

## Resources for Building the State Budget

by Jason Mercier  
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### Introduction

The largest and most difficult task facing lawmakers this legislative session is building the state's 2009-11 operating budget. As of the November revenue forecast, revenues are projected to increase by five percent, \$1.4 billion, in the next biennium, but the planned increases built into the existing budget result in a projected \$5.7 billion shortfall.

There is now concern this fiscal problem could approach more than \$7 billion in planned spending over expected revenue when the March revenue forecast is released. A problem of this magnitude cannot be solved without fundamentally rethinking how state leaders approach budgeting.

To begin the necessary changes, lawmakers should re-evaluate all existing programs and activities against a prioritized, performance-based matrix. To do this agencies should be required to rank their activities as high, medium or low priority, with no more than one third of the total costs allocated to each ranking. Lawmakers should direct agencies to identify at least one expected performance outcome for each activity for which it is requesting funding. Once lawmakers have access to this information, they can make informed decisions on which purchases will deliver the highest results for taxpayers and those who rely on essential services.

### Examples of Prioritization

As an example of how this process can work, Washington Policy Center (WPC) reviewed Governor Gregoire's Priorities of Government report and applied our own "do not buy" matrix to identify nearly \$3 billion worth of activities the legislature should not purchase. This list of potential savings does not include any efficiencies or reductions in future spending growth, but instead reflect activities WPC believes the state should not purchase at this time.

These items ranged from \$20,000 for the state Poet Laureate to \$908,202,000 for the policies of Initiative 728 (class size).

To build the list we asked the following questions:

- Is the activity a core function of government or commercial in nature? Example: Liquor sales distributed by the state in government operated liquor stores.
- Does it duplicate the activities of non-profits or other private initiatives? Example: Some state boards and commissions.
- Does it duplicate the efforts of other state agencies or programs? Example: Salmon recovery office.

- Does the activity demonstrate quantifiable performance? Example: Initiative 728 (reducing class sizes in K-12 public schools).
- Should taxpayers be asked to pay more to provide the activity? Example: State employee pay raises.

We then sent these recommendations to the Governor in response to her request for budget suggestions. (WPC’s full letter to the Governor is attached as an appendix.)

While this exercise was very basic in nature, asking these types of questions can “separate the wheat from the chaff,” so lawmaker’s can spend their time further prioritizing the remaining activities.

## Priorities of Government Budgeting

Having access to this type of information would help facilitate legislative efforts to use Priorities of Government budgeting (POG). Lawmakers would be able to quickly determine if they agree with an agency’s activity rankings and whether the expected performance outcome is worth the investment of taxpayer dollars.

If this occurs, lawmakers would then be able create their own “buy list” to ensure true high priorities are purchased first. If such a prioritization occurs, any proposed tax increases would be directed at purchasing activities that are at the bottom of the state’s buy list, not the top. Essentially, lawmakers are communicating to citizens that those items not purchased are the state’s lowest priorities and everything else purchased by existing taxes is a higher priority.

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## Resources for Spending and Performance Details

To effectively undertake this type of budget review lawmakers need detailed information on agency spending and performance information. There are many resources available to lawmakers to answer these questions and to begin building the budget. Here is a brief overview of each.

**Washington State Fiscal Information** [www.fiscal.wa.gov](http://www.fiscal.wa.gov)

Last year the Legislature unanimously approved and the Governor signed [SB 6818: Promoting transparency in state expenditures](#). The new law required creation of a state expenditure website, which was launched in December, containing the following information:

- state expenditures by fund or account
- expenditures by agency, program and subprogram
- state revenues by source
- state expenditures by budget object and sub-object
- state agency workloads, caseloads, and performance measurements

According to the website:

“The website will display data that are routinely updated: for budgets as budget proposals are made public; for revenues, expenditures, and staffing, on a monthly basis as monthly actual

data are finalized; for historical data, as those data are updated to reflect changes in budget formats; and for workloads, caseloads, performance measures, and performance audits, as websites that display those data are updated.

