

How Rochester Hills Transformed Budgeting with Gravity



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The Challenge

Rochester Hills, Michigan, a thriving suburb of Detroit, faced significant inefficiencies in its budgeting process. With a \$210 million budget spanning 33 funds and 31 cost centers, the city's reliance on Excel, Word, and PDF-based workflows led to cumbersome, susceptible to errors, and time-consuming financial planning. The finance team, led by CFO Joe Snyder and Senior Financial Analyst Debby Hoyle, had to manually verify calculations, which caused bottlenecks and increased stress during budget season.

Recognizing the need for a modern, integrated solution, Rochester Hills issued an RFP for a platform that could integrate seamlessly with JD Edwards, generate a high-quality Budget Book, meet ADA compliance standards, and align with Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) guidelines.

The Solution

After evaluating multiple budgeting platforms, Rochester Hills found that these solutions required them to conform to rigid, predefined workflows. Gravity stood out by allowing the city to retain control over its budgeting process while enhancing efficiency.

Why Rochester Hills Chose Gravity

- Seamless Integration:**
Direct compatibility with JD Edwards, automating data consolidation
- Capital Improvement Planning (CIP) Optimization:**
Enabled better alignment between strategic goals and financial planning
- Customization and Flexibility:**
Allowed Rochester Hills to maintain its existing workflow while improving efficiency
- User-Friendly Transition:**
Gravity was the only solution capable of maintaining their existing Excel-based budgeting format, ensuring a smoother transition for users

Following a rigorous evaluation, the five-member selection team unanimously chose Gravity.



Implementation and Results

Rochester Hills collaborated closely with Gravity's support and implementation teams to ensure a smooth transition. Within the first budget cycle using Gravity, the city experienced significant improvements:



Error Reduction
Eliminated calculation discrepancies common in Excel-based processes



Improved Transparency
Easier sharing of budget details with stakeholders and the public



Streamlined CIP Planning
Seamless data flow between CIP and operational budgeting, eliminating redundancy



Faster Budget Amendments
Adjustments, such as reallocating City Council funds, are now instantaneous



Time Savings
Reduced manual data entry and review time by at least 20%, saving weeks of work

An unexpected benefit of Gravity was its ability to integrate project data, allowing the city's GIS department to visualize capital projects in mapping tools.

Outstanding Support and Collaboration

Throughout implementation, Rochester Hills found the Gravity team to be exceptionally responsive and dedicated to their success.

"The support team has been fantastic. Very responsive," said Snyder. "They knew our timelines and worked hard to ensure we met them. Anytime we had an issue, they followed up quickly and made sure we had what we needed." Senior Financial Analyst Debby Hoyle added, "They checked in with us every week, even when we didn't have major issues. It wasn't just about solving problems; they made sure we were comfortable and confident every step of the way."

Joe also praised the team's ability to handle last-minute adjustments. "We had an aggressive implementation timeline, and they stuck with us through it all. When we had to pivot, they adapted with us. We always felt like we had a partner in this process."

Strategic Impact

Under the leadership of Mayor Bryan Barnett, Rochester Hills prioritizes fiscal responsibility while making critical community investments. The city has been able to:

- Maintain its AAA bond rating
- Fund significant infrastructure projects without taking on debt
- Enhance transparency and stakeholder communication

"This budget and our multi-year budgeting process reflect what our residents want today while seamlessly evolving with the times," said Mayor Barnett. "We continue to invest in top priorities while maintaining financial stability."

The city is doubling down on community investment. The 2008 recession hit the Detroit area hard, with the tax base shrinking by nearly 20%. But the region has since rebounded, and momentum is building. New roads, upgraded water and sewer systems, and a major focus on parks and recreational spaces are all underway. Community investment projects have become the cornerstone of the city's revitalization strategy. Gravity's Capital Improvement Planning (CIP) capabilities are playing a key role in driving collaboration among internal stakeholders as they prioritize projects and allocate resources.

Joe notes, "We've received overwhelmingly positive feedback on this year's CIP process. Gravity helped open the lines of communication, something that was missing in the past. Too often, people weren't aligned."

Rochester Hills is preparing to expand user access to Gravity for budgeting and planning this year. As part of this expansion, department heads will soon begin entering their own budget requests directly into the system, reducing manual work for the finance team and improving communication across departments.

"Previously, a \$5,000 budget adjustment for a council request could take hours to update across all impacted reports. Now, it's a simple entry, and everything updates automatically,"

– Joe Snyder, CFO