

McKinney, Texas First Municipality to Earn 5-Star Texas Transparency Stars Rating



AGENCY TYPE
City Government

POPULATION
155,000

ANNUAL BUDGET
\$275 Million

Named one of Money Magazine’s best places to live, McKinney, Texas is a fast-growing city located just thirty minutes north of Dallas. A diverse and thriving business community contributes to strong, yet balanced, economic growth, and the city’s finance department includes some of the country’s most forward-thinking municipal finance officials.

In April 2017, McKinney became the first government entity in Texas to receive all five transparency stars from the State Comptroller’s distinguished Transparency Stars program. This case study will demonstrate how McKinney’s team successfully leveraged the OpenGov Smart Government Cloud™ to achieve the following results:

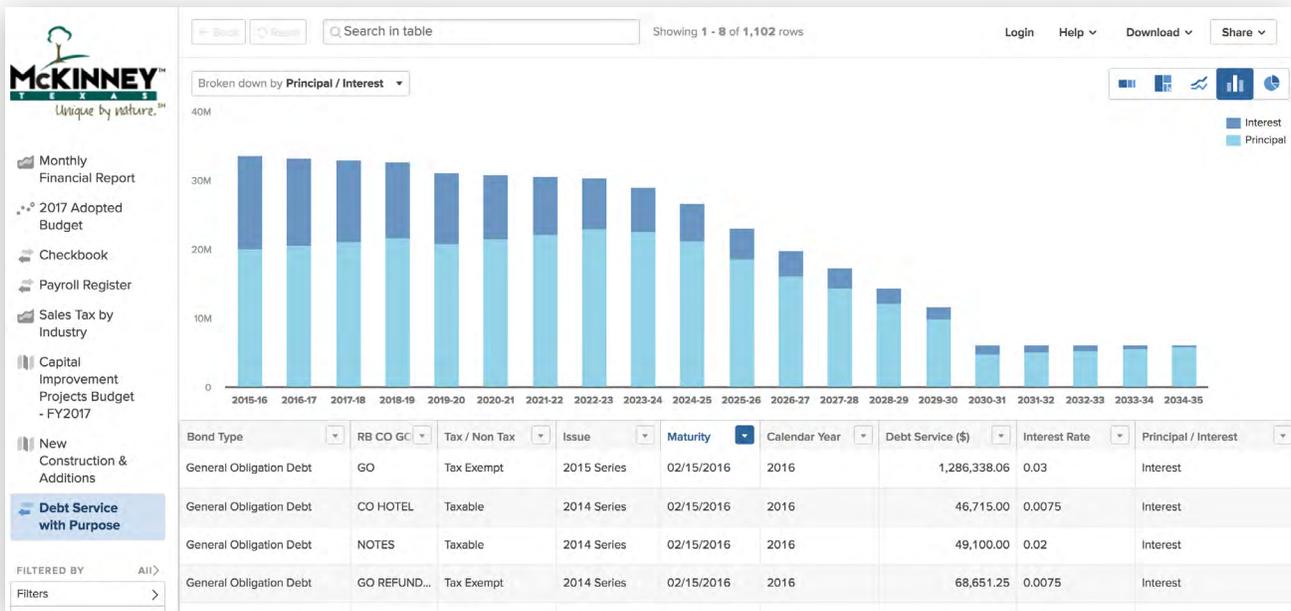
- **Earned First Texas Transparency Star.** Earned Traditional Finances Star by submitting an interactive OpenGov monthly financial reports to the State Comptroller’s Office.
- **Debt Obligations Star.** Used OpenGov to report on outstanding debt obligations and debt retirement schedule.

- **Citizens Engaged in Innovative Ways.** Staff utilized innovative, online tools to effectively engage citizens before and during the budget process, and to measure community priorities.

McKinney Adopts Transparency Goals

McKinney’s longstanding commitment to good governance was enhanced by the Council’s strategic goals, which included maintaining operational excellence and a financially sound government. It explicitly established goals around financial transparency across a number of measures, which empowered its staff to adopt innovative technology solutions to help meet the Council’s goals.