In these ways, the Fiscal Information website improves public access to state fiscal data and promotes government transparency through greater government accountability.”

***State Government Performance and Results*** [www.ofm.wa.gov/performance](http://www.ofm.wa.gov/performance)

The Office of Financial Management’s (OFM) new performance website provides the following information about state agencies:

- strategic plans
- activity inventories
- performance progress reports
- performance assessments
- Governor’s Priorities of Government report

***State Auditor’s Performance Audit Reports*** [www.sao.wa.gov/PerformanceAudit](http://www.sao.wa.gov/PerformanceAudit)

Under the authority of 2005’s Initiative 900 the State Auditor’s Office (SAO) is authorized to conduct independent and comprehensive performance audits of state and local governments. Each report is posted on the Auditor’s website after it is released. According to SAO:

“To date, we have completed 14 performance audits of state agencies and local governments. Four were the result of legislation that directed our Office to conduct independent, comprehensive performance audits of transportation-related agencies. The rest of the audits were conducted under the authority given our Office by citizen-approved Initiative 900.

Collectively, the audits have made 574 recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government. They point the way toward millions in savings of taxpayer dollars and they recommend ways to transform government operations and to make significant improvements in services to citizens. Collectively, the audits identified \$4.1 billion in one-time and long-term potential cost savings and in unnecessary spending.”

***Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC)*** [www.leg.wa.gov/jlarc](http://www.leg.wa.gov/jlarc)

JLARC staff oversee targeted legislative directed performance reviews of agency activities. Recent examples include a review of the state’s 470 boards and commissions and the numerous tax exemptions in statute. Each of the JLARC reports are posted on its website.

According to JLARC:

“The Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee (JLARC) works to make state government operations more effective, efficient, and accountable. The Committee is comprised of an equal number of House and Senate members, Democrats and Republicans.

JLARC pursues its mission by conducting performance audits, program evaluations, sunset reviews, and other analyses. Assignments to conduct studies are made by the Legislature and the Committee itself. Based on these assignments, JLARC’s non-partisan staff auditors, under the direction of the Legislative Auditor, independently seek answers to audit questions and issue recommendations to improve performance.

Between 2000 and 2007, JLARC issued nearly 240 recommendations directly to state agencies. Some 84% of these recommendations have been implemented to date and another 13% are in progress. These accomplishments cover a wide variety of agency performance improvements, spanning across many areas of state government.”

**Government Management Accountability and Performance (GMAP)** [www.accountability.wa.gov](http://www.accountability.wa.gov)

Like the State Auditor and JLARC, GMAP staff also review agency performance. These efforts are directed by the Governor and all reports are posted on the GMAP website.

According to GMAP:

“Staff in GMAP help state agencies measure and improve their performance, and achieve results that matter to citizens. The primary focus is working with agencies to prepare performance-based reports for the Governor and her leadership team. These reports use data about agency results to support focused management discussions – in open public forums – between agency leaders and the Governor and her leadership team.”

## Conclusion

Though daunting, the state’s budget problems can be diligently addressed by refocusing on purchasing high-priority performance outcomes instead of lawmakers being influenced by emotional pleas for continued funding based on past spending decisions. This will help reprioritize excessive spending policies that have contributed to a projected budget deficit despite forecasted revenue growth.

By taking advantage of the budget resources available, lawmakers can make informed decisions and build a solid budget focused on delivering the best results for taxpayers and users of government services. If lawmakers ultimately ask state citizens to pay higher taxes for additional spending the public will know one of two things:

1. lawmakers believe the state’s lowest priorities are still worth purchasing even in this tough economic climate and taxpayers need to sacrifice more or,
2. the budget is not properly prioritized and lower priorities are being purchased first, resulting in the request for tax increases to fund higher priorities.

