



Local Government Budgeting: 18 Benefits of Modernizing with a Cloud-Based Solution

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Finance directors often need to look for ways to do more with less, especially during times when staff and resources are limited. One of the obvious solutions is adopting new technology to make the budget process more efficient. But not all technology truly makes your job easier! Some tech is expensive and difficult to learn, and if you don't realize the benefits, you may end up slipping into old habits and manual processes.

ClearGov is a different type of cloud-based government budgeting solution. It's easy to afford, easy to implement, easy to use, and is specifically designed to meet the needs of local governments — villages, towns, cities, counties, and schools.

If you're on the fence about modernizing your budget process with a cloud-based solution, you're in the right place. We put together this ebook specifically for governments thinking, "There's got to be a better way to do this!" when it comes to their annual budget process.

Without further ado, here are the top 18 benefits of modernizing your budget process with cloud-based software.



1. Improve Collaboration

Collaboration issues are one of the biggest challenges we hear from governments. There's so much back-and-forth between the finance team and department heads, and it's usually over emails that can get buried or lost. In fact, employees spend an average of [28% of their workweek processing emails](#), and yet up to 35% of emails may go unread. Even important information gets lost in the email shuffle!

Cloud-Based Budget Solution

With a cloud-based budget solution, department heads can enter requests via customizable web-based forms. The request forms also allow them to attach supporting documents and responses to questions from the finance department. This eliminates the back-and-forth communication, risk of attachments getting lost in email, and also eliminates paper documents. Best of all, all communication is done in one central location within the software. All parties can see the history of communication and see updates in real-time, so there's no question about the status of a task.



The fact that ClearGov is a cloud-based platform that easily facilitates collaboration between departments puts it over the top for us.



Phillip Puckett

Town Administrator of Buena Vista, CO

2. Reduce Errors

[Data errors cost businesses trillions each year.](#) The reality is that humans are prone to human error. One of the biggest challenges when it comes to creating the annual budget is the amount of manual data entry that goes into it. In addition to the initial data entry, every time a change is made the data must be updated in multiple places manually. If you do use spreadsheet formulas to automatically update data across multiple sheets, you still have to spend time reconciling for accuracy and to ensure the formulas are doing their job.

Cloud-Based Budget Solution

With a cloud-based budget solution, you enter data one time, in one place. The software then automatically populates your budget with the numbers. If you make a change, the software automatically updates every instance of the figure across the entire scope of your budget. Data entry errors are virtually eliminated, saving countless hours on reconciliation.



3. Optimize For ADA Best Practices

Under the [Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\)](#), governments are legally required to ensure all electronic public documents are accessible. This means that residents in your community with disabilities need to be able to use assistive technology - like screen readers - to read your budget book. Governments whose websites and digital documents are not accessible face hefty fines and even lawsuits from aggrieved residents. In fact, anyone can file a lawsuit against any business or government entity that isn't ADA-compliant. In Florida, one blind man has [filed almost 200 lawsuits](#) against government agencies and businesses, accusing them of not following ADA guidelines to ensure blind people can navigate their websites.

Cloud-Based Budget Solution

With a cloud-based budget solution like ClearGov, you can create a web-based Digital Budget Book that is ADA optimized by design, to make it easy for you to create a budget book that residents with disabilities can use assistive technology to navigate your budget website. While avoiding fines and lawsuits is a clear advantage of being ADA-optimized, the biggest win is that your budget is accessible to everyone in your community!



4. Save Time

Many local governments report spending hundreds of hours on their annual budget process. Between collecting requests and collaborating with department heads, creating the budget with multiple scenarios, reconciling for accuracy, designing the budget book, and ultimately sharing everything with the community, the hours add up fast!

Cloud-Based Budget Solution

With a cloud-based budget solution, much of the process is automated. By reducing and eliminating manual processes, you save a significant amount of time that can be reallocated to more important tasks. Most governments realize the biggest time savings in the first two years after implementation, as subsequent budgets created in a cloud-based software can often be copied and updated with new figures from year to year.

