BETTER GOVERNMENT IS UP TO US!
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It’s always fun to tell new people about our work at the Better Government Association. When I say we investigate waste, fraud, corruption, mismanagement and inefficiency in city, suburban and state government, the response is usually along the lines of, “Sounds like long-term job security.”

And, in fact, looking back at 2015 is enough to disgust Illinois residents and enrage Chicagoans.

As I write this, we’re more than half a year without a state budget, we’ve seen the indictment of the Chicago Public Schools CEO on bribery charges, the resignation of the city’s police chief in the wake of the police shooting of a teenager, and that’s on top of 122 stories our investigators completed in 2015.

If there’s ever been a time when we need the BGA, it’s now. Every day, every headline, every City Council meeting and every legislative battle is a reminder that we need a watchdog.

We’ve been blessed with ardent supporters and generous donors, but we can’t do this watchdog work alone. Better government is up to us—all of us, including you. Too many of us are apathetic, disengaged and not even registering or voting.

This crisis of civic disengagement is the challenge we face if we plan to turn this state around, so that taxpayers finally get the good government they’re entitled to in exchange for their hard-earned tax dollars.

In 2016, I hope you’ll help us shine a brighter light on government and hold more public officials accountable, so that eventually we’ll be able to take a day off.

Your Watchdog,

Andy Shaw

ashaw@bettergov.org  |  Andy Shaw
The BGA’s mission is to promote integrity, transparency and accountability in government by exposing waste, fraud and corruption, advocating effective public policy and informing and engaging the community.

The BGA works within **Five Pillars of Action**—to investigate, litigate, educate, advocate and communicate—in an effort to bring better government to Illinois. We go beyond exposing problems to proposing solutions and advocating good government reforms.
## Five Pillars of Action

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<tr>
<th>Pillar</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>Investigate</td>
<td>The BGA’s Investigative Unit examines allegations of waste, fraud, corruption and mismanagement in city, county, suburban and state government.</td>
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<td>Litigate</td>
<td>We are entitled to access certain public records under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). When the BGA is denied access to these documents, we take legal action to force government agencies to comply with the law.</td>
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<td>Educate</td>
<td>The BGA’s Idea Forums, Candid Conversations, Watchdog Trainings and FOIA Clinics are free events that inform, engage and empower the public.</td>
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<td>Advocate</td>
<td>The BGA’s Policy Unit advocates for a more open, accountable and efficient government through public policy reforms.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicate</td>
<td>The BGA communicates through hundreds of media stories and appearances with dozens of media partners around the state.</td>
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BY THE NUMBERS

493 investigations
120 results
31 awards
47 legal actions
13,000 people engaged
Since 2009, the BGA has produced 493 investigations of waste, fraud, corruption and mismanagement of government in Illinois. In recent years, the BGA’s watchdog work has prompted more than 120 results and reforms that will save taxpayers an estimated $50 million.
TOP INVESTIGATIONS

Fatal Shootings By Chicago Police Tops Among Biggest U.S. Cities
Chicago police have shot and killed 70 people over a five-year period, the highest number among America’s 10 largest cities.

Feds Investigate Circuit Court Clerk
Federal authorities investigate after BGA/FOX 32 reported on a questionable land deal involving Cook County Circuit Court Clerk Dorothy Brown, her husband and a campaign donor.

Dead People Get Government Pensions
BGA finds Illinois’ largest pension funds send thousands of payments to deceased people, a sign of weak oversight in some taxpayer-subsidized retirement systems.

Bureaucracy Balloons At City Colleges
As enrollment declines and tuition rises at City Colleges of Chicago, the chancellor gets a big bonus and more administrators are earning six figures.

Taxpayers’ Toxic Tenant
The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District is supposed to safeguard our water supply, but it’s been leasing land to polluters, including an oil company with a history of chemical spills.
TOP RESULTS

Privatization Ordinance Passes Chicago City Council
The BGA's Policy Unit helped draft the new Privatization Transparency, Accountability and Performance Ordinance that became law in Chicago in November. The long-awaited ordinance is designed to increase transparency and accountability, and prevent another parking meter fiasco.

CPS Revises Grad Rates After BGA/WBEZ Report
Acknowledging graduation rates were inflated, Chicago Public Schools officials revised those overly rosy numbers.

Dems Dump Dorothy
The Democratic Party strips away Dorothy Brown’s endorsement amid a criminal investigation, which sources say is also examining her husband’s business. The BGA and FOX 32 were the first to investigate questionable donations to Brown’s campaign in 2013.

Casino Hit With $2 Million Fine
The Illinois Gaming Board proposes fining Rivers Casino $2 million following a BGA inquiry involving a casino contractor.

