



St. Petersburg, Florida Achieves Greater Internal Efficiencies in the Cloud Using OpenGov

AGENCY TYPE
City Government

POPULATION
250,000

ANNUAL BUDGET
\$450 Million

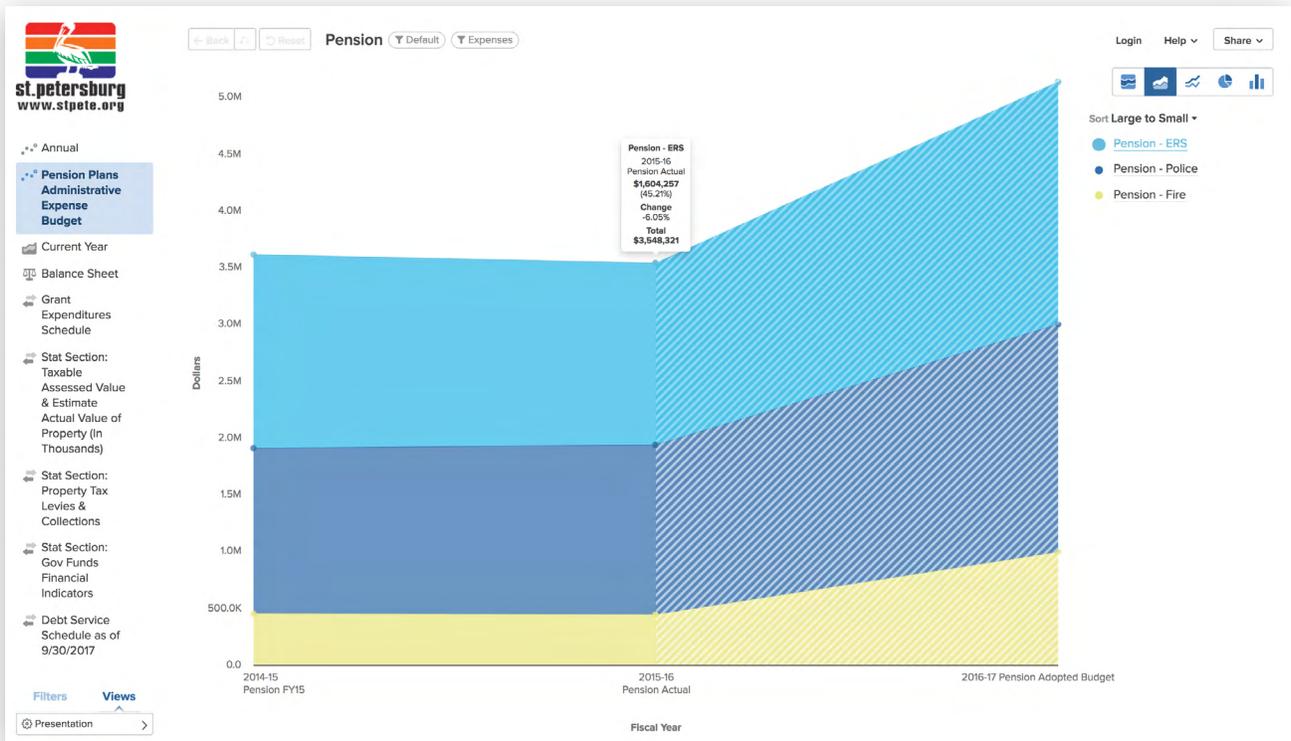
The fifth-largest city in Florida, St. Petersburg is situated on a peninsula, creating both a unique destination and weather challenges such as flooding and tropical storms. In the midst of a residential boom, the city offers a diverse, growing population and ever-increasing activities like entertainment options, high-end restaurants, and breweries.

When St. Petersburg's Mayor prioritized transparency, the City selected OpenGov's Smart Government Cloud™ to present its financial information in an organized, easy-to-understand format. As the Finance Department's staff initially leveraged the technology platform to enhance data accessibility and increase transparency in line with the Mayor's initiative and to stay ahead of forthcoming state mandates, they achieved surprising internal efficiencies along the way.

