Let's Be Clear

– By Bryan Burdick, President & Co-Founder of ClearGov

One of the coolest aspects of working with local government agencies is that - even on a national basis - it is still a relatively close-knit community. Local government and school leaders know each other, learn from one another and frequently share best practices - both within their respective areas as well as beyond their state and regional borders.

For the most part, I have found a similar camaraderie among Gov-tech software providers. Yes, we often compete head-to-head for the same business, but we also share a common mission to genuinely help local governments. As a result, my experience has been that most of the companies in ClearGov's market compete fiercely...but they compete fairly. Most of us - ClearGov included - try to present ourselves in the best way possible, without misrepresenting ourselves and without spreading misinformation about our competitors.

Unfortunately, there is one company in the Gov-tech market that seems to operate by a different set of principles and has been actively spreading falsehoods about their competition - including but not limited to ClearGov. I believe that it is both dishonorable and imprudent to bad-mouth your competition, so it would be hypocritical of me to specifically identify this company. Therefore, for the purposes of this article, I shall refer to them simply as - Competitor X. (And...for the record...I am **not** referring to the company formerly known as Twitter.)

At ClearGov, we welcome competition because having worthy competitors makes ClearGov better - and #BeBetter is one of our core company values. #BeClear is also one of our values, and we believe that transparency is as critical in business as it is in local government. We believe that our customers value clarity as well, because it helps them make the best decisions for their organizations and their communities. So, the purpose of this document is simply to clarify the misinformation that Competitor X has been spreading - specifically about ClearGov.

Misinformation Source

Before we dive into the details of the misinformation, you may be wondering how we uncovered this nefarious activity. ('Nefarious' is a Mr. Sheffler* word.) The short answer is that ClearGov has very loyal customers. More specifically, several of our customers - and even some of our prospective customers - have forwarded us emails that they received directly from someone at Competitor X over the past few months. In other words, each of the statements below attributed to Competitor X was copied directly from an email that was forwarded to ClearGov by a customer/prospect.

Mr. Sheffler was my 10th grade English teacher, and I still recall - to this day - him teaching us some of my favorite vocabulary words.

Setting the Record Straight

If you have heard or seen any of the following comments from one of our competitors, we hope that you will review our response below. And, of course, we would welcome the opportunity to speak with you further if you would like additional clarification.

Competitor X Says

 "ClearGov does not have integration capabilities. This creates additional manual work for your staff, because you will need to send your data to them and wait for them to upload it for you."

The Whole Truth

- I thought I'd start with this one because - as it happens - the first part of that statement is actually true. It's true that ClearGov doesn't offer system integrations, but it's not because we don't know how. It's because we made a conscious decision that when it comes to real-time integrations for budget data, the benefits just aren't worth all of the added time, effort and expense. Or, as they say, the juice isn't worth the squeeze.

- I actually wrote an entire separate article about this concept, and the gist of it is that in scenarios - such as Amber Alerts or Municipal Bond Pricing - where it's mission critical to have data updated in real-time, then systems integrations make sense. But if you think about it, do you really need - or even want - to present your constituents with up to the minute budget data? The vast majority of our customers tell us that they prefer to

reconcile and confirm budget data before presenting it publicly. So, ClearGov doesn't offer system integrations because we don't want to charge our customers extra for something that they don't really want or need in the first place.

- With that said, many of our customers do wish to update their "budget to actuals" data throughout the year - typically on a monthly or quarterly basis, depending upon how often they actually reconcile that data within their accounting system. This is the part where Competitor X implies that there is extra work for our customers, because they have to send us the data, and we do the update for them. Well…I gotta hand it to Competitor X, they got us on this one. Once a month/quarter, the customer will need to run a report from their accounting system and email us the data files. While we've never physically timed a customer doing this, I'm confident that the vast majority of our customers can do this with their eyes closed. And, by the way, the vast majority of data update requests are turned around by ClearGov within one business day.

> *"Unless someone has a really complex or large entity, they don't need auto-integration. I don't need my budget tool to integrate with my accounting tool on a daily basis, or weekly, or even monthly. We don't need it. Why? Because we don't change our budget that often."*
>
> - Doug Martin, Budget Manager, Island County, WA
>
> [View Video testimonial.](#)

On another technical note…

Competitor X Says

"ClearGov forces you to map to a rigid Chart of Accounts."

