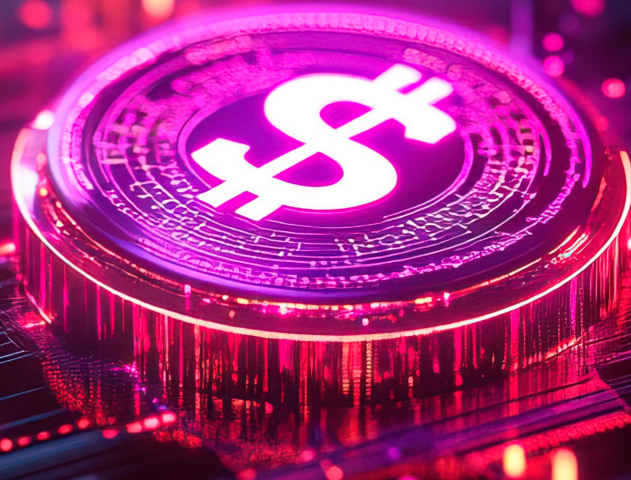




A GOVERNMENT TECHNOLOGY THOUGHT LEADERSHIP PAPER



Turning Public Finance Data into Insight

How local governments can improve transparency, strengthen controls and make better decisions with connected financial data

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Too many finance teams are trying to manage public dollars with systems and processes that were not designed for today's complex demands. Revenue and transaction data for parking, permitting, recreation, utility billing, courts, point-of-sale activity and other public-facing services typically live in separate operational systems. That data usually gets summarized and then batched into the general ledger, often with spreadsheets and manual reconciliations in between.

"That data isn't as useful because it already has been summarized, so it can't provide the managerial insights department leaders need to make decisions," says Louis Stratton, a Workday account executive for local government.

Reconciling siloed data also creates what finance leaders call the "manual gap" — a delay and lack of detail in the data that finance teams need for reporting, analysis, audits and decision-making. In a recent Government Technology webinar, only 3% of respondents in an audience poll said they were free of this gap.¹

The manual gap doesn't just leave governments relying on delayed and disconnected data. It makes it harder to ensure transparency, streamline audits and maintain confidence in the integrity of public finances.

Reconciling siloed data creates what finance leaders call the "manual gap" — a delay and lack of detail in management information.

Moving beyond summary data

Summarizing information before posting it to the general ledger can support basic accounting, but it doesn't always provide enough detail for department leaders to see what's driving the numbers or make operational decisions.

Modern finance systems can ingest transaction-level data from outside systems and still summarize it for accounting purposes, while preserving the ability to drill down into the details.

"You're able to drill down from the \$20 million entry to the \$50 transaction," Stratton says.

Transaction-level data can include time stamps, locations, permit activity, meter information and other context that helps leaders understand spending across the organization.

Better insight into public revenue

For many governments, the manual gap is especially visible in public revenue collection. When Charleston, South Carolina, decided to modernize its finance management system, one of its first use cases was parking fees.

"The information that comes in is very hard to reconcile," says Charleston Chief Financial Officer Amy Wharton. An outside company manages the city's parking garages, while a separate system manages parking meters and violations. "We spend an extreme amount of time reconciling our bank account for parking," she says. The city adopted Workday Financial Management, which Wharton says will expedite those reconciliations and other time-consuming tasks.

Detailed transaction data from parking meters will also help city officials understand parking demand in different locations, which could support decisions about parking zones and dynamic pricing. In addition, Charleston wants to use transaction data to review permitting and licensing, recreation programs, municipal court fines and fees, and point-of-sale transactions at special facilities.



Go Deeper

Watch this webinar to learn more about how modern finance management closes the manual gap.



Escondido, California, faces similar issues. Its engineering, planning and building divisions have complex permitting and fee structures. Revenue data is batched into the city's financial management system each night, but finance staff often need data from other departments to understand what is driving revenue trends.

For example, city councilmembers may want to know whether a specific fee increase actually generated additional revenue, says Escondido Finance Director Christina Holmes. "Our finance team could easily pull that revenue number and compare it between two time periods, but that only tells part of the story."

To fully understand whether revenue is rising or falling, the finance department needs to know the number of permits processed over a given period. "Traditionally, we've had to reach out to multiple departments to get that information," she says. "What should be a simple question really becomes a tedious and lengthy process that involves a lot of staff across the city."

Creating a culture of trust

Modernizing finance requires more than technology. It also means changing how people work, especially when staff members have relied on spreadsheets and manual processes for years or even decades.

Escondido implemented Workday Financial Management in January 2025 after using the same financial software for more than 30 years. The city took an intentional approach to change management by involving staff early and phasing out manual processes.

"From my perspective, it's really about building trust," says Holmes. "We went live slowly and thoughtfully. It didn't all happen overnight, and it worked very well for our city staff. They got excited once they started seeing all the new tools in place. And I'm looking forward to carrying that momentum forward as we implement other new tools."

Cities like Escondido and Charleston are modernizing to reduce manual processes, streamline reconciliation and improve financial insights.

Charleston took a similar approach when it transitioned from using a 20-year-old system and paper time sheets. City executive leaders and change managers from each department met monthly during the implementation.

"We like to make sure those who are the most resistant are very much involved so they understand how this will save them time versus their manual spreadsheets," Wharton says.

A clearer view of public dollars

Closing the manual gap helps governments move from after-the-fact reporting to timely financial insight. Instead of rebuilding reports from spreadsheets every time a question comes up, finance teams can work from a connected data foundation.

That can change the quality of conversations with elected officials and residents. Leaders can understand whether a fee change is working, which programs are recovering costs and which facilities are underused. They can see revenue patterns that point to broader changes in the community.

The value of intelligent finance in local government goes beyond faster reconciliation and cleaner reporting. It's also about the ability to see a full story behind the numbers and use that insight to better manage public resources.

1. https://forms.workday.com/en-us/webinars/closing-manual-gap-government-finance/form.html?step=step1_default

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Workday provides enterprise cloud applications for finance, human resources, payroll, budgeting and analytics to help public sector organizations hire and develop a diverse workforce, budget and forecast for long-term sustainability, and adapt more quickly to change.

Workday Accounting Center helps cities like Charleston and Escondido bring detailed operational data — parking transactions, permits, utility usage and more — directly into Workday Financial Management. By transforming that activity into auditable accounting entries while preserving business context, it closes the “manual gap” and makes real time insight into public revenue possible.

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