, and the web designers watch how they navigate around the site. The Grading State Disclosure usability test is different. We were not concerned with minor differences but with gross ones. Dozens of interfaces were compared across 50 states, and the test measured whether the overall design of a state’s web site—from architecture to jargon to database—facilitated access to information by the average voter. The two types of testing do share a common trait, however. In both types of testing it is not necessary to determine which design is optimal, only which design is better.

Two standard measures of usability were used. The first was a degree of difficulty measure, on the assumption that difficulty and accessibility are inversely related. Subjects were given three tasks to perform and the test measured the time and number of mouse clicks it took to perform each task. The three relatively simple tasks were devised, after some experimentation, to represent the minimum any citizen should expect from a campaign disclosure site. Subjects were asked to: (a) locate the state's disclosure web site starting from the state's homepage; (b) ascertain the total contributions received by the incumbent governor in his or her last campaign (subjects were given a list of incumbent governors that included the year they were last elected); and (c) provide the name and amount contributed by any individual contributor to the incumbent governor's last campaign.

The second measure of usability was a survey. After the third task was completed, each subject was given a short questionnaire and asked to evaluate his or her experiences on each state's web site. Subjects were asked to rate their level of confidence in their answers, whether the web site's disclosure terminology was understandable, and to provide a ranking (one to five) of their overall experience on the site. Subjects were also asked if any special software or unusual browser plug-ins were required to access the site's disclosure information.

Subjects were recruited from the undergraduate student population at UCLA, and the experiments were conducted at the California Social Science Experimental Laboratory (CASSEL) at UCLA. The experiment was administered five times to ten different students, and five different students tested each state. The states were assigned randomly to subjects, and each subject was assigned five states. Each state was tested by six different subjects. Limits were imposed on the amount of time a subject could take with each state and each subject was given no fewer than 25 minutes to complete the three tasks for each state. Each experiment lasted no longer than 150 minutes, and some subjects were finished after 90 minutes.

There were two concerns about the time and mouse clicks data that were collected: first, subjects might learn during the experiment and become more proficient with the later states than the earlier ones; second, there might be subject effects (level of competency, prior experience with disclosure web sites, etc.). To address these issues, a fixed-effects ordinary least squares model was constructed to control for subject differences, and included a variable to control for the order in which each state was tested by the subject. With these controls in place, each state's average time and number of mouse clicks was estimated for each of the three tasks. These scores were then combined into two separate indices (Cronbach's alpha > .75) and ranked. The survey data were also combined into a single index (alpha = .77) and ranked.

Each state could receive up to a total of 27 points for the usability test score. The distribution of scores in the three separate indices (time, clicks and survey) was examined and scores were assigned based upon the apparent thresholds in the distributions. The top-ranked states received six points each, the medium states received three points, and the lowest ranked states received zero points for each of the time and clicks indices. The remaining 15 points were assigned according to the survey responses, with a maximum of 15 and a minimum of three points assigned to each state. These three scores were then added together to create the usability test score for the state.

Appendix II — Grading State Disclosure Criteria

The California Voter Foundation (CVF) utilized the criteria developed for its 1999 “Digital Sunlight Awards” project, as well as the grading model developed by Syracuse University’s State and Local Government Performance Project to inform the criteria and methodology for Grading State Disclosure.

Grading Categories

- I. Campaign Disclosure Laws – 40%
- II. Electronic Filing Programs – 10%
- III. Disclosure Content Accessibility – 25 %
- IV. Online Contextual & Technical Usability – 25%

Grading Categories Criteria

I. Campaign Disclosure Laws – 120 points/40%

Meaningful campaign disclosure requires comprehensive campaign disclosure laws. The Campaign Disclosure Project has identified key disclosure requirements that are essential to public campaign disclosure:

1. Disclosure Content (84 points).
 - 1.1 Contribution record (26 points)
 - 1.1.1 Date (5 points)
 - 1.1.2 Contributor name and address (5 points)
 - 1.1.3 Contributor occupation (5 points)
 - 1.1.4 Contributor employer (5 points)
 - 1.1.5 Contributor ID number (if applicable) (3 points)
 - 1.1.6 Cumulative amount (for the year or election) (3 points)
 - 1.2 Type of Contribution (21 points)
 - 1.2.1 Loan - Date made (3 points)
 - 1.2.2 Interest rate of Loan (2 points)
 - 1.2.3 Loan Repayments (due date) (2 points)
 - 1.2.4 Guarantors (2 points)
 - 1.2.5 In-kind contribution disclosed (9 points)
 - 1.2.6 Total for non-itemized contributions (3 points)
 - 1.3 Expenditure information (22 points)
 - 1.3.1 Vendor name (5 points)
 - 1.3.2 Subvendor information (3 points)
 - 1.3.3 Description and/or expenditure codes (6 points)
 - 1.3.4 Date (4 points)
 - 1.3.5 Accrued Expenditure (4 points)

