OPENGOV

COMMUNICATE WITH COUNCIL AND COMMUNITY

Improve your reporting and transparency capabilities by transforming your budget presentations.

Quick, Answer This...

Can we access these numbers quickly for the Council or Board meeting? How much of our allocated CIP budget have we spent? Do we have any progress to share on our strategic initiatives?

If just thinking about how long it takes to answer these questions is making you sweat, it's time to consider a faster way to find the answers.

After all, community engagement is on the rise. **According to the 2023 State of Local Government Survey, 75% of agencies have seen resident engagement increase in the last year.** Combine that with rising expectations, limited people resources, and inflation, the need for more accessible data, internally and externally, is greater now than ever before.

But, with manual processes and disjointed systems, how can we reduce the time needed to find budget data, updates to strategic initiatives, capital project statuses, and the answers to the hundreds of other questions asked by the council and the community? Not to mention, easily publish all the documents your office creates, such as a GFOA-award-winning budget book.
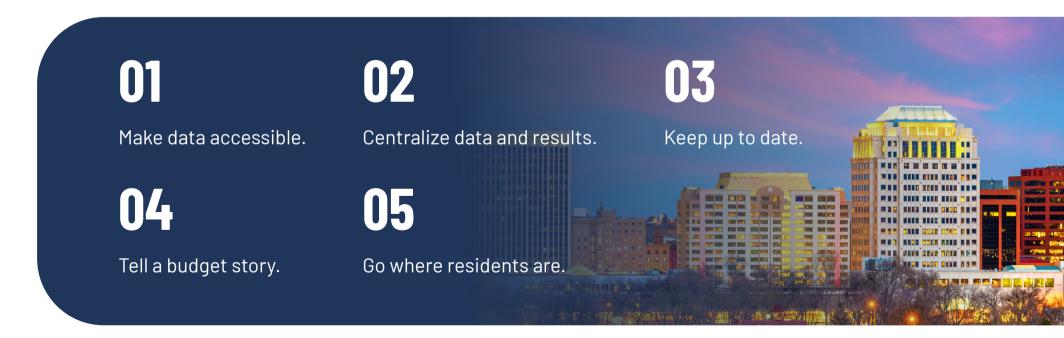
5 Tips for High-Performance Budget Books and Publications

Every day, we see a range of publications from local governments across the country, including budget books, capital project updates, strategic initiatives, budget in brief, and more.
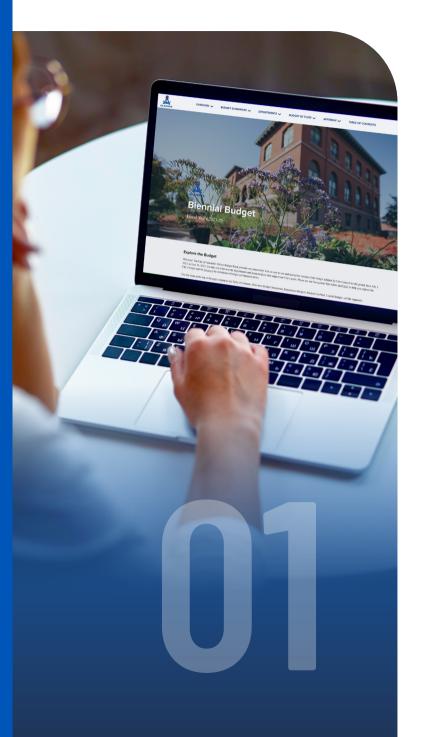
Through that work with high-performance governments, we've collected these tips on improving how you communicate budget data and results. (Examples from high-performance governments included!) The result: Less time answering questions, more time for the initiatives that make an impact, and better community understanding of your hard work.

