

# What 737 GFOA Award-Winners Have in Common

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## Why GFOA Recognition Matters More Than Ever

The GFOA Distinguished Budget Presentation Award isn't just a seal of approval. It's a milestone that signals an agency's commitment to clarity, transparency, and community trust. In 2025, [737 governments earned this recognition](#) by using OpenGov, a number that speaks not just to the breadth of adoption, but to the growing movement behind budget modernization.

At a time when government credibility hinges on performance and transparency, the GFOA award is becoming a national benchmark for budget excellence. To earn it, agencies must produce documents that don't just report dollars—they must articulate intent, show how their budget and performance align with strategic goals, and serve the public with accessible, forward-thinking narratives.

In other words, a GFOA-winning budget is a symbol of leadership.

Today, 103 million Americans live in communities where OpenGov powers the finance office. These finance teams aren't just balancing budgets. They're building capacity for decision-making, fostering civic trust, and transforming a traditionally internal process into a public commitment to better outcomes.

## The Budget Is the Strategy

Gone are the days when budgets were static artifacts, written for compliance and buried in PDFs. In a modern public sector organization, the budget is the strategy. It is the place where priorities are defined, trade-offs are confronted, and choices are made visible.

To meet the GFOA standard, a budget must function as four documents in one: a policy guide, a financial plan, an operational blueprint, and a communications vehicle. This

isn't a bureaucratic expectation. It's a reflection of what communities demand from their leaders.

And increasingly, it's a call to tell that story in a way that's engaging, transparent, and shareable.

That's where OpenGov's [Online Budget Book](#), a key feature of [Budgeting & Performance](#), comes in. It represents a dramatic shift in how agencies communicate budget data and decisions. Rather than publish static documents, agencies now publish compelling, interactive digital experiences. Visuals, charts, videos, narratives—all curated into an intuitive format that deepens engagement and understanding.

It's no longer just about meeting disclosure requirements. It's about inviting the public into the budgeting process. And in doing so, it transforms the budget from an internal tool into a public-facing artifact of trust.

## Performance: The Link Between Planning and Accountability

Performance isn't a metric. It's the mechanism by which a budget becomes more than numbers. Among the GFOA-awarded agencies powered by OpenGov, performance served as the cornerstone of planning, decision-making, and public accountability.

When governments embed performance early in the budget cycle, they aren't just tracking KPIs, they're creating a system of accountability that touches every corner of the organization. They define success before dollars are spent. They measure the actual impact of those investments. And they use that insight to sharpen future plans.

[Montgomery County, PA](#) exemplifies this model in action. By integrating performance management into every phase of the budget, they redefined what effective governance looks like. Departments used KPIs not as an afterthought, but as a basis for requests and results. Strategic initiatives had targets, metrics had meaning, and the public had access to it all. The impact? A budget document that didn't just earn GFOA recognition. It elevated trust across internal teams and community stakeholders.

But this shift didn't stop at transparency. It enabled smarter prioritization, broke down operational silos, and helped leaders defend decisions with data instead of politics. It made the finance office not just a steward of resources, but a driver of outcomes.

Performance matters because it makes budgeting consequential. It ensures that strategy isn't a static vision—it's a living discipline. And in today's high-stakes

environment, that discipline is what separates reactive governments from transformative ones.

## Modern Tools Make Modern Budgeting Possible

It's no longer possible to meet the GFOA standard, or public expectations, using legacy systems and manual spreadsheets. The complexity of today's public finance environment demands real-time data, integrated planning, and transparent reporting.

That's where modern solutions like the [OpenGov ERP](#) come in. These solutions weren't retrofitted for government. They were built for it.

With these systems, agencies:

- Build capital and operational plans in a single environment
- Eliminate version control issues with collaborative, role-based workflows
- Align funding proposals with outcome data
- Produce clear, audit-ready documentation

These tools make budget modernization possible at a time when government teams are under more pressure than ever—pressured to do more with less, to justify every expenditure, and to maintain continuity through leadership transitions.

What's different about OpenGov customers isn't just that they use technology. It's how they use it to rethink processes. They're breaking silos between finance and operations. They're shifting from reactive planning to proactive performance. And they're delivering budgets that both meet the GFOA's gold standard and move the organization forward.

## What Comes Next: GFOA as a Guidepost, Not a Goalpost

Recognition from the GFOA isn't the end of the journey. It's a marker along the path to better governance—one that affirms a government's commitment to transparency, performance, and community engagement.

Those 737 governments that achieved it in 2025 didn't do so because they followed a checklist. They did it because they made the decision to *modernize*. They invested in infrastructure, aligned people and processes, and reimagined budgeting as a strategic act.

That's what others can learn from this cohort. Not just how to win an award, but how to build the kind of budgeting culture that leads to lasting outcomes. That starts with performance. It continues with openness. And it takes root in every planning conversation that prioritizes outcomes over outputs.

As more communities demand clarity from their governments, the playbook is evolving. It's not just about telling people what's been spent. It's about helping them see where they're going, outline the big impact for staff and community, and how their government plans to get them there.

GFOA-guided excellence is the signal. Transforming communities is the opportunity.