The software saves you time by:

- Collaborating with department heads in one location, eliminating the back-and-forth emails and meetings.
- Eliminating manual data entry and consolidation.
- Creating multi-year, multi-scenario plans to easily identify the optimal use of funds.
- Generating engaging graphs and charts automatically.
- Reducing reconciliation.



Pulling data from our financial software and putting it in Excel creates a lot of room for errors. We spent hours laboriously reconciling data across multiple spreadsheets and tabs, and every time a last minute change was made it created a ripple effect that triggered more reconciliation. ClearGov eliminated that reconciliation and shaved off more than 70 hours from our annual budget process.



Courtney Sladek
City Manager of El Campo, TX

5. Improve Transparency

Transparency is more important than ever to governments and citizens alike. Because the internet puts information at our fingertips, residents are able to be more involved in the budget process. They expect their government to spend their tax dollars appropriately, and governments have to find ways to clearly and effectively communicate with the community in order to be held accountable. It's critical that all budget documents are easy to access and easy to understand for everyone in your community.

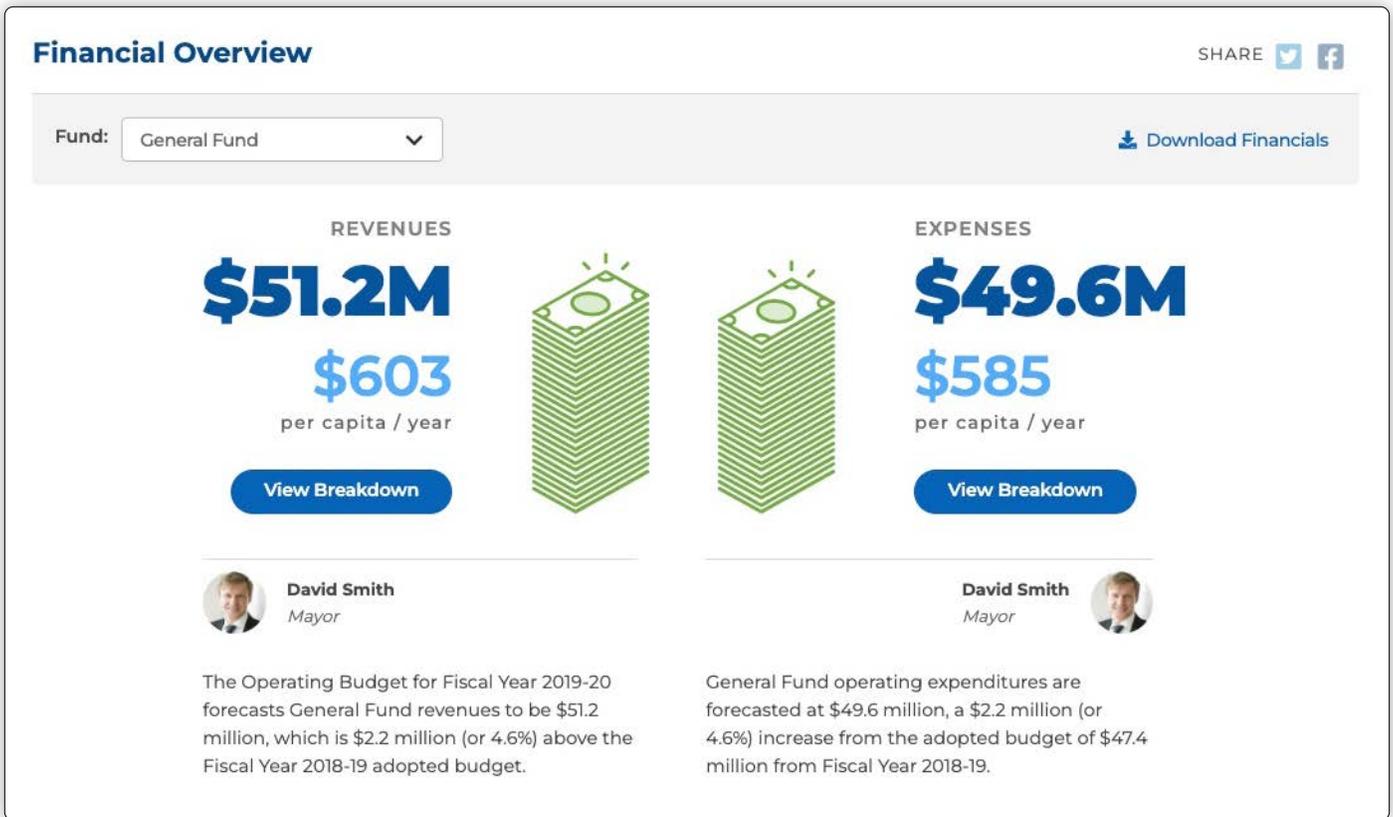
Cloud-Based Budget Solution