School Official Heads To Prison
Following BGA investigations of financial irregularities, the Lyons Township School Treasurer is accused of embezzling $1.5 million, pleads guilty to theft and is sentenced to nine years in prison.
The BGA is proud to report that its investigations and watchdog efforts have been honored with dozens of national and local awards in recent years. In 2015 the BGA won 8 journalism awards.
AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Edward R. Murrow Award  |  April 2015
The BGA's website, the main vehicle for BGA investigative stories, was recognized for regional excellence by the Radio Television Digital News Association. Awarded: “Regional Small Online News Organization Website”

Lisagor Awards  |  May 2015
The Chicago Headline Club, the largest Society of Professional Journalists chapter in the country, presents awards that recognize the best of Chicago journalism and are named for Peter Lisagor, the Chicago Daily News' Washington bureau chief from 1959 to 1976.

The 2014 BGA articles recognized include:

The ABC’s of UNO
Awards: Best In-Depth Reporting in a magazine or magazine section, Best Political Reporting in a newspaper or magazine, Best Education Reporting in a newspaper or magazine

Fire Suppression
Awards: Best Investigative Report, Best Health or Science Reporting

Illinois Public Hospitals Pay $180 Million For Wrongful Death Cases
Awards: Best Business Or Consumer Reporting

Nuns and Strippers
Awards: Best News Specialty/Religious Category
AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Kogan Media Awards  |  May 2015
Two BGA stories about municipal finances in Illinois were recognized in the online category by the Chicago Bar Association, which sponsors the awards contest.

The 2014 online stories recognized include:
Next Up: Illinois Municipal Bankruptcy?
Suburban Pension Peril

Chicago Journalists Association Award  |  November 2015
The Better Government Association—with media partner Chicago Sun-Times — was recently honored by the Chicago Journalists Association for a high-caliber investigative news story.

Accused Of Raping Intern, Cop Still On Force
Award: Investigations, Politics and Education Reporting
The BGA Policy Unit advocates for a more open, accountable and efficient government through public policy reforms. The Policy Unit works to protect and strengthen open government in Illinois and to propose policy solutions to prevent corruption, inefficiency and waste in government.
In 2015, the BGA policy team was instrumental in passing a hard-fought and important Chicago law that will prevent the city from approving costly and ill-conceived plans to sell major public assets to private enterprises—endeavors that, in the past, have greatly hurt and hindered local residents and taxpayers.

Those efforts resulted in passage of the City of Chicago’s Privatization Transparency, Accountability and Performance Ordinance (PTAPO).

The BGA invested nearly three years of coalition building, research, action campaigns and in-depth conversations with lawmakers and policy strategists in Chicago City Council and Mayor Rahm Emanuel’s administration.

Throughout this effort, the BGA’s motto was, “No more parking meter deals,” a reference to the city’s controversial and widely reviled spin-off of Chicago parking meters to a private investment group that produced escalating user fees, confusion and inconvenience.

In November, the Chicago City Council voted to implement the BGA-backed reform, which imposes safeguards and important checks on proposed privatization of major city assets and services.

The BGA recognizes privatization is an option for government but stresses that each transaction be performed openly and made accountable to the public.
Also throughout 2015, the BGA made meaningful progress on an issue that has become increasingly vital in light of recent news about law enforcement shootings and misconduct: the retention of police misconduct records. BGA state lobbyists met with lawmakers throughout early 2015 to stress the urgency of the issue, which has gained momentum since the release of the video of a Chicago police officer shooting 17-year-old Laquan McDonald 16 times.

In 2015, the BGA submitted a letter to the Local Records Commission stressing the importance of these files and urging the commission to maintain them indefinitely. Staff continues to lobby for a state law that would ensure the retention of these records.

The BGA policy team also tackled some of its long-standing issues of transparency and efficiency as they arose in city and state government:

- The unit continued its “Smart Streamlining” efforts towards more efficient, effective government by testifying before Lt. Governor Evelyn Sanguinetti’s Local Government Consolidation and Unfunded Mandates Task Force.
- Staff met with many members of the Chicago City Council to share BGA research and encourage aldermanic support of a pending ordinance that would expand the jurisdiction of the Chicago Inspector General to include the City Council.
- The BGA continued to monitor and tried to prevent efforts to weaken the Illinois Freedom of Information Act.
The Policy Unit also played an important role in many of the BGA's civic engagement efforts:

- Policy staff produced a voter’s guide that provided Chicago residents with key information on where, when and how to register and vote in the Chicago municipal races.
- Staff compiled responses for two mayoral candidate questionnaires that compared candidate positions on major issues of transparency and accountability.
- Hundreds of people attended five BGA Idea Forums, which are panel discussions featuring experts and stakeholders in important, timely good government issues. Forums in 2015 were held in both Chicago and Springfield, and covered issues of charter school transparency, the Freedom of Information Act, municipal bankruptcy, state government and redistricting.
- Staff also contributed research to Think Tank blog posts, columns and Good Government Spotlights throughout 2015.
- Policy staff assisted in the preparation and coordination of two Candid Conversations. BGA President & CEO Andy Shaw sat down with mayoral challenger Jesus “Chuy” Garcia in March and Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle in November for in-depth conversations about good government issues.
The BGA’s Civic Engagement Program encourages meaningful participation in civic activities. Programs are designed to allow discourse about civic issues and provide the public with the knowledge and know-how they need to access public information and effectively express their concerns about government.
Watchdog Training:
January 21, 2015
DePaul University
Chicago
June 6, 2015
Pilsen
Chicago
October 29, 2015
Bucktown
Chicago

