



Allegheny County, PA Streamlines Management Reporting with OpenGov

POPULATION
1,232,000

AGENCY TYPE
County

ANNUAL BUDGET
\$865 million

Allegheny County's Story is America's Story

Allegheny County, Pennsylvania embodies America's story. Its rolling hills, scenic river valleys, and bustling cities hosted a young George Washington as he led British troops during the French and Indian War of 1754-63. The county's inception occurred while thousands of Americans debated and ratified the Constitution. And for over 200 years, led by county seat Pittsburgh, Allegheny County's manufacturing boom helped fuel the national economy. The county's hopes, efforts, and achievements are America's.

So are its challenges. Allegheny County's citizens acutely experienced America's manufacturing decline, fermenting the financial challenges and drug epidemics that plague wide swaths of America. The recession pummeled the county's property tax revenue. State and federal subsidies have also fallen since the recession. Meanwhile, each dollar of revenue must support increasing demands for rehabilitation, mental health, public safety, and other services.

Grappling with the revenue challenges spawned by the recession, the county diversified its tax base. This paid off. The fund balance soared from \$5.7 million to \$41.5 million¹, service levels remained largely intact, and the county replenished some of its transportation and road repair funding – earning Allegheny two ratings upgrades on its General Obligation Debt from Moody's.

But adapting to changing circumstances isn't easy. Citizens, elected officials, managers, and staff need as many actionable insights as possible to inform decisions about the county's future. Since she took office in 2012, County Controller Chelsa Wagner has led advances in innovation and transparency, bringing County residents and staff closer to their government than ever before.

However, Allegheny's financial and payroll system was not designed for rapid reporting and knowledge sharing. Tony Cholewinski, Allegheny's assistant to the Deputy Controller of Management Systems, explains:

“Reporting with our financial and payroll system is cumbersome. The tools utilize older technologies that are not as intuitive or robust.”

TONY CHOLEWINSKI
Assistant to the Deputy Controller of Management Systems

Creaky and inadequate reporting infrastructure placed a huge burden on overworked IT staff, who needed to support a barrage of information requests from other departments (and the public). Most users found the financial system too complex to use themselves. Reporting delays spawned knowledge deficits, which further delayed decisions and degraded their quality.

Recognizing the need for a better process, Allegheny County turned to OpenGov to solve these reporting and transparency challenges.

¹Schooley, Tim. “Moody's Raises Outlook for Allegheny County.” Pittsburgh Business Times. June 16, 2016.

Establishing OpenGov as the “Base of Reporting”

Cholewinski and his colleague, Mario Rudolph, a financial system analyst, use OpenGov to present financial information accessibly and intuitively to department managers. Rudolph describes how OpenGov’s dynamic and shareable graphs and tables enable learners of all types to gain insights without asking IT to run a report – freeing up limited time to focus on strategic priorities and accelerating learning.

“OpenGov’s ease of use enabled it to become Allegheny County’s base of reporting and its official record,” Cholewinski explains, “It’s our one-stop shop for an honest measure of the truth.”

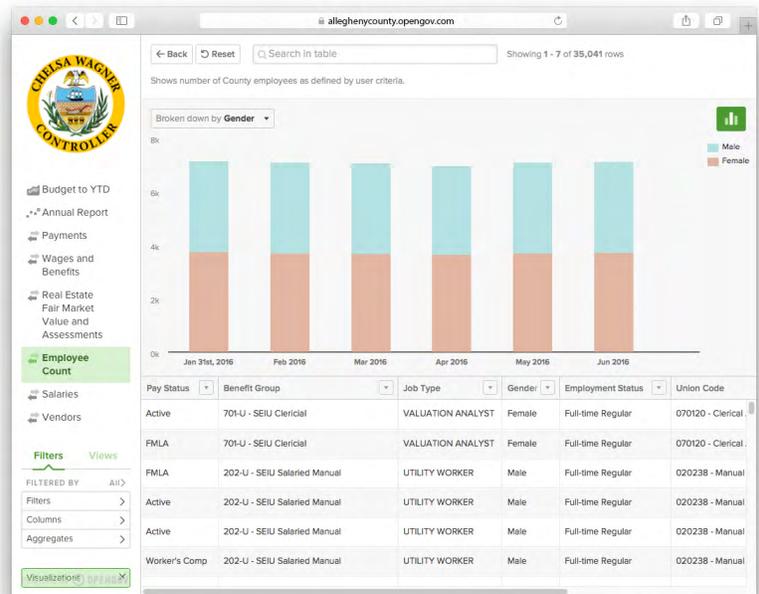
For example, Allegheny’s IT Department frequently generated employee demographic and payroll reports for department heads. The traditional process required department heads to make specific requests and know exactly what they were looking for, limiting exploration and insights.

Now, Allegheny loads its entire payroll database – absent personally identifying information – into OpenGov. With the new system, department heads can find employee and payroll data as easily as they use Google to find a good restaurant while on vacation.