A cloud-based budget solution that includes a transparency portal fosters civic engagement. The financial data that is most important to residents can be front and center -- no hiding questionable expenses on page 275 of a PDF -- and an open checkbook feature keeps governments accountable. A transparency portal also makes budget data interactive. Residents can quickly navigate to the department page or fund summary page they're interested in, then drill down to view the budget to the line item. Automatically generated charts and graphs help residents visualize and understand data, and users can toggle between chart types to view data in the way that makes the most sense to them. Furthermore, ClearGov's Transparency portal has been audited to be ADA-optimized, which means your budget documents will continue to be accessible to residents with disabilities today -- and years from now.



Mesquite citizens have always pushed for more transparency in our budgets, but in the past, we've struggled to make the information widely available and easy to understand using our previous software setup. Now that we have ClearGov, I'm excited that our residents have immediate, free access to the information they want to know. It's been a win-win for everyone!

Dodie Melendez
Finance Director of Mesquite, NV



6. Create Multi-year, Multi-scenario Plans

Especially with capital and personnel budgeting, it's critical to be able to plan several years out as well as create multiple "what if" scenarios. Creating multi-year, multi-scenario plans helps you optimize spend in the coming years. But creating these scenarios in spreadsheets is time-consuming and tedious. Moreover, spreadsheets make it difficult to visualize the data, compare scenarios, and really 'see' how each affects the overall budget.