The staff also set their own internal organizational goals. Among them: being the first local government in the state to achieve all five transparency stars from the State Comptroller. “Having these goals started us down the road of offering our information online and led us to use the OpenGov platform,” Assistant City Manager



Reporting on McKinney's debt obligations in OpenGov helped the City earn the Debt Obligations star in the State Comptroller's Texas Transparency Stars program.

Trevor Minyard said. “We didn’t want to just present information. We also wanted it to be relevant and easy to understand.”

OpenGov Facilitates 5-Star Achievement

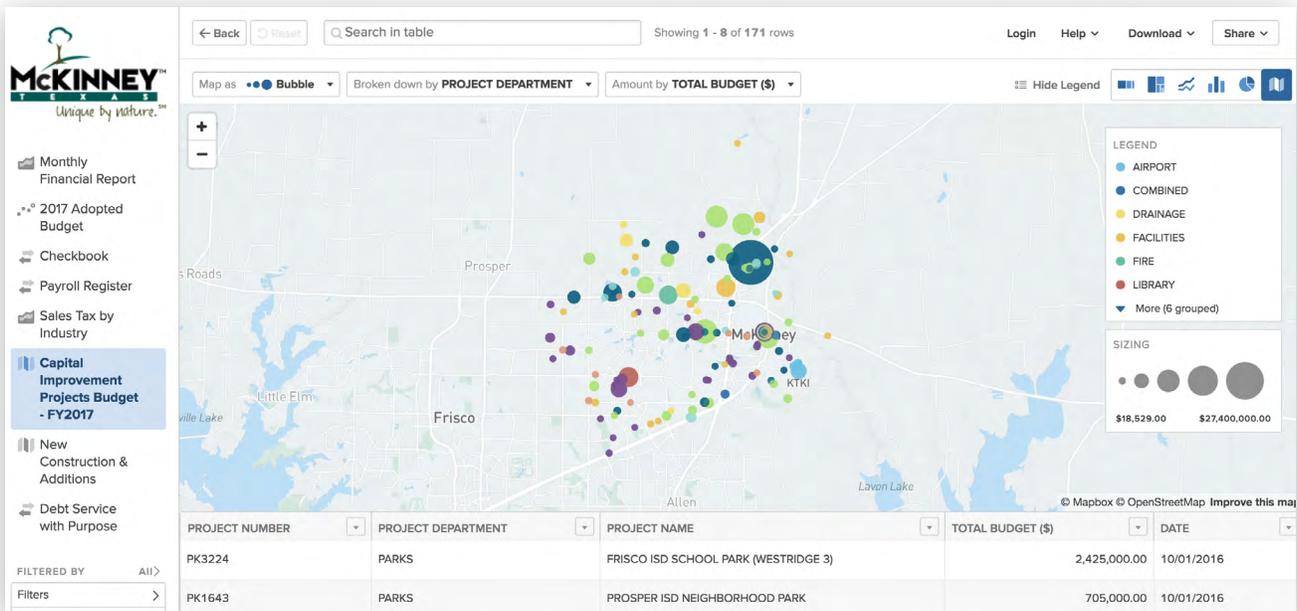
The Comptroller’s program sets forth rigorous standards for financial transparency and recognizes local governments that provide easy online access to important financial data. McKinney earned stars in the areas of Traditional Finances, Contracts and Procurement, Economic Development, Public Pensions, and Debt Obligations.

While the Transparency Stars program encourages greater access to information in those five categories, it also emphasizes that governments should make that information easier for citizens to understand and analyze. For example, to qualify for a star, check registers

cannot merely be made available online. They must also be searchable and allow users to easily perform basic analysis on the data.

Using the OpenGov platform streamlined McKinney’s ability to make information available and usable, in line with the program’s requirements. “Our partnership with OpenGov really helped us achieve the stars. We accomplished a good bit of the first star, for instance, through references to our OpenGov platform,” Minyard noted.

That first star, Traditional Finances, encompass all the activities most governments undertake. It is the foundational step, and all entities have to meet the requirements for this first star before applying for the other four. “We needed to show monthly reports, and we easily provided the Comptroller’s office with the link to our interactive monthly financials,” he explained. “Through OpenGov, we were able to similarly reference links to interactive vendor check registers as well as payroll reports.”