St. Petersburg Delivers on Transparency Best Practices

Before implementing OpenGov, St. Petersburg offered benchmarking statistics on its website to help better inform its citizenry. City Controller Erika Langhans explained that information used to be available only through hundreds of different PDF files. "Pension statistics available, for example, people had to click into a PDF report that was static," she noted. Through the City's OpenGov's transparency portal, the data is now electronic and interactive.

The ease of implementing the platform surprised Langhans. "People at OpenGov really understood government accounting and our structure," she explained. She had expected a technology built for the private sector but squeezed into



Using OpenGov to report on issues like pension costs instead of PDFs, St. Petersburg made information easier to access.

public sector packaging. Instead, she found that OpenGov’s Customer Success team was focused on and passionate about municipal operations and putting the right information at stakeholders’ fingertips. “Implementation was really easy because you do the basics and then you can sit back and see all the different items you can put into the software,” she said.

Delivering a well-organized landing page for the City’s transparency portal was a priority. It purposefully orients visitors to the possibilities available, making the City’s financial information useful and actionable for residents. For example, the landing page is written primarily for non-technical audiences and guides visitors to help them use the portal effectively. “That you can use the portal on your cell phone or iPad also really helps with the accessibility of our information,” she added. Compared to reviewing the CAFR, the

OpenGov platform makes data more interactive and allows the public to drill down to easily find exactly what they need.

Langhans has also found the portal to be valuable in communicating with external auditors who regularly seek detailed information. “We can just point them to the OpenGov platform, and they can look right there and see our most recent quarterly results and do any audit analyses or risk assessments before the year’s end,” she said.

“That you can use the portal on your cell phone or iPad also really helps with the accessibility of our information.”

ERIKA LANGHANS
Controller, St. Petersburg, Florida

Improved Internal Decision-Making and External Communications

The team utilizes over 20 reports in the OpenGov platform to educate the public and inform internal decisions. Exporting the Debt Service report at the end of the fiscal year provides them with easy footnotes for the CAFR, and she regularly uses Check Register and Disbursement Detail reports with her internal audit team. “If they’re going to audit our fleet department, for example,” she said, “they want to know all the vendors paid from that department by account string or by vendor. With OpenGov, you can just type in what department or fund you want, and it will give you the output and illustrate trends.” Internal audit staff have also benefitted from seeing trends in vendor use or overall expenditure trends.

Langhans also utilized the current and annual reports to pull historical trend information to use in reviewing if a department should continue with current equipment (and repair and maintenance costs) or expend capital outlay for new equipment. “Showing expenditure trends over the last six years can make a case for capital outlay of new equipment as more efficient,” Langhans said. To explain the request, the team will use trend analysis in presentations to administration and Council, if necessary.

The team uses many other reports to communicate with St. Petersburg’s Council. The City currently has many high profile capital projects underway – such as a new police headquarters and Pier that have debt issuances related to them. Each quarter, City Council receives a hard-copy packet of information, much of it presented in charts exported directly from OpenGov, to depict the future debt schedules

related to capital projects at the City. The members also have online access to the reports in the platform, so they can access it online and drill down into the information anytime, from anywhere. The report is typically 120 pages, and the staff now saves significant time preparing it, because they can pull information and easy-to-understand visualizations directly from OpenGov.