Cloud-Based Budget Solution

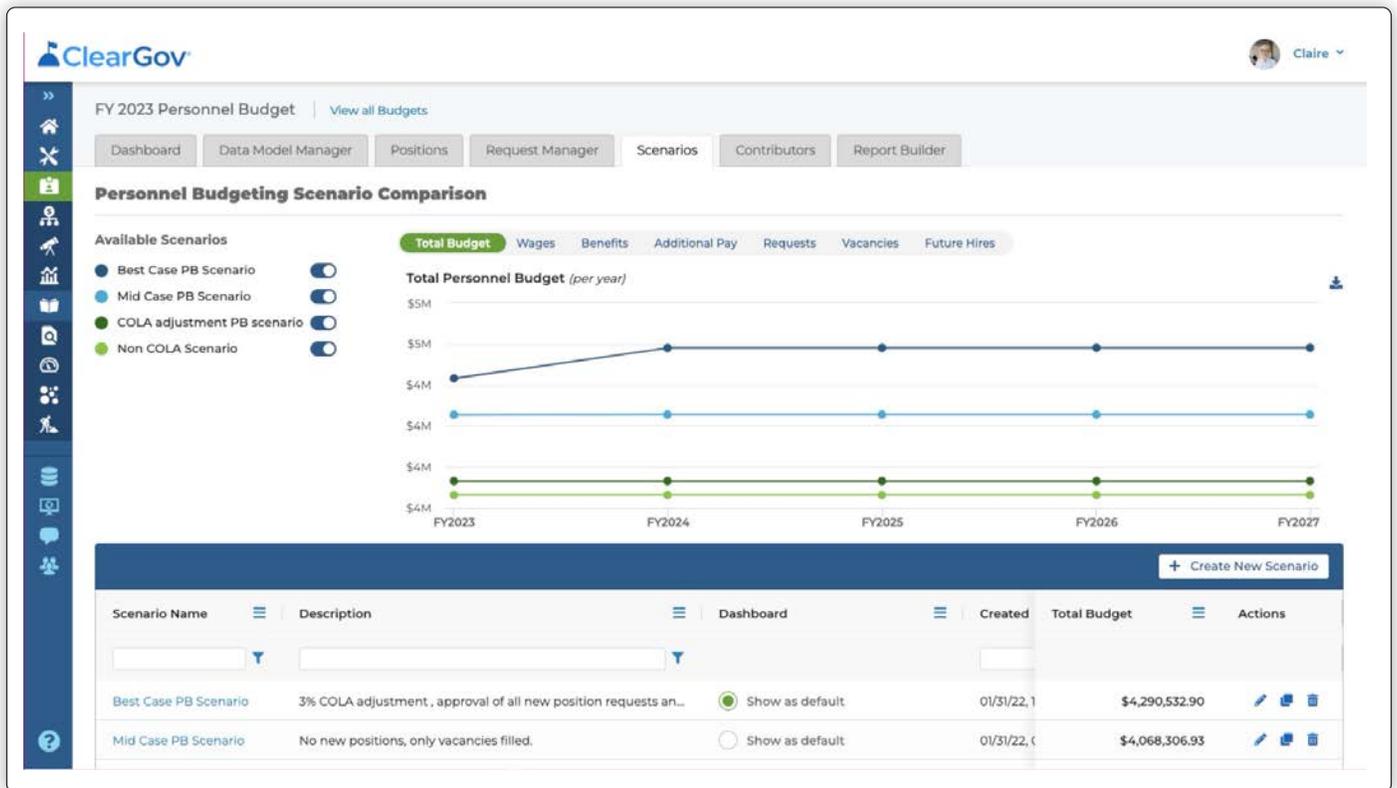
A cloud-based budget solution can automatically create multi-year, multi-scenario plans, and you can create as many versions of the budget as you want. The software also automatically generates graphics to help you visualize each scenario and how it impacts the overall budget -- which is especially helpful for non-financial decision makers during the budget approval process.



With ClearGov Operational Budgeting, we really appreciate the graphics and the visual display, especially when you're looking at multiple budgets at the same time. We're also big fans of the simplicity and power of the forecasting functionality.



David Snowdon
Public Works Business Manager of Shrewsbury, MA



7. Improve Organization

One of the biggest challenges while collecting requests is finding an efficient way to collect requests and organize supporting documentation. Usually department heads will use email to send notes and attach files, but email is inefficient and things get lost. A shared folder is a better option to keep everything together in one place. But the problem is that the documents aren't connected to the request. You have to leave the budget in the spreadsheet and go open a separate folder to view justification for the request.

Cloud-Based Budget Solution

A cloud-based budget solution centralizes every single item related to a request in a single location. Department heads submit their request, attach supporting documents, and collaborate with the finance team right in the software. Anyone can instantly see the history of the request, what information is needed, and the status. One ClearGov client had a savvy library director who used the capital budget module to get a bathroom renovation approved when it had currently been overlooked -- all because pictures and estimates were conveniently attached to the request from the start!



8. Set Milestones & Automatic Alerts

Nagging department heads that requests are due or that you need supporting documents or revisions is an ongoing hassle. You have to manually check your budget in a spreadsheet to see what's missing, then reach out via phone or email to remind people of their responsibilities. These reminders to reach out to others clog up your own calendar and take time away from more important tasks.

Cloud-Based Budget Solution

A cloud-based budget solution allows you to set milestones for tasks. The software will automatically send the responsible party a notification that something is due soon, is due, or is past due.



Having the budget online eliminates version control issues and lets everyone know where we are in the process. Instead of calling or emailing department heads, I can just go into ClearGov and access all the requests and supporting documentation in one place.



Sean O'Brien

Assistant Director of Finance of Natick, MA

9. Enhance Security

Security is a major challenge when using spreadsheets to create your budget. There will always be the risk of employees accidentally deleting or overwriting data, not updating the current version, breaking formulas, or accidentally gaining access to sensitive personnel data. To overcome this, many finance directors use multiple spreadsheets - one for each department - then consolidate everything into a master spreadsheet. It's tedious, time-consuming, and error-prone.

