

Our View: This time, Idaho ranks lower than Mississippi

Murf Raquet/Moscow-Pullman Daily News

Once again Idaho ranks near the bottom compared to the other 49 states.

This time, the Gem State is one of three that earned an F for government transparency in how public money is spent.

Idaho, California and Alaska all failed in a U.S. Public Interest Research Group study on transparency, according to a Boise State Public Radio report. And the rating occurred after the launch of the Transparent Idaho website. (U.S. PIRG, a private consumer interest group, had given Idaho a C rating in 2013.)

The new website just isn't user friendly.

The report cites a senior analyst at U.S. PIRG as saying the state "falls short when it comes to searchability of the website, and little to no information is available online about the state's economic development programs. Idaho did score some points for making more data downloadable." But not enough to take it out of the basement.

It's frustrating when finding basic information on how and where taxpayer money is spent is more difficult than translating the Rosetta Stone.

The average person is not an expert in navigating the Transparent Idaho website. And it would help if the site were searchable by keyword.

"We have no one kicking in our door for any of this information," said Idaho's Chief Deputy State Controller Dan Goicoechea in the report. "Bottom line, no one in Idaho is going without the information they're entitled to."

Technically correct - all the financial information is on the website, it's just not as easy as it should be to find.

Goicoechea also said the goal of the website "was to give Idahoans a self-guided tour of the state's finances."

That's one way to put it.

(Don't take our word for it, try it yourself at this shortened address: <http://goo.gl/GeqzJV>.)

Idaho officials have a history of working behind closed doors - especially in the Legislature, where closed committee meetings are the norm.

So it seems to be the same with a website that's so confounding to navigate, it might as well be behind a closed portal.

Allocating and spending tax dollars is one of the more crucial functions of government - all stakeholders need to know how that is done.

For those keeping score, Mississippi received a C-plus for its transparency, Washington a B.