

How Cupertino, California Embraced the Information-on-Demand Era



Introduction

In many ways, Cupertino, California is the embodiment of Silicon Valley. Apple, Inc. and many of its employees call the city home. Education figures prominently into everyday life as the city’s public schools thrive and top-ranked university research teams chase breakthroughs only miles away. Moreover, its relatively small size creates the opportunity for both community-driven innovation and responsiveness to local needs.

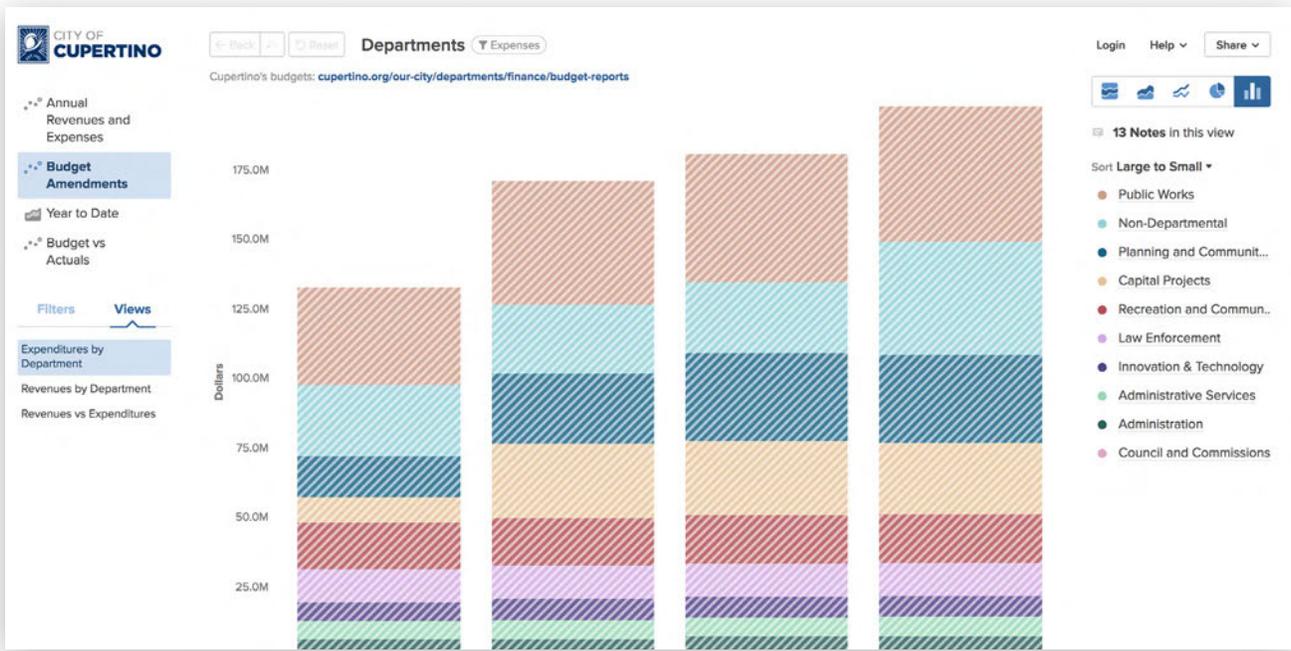
Over the last decade, Cupertino’s residents, elected officials, and internal teams have largely come to embrace the notion of information-on-demand – the flexibility, simplicity, and timeliness it promised. The city’s employees increasingly dismissed notions that departmental reports take weeks to deliver, and residents could no longer accept that interfacing with government must be done in person and between the hours of 9AM and 5PM, Monday through Friday.

Demands for More Information Faster

Cupertino’s Director of Administrative Services Kristina Alfaro noted that the city’s management team sought a solution that would help them adapt to and alongside the evolving demands resulting from changing technology. They sought to anticipate residents’ expectations and lay a groundwork for meeting them.

