



Meridian, Idaho Promotes Transparency and Facilitates Stronger Citizen Engagement with OpenGov



AGENCY TYPE
City Government

POPULATION
98,300

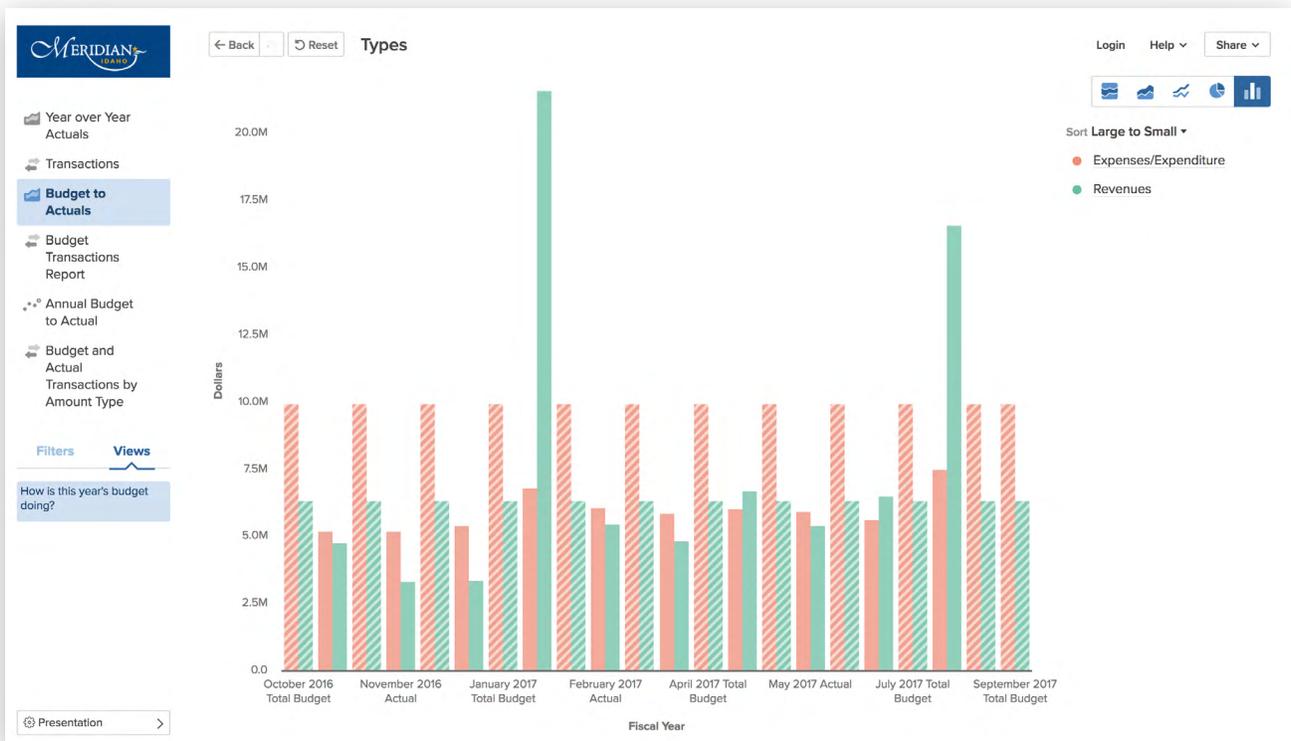
ANNUAL BUDGET
\$154 Million

The second-largest city in Idaho, Meridian is also the state's fastest-growing urban center, with an annual growth rate of over three-percent. Located just outside of Boise, residents enjoy easy access to the broader metropolitan area's surrounding towns and local attractions such as Roaring Springs Water Park, the Warhawk Air Museum, and Eagle Island State Park.

While the City's staff took pride in responsibly managing taxpayer dollars, their system of communicating with the citizens did not adequately achieve their desired level transparency and accuracy. That is why City of Meridian leaders sought a 21st-century technology solution to move away from supply-driven information sharing to a demand-driven solution, providing citizens with the information they want and need using a dynamic interface.