The Whole Truth

- This statement is just flat-out nonsense. I can't even imagine how they came up with this one.

- We recognize that every local government agency is unique. Why would we ever try to force you into a standard chart of accounts? The answer is…we wouldn't. With ClearGov, you can structure your chart of accounts in whatever way you want or need.

- By the way, the majority of our Data Onboarding team consists of former local government finance directors. So, they know your world and will often have great insights and best practice recommendations to help you optimize how you structure and present your budget *data.*

> *"I was actually shocked that the lady that helped us onboard knew fund accounting and understood our 26-number account number string, which I find just absolutely ridiculous. But she was amazing. It was just so refreshing…. Even in the second year of us using ClearGov, we edited new funds this year and I experienced the same knowledge with the data team and not just the onboarding team."*
>
>   - Jenny Fitzgerald, Deputy Director of Finance, Mount Prospect, IL
>
> *View video testimonial.*

Let's switch gears and talk about implementation support…

Competitor X Says

"*ClearGov has low implementation costs, so they will only spend a minimal amount of time on your implementation.*"

The Whole Truth

- Once more, Competitor X twists a bit of truth to mislead and misdirect. It's true that ClearGov does have low implementation costs - typically much lower than our competitors. In fact, I guess I have to thank Competitor X for confirming that.

- The misleading part is the rest of the sentence where Competitor X implies that since ClearGov doesn't charge a huge setup fee, we therefore don't provide implementation assistance. In short, nothing could be further from the truth.

- Every new ClearGov customer is assigned a dedicated Implementation Manager, who will shepherd you through the entire process. Plus, for the most difficult stuff - i.e. mapping your general ledger data onto our platform - we'll actually do that work for you. It's also true that it doesn't take a ton of time to implement ClearGov software, because 'Easy to Implement' is one of our key product design guidelines.

- You don't even have to take my word for it, because ChurnZero recognized us with their Onboarding Hero award for our implementation process. And, our customers recognize us by giving us a 98% satisfaction rating for our onboarding process. (I wish I could tell you that it was 100% - and we're still trying to #BeBetter - but the point of this article is to #BeClear.)

- Bottom line, ClearGov works hand-in-hand with our customers throughout the implementation process...and beyond.

> *"The initial data onboarding, when we sent it over, I was really happy because we didn't have to clean any data or anything. I just sent it over as a CSV or Excel file, the onboarding team cleaned it all up, had a couple of questions about the structure, and then they were ready to go. Going into the second year and as we're sending over new updates, it's always a pretty much seamless implementation. They understand the structure, even if you're adding general ledger codes or anything like that. We've been very pleased. And that's why, just this past spring, we then decided to add the Capital Budgeting module. We're very pleased so far."*
>
> - Chris Scelza, Village Administrator/Treasurer, Village of Pelham, NY
>
> [View Video testimonial.](#)

Which actually brings us to the next comment...

Competitor X Says

"Competitor X is a true partner - we will provide a Customer Success Manager that will be responsible for maintaining our successful partnership even after implementation. With ClearGov, you're on your own."

The Whole Truth

- Okay...this one is just kinda silly, because guess what? ClearGov has Customer Success Managers as well. Technically, we call them Client Success Managers (or CSMs for short), and each of our customers is assigned a CSM, who is dedicated to making sure that you achieve your objectives.

- Moreover, ClearGov has an entire team of people committed to our customers' success - our aptly named Client Success Team. That team represents about one third of the overall

ClearGov family and continues to grow as we rapidly add new ClearGov customers. And, for the record, our Client Success Team won a Stevie Award last year for Customer Service Team of the Year. We hope to repeat this year.

> *"From the first meeting to finalizing the budget, it really was a remarkable experience. While the product is truly great, it wouldn't have been so successful if it weren't for the ClearGov team! The customer service has been phenomenal."*
>
> - Tiffany Barnett, Accounting Manager, Hemet, CA

Speaking of our Client Success team...

Competitor X Says

"With ClearGov, you can expect a library of video training on your first day and minimal hands-on experience with their team."