“The standard for communications is going to be that people demand information as fast as we can produce it,” Alfaro noted. “If we tell [people] something will take two weeks to produce, it will speak to the old adage that government is old and slow and ineffective and inefficient. I don’t look at my job that way, and I don’t want residents to look at the City of Cupertino that way.”

Furthermore, the city’s management team was not immune to the impact of the public’s growing distrust of public institutions. Like governments across the country, the city’s management team



Cupertino's staff uses OpenGov to engage residents throughout the budget process, including at amendment milestones.

had to contend with technology's ability to facilitate the rapid spread of misinformation and sow distrust. Continuing to use traditional, largely in-person methods of community engagement prevented the city from keeping pace with misinformation and reaching the wider audience that sought to engage online. Cupertino's management team struggled to publicly articulate exactly what it was doing and why, breeding a sense of skepticism within the community. "If we're not building that trust, when something negative does appear in headlines, the public's first reaction is skepticism because they think you're hiding information," Alfaro said.

OpenGov's Value Proposition

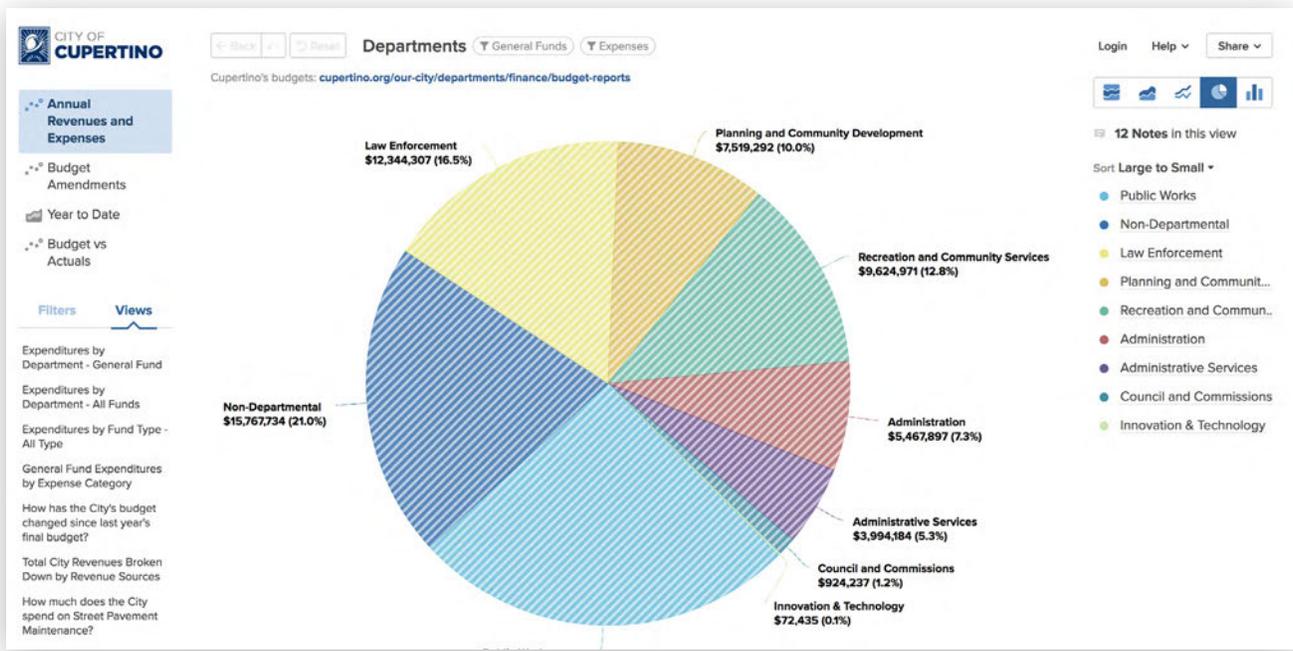
Alfaro and other members of Cupertino's management team knew they had to deliver more flexible services and information online.

