New York City Comptroller
John C. Liu

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LAUNCH OF CHECKBOOK 2.0 MAKES NYC TOP
IN THE NATION FOR FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY

Comptroller Liu Launches New Website, Solidifying Big Apple as the Most Transparent City in Country, According to U.S. Public Interest Research Group

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NEW YORK, N.Y. – City Comptroller John C. Liu today unveiled his much anticipated website *Checkbook NYC 2.0*, which provides unprecedented access into how New York City spends its nearly $70 billion annual budget.

The new website can be accessed at www.checkbooknyc.com.

"Checkbook NYC 2.0 empowers and enlists the public to keep an eye on government spending and thereby curtails wasteful and improper spending of public money," **Comptroller Liu** said. "With out-of-control cost overruns and a growing public sense that tax dollars are not funding real priorities, this application could not have come sooner."

 Version *2.0*, the new and improved release of Liu's *Checkbook NYC,* solidifies New York City's position as a national leader in financial transparency. A comprehensive national study of the country's 30 largest cities ranked New York City in the top spot. The study conducted by the United States Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG), **Transparency in City Spending: Rating the Availability of Online Government Data in America's Largest Cities** was released today**.** In fact, under the study's scoring criteria, an early test version of *Checkbook NYC* scored a 98 out of a possible 100. *Checkbook NYC 2.0* is so advanced it is now the benchmark for future comparisons.

U.S. PIRG's report can be found at http://www.uspirg.org/reports.

Liu launched the website at his downtown offices, where he was joined by elected officials, U.S. PIRG officials, leaders of the New York City Transparency Working Group (a coalition that supports efforts to use information technology to make City government more open and accountable), and good-government and technology advocates.

As with the original *Checkbook NYC*, all City expenditures are available, but with an easier-to-use design.   *Checkbook NYC 2.0* also provides improved search and navigation, data

visualizations, historical trends, data exports, and access to more comprehensive data on City contracts, payroll, and spending.

"We want to commend Comptroller Liu on presenting such a comprehensive look at New York City's finances. In the four years we've published evaluations of government-spending transparency, we haven't seen any site with this much capacity to follow the tax dollars," said **Phineas Baxandall, Ph.D., Senior Analyst and Program Director for Tax and Budget Policy at U.S. PIRG.** "I doubt any Fortune 500 company keeps track of its own spending as comprehensively, much less as openly, as New York City. We look forward to future improvements in disclosing economic-development subsidies and the full text of contracts."

"Budget transparency and accountability are at the heart of good government. By giving taxpayers the ability to track expenditures, budgets, and contracts, we can further promote trust in local government and improve the way public money is spent, ultimately contributing to greater cost-effectiveness and stronger fiscal performance for the City," said **Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer**. "I commend Comptroller Liu for shining light on the budget process and giving the public an opportunity to understand and engage the City's budget to help ensure it is meeting the needs of our communities."

"There's no room for waste or corruption in this government. The Comptroller's Checkbook NYC 2.0 is a powerful tool for watchdogs and taxpayers alike," said **Public Advocate Bill de Blasio.** "We need this kind of sunlight shed on all parts of the City to hold agencies accountable."

"As evidenced by my passage of Local Law 11 of 2012, the most comprehensive Open Data legal policy in the country, I am a strong believer in the public's right to access government records," said **Council Member Gale A. Brewer.** "Checkbook NYC 2.0 is a fantastic tool that provides unprecedented information about the City's budget, and I am very excited to see the many ways New Yorkers will use this data to save money and improve City services. I thank Comptroller Liu for his vision and commitment to ensuring New York City is the national leader in municipal transparency."

"Checkbook NYC 2.0 is probably the most powerful fiscal transparency website in the United States, maybe the world. It's a civic-technology home run for New Yorkers," said **John Kaehny, Co-Chair of the NYC Transparency Working Group and Executive Director of Reinvent Albany**. "It hugely increases the usefulness of the City's Financial Management System to watchdog groups and journalists, and allows the public to cast an independent eye on City spending. And, hugely to the Comptroller's credit, Checkbook NYC 2.0 will be open source – which means governments and transparency groups across the country can reuse it to shine a light on their own city or state."

"An accountable government only occurs with robust transparency," said **Bettina Damiani, Project Director of Good Jobs New York.** "Checkbook NYC 2.0 is a critical step forward to building a bridge between taxpayers and officials who promise investments that will benefit our City."

"Checkbook NYC 2.0 is a great step forward in transparency in City government. It makes information on City spending easily accessible," said **Carol Kellerman, President of the**

Citizens Budget Commission. "The City's public authorities, including the Municipal Water Finance Authority, the Health and Hospitals Corporation, and the New York City Housing Authority, should follow the lead of the Economic Development Corporation and make their data available to Checkbook NYC 2.0 so New Yorkers have a complete picture of how their tax dollars are being spent."

