OpenGov Communications Guide

The biggest mistake governments make is focusing purely on their launches. When governments do that, they often see a spike in awareness and engagement with their performance dashboards and transparency sites, followed by sharp declines.

It's important governments develop phased communications plans, with Pre-Launch, Launch, and Post-Launch phases. The Pre-Launch phase includes communications activities that provide high-level details on the announcement to begin build awareness and interest. The Launch phase introduces the performance dashboard or transparency site. The Post-Launch phase includes a long tail of activities designed to maintain awareness and engagement.

Here are some best practices from our customers for each phase of the communications plan:

Pre-Launch:
- Some governments worry about the information they're disclosing in their dashboards and sites -- Is it the right data? Will it lead to more criticism? Does it tell the right story? That's why we recommend customers share the dashboard or site under embargo with trusted people or groups (like a local journalist or community group) prior to the launch to get their feedback. It often leads to valuable feedback that improves the dashboard and site, and builds goodwill since you give them a sneak peak and opportunity to provide input.
- Governments often ask what types of data they should include on their dashboards and sites. That depends on the kinds of info community members (like local journalists, community groups, and residents) ask for most. The easiest way to identify those questions is to review your FOIA requests, or to ask your finance analysts what data they're asked for most. You can also ask local journalists, community groups, and residents what data they're most interested in.
- Some of our customers do an interview or two with local journalists prior to the launch of their dashboards and sites. The goals are to manage the story from the get-go, and begin building awareness and interest. [Here's an example of West Virginia Auditor JB McCuskey doing](#) an interview with the state's most influential policy journalist prior to the launch of West Virginia's site. [And here's an example of Sandpoint, Idaho's, Mayor](#) publishing an op-ed in the local newspaper about the city using Open Town Hall to get more feedback from residents.
- It's also key to give department heads and other senior leaders a heads up prior to launch. Holding an in-person meeting or sending an email often work well. Highlight when you're launching the transparency site, why you're launching it, and how you're hoping the community uses it. That way, when they get asked about the site at cocktail parties, farmers markets, etc., their responses are consistent.

Launch:
- There are typically two kinds of launches: a soft launch and a hard launch.
    - The goals of soft launches are to make an announcement, and get the facts out, without building too much hype. Our customers typically publish a press release and offer one local journalist they trust an exclusive. The upside is you set lower expectations and don't build too much hype. The downside is you typically don't build as much awareness or engagement with your dashboard or site.
    - The goals of hard launches are to generate as much awareness and engagement as possible. Our customers leverage every distribution channel at their disposal: press releases, newsletters, e-newsletters, social media, local journalists, events, and even utility bills and videos. [Here's an example of a video Coral Gables, Florida, produced](). The upside is you typically generate a lot of awareness and engagement. The downside is you can create high expectations.
- There are a number of things we do to help customers develop and execute their communications plans:
    - We meet with our customers to share best practices, explain how we can help them achieve their objectives, and develop their communications plans.
    - We provide copy for press releases and social media. And we promote their press release and social media posts across our social channels.
    - We provide spokespeople for launch events, press releases, and local press interviews.
    - We host OpenGov For Journalists Training, where we show local journalists how to use OpenGov to surface insights for articles. Several customers have also asked us to provide that training as part of a launch event for local press, community and group leaders, and residents.
    - We produce videos and stories that showcase our customers' success stories. [Here's an example of a video we produced for California Health and Human Services](). Most of our customers share the videos internally and with local journalists to promote their work.
    - We feature customer success stories in national press. [Here is an example of a WIRED story that features the City of San Rafael, California]().

Post-Launch:
- This is arguably the most important phase of the communications plan because if you don't conduct a steady stream of communications activities pointing back to your dashboard or site, awareness and traffic will decline. The question I ask customers is "What do you have coming up in the next six months that you can use to highlight the dashboard or site?" Here are a few recent examples:
    - The City of Coral Gables, Florida, recently renovated and reopened its main street. So we're helping the city draft a series of social media posts that show

taxpayers how the main street renovation was funded. The key is taxpayer dollars didn't fund the entire renovation.

○ You can also leverage holidays, like Earth Day. We've worked with several customers to place stories and draft social media posts that showcase how they've progressed against their Parks and Recreation goals, and how the department uses taxpayer dollars.