*Jason Mercier is director of the Center for Government Reform at Washington Policy Center, a non-partisan independent policy research organization in Seattle and Olympia. Nothing here should be construed as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any legislation before any legislative body.*

## Additional Resources

Washington Policy Center’s letter to Governor Gregoire with a recommended “do not buy” list is attached, and is also available online at:

[http://www.washingtonpolicy.org/Centers/government/PDF/Budget\\_Savings.pdf](http://www.washingtonpolicy.org/Centers/government/PDF/Budget_Savings.pdf)

For more information on budget reforms, read the December 2008 Policy Note *Changing the Budget Status Quo*, by Paul Guppy and Jason Mercier. It’s available online at:

[http://www.washingtonpolicy.org/Centers/government/policynotes/Changing\\_Budget\\_Status\\_Quo.html](http://www.washingtonpolicy.org/Centers/government/policynotes/Changing_Budget_Status_Quo.html).

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December 12, 2008

Hon. Christine Gregoire  
Governor  
State of Washington  
P.O. Box 40002  
Olympia, WA 98504-0002

Dear Governor Gregoire:

Washington Policy Center would like to offer its assistance in light of the state's budget outlook. We appreciate your commitment to balance the 2007-09 and 2009-11 budgets without raising new taxes and fees. We share your belief that this is a unique opportunity to rethink what the government does and how it delivers vital services to the public.

Our organization stands ready to help in any way that you find useful to bring about the fundamental budget reforms in which you have expressed interest. I particularly want to offer the services of our Center for Government Reform director, Jason Mercier, as a resource on budget issues and as someone who is well respected by your staff, the State Auditor and legislators.

To offer constructive suggestions, we have enclosed our "Do not buy list," which we adapted from your 2009-11 Priorities of Government report, as well as a list of eight reforms that we believe will help put the state on the path toward a sustainable performance-based budget.

We have enjoyed working with you and your staff as a member of your Performance Audit Citizen Advisory Board, and on the adoption and implementation of the state's new searchable budget website. We look forward to working with you on this new challenge of reforming the state budget so our state can avoid severe budget shortfalls in the future.

Sincerely,



Greg Porter  
Chairman



Daniel Mead Smith  
President



The Washington Policy Center (WPC) appreciates the Governor’s commitment to balancing the 2007-09 and 2009-11 budgets without resorting to tax and fee increases. We stand ready to help in any way possible to bring about the fundamental budget reforms the Governor is now requesting help with.

Included with this summary is a copy of WPC’s recommended “Do not buy list” adapted from the state’s 2009-11 Priorities of Government report. These savings do not include any potential efficiencies or reductions in future spending growth but instead reflect activities WPC believes the state should not purchase at this time.

Along with refocusing current and future state expenditures on those vital core services demonstrating quantifiable performance that only government can provide, we believe the following reforms will help put the state on the path toward a sustainable performance based budget (additional details available on request):

- 1. Issue a competitive contracting executive order.** The Governor should direct agencies to take full advantage of the opportunity to competitively contract commercial type activities using a “yellow pages” test. Such an order should clarify the competitive contracting policy of the state to mitigate any negative impact of the current lawsuit against General Administration. The current law should be simplified to make it easier for agencies to contract while not making this valuable savings tool subject to collective bargaining agreements.
- 2. Adopt a constitutional amendment to limit the growth of spending to inflation and population growth.** Reasonable budget limits similar to those of Initiative 601, but as part of the state constitution, would protect taxpayers and bring greater discipline to public finances. This would build on the success of the constitutional rainy-day account advocated by the Governor in 2007.
- 3. Adopt performance-based, Priorities of Government budgeting to slow the rate of spending growth and end the chronic sense of crisis in state finances.** The Priorities of Government standard has proved successful in the past. The legislature should adopt it as a permanent part of the budget process by requiring all budgets be adopted against a performance-based, prioritized matrix.

**4. Place performance outcomes directly into the budget.** To help improve budget accountability, high-level performance outcome expectations should be placed directly into the budget, so state officials and citizens can quickly review whether the goals have been met each time new or increased spending is requested.