01
Make data accessible.

02
Centralize data and results.

03
Keep up to date.

04
Tell a budget story.

05
Go where residents are.

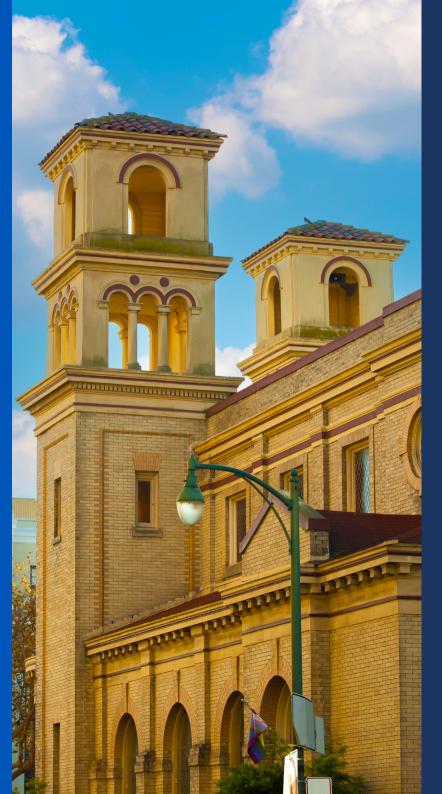# Make data accessible.

The weighty, multi-hundred-page printed budget book has been the standard for decades. After all, what alternatives were there?

The typical printed budget book tends to be the output of hundreds of hours of work and results from a disorganized, cross-departmental endeavor assembling disparate data and graphs from dozens of Excel spreadsheets which are cut and pasted into a Word document with written content that is wrangled into a hard-to-read printed PDF.

Although PDFs never go out of style, there's still lots of room for improvement. The budget book should be an accessible communication device that shares organization-wide, strategic goals, and strategies that address long-term concerns and issues within the community.

Make it easy for anyone to find the budget information they need by making it more accessible. Once available, users can click on embedded reports to see the most up-to-date information and further drill down into the details. Accessibility also means ensuring your communications meet ADA requirements and can be translated into any language.
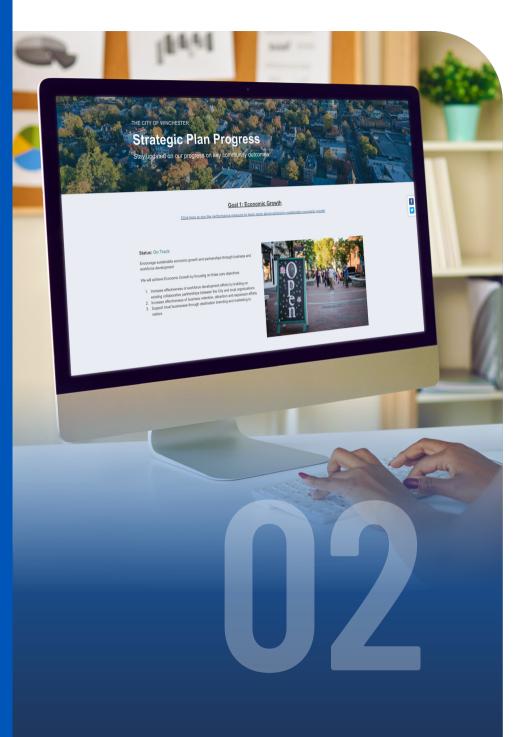
HIGH-PERFORMANCE COMMUNICATION

The City of Alameda's Online Biennial Budget

The City of Alameda's online biennial budget is the epitome of accessibility. With a few clicks, council members and residents can find, just to name a few:

- ⊘ Individual department budgets
- ⊘ Financial plans that support our City's goals
- ⊘ CIP updates
- ⊘ Budgets by fund

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Centralize data and results.

One major key to effective communication is establishing a dependable, easily located source of truth. An online budget book provides a consistent place that the community can go to and know that the information they are viewing is true, comprehensive, and current.