○ Lots of governments do "Money Mondays" or "Finance Fridays" where they highlight an interesting point from their transparency site on social media. The goal is to keep the site top-of-mind and drive traffic back to it.

○ [Here's an example of Thurston County, Washington, using story builder](#) to inform and educate residents on the County's budget crisis, and ask how residents would spend $500. We're working with Thurston County to use feedback from residents for a story in local press.

○ And many of our customers publish annual press releases highlighting the top data searched for on their sites, and explaining how they've progressed against the goals on their dashboards.

OpenGov PR Content

Sample Introductory Language:

Example 1:
In an effort to provide a more inclusive and transparent budget, the **[Insert Organization Name]** is pleased to present our Financial Transparency portal. The **[Insert Organization Name]** partnered with OpenGov to provide a new web-based financial transparency and intelligence tool that dynamically presents the county's revenues and expenses, from historical trends to line item level details.

By using the OpenGov platform, residents and staff have around-the-clock access and a better presentation of the **[Insert Organization Name]** budget and actuals. **[Insert Organization Name]** is one of the first **[Town, City, County, District]** in the State of **[Insert Home State]** to publicly release its financial data on the OpenGov platform.

Explore **[Insert Organization Name]** to get a feel for a new standard of transparency. For additional context and descriptions of the county's departments and programs, please refer to our Budget Overview online.

Example 2:
There's nothing quite like being able to examine financial data by yourself by viewing charts and graphs or downloading the information into an excel spreadsheet. That's why the **[Insert Organization Name]** has engaged with OpenGov to assist with providing the public an interactive way to learn more about the City's finances. This resource is a part of the **[Insert Organization Name]'s** ongoing effort to enhance transparency and public engagement in city government.

Example 3:
While the **[Insert Organization Name]** has shown its commitment to financial transparency by posting financial documents on our city's website, including the **[Insert Organization Name]** operating budgets, sometimes additional information may be sought out by citizens. Oftentimes that information is most easily understood through interactive charts and graphs.

In an effort to enhance transparency in financial reporting, the **[Insert Organization Name]** is offering an interactive reporting tool that allows citizens to explore **[Insert Organization Name]** budget data online in various graphical formats selected by the user. OpenGov, a California-based company specializing in financial transparency, pioneered this online application.

The **[Insert Organization Name]** is providing actual historical budget data from **[Timeframe]** for public review. We hope to strengthen the connection between our local government and our community members.

Example 4:
The **[Insert Organization Name]** is committed to honest budgeting, responsible spending, and financial transparency. In this spirit, the city has partnered with OpenGov to provide its citizens and stakeholders with the Financial Transparency Portal. The portal is designed to bring visibility, openness, and accountability to our operations.

This site provides you the opportunity to view, filter, and analyze revenue, expense, and balance sheet financial data for **[Insert Organization Name]**. You can analyze financial trends from **[Date]** to **[Date]** (i.e. {Include examples of questions you'll be answering in your reports}). Also, you are not limited to viewing

your city's financial data online. You can download the data (i.e. in Excel) for offline analysis and even share it on social media.

Example Quote: "We strive to be open and transparent about how we spend our resources. The more informed our residents are about what we do, the better off we are."- City Official

OpenGov How-to Guide:

OpenGov allows you to explore budget and historical finances in a simple graphical user interface.
- You'll notice the title of the Report you are viewing in the top left corner.

- Click on Saved on the left-hand side to view a list of common or favorite views on each report.

- Select Filter to display key menus.

- You can use the Show drop-down to select the data that is of most interest to you.

- Use the Broken Down By drop-down to specify the category you would like the data organized by in your chart or graph.

- Select the Filtered By option to view the data filters. These filters will allow you to select exactly which data you want to include, or exclude, from your graph or chart.

- Use the Search function within each filter to find exactly what you are looking for.

- If your organization has uploaded multiple years of data, a Fiscal Year slider will be present below the Filtered By menu. Move the sliders to choose the fiscal year(s) of data you would like to see.