Meridian Embraces Modern Technology to Meet Citizens' Information Needs

Chief Financial Officer Todd Lavoie facilitated Meridian's OpenGov Smart Government Cloud™ implementation to improve transparency and citizen trust. "We pursued this approach because we can't stay with what we've always done," Lavoie noted. "We have to continually change and improve to be as transparent as possible to communicate to citizens that the monies they pay are being spent responsibly." Lavoie sought to move the City's information forward through social media and dynamic platforms, which would allow timely and accurate data to reach the public in meaningful ways.



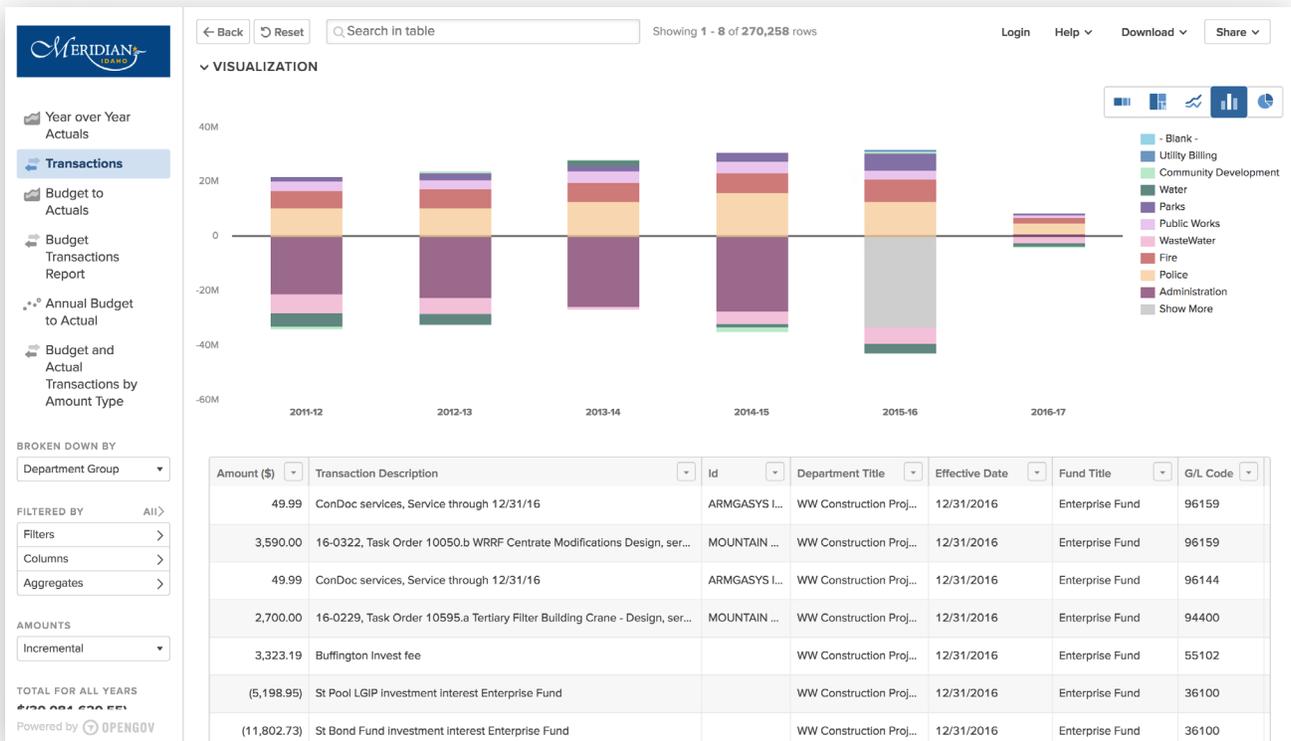
The City of Meridian’s reports in OpenGov make the City’s financial reporting dynamic instead of static PDFs.

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TODD LAVOIE
Chief Financial Officer, Meridian, Idaho

City of Meridian leaders often spoke over the years of “humanizing data” – translating financial jargon into user-friendly information. This included a desire to utilize charts and graphs. “We believe that our community will understand pictures (charts and graphs) better than numbers on a 500-page financial report, and that’s what we mean by ‘humanizing data,’” Lavoie said.

