

CASE STUDY

City of Columbus Modernizes ACFR Process with Gravity

OVERVIEW

The City of Columbus, the 14th largest city in the United States, is a hub of innovation and efficiency, managing a \$1.2 billion annual general fund budget. Beyond its population of nearly 1 million, Columbus extends essential services, such as water and sewer systems, to a wider area of over 2 million residents. Recognized for its financial leadership, Columbus has maintained an impressive AAA/Aaa/AAA bond rating since the mid-1990s, highlighting its commitment to fiscal responsibility and operational excellence.

The City's Annual Comprehensive Financial Report (ACFR) is prepared by the City Auditor's Office. Megan Kilgore is the elected Auditor for the City of Columbus. Per the City Charter, the City Auditor serves as the city's chief accounting officer responsible for maintaining high-quality fiscal processing, tax collection and auditing, debt

management, record keeping, and reporting to residents, the business community, city departments and divisions, and other interested parties.

With a strong focus on transparency and timeliness, Columbus consistently delivers its ACFR within an ambitious 90-day timeline, setting it apart as a leader among municipalities. However, the reliance on manual processes and outdated tools made things more complicated for the city, pushing them to look for a better solution that could help them maintain their reputation for financial excellence. In addition, Auditor Kilgore was looking for tools to assist with the future implementation of the Financial Data Transparency Act of 2022 (FDTA) requiring certain data and financial information provided to and developed by many federal agencies to be sent in a "structured data" format sometime in 2026 or thereafter.



THE NEED

Before implementing Gravity, the City of Columbus relied on disparate spreadsheets and Word documents to prepare its ACFR. The prior software, while functional, required extensive manual effort to:

- **Consolidate data** exported from Microsoft Dynamics 365 into static files.
- **Manage 80–85 budget-to-actual statements** and combine them into a single document.
- **Cross-reference financial data** and narratives manually, increasing the risk of errors.
- **Update PDFs with new data**, which required extensive reformatting of page numbers and the table of contents.

THE SOLUTION

To address these challenges, the City of Columbus implemented Gravity’s ACFR solution, leveraging its robust automation capabilities to:

KEY IMPACT AREA	SOLUTION
Automate Data Integration	Gravity imports data directly from the city’s ERP system, eliminating the need for manual data entry and reconciliation.
Streamline Narrative Updates	Built-in linking ensures that changes to numbers automatically propagate through narratives and calculations, maintaining consistency.
Simplify Collaboration	Gravity’s cloud-based platform enables multiple team members to work simultaneously, eliminating version control issues.
Reduce Compilation Time	Automated tools generate a comprehensive ACFR document, complete with accurate page numbers and table of contents, in a fraction of the time.

THE RESULTS

Since implementing Gravity, Columbus’s budgeting process has seen significant improvements.

-  Efficiency Gains and Time Savings
-  Improved Accuracy and Consistency
-  Enhanced Collaboration and Workflow
-  Significant Reduction in Overtime
-  Support and Implementation
-  GFOA Excellence Award Winners

LOOKING AHEAD

As Columbus enters its second year with Gravity, the City Auditor’s team looks forward to unlocking even greater efficiencies and expanding their use of the platform. The city is also exploring additional modules within the Gravity suite to further modernize its financial operations, including tools for budgeting and debt management. By partnering with Gravity, the City of Columbus has transformed its ACFR process, setting a new standard for efficiency, accuracy, and transparency in government financial reporting. This transformation not only streamlines internal operations but also strengthens the city’s reputation as a leader in financial excellence, ensuring continued recognition from the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA) and building greater trust with its community.

In addition, Gravity was working on a way to auto-generate ACFR iXBRL allowing organizations to effortlessly bypass the labor-intensive process of manually tagging and allowing them to produce XBRL files in real-time.

“We’re already seeing time savings in areas like budget-to-actuals. What took two weeks can now be done in a day. The ability to link everything in Gravity has been a game-changer.”

– Darlene Wildes, Deputy City Auditor