- There are five different types of visual representations of the data:

    o A stacked percentage graph to see percentage changes over time.

    o A stacked line graph to visualize overall trends over time.

    o A line graph overlaying each trend over time.

    o A pie chart to view percentage breakdowns by year. To view data for other years, move the slider below the pie chart.

    o A bar chart comparing trends and percentage breakdowns over time.

- Below any chart or graph, you can view a Table detailing the financial information in the visualization above.

- Use the Help drop-down in the top right corner to:

    o View a short How-To Guide with tips on navigating the platform.

    o Recall the **Welcome Screen.**

    o View a short **Multi-Fund Accounting 101** primer with basic information on multi-fund accounting.

    o **Contact** the administrators of the account.

- Use the **Share** drop-down in the top right corner to:

    o Share your customized graph or chart through social media.

    o Send a link to your customized graph or chart through email.

- Use the **Download** drop-down in the top right corner to:

- Download an image of the graph or table as a .png file.
- Download a spreadsheet as a .csv file.

For additional information on OpenGov and to access education materials, please visit: www.opengov.com/resources

OpenGov Company Overview:

OpenGov transforms the way the world analyzes and allocates public money. With more than 1600 government customers across 48 states in a rapidly expanding network, OpenGov is the market leader in cloud-based financial intelligence, budgeting, and transparency for government. The OpenGov platform transforms government financial data into intuitive, interactive visualizations for both internal government users and citizens. OpenGov technology empowers administrators to make better policy decisions by measuring budget to actual expenditures, comparing data across departments and other governments and streamlining the budgeting process. Founded in 2012 with headquarters in Silicon Valley, OpenGov works with leading governments of all sizes including Minneapolis, New Haven, and Beaufort, SC. Learn more at www.opengov.com.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: What is OpenGov?
A: OpenGov is a technology company based in Silicon Valley focused on building the most powerful financial intelligence and transparency platform ever created for governments. We are transforming how state and local governments analyze, share and compare their financial data.

Q: How do I select the data I want to see?
A: To focus on specific data — like a fund, department, expense type, or any combination — use the menu on the left side panel. The "Broken Down By" drop-down allows you to specify which breakdown you want the graphs and table rows to represent on the graph. You can analyze the expense and revenues data by fund, department, or type.

Q: Can I select more than fund or departments?
A: Yes. Use the Data Filter on the left side panel to make specific selections within the data. The Data Filter shows you the hierarchical relationships of Funds, Departments, and Account Types. You'll notice the title of the graph you are viewing on top along with the account type selector. You can use the filter to see the data of most interest to you.

Q: How do I see the actual numbers within the graph?
A: Hover over any area of the graph to see the actual or budgeted amounts for that period. Or, just scroll down to see a table with detailed information below the graph.

Q: Can I see the data in a different graph?
A: In the upper right hand corner, you will see options for the different graphs and tables. There are five graph types: an area graph, an area graph by percentage, a line graph, a pie graph, and a bar

chart. Additionally, there is always a table view below any graph. The table allows you to zoom-in on the detailed financial data selected in the chart or graph above.

Q: Why are there sometimes spikes in one year?
A: In reviewing multiple years of data, you may see "spikes" in the individual years; this can be due to unexpected expenses, such as a hard winter, equipment failure, a capital project, or a specific event that required additional funds. You can drill-down into our OpenGov platform to learn more about where exactly those expense or revenues are categorized.

Q: Can I save the data I am looking at?
A: Yes, there are Share and Download buttons in the upper right corner. You can share any view on a social network or by email. There are also options to download the displayed data in .csv spreadsheet and .png image formats. Additionally, you can copy and paste the url at the top of the page you are viewing.

Q: How do I learn more about government accounting?
A: Use the Help menu on the top right corner to navigate to the "Budget 101" primer to learn more about multi-fund accounting.

Q: I have a question. How do I contact my organization?
A: Use the Help menu on the top right corner to navigate to the "Contact" option to send a message to your organization.

Social Media Tips

Remember to include our handle @opengovinc on Twitter, or tag us on Facebook so we can retweet and share. Use relevant hashtags including **#transparency #[yourcity] and #LocalGov** to connect with other governments and thought leaders on the topic and stimulate discussion.

Connect with us! We're always on the lookout for posts from our partners to amplify and support. Below are the OpenGov social channels.