Cloud-Based Budget Solution

A cloud-based budget solution gives you better control over who has access to what part of the budget. You eliminate the risk of employees 'breaking' the budget and save countless hours not consolidating and reconciling everything. Best of all, multiple people can be working on the same part of the budget at the same time. Anything they don't have access to is 'locked' and not visible.

10. Go Paperless

While many aspects of government are still very manual and require a paperwork trail, a paperless office IS possible with the right tools and technology. Having department heads submit requests on paper with supporting paper documents is inefficient and results in having to find more space to organize and store files. Not to mention the added cost of paper, ink, folders, and file cabinets!

Cloud-Based Budget Solution

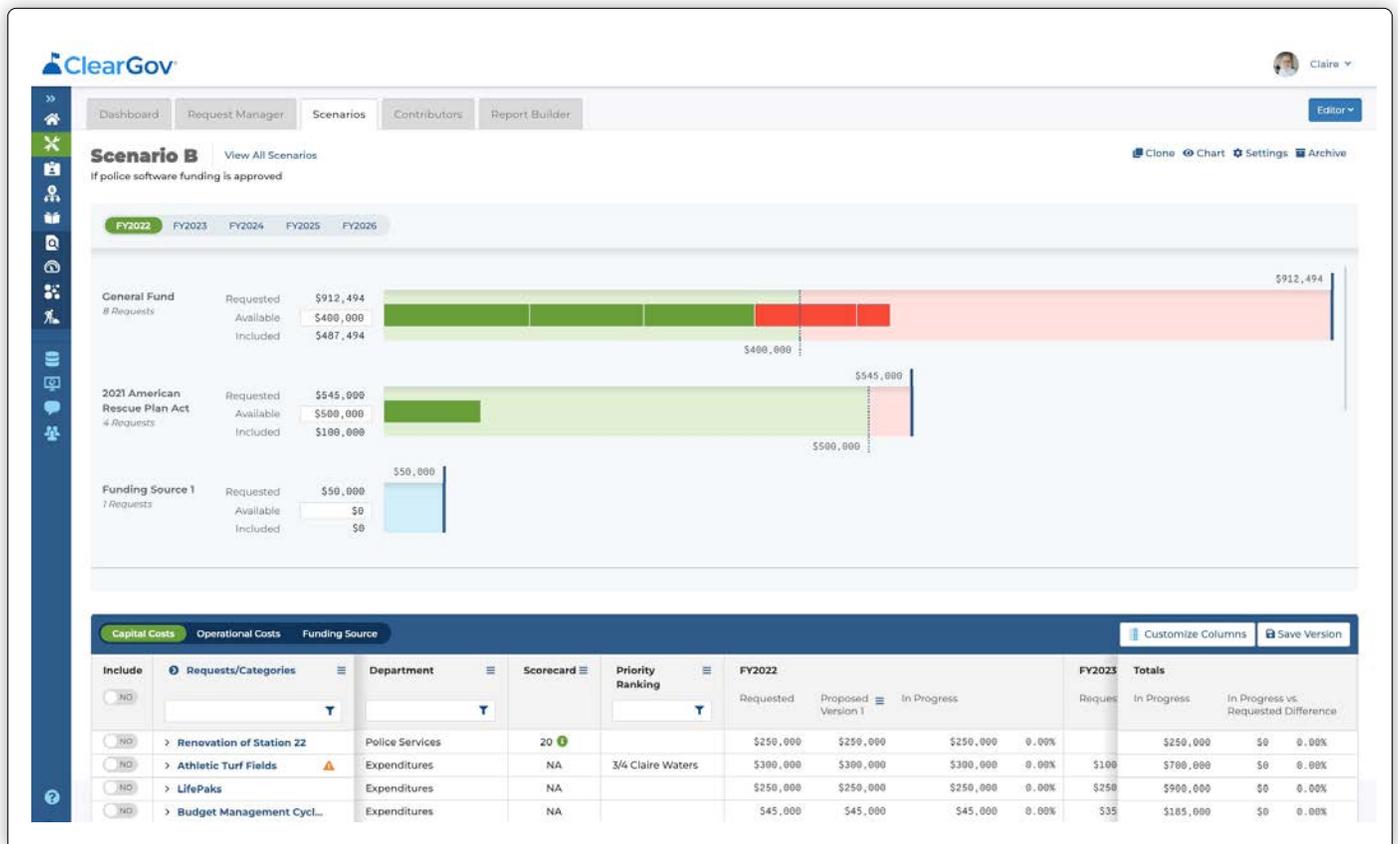
A cloud-based budget solution is 100% paperless, which means you can save the trees! It also means you save time and money not printing and filing, which equates to less office and storage space needed. But most importantly, a cloud-based paperless budget process means the data is both more secure and more accessible.

