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Transparency Stars

Frequently Asked Questions

If you don't see your question addressed below, please contact the Transparency Stars Team
[mailto:transparency.stars@cpa.texas.gov].

▼ What is the deadline for the Transparency Star awards?

There are no application deadlines for Transparency Stars. Transparency Stars are granted and maintained on an ongoing basis.

▼ My entity does not have the resources to meet some of the requirements of the Transparency Stars program, but we want to participate. What can we do?

Program participants demonstrate a significant commitment to transparency. Various types of software can be used to meet program requirements. The Comptroller's office does not partner with or endorse vendors for the Transparency Stars program. Our office strives to be of assistance in answering your questions and providing guidance so that any city, county or school district, regardless of resources, can move toward greater transparency.

We offer these tips on compiling a check register:

- In order to meet the check/expense register criteria for Transparency Stars, your entity must post all transactions including electronic ones, not just written checks.
- You may be able to use your accounting software to create expenditure reports that are reusable each month. If not, off-the-shelf accounting software can download transactions from your financial institution once they are completed.
- Your financial institution's website may also allow you to download a spreadsheet detailing all of your entity's monthly transactions.
- Note that employee pay, benefits and withholding amounts are confidential information. These transactions should be aggregated into totals within the check register.

All downloadable data sets must be kept as current as possible. For the Traditional Finances downloadable data requirements, new annual raw format budgets must be posted as soon as they are available, and the check register must always reflect the prior 36 months of activity with the most recent data not more than 90 days old.

In addition, the Comptroller's office has developed a set of templates and forms that may be used in fulfilling the visualization and summary requirements.

▼ This information is already included in my local government's financial documents. Can't we just direct people to the information that's already posted?

No. All summary information should be posted separately from any financial documents from which they are derived. Consolidating this information as a listing or table posted directly to the page or as a clearly labeled link is the most expedient and concise manner in which to do this.

▼ I participated in the Leadership Circle program and have a Leadership Circle emblem displayed on my website. Am I expected to remove the emblem now that the program is retired?

Though transparency achievements made as part of the Leadership Circle program are still relevant, the program and its awards have been discontinued. We ask that Transparency Stars insignia replace, rather than coexist with, Leadership Circle insignia. New program insignia should also replace previous program award insignia upon receipt. If you require rebranded award logos, please contact the Transparency Stars Coordinator [mailto:transparency.stars@cpa.texas.gov] directly.

▼ What is to be included in revenues and expenditures per the Traditional Finances guidelines?

Expenditures include all payments that a local government makes no matter what fund a payment is made from and should mirror the total combined budget.

Expenditures should include:

- all operational expenditures;
- all debt payments;
- all electronic fund transfers;
- all other funds (such as enterprise funds) beyond the general fund (GF); and
- any other payments from any funds of the local government.

Revenues include all sources of revenue that a local government collects through taxes, fees or fines as well as any other sources such as grants, federal or state sources.

▼ Is it acceptable for entities to provide a total monthly payroll amount rather than each individual person's name and monthly check amount in the check register?

Yes, it's ok to aggregate payroll.

▼ Many local governments consider bond proceeds and grants as part of total revenue. Should funds from these sources be included in total revenue?

Yes, these sources must be included in revenues.

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▼ I have concerns that greater transparency will possibly open my local government to greater financial risk. Is the Stars program still for me?

Yes, the Comptroller's office is committed to working with entities to ensure that the highest level of transparency is being met while still being conscious of security risks and threats.