1.4 Independent expenditures (15 points)

- 1.4.1 Are they reported? (6 points)
- 1.4.2 Are last-minute independent expenditures reported? (3 points)
- 1.4.3 Does report include who benefits? (3 points)
- 1.4.4 Does report include cumulative amount? (3 points)

2. Enforcement (15 points)

2.1 Does the state conduct mandatory reviews and/or field audits? (6 points)

2.2 Enforcement mechanism: Criminal, civil, or both? (6 points) (3 points for either, 6 for both)

2.3 Is there a penalty for late filings? (3 points)

3. Filing Schedule (21 points)

3.1 Pre-election reporting (9 points) (points awarded will depend on the number of reports required before an election: 1 report = 3; 2 reports = 6; more than 2 = 9)

3.2 Late contribution reporting? (6 points)

3.3 Non-election year filing (6 points) (points awarded will depend on the number of reports required during non-election years: 2 or more reports = 6; one report = 4; no reporting = 0)

II. Electronic Filing Programs – 30 points/10%

Electronic filing is key to timely online disclosure. If campaigns send disclosure data reports to state agencies in a digital format in the first place, it is feasible to place the data immediately on the Internet in ways that make it easy to search, browse or download. CVF will evaluate and assess state electronic filing programs based on the following criteria:

1. Electronic Filing Program (30 points)

1.1 Does the state have an electronic filing program? (3 points)

1.2 Is electronic filing mandatory for statewide candidates? (10 points) (if mandate covers all statewide candidates and the threshold is reasonable = 10 points; voluntary program = 2 points)

1.3 Is electronic filing mandatory for legislative candidates (8 points) (If mandate covers all legislative candidates and the threshold is reasonable = 8 points; voluntary program = 1 point)

1.4 Is there adequate funding for an electronic filing program? (3 points)

1.5 Does the state provide training and/or technical assistance to filers? (3 points)

1.6 Is filing software and/or web-based filing available? Is it free? Does the state have a standard filing format? (3 points)

III. Disclosure Content Accessibility – 75 points / 25%

In this category, CVF will look at the degree to which content included in disclosure reports is accessible to the public.

1. Accessibility to Disclosure Records on Paper (12 points)

CVF will assess the degree to which paper records are available to the public. For each state, CVF will look at how the public gains access to paper records from state disclosure agencies, by answering the following questions:

- 1.1 What is the procedure the state uses to facilitate public access to paper disclosure reports? Can the public obtain them in more than one place? How long does it take for the state to respond to a request? (9 points)
- 1.2 How much do the paper records cost? (3 points) (10 cents or less per page = 3 points; 11-15 cents = 2 points; 16-25 cents = 1 point; more than 25 cents = 0 points)

2. Scope of Disclosure Records on the Internet (18 points)

- 2.1 Is the state publishing campaign finance data on the Internet? (3 points)
- 2.2 How quickly are the data made available on the Internet? How up to date is the information online? Is it instantly available as soon as it is reported? Is it available within 24 or 48 hours? Is it available within a week? Does it take longer than a week? (4 points)
- 2.3 What is the scope of the data online? Is data available for all disclosed reports, or just some? (6 points) (If all reports are online via e-filing or data entry = 6 points; mix of e-filed data and scanned reports = 3-5 points; all reports online in PDF = 2 points; some reports online in PDF = 1 point).
- 2.4 Does the site feature itemized contribution and expenditure data? (5 points)