11. Improve Visualization

We touched on this briefly, but numbers in a spreadsheet can be difficult to visualize - especially for non-financial decision makers and the general public. Many local governments understand this and, as a solution, they create custom graphs, charts, and other visuals in separate software, then insert the graphics into their budget book alongside spreadsheets. It helps, but it's still tedious to create. Furthermore, not every type of graph makes sense to every person.

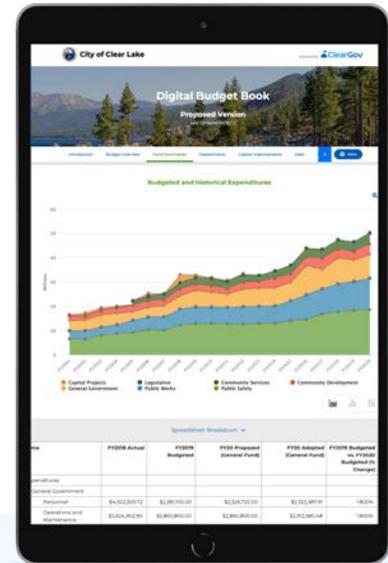
Cloud-Based Budget Solution

A cloud-based budget solution automatically generates graphics to help both internal and external stakeholders visualize the data. Decision makers can see how multiple scenarios affect the overall budget today, and years from now, at a glance. They can interpret the data much faster with visuals than with numbers alone. Additionally, residents can toggle between pie charts, bar charts, and mountain charts in order to view the data in a way that makes the most sense to them.



12. Share Your Budget Book Easily

Traditional budget books were printed. Then they evolved into a scanned document and uploaded to a city's website as a PDF. Now, many governments create their budget book in a word processing app then save it as a PDF -- which has the added benefit of being searchable. But all of these methods still end with a static document. Which means if you make any changes, the version you shared is out of date. You have to re-share the new version in all the same places!



Cloud-Based Budget Solution

A cloud-based budget solution generates a dedicated URL for your web-based digital budget book. You can share this link anywhere - on your website, social media, community groups, emails, etc. Not only does this save time and money not printing (and reprinting!) budget books, but a web-based budget book is dynamic. It automatically updates when changes are made, so you never have to worry about making edits to the many places where you shared the link.



In today's day and age, people don't just want to look at a budget book, they want to go online, search, and interact with it using smartphones and browsers.