After researching various software solutions for nearly seven years, including an internally-developed option, Meridian chose to implement OpenGov for its citizen-friendly interface and dynamic reporting functionalities. “Getting the data into a better format for the general public was the goal, and that’s what OpenGov did for us,” Lavoie said. With OpenGov, Meridian shifted to dynamic reporting by presenting the City’s data from its existing financial system into the cloud-based platform. This provided the public with greater access to critical information. “Reports can be automatically updated daily,” said Lavoie. “The efficiency and accuracy from a finance standpoint are important, and there are nearly zero man hours needed to keep the website up to date and error free.”



Updating in financial data in OpenGov has reduced the team's time spent to "nearly zero man hours."

City Residents Become Engaged Partners in Decision-Making

Because not everyone understands government financials or how to read certain financial statements, Lavoie focused on providing City data to citizens in a useful and understandable format. Before implementing OpenGov, Lavoie and Meridian staff used static PDF reports to inform citizens of City financials. The monthly financial PDF reports were neither searchable nor interactive. Additionally, the PDFs as shown were 45 days in arrears.

"OpenGov solved our quest to get the data out there to our citizens on a daily basis, from desktop or mobile places," Lavoie said. Before OpenGov, residents seeking information would

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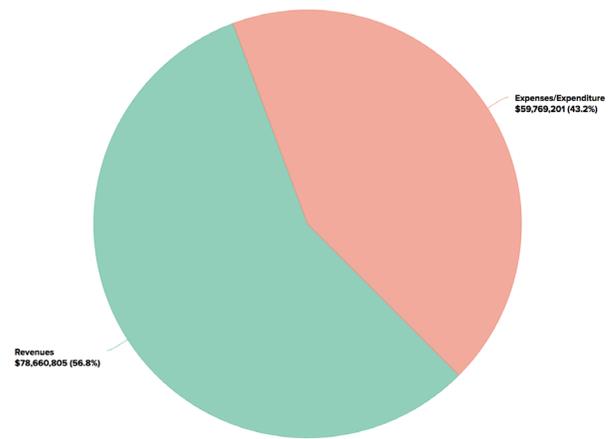
have to click into and open multiple spreadsheets to find one check or payment. Now, through the online portal that draws from a comprehensive, consolidated database, residents can type in a search word and automatically have the information at their fingertips. "We're effectively informing citizens of what they need to know daily as opposed to monthly, in a dynamic way," Lavoie said. "To go from 45 days in arrears to nightly was a great efficiency."

Meridian’s transparency site makes use of Saved Views to answer common questions from the public, such as how much money is spent on public safety. The Saved Views feature interactive questions that automatically display on-demand information when clicked. “We figured putting out common citizen questions would get the public engaged easier. It’s a great way of getting them to dive into the system,” Lavoie said.

That type of meaningful public engagement is a high-level goal among City of Meridian leaders.

“We are constantly striving to be as transparent as possible for our community. The budget is one thing we’ve always wanted to be more accessible and easier for our public to dive into if they want to. The OpenGov platform makes it easy for everyone to access and navigate our financial details,” the City’s Mayor Tammy de Weerd said.

“We need to get our citizens and community partners the data they need for them to become informed citizen partners,” Lavoie explained. He envisions using OpenGov to seek public input and inform the community on policy decisions – first, by creating an informed and engaged citizenry, and, second, by conducting polls based on the published data.



OpenGov’s transaction reports help the communicate how it spends public funds.

Meridian Benefits from the OpenGov Community Network

A contributing factor in the decision to implement OpenGov was its unique and valuable network of other public sector agencies. “We really liked the integrated connection to all other OpenGov communities – it’s a fantastic advantage,” said Lavoie. The OpenGov Network is comprised of more than 1,600 entities. “From a searchable website, we can compare ourselves with similar cities,” Lavoie said. “We can compare our spending against theirs and leverage the Network’s data to help us make more informed decisions in the future.”

RESULTS

- ✓ **From Static to Dynamic Data.** Meridian replaced a static, supply-driven method of communicating financial information with a dynamic, searchable resource.
- ✓ **Time Saved.** Automatic data updates require “nearly zero man hours” to maintain and ensure accuracy. Citizens no longer have to search through multiple spreadsheets to find the information they seek.
- ✓ **Stronger Citizen Engagement.** With accurate information, Meridian’s citizens are better able to share data-informed opinions and with the City.