3. Accessibility to Disclosure Records on the Internet (42 points)

- 3.1 Does the site offer a searchable database of itemized campaign contributions? (20 points) (if can search in one report for one candidate = 2 points; or if can search within all reports of one candidate = 4 points; or if can search across all filers = 10 points) (In addition, for the following fields: donor, amount, date, zip code, and employer – one point per searchable field for single candidate search of all reports; 2 points per searchable field for all filer search.) (Maximum points for searchable databases will be 2, 9 or 20 depending on scope of search capabilities.)
- 3.2 Does the site offer a searchable database of itemized campaign expenditures? (10 points) (if can search in one report for one candidate = 1 point; or if can search within all reports of one candidate = 2 points; or if can search across all filers = 5 points) (In addition, for the following fields: description/code = 2 points; vendor name = 1 point; amount = 1 point; date = 1 point; field search points will be awarded only if can search by all candidate's reports or across all filers; the same number of search field points will be awarded in either case). (Max. points for searchable databases will be 1, 7 or 10 depending on scope.)
- 3.3 Can you filter or limit the search? (i.e. ability to limit search to just one election cycle or one candidate) (1 point)
- 3.4 Are there any types of “smart search” features such as “name sounds like” or “name contains”? (1 point – no credit for “hidden” smart search capabilities)
- 3.5 Can the data be sorted online? (3 points)
- 3.6 Can the raw data be downloaded for sorting and analyzing offline? (3 points)
- 3.7 Can you browse an index of a particular candidate's reports? (2 points)
- 3.8 Can you browse itemized transactions within a report? (2 points)

4. Accessibility to Disclosure Records in Other Formats (3 points).

- 4.1 Are disclosure records accessible in other formats, i.e. on disk, CD-Rom, other? How much does it cost? Is it available from the state or an outside vendor? (3 points)

IV. Online Contextual & Technical Usability – 75 points/25%

Each state will be assessed on the usability of the state's campaign disclosure web site. Usability is divided into two categories: contextual and technical.

1. Contextual Usability (38 points).

Contextual usability means whether the web site provides essential background information that helps the public understand what the disclosure laws and campaign finance limits, if any, are, so that they can monitor campaign finance activities. When evaluating sites for contextual usability, the following questions will be answered.

- 1.1 How easy is it to find the disclosure agency's contact information? (2 points) (if it's on front page or featured on front page = 2 points; buried = 1 or no points; not there = 0 points)
- 1.2 Does the site provide information, such as summary campaign data and historical figures to give the public an overview of campaign financing trends? (8 points) (recent statewide info = 3 points; and/or recent legislative info = 3 points; and/or historical summaries for either = 2 points.)
- 1.3 Does the site provide information explaining the state's campaign finance restrictions? (3 points)
- 1.4 Does the site provide information explaining the state's disclosure requirements? (3 points)
- 1.5 Does the site provide a comprehensive list of candidates for recent or current elections? Does this list include offices and/or district numbers? Does it include party affiliation? (5 points) (List/office/party = 5 points; list and office or party = 3 points; list without office or party = 2 points)
- 1.6 Can the public determine which filers' reports are available online and which ones are not? (5 points)
- 1.7 Are the disclosure reporting periods clearly labeled? (3 points) (if filing period is featured in a report index = 3 points; if reporting periods are listed only inside the actual report = 2 point; if unavailable = 0 points).
- 1.8 Does the site use clear terminology to identify information? (3 points)
- 1.9 Are original filings and amendments available? Are amendments clearly labeled? (6 points) (Both original and all amended reports available online = 3 points; and/or amended reports are clearly labeled = 3 points)

2. Technical Usability (10 points).

Technical usability refers to the architecture of the disclosure web site. A site's structure, navigation, and database configuration have great impact on a site's overall "user-friendliness". When evaluating a site for technical usability are, the following questions will be answered:

- 2.1 How easy is it to find the disclosure site from the state home page? (4 points) (if you can

- find it quickly through a search tool and through a topical or agency browsing feature = 4 points; otherwise 0 – 2 points)
- 2.2 Does the site provide instructions for how to use it? (3 points)
 - 2.3 Can the features on the site be easily utilized with a dialup modem and/or a machine with limited RAM? (3 points)
3. Usability Testing (27 points)

One of the best ways to evaluate a disclosure web site's usability is to see how easy or difficult it is for someone to use the site. One of the challenges disclosure agencies have faced with their web sites is trying to meet the needs of both the high-end, advanced users and the low-end casual users. CVF and the UCLA School of Law will recruit a group of upper division social science students to help assess the usability of disclosure web sites. They would fall somewhere in the middle of the casual-to-advanced scale of users; interested in politics and familiar with technology, but not familiar with the politics in the states they will be evaluating.