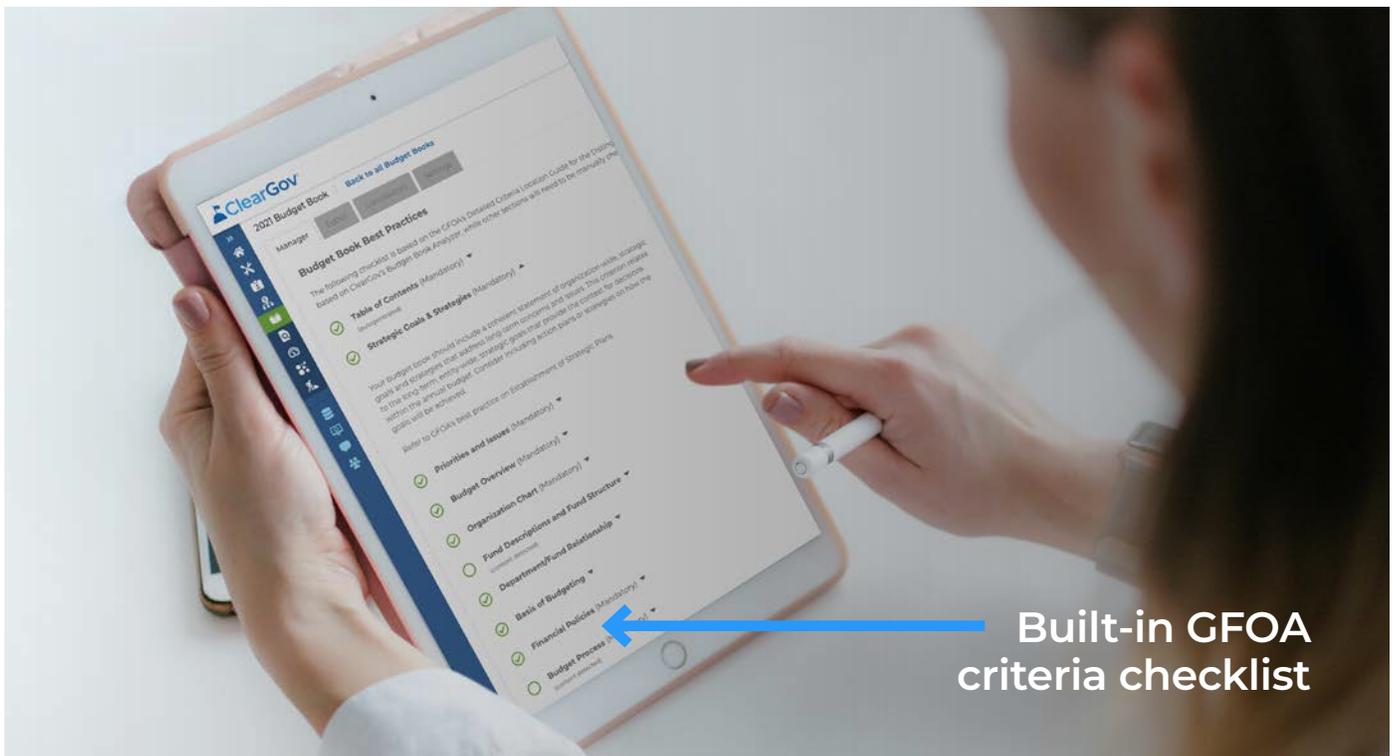
Tony Struck
Budget Director of Yuma County, AZ

13. Win Awards

Who doesn't like being recognized for the excellence in government budgeting -- especially when you've spent hundreds of hours on your budget? Awards like the [GFOA Distinguished Budget Presentation Award](#) and the CSMFO Budget Award exist for this very reason. Anyone who has ever submitted their budget for award consideration understands the extra layer of work that goes into ensuring your budget meets and exceeds award criteria. After a long budget season, it's an extra step a lot of governments skip because of the extra work.

Cloud-Based Budget Solution

A cloud-based budget solution has a GFOA award criteria checklist built right in. It also automatically generates many sections that are on the mandatory criteria list, so all you have to do is add commentary to customize each section. Budget awards earn prestige for your community and set you apart as a leader among your peers. It demonstrates your commitment to transparency and budgeting excellence and proves that commitment to your citizens.



14. Improve Community Engagement

Ultimately, your goal is to use tax dollars as responsibly as possible. Part of that is finding out what projects and services matter most to your citizens. Traditional town hall meetings still work in many cities, while others use more modern forms of communication, like email and social media to stay connected. What does not work is a 300-page PDF for residents to muddle through to find out what park projects are planned for their family. In our digital age, people expect information at their fingertips. If you want to involve your community in the budget process, you need modern tools that foster engagement.

Cloud-Based Budget Solution

A cloud-based budget solution is built with community engagement in mind. Transparency portals and web-based budget books allow you to put the information that matters most front and center. For capital budgeting, dedicated project pages are automatically generated with details about each project, including funding sources, maps, and other pertinent details. Citizens can subscribe to the projects they're interested in and receive automatic alerts whenever the status is updated.



