OPENGOV

How Ashland, OR Saved $110k Annually and Produced the First-Ever Interactive Budget Book

TYPE
City

POPULATION
22,000

ANNUAL BUDGET
$150M

Challenge

The City of Ashland was challenged on many fronts. The ERP lacked the ability to provide detailed reporting for analysis. Data that was pulled took a long time to gather and then manually compile. The budget process required multiple staff resources and lacked transparency, creating distrust with the public.

Solution

Drive digital transformation through the OpenGov Cloud™ to build public trust, save valuable staff time, and reallocate budget to more strategic needs.

Results

✓ Saving $110k annually
(1 Financial Analyst FTE)

✓ 67% time savings across staff time for preparing budget

✓ Saved 3-4 hours of reporting time per month

✓ Reduced time spent on rework from 15% to 0%

> "OpenGov has been instrumental in enabling us to put all the data including line item details into the budget proposal and make it far easier to understand as the single source of truth. The technology innovation is why we've chosen to partner with OpenGov to drive our strategic vision forward."

MARK WELCH
ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES DIRECTOR
CITY OF ASHLAND, OR

About Ashland, OR

Ashland is a picturesque city in southern Oregon, nestled at the base of the convergence of the Siskiyou and Cascade mountain ranges at nearly 2,000 feet in elevation. The city is best known for the Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

What led you to seek a cloud-based solution?

We had a budget process that lacked transparency and lacked availability of data. All of the big ERPs have a weakness and that's in reporting, pulling data, and doing analytical analysis. People wanted to see more than all the info included in a traditional budget book. Real-time information gives the public more trust.

In 2017, we had just begun using Munis budgeting and our budgeting was largely being done in Excel. Our charts in the proposed budget didn't match the summarized data. We tried to pull data for analysis, but it would take at least 30 minutes to pull one data point. Then it all had to be compiled. We also had a financial analyst leave, and we didn't backfill. That position cost us around $110K. So, we were looking for a way to get the work done without needing to hire a FTE.

Why did you choose OpenGov?

We chose OpenGov because of the ease of doing analytical analysis which includes internal use and public facing. OpenGov also helps with forecasting and financial planning. The innovative technology met our needs for Ashland's long-term strategic vision.

What benefits are you experiencing by using OpenGov?

There are many benefits that we've experienced already:

- **Return on Investment:** We have realized a $110k annual savings from not needing to hire a full-time financial analyst.

- **Time savings with reporting:** OpenGov has changed how we do our monthly reports to departments. We put out a standard Munis report and redirect it to OpenGov which saves three to four hours per month for accountants. It's been a very well-received new process.

- **Time savings with budgeting:** We just completed our first budget cycle using OpenGov budgeting, and the time savings was tremendous. We went from a process that involved three employees spending 80% of their business day over a three week period to just one employee spending 80% of their time over a three week period. That's a 67% time savings across the team!

- **First-ever interactive budget book:** We're proud to have launched the [first-ever interactive Budget Book](#) using OpenGov! This is a game-changer for internal stakeholders and the public.

- **Building internal and external trust:** Our department users are comfortable using OpenGov, and the department heads have been very supportive of it. They like being able to see the real-time impact when they input the budget into OpenGov versus having to wait for a report to be run. It also equates to less work for staff, as people can self-serve. It used to take 30 minutes per data point each time we received a question from the budget committee and we had to pull the data and produce the analysis; now it's down to 10 seconds through 5 quick clicks. As a result, we've built a strong relationship with the budget committee and the public because of the trust built through using OpenGov to share and access real-time data.

- **No more rework:** We've been able to reduce the amount of time spent on rework from 15% to 0%, due to removing the manual rework steps in our process by moving to the OpenGov Cloud™.

How has OpenGov changed your budgeting process?

We have gained tremendous process efficiencies. Previously, we did everything in Excel, using 20 different versions of the same excel spreadsheet. The process was error-prone with many inaccurate linkages and calculations that weren't summing up properly. One error in the spreadsheet caused us to have to go back to the council for a budget adjustment. People just stopped trusting us. We don't have that problem anymore. OpenGov has been instrumental in enabling us to put all the information including line item details in the budget proposal and make it far easier to understand as the single source of truth.

In addition, we can do much more analysis-- and quickly-- in OpenGov. Previously, we spent so much time inputting the budget, manipulating data in excel, and creating multiple tables. That left us with no time to do the analytical process that's required. Now we can do real-time, on-the-fly, analysis efficiently and accurately, and we no longer need a financial analyst since all the data can be pulled in OpenGov.