- Blog: http://opengov.com/blog/
- Twitter: @OpenGovInc
- Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/opengovinc
- LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/opengov-inc

FACEBOOK:
Use your Facebook page to inform the public of your new OpenGov platform. Tag (or @) OpenGovInc in your post (so we can share). If you also use **G+,** the same content you post on Facebook may also be applicable for your **G+** page. Photos increase visibility and engagement, so remember to include an image.

Examples:
- "We've launched a budget #transparency platform powered by @OpenGovInc that makes it easy to explore how your tax dollars are collected and spent <link to your press release, news post or your OpenGov portal URL> <photo>

- "Dive into [City Name]'s finances and [X] years of spending and revenue detail with our new financial #transparency platform" <link to your press release, news post or your OpenGov portal URL> <photo>

- *On a regular basis, you may consider posts highlighting frequently asked questions ("Saved Views") from your constituents or interesting observations from the budget.*

- "The 2017-18 Budget is now available online in an interactive, digital format. Visit [link] to view the city's plan for the year"

- "Curious about how much we're spending to improve and maintain the city's parks? Visit <your OpenGov platform URL> to find out.

TWITTER:
Tweet about the launch of your OpenGov platform and include relevant hashtags when appropriate. A best-practices tweet that uses your handle, our handle (@OpenGovInc) (so we can re-tweet) and a link (either to your blog post or OpenGov portal) to urge people to visit would look like this:

- "Explore X years of [Name] finances with the launch of our @opengovinc financial #transparency platform>> [LINK]"

- "We've teamed up with @OpenGovInc to provide instant access to #[Name]'s finances <link to your press release, news post or your OpenGov portal URL> <photo>"

- "Curious how your tax dollars are collected and spent? Visit our new @opengovinc platform [OpenGov portal URL] for instant access and visualizations" <photo>"

If you have any questions regarding maximizing your social media outreach, feel free to contact us.

Press

Most cities develop a press release to share their OpenGov platform launch with external audiences. Whether or not you are planning to hold a full press conference or simply share the news via email with your local paper and citizen listserv, we have a template to get you started. Remember to distribute the news with a screenshot of your platform.

PRESS: Press Release Example Template

Sample Press Release

<mark>[Insert date]</mark>
<mark>[Insert local government contact]</mark>
OpenGov Contact: Joe Roualdes, 415-823-2136, jroualdes@opengov.com

<mark>[Insert government name]</mark> Introduces New Site To Further Increase Its Transparency

The New Site Shows Community Members How the <mark>[city OR county]</mark> Spends Their Taxpayer Dollars

<mark>[INSERT GOVERNMENT LOCATION]</mark> **& REDWOOD CITY, CA** – Today, <mark>[Insert government name]</mark> announced that it's partnering with OpenGov - the leading Budgeting and Performance company powering more effective and accountable government – to introduce a new site that offers insight into the <mark>[City's OR County's]</mark> finances.

> **Commented [JR1]:** Insert the link to the site.

<mark>**[Insert quote from government official]**</mark>

The OpenGov Cloud™ is an easy-to-use, cloud-based solution for budgeting, performance, and citizen engagement. OpenGov's transparency site aggregates, organizes, and visualizes various data sets (like budgets, building permits and 311 requests). It's powered by CKAN - the open-source standard that the U.S. federal government, the European Union, and hundreds of other agencies around the world use for open data. It also includes tools like APIs that developers can use to build applications.

The new site serves two purposes: it gives community members more insight into how their taxpayer dollars are spent, and gives <mark>[City OR County]</mark> officials across numerous departments easier access to data so they can make more informed decisions that drive better outcomes.

"Our open data portal is a win-win for <mark>[Insert government name]</mark> and the community," said OpenGov CEO Zac Bookman. "On average, governments receive 20 percent less requests for information after they launch their OpenGov open data portals. That means citizens are getting the information they need, and it saves governments time and energy that can be spent elsewhere."

<mark>[Insert government name]</mark> joins over 1,900 city, county, and state governments, special districts and schools that rely on OpenGov to be more effective and accountable.