The Whole Truth

- Again, there is a kernel of truth to this statement, because ClearGov does have a very robust library of video training. Thanks again, Competitor X. Not only do we have online video training, but we also have ClearGov Academy - which is an entire online training and support center available 24 x 7 x 365 for all customers.

- However...contrary to what Competitor X implies...ClearGov also offers live-person, instructor-based training upon request. We call them ClearGov Workshops, and each ClearGov Workshop is customized to your needs and always **offered at no additional charge.**

- Our training and support teams also have an outstanding customer satisfaction rating - 96%. And trust me, they're doing everything they can to lock down that additional 4%. If anything, ClearGov goes overboard on training and support. I say that because we've also built outstanding products that are intuitive to use, so they have a pretty flat learning curve to begin with.

> *"ClearGov was remarkably easy for our team to start using. After the training, we barely had any questions; everyone just understood it and was eager to jump in and start using it. It's intuitive and easy to use for both city staff and residents alike."*
>
> - Bernadette Harvill, Assistant City Manager, Milton, GA

Last, but not least...

Competitor X Says

"With ClearGov, you will not be able to make edits or updates to your budget book and have to use their one-size-fits-all format."

The Whole Truth

- ClearGov's Digital Budget Book has been our most popular product with more than 1,000 local governments using this solution across the country. And, ClearGov powered Digital Budget Books are like snowflakes, i.e. no two are the same.

- Once you have finalized your budget, with the click of the mouse, we will automatically create a budget book for you that is pre-formatted and structured to meet the GFOA Distinguished Budget Presentation award criteria. We'll also automatically create all of the numbers, tables, graphs, etc. for each of the funds in your budget. And...yes...technically... that's a template.

- But...that's just a starting point.

- From there, you have the control. You can easily add or delete as many pages/sections as you want. You can customize the colors, the font, the layout, etc. You can add your own images, branding, charts, graphs to your heart's content. And, of course, you can add whatever narrative or other content you need to tell your story.

- ClearGov has built-in tools to make all of this customization and configuration point-and-click simple. We have even added our new First Draft™ feature that uses generative AI to help you get past the 'staring at a blank page syndrome'.

- Don't just take my word for it, check out some live Digital Budget Books, and you'll see how our customers have each added their unique style and content. By the way - you'll also notice that each customer has a completely different chart of accounts, per the previous topic.

- [El Mirage, AZ Digital Budget Book](#)
- [Woodbridge, CT Digital Budget Book](#)
- [Yuma County, AZ Digital Budget Book](#)
- [Sussex County, DE Digital Budget Book](#)
- [City of SeaTac, WA Digital Budget Book](#)

> *"We are proud to have won a GFOA award for our latest budget book that we created with ClearGov's Digital Budget Book tool. One GFOA reviewer even gave us an Outstanding rating for Document-wide Criteria and noted: "The new software they have implemented is great. Graphics, charts, formatting: all exceptional. Outstanding as a communication device." We are thankful to ClearGov for all of their support throughout the process."*
>
> - Janet Holman, Financial Systems Manager, Montgomery County, OH

Putting a Bow On It

I hope that I have lived up to our #BeClear core value and that - by bringing clarity - I have helped you make a better decision about the best solution for your agency. If you still decide to work with Competitor X - or any of our other competitors - we genuinely wish you success.

I am definitely an optimist and strongly believe that most folks are fundamentally good people trying to do the right thing. We have absolutely found that to be true with the hard-working civic and school leaders across the country that it has been our pleasure to serve. So, I would like to believe that these misleading claims from Competitor X are coming from only one or two rogue sales reps who will say anything to sign a deal, but frankly given the number of times that we have heard these comments and/or seen them in emails forwarded by our customers, it certainly seems to be a more systemic issue.

In fairness, perhaps the powers that be at Competitor X genuinely believe that these claims are true. If that has been the case, then I hope that someone at Competitor X will read this post and clear up their internal confusion.

In fact, to that end, if anyone reading this message receives a claim about ClearGov from any of our competitors that seems dubious (another Mr. Sheffler* word) or you'd just like some clarification, please feel free to forward it directly to my email address - bburdick@ClearGov.com. I promise that you'll get the Whole Truth in response.