Idea Forums:
January 28, 2015
Getting the Scoop on Charter Schools
Belmont Cragin, Chicago
March 24, 2015
FOIA Facts & Friction: The Future Of Open Records Laws In Illinois
Springfield

September 22, 2015
Springfield
December 3, 2015
Who Should Draw Illinois’ Political Map?
Loop, Chicago

June 3, 2015
Municipal Bankruptcy: Is Your Hometown School District the Next Detroit?
Loop, Chicago
In 2015, BGA President and CEO Andy Shaw sat down for exclusive interviews with Toni Preckwinkle and Chuy Garcia on good government issues. The conversations are broadcast live online and available as videos at bettergov.org.
In an exclusive interview with Better Government Association President & CEO Andy Shaw, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle defended her move to increase the county’s sales tax and her proposed increases in taxes on hotel and motel stays and the purchases of firearms and ammunition.

During the interview held at the Union League Club of Chicago, Preckwinkle attributed the county’s financial troubles to the “inattention and irresponsibility” of her predecessors and highlighted moves she’s made to close budget deficits, reduce spending and trim the county’s workforce.

Preckwinkle gave candid responses to Shaw’s questions on a wide range of topics, including her efforts to reform the criminal justice and health systems, reduce the county’s jail population, fix the underfunded public pension systems, spark economic development and work with other powerful elected officials.
March 3, 2015  Cook County Commissioner Jesus “Chuy” Garcia did what no other mayoral candidate had done before: forced a runoff election. But before the final vote, which resulted in a win for incumbent Rahm Emanuel, BGA President & CEO Andy Shaw sat down with the mayoral hopeful at the Union League Club of Chicago for a one-on-one interview to discuss his vision for Chicago. The conversation followed a December 2014 sit-down with Emanuel on a number of good government issues. Garcia discussed what he would’ve done differently from the mayor over the past four years, including the top-down closure of CPS schools, as well as what he will do going forward in regards to Chicago’s troubled finances.

The event was streamed live on CAN-TV and on the BGA’s website.
In 2015, the BGA continued to focus on Springfield and issues facing the state of Illinois.

The “Smart Streamlining” initiative continued this year with BGA Policy Analyst Alden Loury testifying before the Local Government Consolidation and Unfunded Mandates Task Force in November. That task force later made recommendations to Gov. Bruce Rauner.

The BGA also was among a number of good government groups formally calling for the governor and legislative leaders to meet to discuss the state’s budget as the standoff dragged on.

The Springfield Advisory Board met numerous times to provide guidance, support and resources to our Springfield watchdog operation. The advisory board also helped to host two civic engagement events for Springfield-area residents: one on the future of the Freedom of Information Act with the State Journal-Register and another with freshman legislators discussing Illinois’ biggest problems.

The BGA continues to make Springfield a priority as we work to shine a brighter light on taxpayer dollars flowing through the Statehouse and to hold our state officials accountable.
The BGA hosts three fundraising events a year:

> The Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Awards for Investigative Reporting
> The BGA’s Young Professionals Board’s Summer Comedy Event and
> BGA’s Annual Luncheon.

1st Place: “Harsh Treatment” by David Jackson, Gary Marx and Duaa Eldeib (Chicago Tribune)
2nd Place: “Child protection failures in Minnesota” by Brandon Stahl (Star Tribune)
3rd Place: “Unguarded” by Lucas Sullivan, Mike Wagner, Jill Riepenhoff, Josh Jarman, Brooke LaValley and Alan Miller (The Columbus Dispatch)
August 6, 2015  Chicago-bred comedian John Mulaney returned home for one night only to perform for the sold out crowd at the Park West. This was the fourth annual fundraiser put on by the BGA’s Young Professionals Board and the most successful one to-date. The roughly 600 guests enjoyed hors d’oeuvres and drinks while checking out the vast array of raffle prizes. Chicago-based comedian Adam Burke, voted the best local standup in the Chicago Reader last year, warmed up the crowd with his candid observations of life in Chicago.
October 19, 2015  A crowd of 1,000 supporters and guests watched BGA President & CEO Andy Shaw host a keynote conversation with David Muir, an Emmy Award-winning anchor of ABC World News Tonight with David Muir and co-anchor of ABC’s 20/20. The BGA also honored Zach Fardon on behalf of the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Northern District of Illinois with the BGA Watchdog Award.
FINANCIALS

INCOME: $4.8 MILLION

- Major Donors ........................................... 49%
- Events ................................................. 32%
- Foundations ........................................... 9%
- Individual Members & Donors ...................... 2%
- Other .................................................... 8%

EXPENSES: $3.3 MILLION

- Investigations ........................................... 46%
- Policy .................................................... 14%
- Development .......................................... 13%
- Administration ......................................... 9%
- Communication & Media .............................. 13%
- Civic Engagement .................................... 5%
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