To evaluate usability, the evaluators will answer the following seven questions:

1. Find the campaign disclosure webpage for this state. Copy the site URL into the space below.
2. From the list you were given, find the name of the Governor of this state. How much money did this person raise in their last election campaign? Enter that amount in the space below.
3. Find a list of contributors to the Governor's last campaign. Identify one contributor from that list. In the space below, provide the name of the contributor, the amount of the contribution, and any other identifying information (street address, city, zip code, occupation, employer, etc.)

Post-task survey (after each state):

4. How confident are you that you answered the three questions accurately? (1. Very confident 2. Somewhat confident 3. Not very confident 4. Not at all confident)
5. Was the disclosure terminology on this website easy to understand or was it confusing? (1. Very easy to understand 2. Somewhat easy to understand 3. Somewhat confusing 4. Very confusing)
6. On a scale of one-to-five, with one being Terrible and five being Excellent, how would you rate your overall experience on this disclosure site?
7. Did this site require any uncommon software, plug-ins or browser features in order to view the information? (1. Yes 2. No)

Appendix III — Glossary

Accrued Expenditure – an expenditure that is not paid at the time a service is provided. Accrued expenditures are debts owed by the campaign to political consultants or other vendors for good or services such as direct mail or campaign signs.

Amendment – a correction or revision made to a campaign finance report.

Committee – an entity established by a candidate, political party or other organization for the purpose of raising and spending money and filing required campaign statements with detailed information about campaign contributions and expenditures.

Desk Audit – a review of a campaign finance disclosure report as it has been filed by a political committee. In a desk audit, documentation other than the actual campaign finance disclosure report, such as canceled checks, bank statements and vendor receipts, are not reviewed.

Disclosure – in the context of campaign financing, disclosure means making information about campaign contributions and expenditures known to the public.

Electronic Filing – the process by which political committees and candidates disclose campaign contributions and expenditures in an electronic format. Electronically filed campaign finance information can be submitted via a web-based filing system, e-mail or computer disk. Candidates typically use either a standard filing format provided by the state, or filing software provided by the state or an outside vendor.

Field Audit – an in-depth review of a campaign finance disclosure report and other documentation related to the campaign finance report, including canceled checks, bank statements and vendor receipts, to verify the accuracy of the report.

Independent Expenditure – an expenditure for a communication which expressly advocates the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate, but which is made independently of any candidate's campaign. An example of an independent expenditure is a campaign ad run by an issue organization in support of a specific candidate for office. (Source: Federal Election Commission)

Itemized Data – breakdowns of contributions received or expenses made by a committee, such as listings of individual contributions with the contributor's name, address, occupation, and employer. (By contrast, an example of unitemized data would be when a committee reports the total amount of all contributions under \$100, but does not provide detailed information about the individual transactions that make up that total figure.)

Last-minute Contribution or Late Contribution – a contribution (often large) that is received by a committee after the closing date for the final statement filed before the election, but before the election takes place. Many states require supplemental reporting of individual last-minute contributions made in the last days and weeks prior to Election Day.

Last-minute Independent Expenditure or Late Independent Expenditure – an independent expenditure that is received by a committee after the closing date for the final statement filed before the election, but before the election takes place. Many states require supplemental reporting of last-minute independent

expenditures made in the last days and weeks prior to Election Day.

Loan Guarantor – a person who guarantees that a loan to a campaign will be repaid. Often financial institutions will not lend money to a candidate or campaign unless there are private individuals who guarantee that they will repay the loan if the campaign cannot.

Mandatory Review – the process by which a state’s campaign finance filing agency, often the Secretary of State, is required to examine campaign statements that are filed with its office, typically either through desk or field audits.

Reporting Period – the specific time period covered by a particular campaign finance statement.

Standard Filing Format – a uniform or standard technical format set forth by a state government which committees or candidates can use to file campaign finance disclosure statements electronically. The standard format ensures that all candidates’ filings can be integrated into the state’s internal data system or system of Internet disclosure.

Subvendor – a third party, such as a political consultant, who makes an expenditure on behalf of a campaign. For example, when a political consultant receives funds from a campaign and purchases TV time for the campaign, the campaign must report the consultant’s expenditures if subvendor disclosure is required. Credit cards can also fall into the subvendor category because detailed information about expenditures can be found in credit card statements. If the campaign only listed the credit card company in its expenditure report, the public would not know the actual expenditures of the campaign.

Subvendor Information – detailed information, including name and address, about subvendors.