With the right budgeting and planning tool, you'll find one place to build a budget from beginning to completion. Rather than cutting and pasting tables and graphs from Excel worksheets into a lengthy Word document or porting over to Adobe to assemble a PDF, you can publish a fully interactive GFOA award-winning budget book directly from your budgeting system and not a third-party solution. The solution marries budgeting, reports, and communications on a single platform.
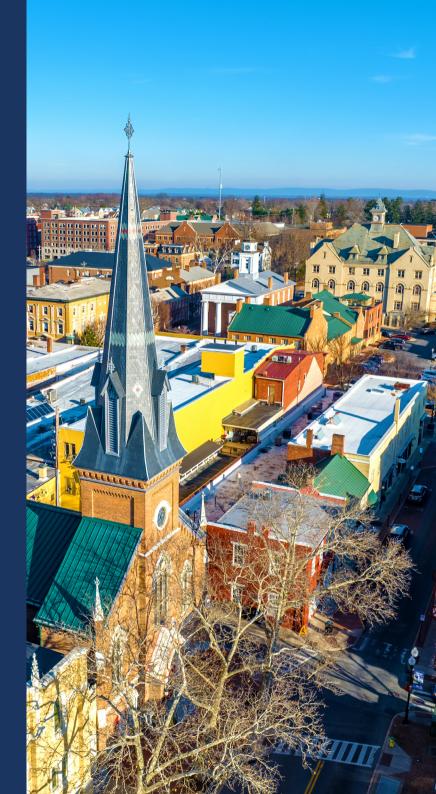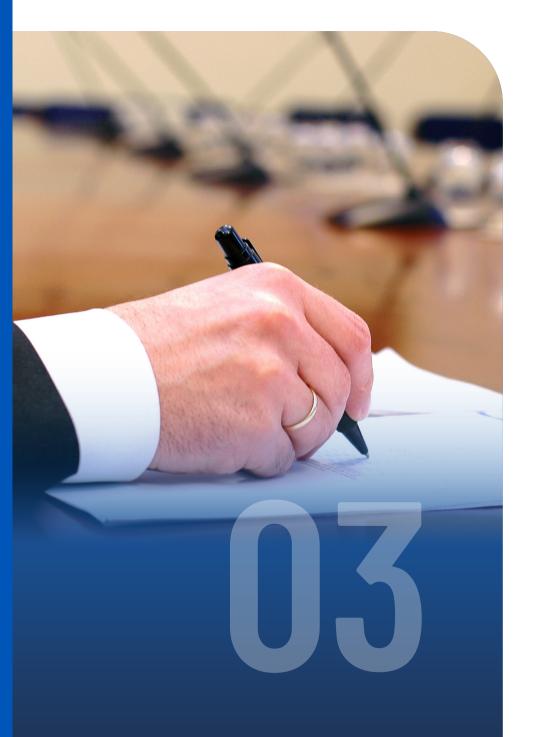
02

⊘ OPENGOV

The City of Winchester, VA's Strategic Plan Progress

The City of Winchester's Strategic Plan Progress website keeps residents and stakeholders updated on the progress of key community outcomes, in turn improving transparency and trust. Plus, it's connected to performance measures, budget data, and more. This one-stop-shop includes a range of information, including:

⊘ Detailed goals and plans

⊘ Whether a strategic initiative is on track

⊘ Performance measures and budget data tied to each initiative
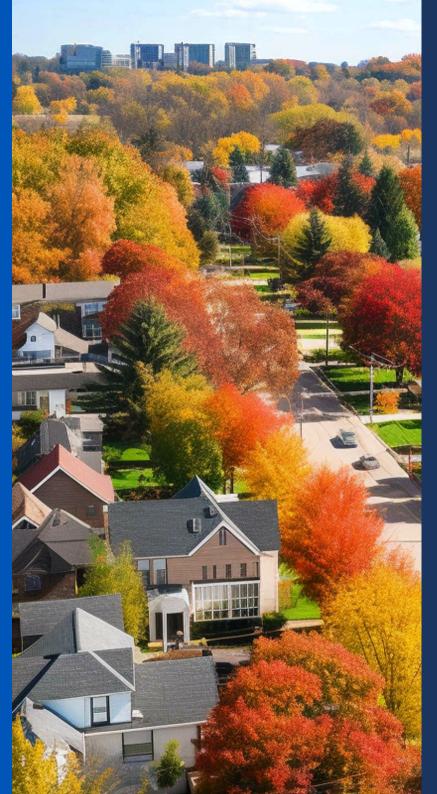
⊘ Highlighted accomplishments

Keep up to date.

Plans never change in local government, right?

If only that was the truth. **The reality is that situations are constantly shifting. And, as they do, communications need to keep up.**

Suppose an agency must amend information in the published budget book or other publications. In that case, these council actions and council-approved changes can be reflected quickly and easily when using a digital centralized source of truth. This ability ensures that whoever is viewing the living document is viewing the most up-to-date information.

In addition, there are the publications that you expect to regularly update, such as the status of capital improvement projects. As progress is made, it's important to have the ability to easily share updates on funding, timeliness, performance measures, and more.