Managers can view and analyze costs, including taxes and benefits from multiple funds, and demographics such as the race, age, and gender of all employees. The county can now easily determine how women’s salaries compare to men’s, and beginning discussions centered on adjusting salaries to achieve pay equality. And for the first time, department heads do not have to know what they are looking for; they can find unexpected insights.

Rudolph shares how “department heads are frequently telling me things like, ‘We never knew that we had 17 people over 80 years old.’” He continues, “People are going out there and both getting answers to questions and asking more informed follow-up questions about employee count and payroll benefits.”

Allegheny also benefits from reports with statistical data. For example, it has an internal report on fatal accidental overdoses from various drugs (like cocaine and heroin)



Allegheny County’s employee count report breaks down employment by a wide range of metrics, such as gender and department.

that displays data from the morgue. Users can break down the information to analyze overdoses by cause of death, race, gender, and other characteristics. These insights will help Allegheny optimize resources to combat drug abuse.

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Assistant to the Deputy Controller of Management Systems

Streamlining Accounting Processes and Verifying the Numbers

While exploring an OpenGov report in June, Allegheny’s Deputy Controller took just five minutes to realize that accruals due in May had not been entered into the financial system. She saw that the 2016 period’s revenue dramatically differed from 2015’s, raising a flag. With a few clicks, she drilled deeper into the report and found the accrual issue, enabling her to ask staff to fix the problem.

Cholewinski shares how “I believe OpenGov’s ability to interact with data helped us correct the problem faster than we would have otherwise.”

Allegheny used OpenGov to find other accounting issues as well. For example, OpenGov revealed instances where revenue adjustments and reclassifications occurred in reports but not in the underlying database. OpenGov addresses this problem by becoming Allegheny County’s primary accounting research tool:

“We’ve gone back and adjusted our business processes to ensure the data in our financial system is as accurate as possible. Then we quickly pull it out of our ERP and get the information into OpenGov. This helps managers easily spot issues such as the missing accruals,” Cholewinski explains.

OpenGov allows users to filter and pivot across funds and departments. Rudolph explains, “It’ll help the accounting department because they can go back and do reconciliations in OpenGov by clicking on one or a combination of funds. It’s a good way to verify the data.”

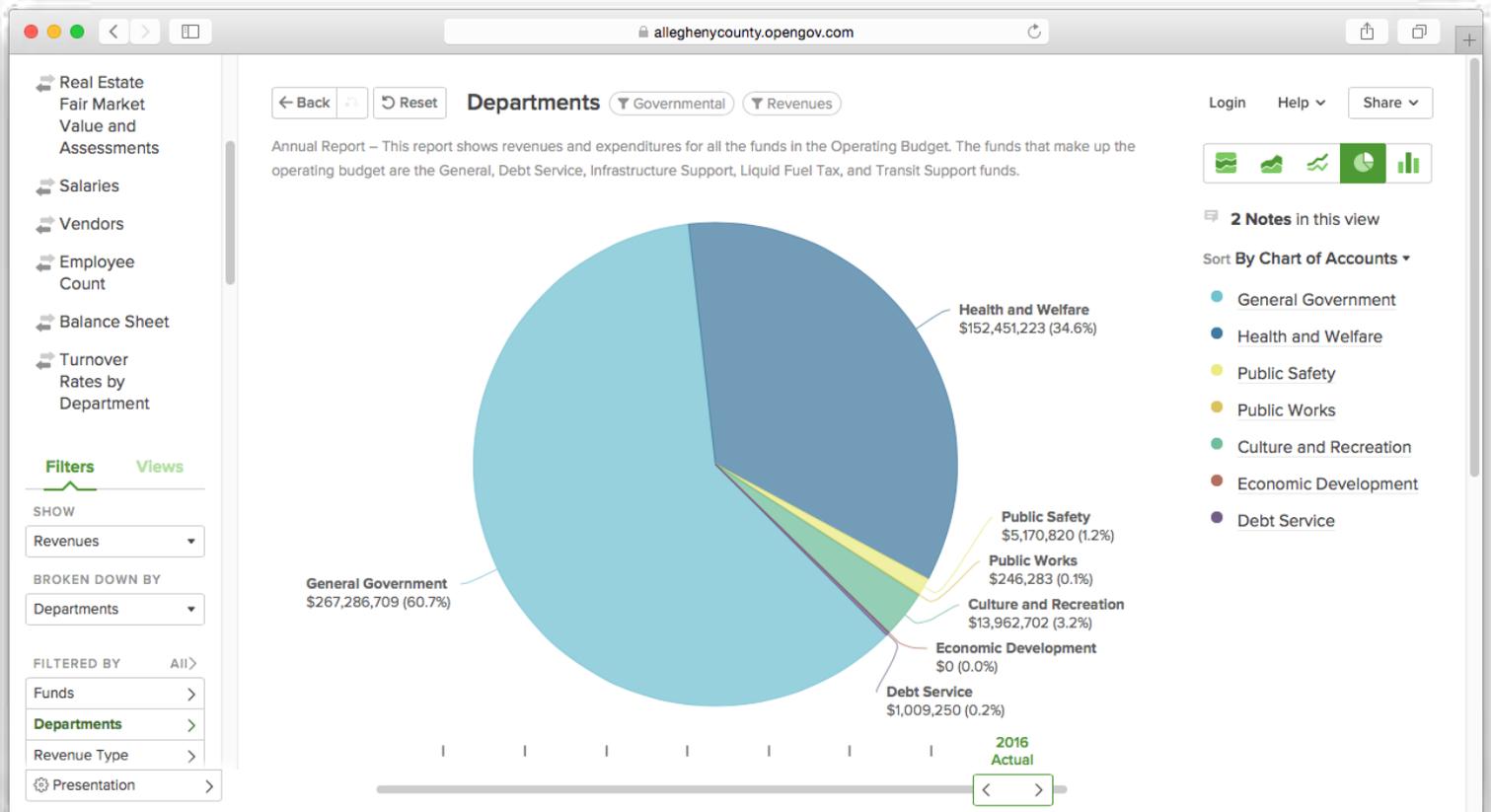
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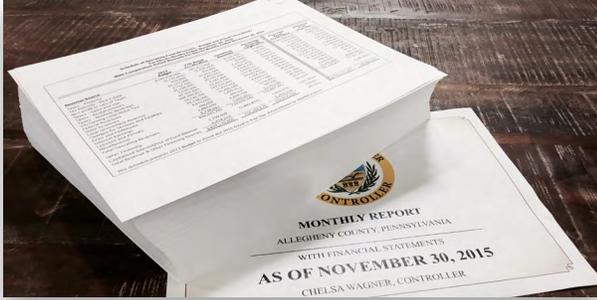
Replacing Hefty and Outdated Monthly Reports