Supplemental Filing – a campaign finance report that is filed in addition to regular campaign finance filings. Supplemental filings are often last-minute contribution statements, independent expenditures statements, or last-minute independent expenditure statements.

Threshold – a monetary value at or above which a candidate must disclose campaign activity. The threshold can apply to the contribution amount that will trigger a campaign to disclose detailed information about a contributor. Or, the threshold can apply to the total amount of money raised or spent that will require a campaign to file campaign finance reports electronically.

Appendix IV — 2003 Grade and Ranking Chart

State	Grade	Rank	Law Grade	Law Rank	E-Filing Grade	E-Filing Rank	Accessibility Grade	Accessibility Rank	Usability Grade	Usability Rank
Alabama	F	47	F	47	F	37	F	45	F	30
Alaska	C-	13	C+	23	F	31	D	20	B-	3
Arizona	C-	16	C+	22	A+	1	C-	17	F	36
Arkansas	F	41	C	28	F	37	F	39	F	47
California	C	9	A	2	B	9	F	28	D-	19
Colorado	D+	19	B-	15	F	35	C+	12	F	32
Connecticut	D+	23	B	12	F	20	D-	24	F	33
Delaware	D-	31	D-	37	F	21	C-	16	F	27
Florida	C	7	B-	15	D	17	B+	8	F	24
Georgia	D+	21	A-	3	D	17	F	27	F	41
Hawaii	C	6	B	8	C	10	A-	6	F	36
Idaho	D	24	C+	25	F	37	D-	23	C	5
Illinois	B	2	C	28	A+	1	B+	8	B+	1
Indiana	D-	32	F	43	F	31	C-	17	D-	19
Iowa	F	45	F	46	F	31	F	36	F	47
Kansas	F	39	D-	36	F	37	D-	25	F	45
Kentucky	C-	13	B+	5	F	21	C+	12	F	36
Louisiana	C-	17	B-	20	C	14	D-	25	D	15
Maine	D-	29	D+	34	F	28	C	14	F	41
Maryland	C	12	F	39	A+	1	B+	8	D+	12
Massachusetts	C+	3	D+	35	A+	1	A-	6	B-	4
Michigan	C	10	C-	32	F	21	A+	1	D	16
Minnesota	D-	28	B+	6	F	21	F	40	F	26
Mississippi	F	35	C+	25	F	37	F	36	C-	8
Missouri	D	26	B	8	C	10	F	32	F	41

Appendix IV — 2003 Grade and Ranking Chart (continued)

State	Grade	Rank	Law Grade	Law Rank	E-File Grade	E-file Rank	Accessibility Grade	Access Rank	Usability Grade	Usability Rank
Montana	F	38	A-	4	F	37	F	47	F	40
Nebraska	F	36	B-	15	F	37	F	30	F	33
Nevada	D	27	F	44	F	21	D	22	C	7
New Hampshire	F	40	B-	18	F	36	F	44	F	49
New Jersey	C	8	B	12	F	21	C	14	C-	8
New Mexico	F	44	F	44	F	31	F	45	F	33
New York	D	25	F	39	A+	1	D+	19	F	27
North Carolina	D+	19	B	8	C	10	F	29	D-	22
North Dakota	F	48	F	50	F	37	F	43	C	5
Ohio	C+	4	C	27	A+	1	A+	3	F	24
Oklahoma	D+	18	B-	18	F	21	B	11	F	45
Oregon	D-	30	B+	6	C-	15	F	40	F	41
Pennsylvania	F	34	C	30	F	28	F	33	D-	22
Rhode Island	C	11	C	30	C	10	A-	4	F	27
South Carolina	F	49	C-	32	F	37	F	50	F	50
South Dakota	F	43	F	49	F	37	F	36	B-	2
Tennessee	F	46	F	39	F	37	F	48	D	16
Texas	C+	4	B-	20	C-	15	A-	4	D+	13
Utah	D-	33	F	39	F	28	D	20	D-	19
Vermont	F	42	D-	38	F	37	F	33	F	30
Virginia	D+	22	B	12	D	17	F	33	D+	13
Washington	A-	1	A	1	A+	1	A+	1	C-	8
West Virginia	F	37	C+	23	F	37	F	40	D-	18
Wisconsin	C-	15	B	11	A-	8	F	31	C-	11
Wyoming	F	50	F	48	F	37	F	48	F	39

Appendix V — Credits

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