**5. Begin a “base closing” process for state programs and agencies to determine which ones can be consolidated or eliminated.** This review process would help optimize state spending by eliminating state programs that are unnecessary, duplicative, wasteful or have fulfilled their purpose. The money saved could be devoted to higher-priority programs that provide valuable services to the public.

**6. Adopt a 72-hour budget timeout.** To help facilitate public involvement, the state should adopt a 72-hour timeout period once a tax or spending bill is introduced or amended before hearings or legislative votes could occur.

**7. Require updated six-year budget forecasts be tied to quarterly revenue forecasts or adoption of new budgets.** To help provide updated information throughout the year on the state’s fiscal outlook, an official updated six-year budget outlook should be issued each time the revenue forecast is released or a new appropriation bill is adopted.

**8. Require completed fiscal notes before bills can be acted on.** State officials and the public should know the full impact of a spending proposal before any action is taken. Bills proposing increased spending should not receive hearings or votes until a completed fiscal note is issued.

**Washington Policy Center 2009-11 Priorities of Government Recommendations**  
**"Do not buy"**

<b>Agency</b>	<b>Activity Title</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Total</b>
Central Washington University	Salary increases	\$11,000,000.00	\$11,000,000.00
Comm on Asian Pacific Amer Affairs	Advocacy of Asian Pacific-American Community Issues	\$534,000.00	\$534,000.00
Commission African-American Affairs	Advocacy and Coordination of Issues for African-American Community	\$552,000.00	\$552,000.00
Commission On Hispanic Affairs	Advocacy and Coordination of Hispanic Community Issues	\$598,000.00	\$598,000.00
Community, Trade & Economic Develop	Growth Management	\$27,958,000.00	\$27,968,000.00
Community, Trade & Economic Develop	Agency Administration	\$14,155,000.00	\$18,744,000.00
Community, Trade & Economic Develop	Economic Development Financial Assistance	\$13,841,000.00	\$14,258,000.00
Community, Trade & Economic Develop	Tourism Development	\$13,581,000.00	\$13,581,000.00
Community, Trade & Economic Develop	Statewide Services	\$8,440,000.00	\$13,460,000.00
Community, Trade & Economic Develop	Washington Technology Center	\$5,676,000.00	\$5,676,000.00
Community, Trade & Economic Develop	Global Trade and Investment Services	\$5,322,000.00	\$5,564,000.00
Community, Trade & Economic Develop	Regional Services	\$4,833,000.00	\$5,274,000.00
Community, Trade & Economic Develop	Community Projects	\$3,600,000.00	\$3,600,000.00
Community, Trade & Economic Develop	Asset Building for Working Families	\$2,788,000.00	\$2,788,000.00
Community, Trade & Economic Develop	Economic Development Capacity Building and Outreach	\$1,659,000.00	\$1,921,000.00
Community, Trade & Economic Develop	Farm Worker Housing	\$1,597,000.00	\$1,597,000.00
Community, Trade & Economic Develop	Film Office	\$460,000.00	\$460,000.00
Community/Technical College System	Salary increases	\$99,700,000.00	\$99,700,000.00
Department of Agriculture	Agricultural Fairs	\$4,252,000.00	\$4,252,000.00
Department of Agriculture	International Marketing	\$2,206,000.00	\$2,419,000.00
Department of Corrections	Salary increases	\$1,142,000.00	\$1,142,000.00
Department of Ecology	Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation	\$1,589,000.00	\$1,589,000.00
Department of Labor and Industries	Employment Standards/Prevailing Wage	\$15,175,000.00	\$15,203,000.00
Department of Transportation	Roadside and Landscape Maintenance	\$61,252,000.00	\$61,252,000.00
Department of Transportation	Commute Trip Reduction	\$7,738,000.00	\$7,738,000.00
Department of Transportation	Moving Washington - GTEC Grants	\$2,500,000.00	\$2,500,000.00
Department of Transportation	Public Transportation Vanpools	\$2,500,000.00	\$2,500,000.00
Department of Transportation	Climate Change (E2SHB 2815)	\$1,220,000.00	\$1,220,000.00
Dept of General Administration	Motor Pool	\$37,251,000.00	\$37,251,000.00
Dept of Social and Health Services	Chldrn's 250%-300% Health Cvrage	\$30,905,000.00	\$30,905,000.00
Dept of Social and Health Services	Immigrant State Food Assistance	\$18,033,000.00	\$18,033,000.00
Dept of Social and Health Services	SCHIP Coverage over 200% FPL	\$17,702,000.00	\$51,016,000.00
Dept of Social and Health Services	Special Programs - Family Planning	\$10,577,000.00	\$165,585,000.00
Dept of Social and Health Services	Family Policy Council	\$8,104,000.00	\$8,104,000.00
Dept of Social and Health Services	Optional Health Care	\$7,265,000.00	\$13,711,000.00