McKinney's management team uses maps to visualize its capital improvement plan internally and for the public.

He also explained that the City used OpenGov in its pursuit of the Debt Obligations star. “Through the platform, we were able to showcase our interactive financial report that includes where we have obligations such as revenue bonds, and outstanding debt service, as well as details of our debt retirement schedule,” he said.

In the other areas, the availability of historical data proved useful. For instance, the City’s successfully illustrated how it funded its pension liability – not just in the present, but also in the past.

City Leaders Leverage Technology to Foster Engagement

McKinney’s citizens have a history of engaging with their local government’s processes and decision-making through the city’s social media presence, sending e-mails, and attending Council meetings.

“We can be as comprehensive as possible in making information available, but making it palatable is the key step for actual engagement. It’s really a matter of utilizing tools and building up layers. We use OpenGov to provide information – our five-star recognition validates that we’re doing a good job at that,” Minyard said. “We then proactively provide opportunities for citizens to get involved through interactive, online forums. We provide opportunities for Q&A online, as well as a digital workshop that allows users to ‘allocate’ resources to the areas they are passionate about. There is a lot of interaction.”

Minyard said their five-star Texas Transparency Stars rating is not the crux of the city’s motivation and work. “Accomplishing the five-star rating is a nice achievement, but it’s not the end. We have a continuous commitment to transparency, and we’re not just resting on having a great platform or meeting certain metrics,” he said.

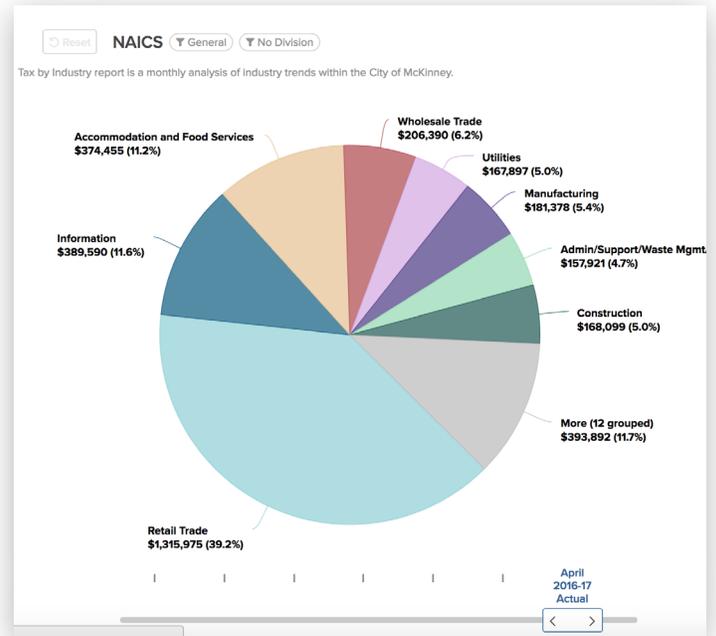
McKinney Strengthens Internal Analysis and Reporting

In McKinney, from the top down, maintaining fiscal health and operational excellence requires continuously enhancing their internal data analysis and reporting capacity. “We began online financial reporting through OpenGov, and we continue to make it more robust by adding, for example, capital improvement maps, weaving in clearly-articulated performance measures, and engaging the citizenry,” Minyard said.

Strengthening its internal access to data will be critical for McKinney’s team to push its operational analysis to the next level. “Our next area of focus is really on performance measures. We want to clearly link outcomes to the inputs that we’re giving to the community,” he noted.

The staff seeks to use those outcomes to validate and explain how it is completing the Council’s strategic plan. The City also hopes to involve more people in the budget process by providing

them with the tools to truly understand the underlying finances, while engaging them in every step along the way. “Finally, if the Comptroller decides to add a sixth star to the program, we look forward to being the first city to achieve all six!” Minyard exclaimed.



Using OpenGov to break down sales tax revenues for the public promotes greater understanding of the City’s finances.

RESULTS

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