For Cholewinski, “data delayed is data made useless.” However, before implementing OpenGov, Allegheny County’s departments needed to routinely wait a couple of months before receiving their expense and revenue packets. Although accountants inputted the data on time, there was a delay until accountants could reconcile the numbers.

“What good is a report on May’s activities,” Cholewinski asks, “if I get it in September? By that time, I don’t have



Users can pivot across revenues, expenses, funds, and departments to examine financial data and easily find issues.



the opportunity to be agile and react.” At around 25 pages a month, a year’s worth of monthly reports for one person consumes 300 pages.

Allegheny is replacing this report with OpenGov. Cholewinski and Rudolph quickly enter preliminary monthly data into OpenGov shortly after the month concludes, and circulate it to managers to find issues and foster accountability.

Rudolph explains how building these monthly reports in OpenGov will “make sure people can get information and react to it in a timely manner.” As accruals and updates come in, Allegheny can update its OpenGov site without printing a new report.

Cholewinski believes, “There’s now no excuse for directors not to take a given number from a monthly update and make a decision on it, verify it, or learn more. All the tools are there.” Before, if a manager looked through her static 25-page report and saw \$50 million in unexpected spending, she was stuck with just a number.

In OpenGov, she can click on the number and figure out which divisions generated the expense, find the source, drill down to the transaction-level, and find any accounting issues. “Instead

of taking the book and going back to our financial system to make decisions and assess metrics, I can do it in OpenGov by putting on a couple filters to find important trends,” Cholewinski adds.

Preparing for Millennials

“We were used to looking at a green screen. Young people are used to getting information on their phone with a couple clicks. They expect information to be easily accessible, and can manipulate spreadsheets in seconds. Our citizens, both millennials and other generations, also expect higher-tech services and intuitive insights into county services,” Cholewinski says.

OpenGov’s ability to give staff rapid access to information reflects millennials’ learning style. Rudolph explains, “I’ve had people come to me and say, ‘I’ve easily found info in OpenGov that I wouldn’t have known how to find in JD Edwards.’”

“OpenGov is going to be a tool for the next generation of accountants to use and train. It fits how they learn and interact with data.”

MARIO RUDOLPH
Financial Systems Analyst

CONCLUSION

Allegheny County is positioning itself to react to changing financial circumstances, inform decisions with current data, and engage citizens. The county recognizes that innovation is essential for governments looking to optimize for serving citizens in the 21st century. One of America’s top counties is again taking the lead in showing the country how digital connections and new technologies can position our political institutions for success.

RESULTS

- ✓ Bolstered internal reporting that enables managers to gain new insights without relying on IT, freeing IT to focus on other strategic priorities.
- ✓ Streamlined accounting processes to reduce errors, verify information, and enhance research.
- ✓ Replaced printed, delayed monthly report with dynamic OpenGov report.
- ✓ Improved financial transparency.