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**"Do not buy"**

Dept of Social and Health Services	Governor's Juvenile Justice Advisory Activity	\$1,925,000.00	\$7,893,000.00
Dept of Social and Health Services	Foster Care Youth Medical - Ages 19-21	\$1,395,000.00	\$2,769,000.00
Dept of Social and Health Services	WA Mentoring Partnership	\$500,000.00	\$500,000.00
Eastern Washington State Historical Society	Museum Operations, Maintenance, and Exhibits	\$4,343,000.00	\$4,343,000.00
Eastern Washington State Historical Society	Agency Administration	\$1,338,000.00	\$1,338,000.00
Eastern Washington State Historical Society	Development, Marketing, and Communications	\$777,000.00	\$777,000.00
Eastern Washington State Historical Society	Community Outreach Activities	\$762,000.00	\$762,000.00
Eastern Washington State Historical Society	Acquire and Maintain Cultural, Artistic, and Historic Collections	\$586,000.00	\$586,000.00
Eastern Washington State Historical Society	Cultural, Artistic, and Historical Education and Community Outreach Activities	\$24,000.00	\$24,000.00
Eastern Washington University	Salary increases	\$10,977,000.00	\$10,977,000.00
Employment Security Department	Family Medical Leave Program	\$13,585,000.00	\$13,585,000.00
Evergreen State College	Salary increases	\$6,607,000.00	\$6,607,000.00
General Government	Salary increases	\$352,000,000.00	\$352,000,000.00
General Government	Salary increases (non-employees)	\$169,000,000.00	\$169,000,000.00
Growth Management Hearings Board	Environmental Dispute Resolution	\$3,930,000.00	\$3,930,000.00
Higher Education Coordinating Board	Coordination and Policy for Higher Education	\$11,701,000.00	\$16,054,000.00
Human Rights Commission	Civil Rights Complaint Resolutions	\$6,554,000.00	\$7,971,000.00
Human Rights Commission	Civil Rights Education and Outreach	\$522,000.00	\$628,000.00
Liquor Control Board	State Liquor Store Operations	\$149,369,000.00	\$149,369,000.00
Liquor Control Board	Administrative Activity	\$33,647,000.00	\$33,647,000.00
Liquor Control Board	Contract Liquor Store Operations	\$26,295,000.00	\$26,295,000.00
Liquor Control Board	Liquor Warehouse Operations and Distribution	\$22,917,000.00	\$22,917,000.00
Liquor Control Board	Liquor Purchasing and Merchandising	\$1,945,000.00	\$1,945,000.00
Municipal Research Council	Municipal Research Services	\$6,324,000.00	\$6,324,000.00
Off of Minority & Women's Business	Minority and Women Business Development	\$1,226,000.00	\$1,226,000.00
Off of Minority & Women's Business	Certification	\$1,032,000.00	\$1,032,000.00
Off of Minority & Women's Business	Agency Support	\$969,000.00	\$969,000.00
Off of Minority & Women's Business	Administration	\$537,000.00	\$537,000.00
Office of Financial Management	Collective Bargaining	\$3,724,000.00	\$3,724,000.00
Office of Insurance Commissioner	Health Insurance Benefit Advisors	\$2,759,000.00	\$4,713,000.00
Office of Lieutenant Governor	Executive Operations for the Lieutenant Governor's Office	\$1,219,000.00	\$1,219,000.00
Office of Lieutenant Governor	Leg Comm on Economic Development and International Relations	\$523,000.00	\$523,000.00
Office of the Governor	Economic Development	\$6,000,000.00	\$6,000,000.00
Office of the Governor	Salmon Recovery Office	\$500,000.00	\$500,000.00
Public Employment Relations Comm	Dispute Resolution of Public Employer Labor Disputes	\$10,290,000.00	\$10,290,000.00
Public Printer	Printing and Related Services	\$22,083,000.00	\$22,083,000.00