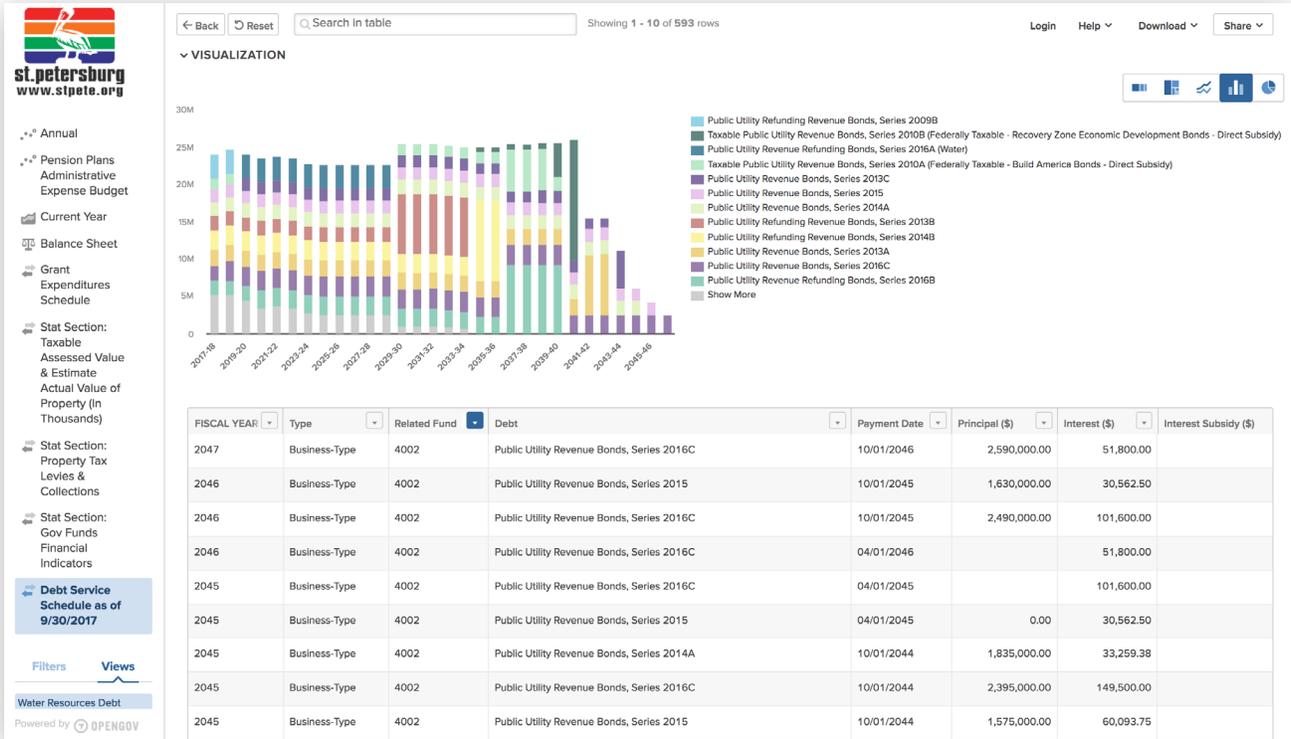
Grant expenditure schedules are popular with City residents seeking information on state and federal environmental grants, in particular. “If you click on the report,” Langhans explained, “it becomes very obvious how grant availability changes over time and with the economic conditions (ARRA years we had higher grant funding available). Looking at the trends helps users determine which grants we should consider applying for again from an internal perspective. Externally granting agencies can see a longer history of expenditures rather than reviewing the PDF SEFA document.”

Additionally, the Budget Department uses the budget milestones feature from OpenGov during public meetings to show the proposed budget.

Internal Efficiencies a Surprise By-product of Transparency Program

What began as a transparency solution evolved into a more robust data reporting solution for St. Petersburg. “At first the Mayor’s office wanted to go live with budgets, so the transparency platform was given to Finance,” said Langhans. “We just keep adding things as we continue to see the possibilities.”

The City’s multiple Excel spreadsheets containing debt schedules were susceptible to errors



Reports about debt service costs offer an accurate data source for internal analysis and help the City easily generate footnotes for the CAFR.

because individuals could accidentally delete important information. “Before OpenGov, we could be making decisions on bad information,” Langhans said. With a debt schedule downloaded from OpenGov, everyone can be confident that the version is clean and the information

is accurate. “There are definitely efficiencies and times savings going on,” Langhans said, explaining unexpected benefits of the OpenGov platform. “OpenGov is where you can download data – especially debt service data – and know it’s correct,” she said.

RESULTS

- ✓ **Made Performance Data Dynamic.** Replaced performance benchmarking PDFs with online, interactive data in OpenGov.
- ✓ **More Efficient Public Records Requests.** By using OpenGov, the team uses internal reports such as the Check Register or Annual Financial reports to expedite its response time to public records requests.
- ✓ **Saved Time.** With one single, reliable source of financial information in OpenGov, St. Petersburg’s staff reduced time spent creating reports and increased their confidence in the data’s accuracy.