"Checkbook NYC 2.0 gives all New Yorkers their own key to the City, providing them with both the data on how City funds are spent and the tools to take a close look," said **Gene Russianoff, Senior Attorney for the New York Public Interest Research Group.**

"In times of austerity, it is great to see the City's checkbook open and publicly accountable. By open-sourcing this application, the citizens of New York are presented with a cost-effective, renewable resource for time to come. In addition, by launching this application with an open API, the City's checkbook is uniquely presented to developers, entrepreneurs, and advocates equally," said **Noel Hidalgo, NYC Program Manager for Code for America.** "The bar to an open and accountable government has been elevated. In the months to come, we hope to work the Comptroller's office to host a hackathon and dive deeper into the data."

"Checkbook NYC 2.0 is not only a terrific service that will give all New Yorkers unprecedented access to useful information about how their government works, but can also serve as a model for all elected officials in New York and around the country to fulfill their responsibility of providing citizens with transparent and accountable government," said **Andrew Rasiej, Chairman of the NY Tech Meetup and Founder of Personal Democracy Media**. "This is a major step forward in making New York City government transparent and accountable to its citizens, as well as an ambitious and useful model for bringing government services into the 21st century."

"Budget transparency is an important, but often overlooked, goal. Checkbook NYC 2.0 helps make the City budget more transparent by allowing all New Yorkers to readily access information on City spending," said **IBO Director Ronnie Lowenstein**.

"Citizens Union commends Comptroller Liu for developing the latest iteration of Checkbook NYC," said **Dick Dadey, Executive Director of the Citizens Union**. "Checkbook NYC 2.0 will help ensure taxpayer money is more wisely spent by government, from payrolls to contracts, by making transparent in new ways and in near real time every dollar the city spends. New apps and dashboards will make vital information on the City's expenditures more accessible to the public and thereby increase accountability in government."

Key features of the website include:

Dashboards

The new website contains a "Citywide" dashboard as well as dashboards for more than 100 individual agencies. Using a combination of data visualizations and apps, users get a more comprehensive financial picture of the City and each City agency.

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Each dashboard provides access to individual apps that help users track and search specific data sets. *Checkbook NYC 2.0* dashboards now include three apps:

- **Spending App:** This provides users with up-to-date spending activity on a Citywide and individual agency level. Useful data visualizations are easily navigated from one place, including breakdowns of the largest payments, top vendors, and expense categories.

- **Contracts App:** This represents a complete overhaul of the Comptroller's Clearview NYC application and allows users to easily search spending by City agency or vendor. Users can now search contract modifications to see which contracts have grown more expensive and by how much, allowing for more scrutiny of potential cost overruns.

- **Payroll App:** This allows users to monitor citywide payroll costs, complete with agency trends as well as overtime spending.

Trends

This tool provides access to more than 20 years of historical information, allowing users to conduct trend analyses in more than two dozen areas, including the City's debt load, population, and budget.

Data Feeds / API

Through the Data Feeds and Application Programming Interface (API) tools, users can produce their own snapshots of the City's financial information by saving data in a CSV format or dynamically updating an XML feed for other web applications and website widgets. Micro-data from the City's Financial Management System is available back to January 1, 2010.

The source code of the website will be released publicly within a few months. This "open source" approach will allow other cities to quickly implement their own transparency sites by leveraging New York City's investment and will also reduce future development costs because any developer can improve and expand the site's features.

In July 2010, Comptroller Liu rolled out *Checkbook NYC*, an online transparency tool that for the first time placed the City's day-to-day checkbook in the public domain. Since the initial launch, Liu's office, led by Deputy Comptroller Ari Hoffnung and Assistant Comptroller Michael Bott, has been exploring ways to improve the website.

Working closely with the Mayor's Office of Contracts, the New York City Council, the City's Financial Information Services Agency, the Office of Management and Budget, good-government experts, and data specialists, the Comptroller's office was able to create an improved web tool that is considered among the best in the nation for about $2 million. This is less than one percent of the more than $300 million spent on FMS 3.0, the centralized accounting system used by all City agencies and the data foundation used by *Checkbook NYC 2.0.*

Checkbook NYC 2.0 builds on the *My Money NYC* suite of online transparency tools launched by Comptroller Liu, which include:

- *M/WBE Report Card NYC:* Real-time tracking of how much the City spends on contracts with Minority and Women Owned Businesses.
- *Pension NYC:* A website that publishes unprecedented data on the City's $128 billion Pension Funds, including comprehensive investment performance reports, historical trends on pension statistics, webcasts of investment meetings, and meeting minutes.
- *Open Audit NYC:* Allows the public the ability to make direct recommendations to Comptroller Liu's Audit Bureau on City agencies and programs that may be wasting taxpayer dollars.

Plans for *Checkbook NYC 3.0* are already in the works and will include apps that provide access to revenue data, sub-contracting information, agency budgetary conditions, and mapping of capital projects.

The *Checkbook NYC 2.0* website was developed in collaboration with REI Systems, a firm that worked with the Obama Administration to launch several federal transparency websites, including USAspending.gov, DATA.gov, and ITdashboard.gov.

Visit www.comptroller.nyc.gov for the latest news, events, and initiatives.
Follow Comptroller Liu on [Twitter](#). To receive Twitter updates via text message, text "follow johncliu" to 40404. View the latest Comptroller's office videos on [YouTube](#).

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