**Washington Policy Center 2009-11 Priorities of Government Recommendations**

**"Do not buy"**

Rec/Conserv Funding Board	Administrative Support	\$6,271,000.00	\$6,312,000.00
State Conservation Commission	Operations & Administration	\$28,679,000.00	\$28,679,000.00
State Convention and Trade Center	Convention and Trade Shows	\$60,109,000.00	\$60,109,000.00
State Parks and Recreation Commission	No Child Left Inside	\$1,834,000.00	\$1,834,000.00
Supt of Public Instruction	Student Achievement Fund	\$908,202,000.00	\$908,202,000.00
Supt of Public Instruction	All-day K	\$84,189,000.00	\$84,189,000.00
Supt of Public Instruction	LID days	\$74,581,000.00	\$74,581,000.00
Supt of Public Instruction	Professional Educator Standards Board	\$3,237,300.00	\$3,313,300.00
Transportation Improvement Board	Sidewalk Program	\$5,496,000.00	\$5,496,000.00
University of Washington	Salary increases	\$58,700,000.00	\$58,700,000.00
University of Washington	GFS Portion of UW Hospital Operations	\$32,416,000.00	\$32,416,000.00
Wash State Health Care Authority	Opposite Sex Domestic Partners benefits	\$32,920,000.00	\$32,920,000.00
Washington Horse Racing Commission	Regulation of Horse Racing	\$5,223,000.00	\$5,223,000.00
Washington Horse Racing Commission	Promotion of Horse Racing	\$3,616,000.00	\$3,616,000.00
Washington State Arts Commission	Support the Arts as Basic Education	\$1,990,000.00	\$2,262,000.00
Washington State Arts Commission	Local Arts Organizations	\$1,817,000.00	\$3,093,000.00
Washington State Arts Commission	Build Participation in the Arts	\$1,106,000.00	\$1,292,000.00
Washington State Arts Commission	Public Art	\$866,000.00	\$906,000.00
Washington State Arts Commission	Support State Poet Laureate	\$20,000.00	\$20,000.00
Washington State Historical Society	Museum Operation and Facilities Maintenance	\$2,145,000.00	\$2,145,000.00
Washington State Historical Society	Community Outreach Activities	\$2,139,000.00	\$2,139,000.00
Washington State Historical Society	State Historical Exhibits	\$1,827,000.00	\$1,827,000.00
Washington State Historical Society	Acquire and Maintain Historic Collection	\$1,607,000.00	\$1,607,000.00
Washington State Historical Society	Member, Donor and Public Relations	\$1,204,000.00	\$1,204,000.00
Washington State Historical Society	Historical Education	\$1,060,000.00	\$1,060,000.00
Washington State Historical Society	Agency Administration	\$772,000.00	\$772,000.00
Washington State Patrol	King Air Maintenance	\$1,058,000.00	\$1,058,000.00
Washington State University	Salary increases	\$41,255,000.00	\$41,255,000.00
Western Washington University	Salary increases	\$13,259,000.00	\$13,259,000.00
	<b>Total</b>	<b>\$2,687,929,300.00</b>	<b>\$2,910,982,300.00</b>