We just completed the [first-ever interactive Budget Book](#) using OpenGov Communications and Reporting. This online version received very positive feedback in the first night after launch. The level of detail that can be provided was eye-opening. There were literally big smiles across the board when people saw the overtime analysis page and realized the capabilities now with OpenGov.
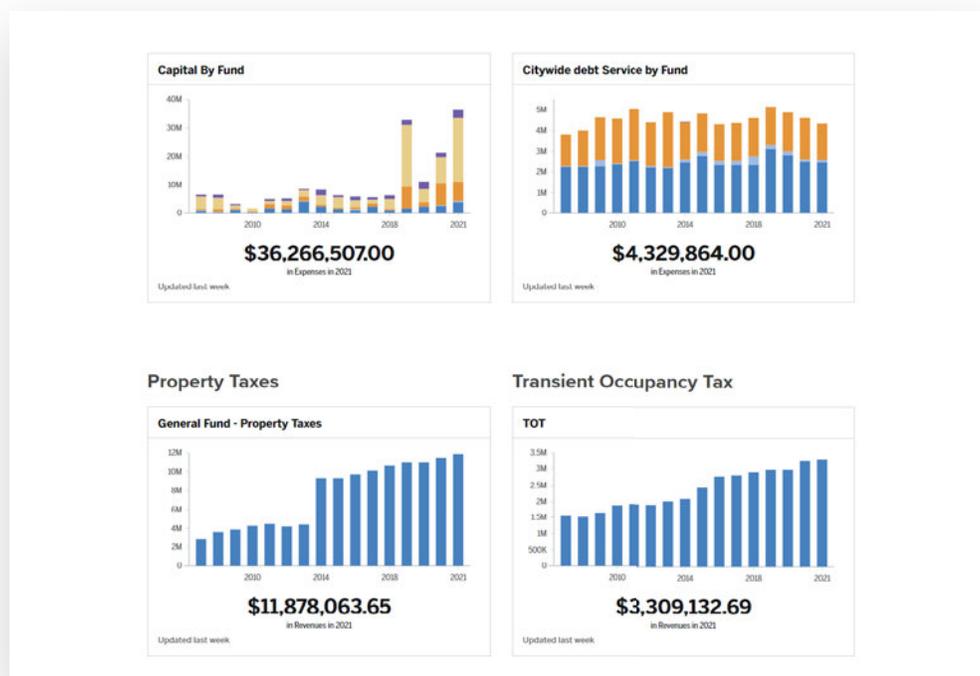
You also use Workforce Planning. How has that helped?

OpenGov Workforce Planning has enabled us to make more accurate projections, and it makes modeling much easier. We can easily go in and change cost elements and see what the impacts will be. It's impressive to be able to see the total cost of all the added wages, and it has improved our understanding of some of the cost streams. Previously, we weren't doing a good job modeling the cost of other wages, including non-positioned specific wages like overtime. For example, the fire department isn't $400k total; it's more like $600k when you add in all the wages and compensation. This has given us a much more accurate picture, so we can better manage our workforce planning and the true impact of each line item. Another great feature is that the end user can go in and develop their own workforce plan. Right now, Finance is the primary user for this, but we can send all departments a user-friendly report.

Are you using OpenGov for civic engagement?

Yes- in fact, we offer training to the media on how to use the tools and have hosted public meetings, as well as met with the local newspaper and members of the public to show them how to use it. It's very beneficial for the media and public to have factual, real-time information when producing materials or understanding issues of concern. The local newspaper usually links directly to reports in OpenGov when they report on financial issues.

You are using the Stories feature of OpenGov as well.
Tell us about that experience.

We love Stories. It's quick to update, allows for flexibility in how we present data, and we can compile data in one central location. This allows people to see all the facts with just a click, and they can easily see the details that led to certain decisions. For example, we hired four additional police officers and the public can go to our Stories page and see the minutes and agenda for the council meetings and narrative that led to that decision. We have a vision of being able to do the entire budget in Stories which will save weeks of staff time.

How has OpenGov impacted residents?

Ashland residents are better informed. By sharing data through OpenGov, it builds trust and credibility to what we're saying. When we have financial challenges, the data helps educate and reinforce the narrative we're sharing with the public.

We recently leveraged OpenGov's online survey tool, Open Town Hall, to solicit feedback from residents. We just completed a big community survey on housing to engage citizens in a dialogue on Ashland's comprehensive plan for housing, better understand their perspectives, and allow their voices to guide better decision making for the community.

What was the OpenGov implementation and customer support experience like?

It was a simple implementation, and it was not labor-intensive on our side to implement. And the OpenGov customer service team makes themselves available to others on the team, not just the main point-of-contact at City of Ashland, which is very helpful.

OpenGov training was also great. They walked us through how to use everything and how the different pieces work together so we could start to troubleshoot. Training covered all the areas we needed, and the team was always open to questions during and after the training. With OpenGov, you know you can pick up the phone and call somebody-- everyone on the team is welcoming of your call versus other software partners that won't always listen.

Do you view OpenGov as a strategic partner?

Yes, we see OpenGov taking on a lot of our communications. Ultimately, everything has a financial impact. Being able to communicate through Stories to the public about what we're doing has huge strategic impact long-term. And with performance measurement, OpenGov allows us to put in measures that actually have a meaning. We can track it in real-time, and see how we're trending.

We see OpenGov being super instrumental, not only in Ashland, but across the country. The old way of producing a budget book is stale and doesn't meet the needs of any government because it's too structured and doesn't allow the ability to communicate. The Stories piece and creating a budget book that is 100% integrated and online is key for all governments.

Think about it: We spend months producing this budget book and printing it for people who never look at it. So we see OpenGov as a way to improve communication both to the public and internally, create the flexibility for departments to use the budget and communicate it to the public. Having an online, interactive platform is a springboard into all the information you'd ever want in terms of budget. The budget book is traditionally a snapshot in time where we never go back and report on that table. In OpenGov, we can start to track how we're performing (actuals vs budget) and improve our ongoing operations. That innovation is why we've chosen to partner with OpenGov to drive our strategic vision forward.