They attended professional conferences, conducted research online, and sought product demonstrations to better understand the technology options available to the public sector.

Deliver Information on Demand

To meet the community's demand for more information faster and on their own terms, Cupertino adopted the OpenGov Smart Government Cloud™. It provided both the public and council members with on-demand access to accurate information. For internal operations, it helped teams run relevant, custom reports immediately, thereby eliminating the need to wait weeks for a single report. They use flexible internal reports to track service systems, local business data, and community assets.

"Long waits for information are just not acceptable anymore especially in Silicon Valley where information is everything and the expectation is



OpenGov's visualizations allow citizens to better understand the City's budget and access detailed information.

that I can type something into a search engine and have responses back in less than a second,” Alfaro explained. “We once explained why we couldn’t respond quicker, but really it’s up to us in government to ask but why can’t we? Why can’t we get that information faster?”

Make Data More Intuitive

Recognizing that not everyone processes quantitative information easily and the importance of being able to access information easily, Alfaro and her team prioritized ease of use when evaluating technology solutions. For instance, the platform’s Saved Views feature enables the city to create shortcuts to views of specific information that answers frequently asked questions. “Numbers, especially those related to public sector operations, can be difficult for people to understand.” In the OpenGov platform, Cupertino’s team has created over two dozen helpful Saved Views.

In OpenGov, they also valued the platform’s focus on visualizing the same information presented in tables below, and allowing users to easily drill-down for additional information as needed. “We want to present something that’s intuitive. That’s probably one of my favorite things about OpenGov,” Alfaro noted. “I just click to get the information I need. It’s so easy.”

Streamline Council Communications

Like other municipalities, the use the council-manager form of government, Cupertino’s management team sought ways improve its communications with the council. They proactively shared information by directing members to the OpenGov platform and integrated the platform into their budget presentations to the council. “We do always talk about OpenGov in our budget presentations,” Alfaro said. “We give data to councilmembers so readily and often – often we just point them

to OpenGov. We realized that when you present the council with the information they want in an easy format, our discussions are more constructive. They trust you.”

Furthermore, by using OpenGov to centralize financial information in the cloud and answer council member’s questions both quickly and accurately, the management team and council realized significant time savings in their budget planning meetings. “We went from having budget adoption sessions that were six or seven hours long, to sessions that were about two hours long,” Alfaro noted.

Strengthen Trust in Government

The city’s management has worked to communicate its decisions, activities, and status proactively in a concerted effort to rebuild its community’s trust in their work. In some instances, that has resulted in the team using OpenGov to publicly set the record straight

concerning action the government was (or was not) taking. “We have already had a couple of instances of engaging on social media where we responded to some comments to correct misinformation by linking directly to the correct information in OpenGov,” Alfaro recalled.

She noted that some governments may hesitate to make information more readily available to residents due to the possibility of them misinterpreting it due to governments’ often complex structures. She counseled, “That may happen, but the response should be to correct people when they are wrong.”

Ultimately, Alfaro saw Cupertino’s approach as one focused on constructive discourse, trust, and improved government performance. To that end, restoring trust and improving engagement is essential. “I want to see people asking for status updates on projects and checking milestones on OpenGov. This is our residents’ money, and they should be able to see how we’re spending it.”

RESULTS

- ✓ **Improved Budget Presentations.** Augmented budget presentations and regular reports with dynamic visualizations, enabling faster and more accurate information delivery.
- ✓ **Robust Operational Analysis.** Utilized interactive map reports, enabling internal teams to track service systems, local business data, and community assets.
- ✓ **Reduced Meeting Times.** Streamlined management’s presentations to council, reducing budget adoption meeting duration from at least six hours to two.
- ✓ **Proactive Information Sharing.** Created nearly two dozen public “Saved Views” that present relevant information, anticipate frequently asked questions, and provide answers proactively.