The per capita breakdown per year of expenditures is awesome. In fact, the data on building permits and inspections has become a go-to source for our community and economic development director.



Christina Smith
Finance Director of Lemont, IL

15. Centralize Data

One of the more challenging aspects of the annual budget process is having so many disparate channels and sources of information. For example, communication is in email, request forms are in Google docs, the budget is in Excel, and the budget book is created in Word. It requires a lot of collaboration and cooks in the kitchen to get the recipe just right, and there's always the risk of error as the data moves from app to app.

Cloud-Based Budget Solution

A cloud-based budget solution allows you to operate off a single source of information. Every part of the budget process is centralized in a single location, with all communication, supporting documents, historical data, and forecasting available at a glance. When siloed data and processes are eliminated, everyone works together more efficiently and the entire budget process is improved, from start to finish.



Having all of our data in one spot where it can be easily tracked and compared helps our department heads make data-driven decisions. Seeing the data graphically paints a really helpful, precise picture.



Charlie Funderburk
City Manager of Tega Cay, SC

16. Improve Negotiations With Unions

For local governments with union employees, it's critical to build out multi-year, multi-scenario plans that will accommodate the "what ifs" that may arise throughout the years. Preparing for union negotiations can be a lengthy, in-depth process. You need to have several options for negotiating salary, benefits, hours, working conditions, and time off. If you want to land on a fair contract, you need to come to the table prepared. Having to go back to the drawing board because you didn't calculate how multiple scenarios impact your budget can draw out the process and stifle productivity.

Cloud-Based Budget Solution

A cloud-based budget solution improves negotiations with unions. You can create multiple versions of your budget with an unlimited number of real-time "what if" scenarios. At the negotiation table, you can switch between scenarios with the click of a button and see how a change to salary or benefits impacts the overall budget. Having a dynamic version of your personnel budget in front of you at the negotiation table can also help you justify your positioning to union representatives.



17. Compatible With Most ERPs/Accounting Software

Most local governments use separate systems for building their budget and tracking day-to-day accounting activities. But the financial data from their ERP or accounting software is critical to help department heads plan for the future and submit accurate budget requests. If the budget and accounting system don't talk to one another, this is often a very manual process of pulling reports from an ERP.

Cloud-Based Budget Solution

A cloud-based budget solution is compatible with most ERPs/accounting software. However, that doesn't mean they're integrated. ClearGov offers highly customizable export capabilities, making it compatible with most CVS-compatible ERPs. Many ERPs also have built-in import functions that can send select data to the budget platform.

Complements Your Current Platform



Easy to Move Data In

ClearGov will onboard your accounting data

Easy to Move Data Out

Export budget information into current system

18. Export For Reporting Needs

Local governments have to report their budget information to many entities. Cities, towns, counties, and even schools often have to submit very specific reports to their state. Traditionally, these reports had to be put together manually, pulling data from various places throughout the budget.

Cloud-Based Budget Solution

A cloud-based budget solution like ClearGov features a report builder function that allows you to easily create and export required reports, like those requested by the state. Simply select the data and sections for the report, and export to a clean, professional looking report. This eliminates the time spent manually cutting and pasting disparate data to cobble together a custom report.



Moving forward, I know our budgeting process will be a lot easier! Instead of having to manually create new charts, our data in ClearGov's Digital Budget Book auto-generates charts and graphs. This allows us to focus on the content rather than spending time on formatting.



Rheagan Basabica

Finance Director/Treasurer of Ypsilanti, MI

Modernize Your Budget Process With ClearGov

If you're tired of thinking, "There's got to be a better way!", it's time to discover ClearGov. With a full suite of Budget Cycle Management software solutions, local governments can streamline and automate how they Collect, Create, and Communicate their [Operational](#), [Capital](#), and [Personnel](#) budgets. A [Digital Budget Book](#) tool lets you create a beautiful, engaging, web-based budget document, and a [Transparency](#) portal makes it easy to keep your community informed and involved in the financial health of your government.

Learn how ClearGov can modernize your budget process today.