<mark>*[Insert government boilerplate]*</mark>

About OpenGov
OpenGov is the leading Budgeting and Performance company powering more effective and accountable government. Over 1,900 public agencies in 48 states use OpenGov -- including the State of Ohio; the City of Richmond, VA; the City of Flagstaff, AZ; and Washington, DC. OpenGov was founded in 2012, and is backed by Andreessen Horowitz, JC2 Ventures, Emerson Collective, 8VC, and Thrive Capital.

# # #

Sample Tweets & Facebook Posts

Remember to mention @OpenGovInc on Twitter so that we can respond and amplify your message to all of our followers. Also be sure to use hashtags like #OpenData and #GovTech to connect with other governments and thought leaders to stimulate conversation.

OpenGov's Facebook page is https://www.facebook.com/opengovinc. Remember to tag or mention @OpenGov Inc so we can respond and amplify your message to all of our followers.

With Twitter and Facebook, be sure to include a photo with each of your posts!

- *#Transparency is a priority in [Insert government handle]. That's why we're excited to introduce our new transparency site! It shows exactly how the [City OR County] spends your taxpayer dollars. Check it out! [Insert site link] @OpenGovInc #OpenData*

- *The budget is now available online in an interactive, digital format. Visit [Insert site link] to view our plan for the year #OpenData @OpenGovInc*

- *Ever wonder how the [City OR County] spends your taxpayer dollars? Well you're in luck! Check out our new transparency site to see the services your taxpayer dollars fund! [Insert site link] @OpenGovInc #OpenData*

PRESS: Draft Media Advisory Template [Use this template to invite media to your launch]

City to Unveil Budget Transparency Platform on [Day]

[DATE], 2018 — On [date], Mayor [Name] and Councilmember [Name] will announce a new financial transparency platform giving the public unprecedented access to city budget data.

WHAT:	Press Conference [or council demonstration] announcing new [Name] Financial Transparency Platform and platform demo

WHEN:	Date
	Time AM

WHERE:	[Insert location]

WHO:	Mayor [Name]
	Controller [Name}
	Councilmember [Name]

For further information or to RSVP, please contact ==*[contact details]*==

-###-

PRESS: External Launch Scenarios

There are many ways you can choose to hold a public launch. Here are three examples to guide you:

Launch Scenario 1: Presenting at a council, commission or budget meeting
Tactics:
- Alert the media in advance of the presentation
- Demonstrate how to use the platform (remember to highlight saved views, navigation tips and share features)
- Provide a 1-pager for council members. (We have a template for this)
- Distribute your press release following the meeting and amplify on social
- Include the press release in the news section on your website
- Resources needed:
   o Council one-pager
    o Press Release
    o Media Alert

LAUNCH STORY: City of Miami rolls out OpenGov platform
> Debuted at a commission meeting in early January.
> Alerted the media in advance
> Launch attended by local and broadcast reporters
> Coverage in the local public radio affiliate, Miami Herald, and several other publications
> Local govtech community celebrated launch on social

Launch Scenario 2: Press Conference or Media-only event
Tactics:
- Confirm the logistics. Choose a location, speakers, timing and run-of-show.
- Invite media in advance of the event, and remember to include local TV and radio.
- Demonstrate the platform, highlighting saved views and address any questions.
- Distribute your press release and amplify on social. Remember to include a photo or the platform!
- Include the press release in the news section on your website
- Resources needed:
    o Press release
    o Media alert/advisory
    o Press conference logistics and run of show
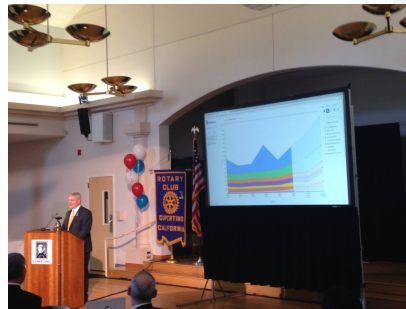
Cupertino OpenGov launch press conference

Launch Scenario 3: Web & E-Mail press release distribution
Tactics:
- Develop a press release, highlight your saved views and strategic priorities
- Pitch the press release, including a photo to your local media
- Post the release on your website news section
- Amplify on social media channels
- Coordinate media interviews or questions reactively
- Resources needed:
    o Press release