03

HIGH-PERFORMANCE BUDGET BOOK

The City of Eau Claire, WI

Budget message, strategic plans, enterprise funds, capital planning progress, and more. The City of Eau Claire's online budget book has up-to-date information easily available for residents and internal stakeholders. Using this online budget book, anyone can:

- ⊘ See the big picture of fund allocation
- ⊘ Drill down into detailed department data
- ⊘ Check budget versus actuals

Tell a budget story.

Think outside the spreadsheet. To truly show the impact of every dollar spent, bring your numbers to life with narratives and interactive charts. These details and visuals make it easy to understand what your budget is trying to communicate, without digging into numbers line by line.

Plus, it provides a visually pleasing presentation for you to share at Council meetings, in emails, and other presentations.

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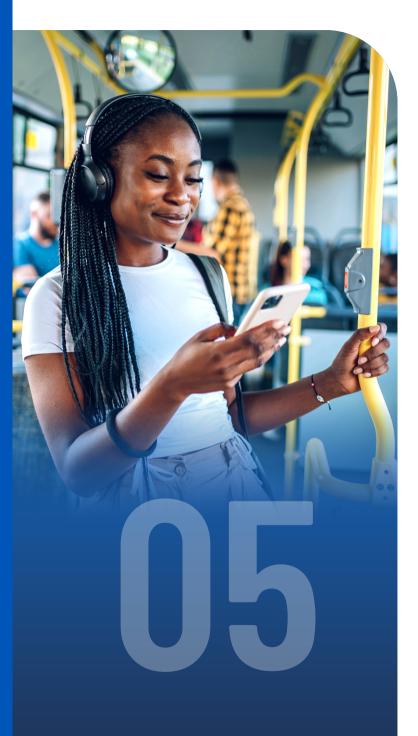
HIGH-PERFORMANCE METRICS

The City of Tampa, FL

Transparency is top priority for the City of Tampa. Leaders have prioritized telling the stories of their work, making it easily accessible to anyone. On its performance metrics portal, the City shares detailed metrics for a number of areas, including:

- ⊘ Development and growth management

- ⊘ Equal business opportunity

- ⊘ Fire rescue

- ⊘ Neighborhood enhancement

- ⊘ Parks and recreation

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Go where residents are.

Just about everyone is receiving, and expecting to receive, their information online. Government is no exception. Take the budget book and publications online to meet residents where they are. Plus, when online, it can be viewed anytime, from anywhere. This allows viewers to find the answers to their questions easily.

As an example, when the City of Ashland, OR released its online budget book, roughly 10% of its population of 22,000 viewed the online budget book (over 2,000 views). In contrast, only four people downloaded the static PDF book from the previous year.

But, to still keep the traditional version available for those who prefer it, use an online tool that easily creates a PDF version of your online budget book. In addition, consider a budget brief where viewers can get the big picture without wading through hundreds of pages, like Boulder, CO did here. That way, everyone wins!

05

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Amplify Your Impact

With these tips for smarter and more efficient communication, you'll be able to say goodbye to manually pulling data and reports and answering an endless list of questions. Imagine how good that will feel! In addition, when you use OpenGov to help, you can:

Focus on Strategy, Not Clerical Work

Build a compelling narrative that clearly explains the agency's priorities and tradeoffs, without manual updates.

Build a Sustainable and Repeatable Process

Build your online or printed budget book leveraging templates designed with GFOA best practices in mind.

Create a Single Source of Budget Truth

Eliminate the headache of conflicting versions and establish one destination for your most important policy documents.

Improve Outcomes with One Integrated Solution

Your job doesn't end when the budget is published, so year-round budgeting, planning, reporting, and transparency are there to help.

OPENGOV

Start Your Digital Transformation

Power more effective and accountable government with modern cloud software.

Learn more about OpenGov, the most flexible and delightful budgeting, permitting, procurement, asset management, and transparency solution on the market. Empower your team to:

- ✓ Build a better budget in half the time.

- ✓ Digitize paper-based workflows and improve customer satisfaction.

- ✓ Strategically manage every infrastructure asset.

- ✓ Turbocharge eprocurement from start to finish.

About OpenGov

OpenGov is the leader in modern cloud software for our nation's cities, counties, and state agencies. With a mission to power more effective and accountable government, OpenGov serves thousands of agencies across the U.S. and is built exclusively for the unique budgeting, procurement, asset management, and citizen services needs of the public sector. The OpenGov Cloud makes organizations more collaborative and efficient and enables best-in-class communication with stakeholders and community.