



JOSH MANDEL

STATE TREASURER OF OHIO

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The first two state universities have joined Ohio Treasurer Josh Mandel's OhioCheckbook.com, and Bowling Green is one of them. All other state universities should join this transparency initiative.

OhioCheckbook.com provides what the treasurer's office calls "checkbook-level" information on how the public's money is spent. Mr. Mandel launched it in 2014. Numerous local governments have joined, including Lucas County and the city of Toledo, and now the treasurer's office is working to bring universities on board.

According to the treasurer's office, four universities, including Bowling Green, were chosen as "guinea pigs." Central State University added itself to the list and was, alongside Bowling Green, one of the first two to get their 2014-15 data up. Data from the remaining three guinea pigs is expected online soon, and annual updates should follow.

The data from the universities is not completely comprehensive. Bowling Green's Checkbook site links to another website from the treasurer's office that has faculty salaries; it doesn't include them itself. And most information related to individual students is protected by federal law.

Local governments, schools, and public universities across Ohio spend billions of dollars, and they should be accountable for how they spend it.

Checkbook-level data is not all it takes to judge the stewardship of public money. It can't show whether a city got a good price on a purchase or a bad one, or how the goods or services contributed to a university's mission.

But the Checkbook can be a useful transparency tool, especially if used with other tools or knowledge — for example, by people who might recognize that a vendor is owned by an official's relative, or who might already know something about a purchase. And the Checkbook provides a form for asking questions.

The Checkbook is also a reminder to all those who spend the public's money that it isn't theirs, it's ours.

Mr. Mandel is to be commended for creating the site, and Bowling Green and Central State for joining it. The University of Toledo should join as soon as it can. The sooner participation becomes the norm for all Ohio public universities, schools, and local governments, the better.

To access the Checkbook sites for the various institutions and local governments that have shared their data, go to OhioCheckbook.com, click the "local gov and schools" tab in the upper-right corner, and either scroll down or use the search box.

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