

Using AI for Communication in Government Finance

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If you've been to an industry conference lately, read articles in professional publications, or been closely watching the news, you've undoubtedly heard of the transformative impact that artificial intelligence (AI) is having on how we work.

AI can help us automate tasks, optimize processes and enhance creativity. For those of us in government finance, one of the areas where AI can have a significant impact is in preparing presentations and memos to governing board and city council members.

If you are involved in directly communicating with governing boards or city councils, you are likely familiar with the challenges of preparing information for monthly meetings. You must strike a fine balance between providing detailed, meaningful information, while not overwhelming people with data and reports. At these meetings, members of the public are also watching and participating, looking for ways to understand how their local governments operate.

This is where AI, such as Bing Chat or ChatGPT, comes in. Let's go through an example. Let's say that you are the Finance Director for a local government, such as a city or a school district, and you want to prepare a memo to an entirely new board or council that discusses the proposed budget, including the significant revenue sources for your government, and the primary categories of expenditures. You can go to Bing Chat or ChatGPT and ask exactly that, and you can provide a link to your own government's proposed budget document. It will then use that information to instantly generate a memo for you. Is it too long and unwieldy for your audience? Ask it to try again and keep it to four or five paragraphs. Want pictures for enhanced understandability? Ask it to prepare a pie chart or bar graph using the data. Want to list some key

critical insights for the public to know, such as the main drivers of budget increases, ongoing federal projects, or strategic initiatives? Well, you guessed it – it can do that, too.

AI can even help you tailor your memo to the specific interests and concerns of your audience. For example, if you know that some board or council members are particularly interested in how your government is addressing environmental issues, you can ask Bing Chat or ChatGPT to highlight the budget items that relate to sustainability and green initiatives. Or, if you want to compare your government's budget with those of similar governments, you can ask it to find and analyze data from other sources and include them in your memo.

Below is the analysis provided by Bing Chat when I asked it to compare the budget of Phoenix, the largest city in my home state of Arizona, with cities of similar size.

"To provide some context and comparison, I also analyzed the budgets of two similar cities: San Antonio and Dallas. Here are some findings that I discovered:

- The City of Phoenix has a higher sales tax rate (8.6%) than San Antonio (8.25%) and Dallas (8.25%), but a lower property tax rate (\$1.82 per \$100 assessed value) than San Antonio (\$2.04 per \$100 assessed value) and Dallas (\$2.78 per \$100 assessed value).
- The City of Phoenix spends more public safety (54% of total expenditure) than San Antonio (49% of total expenditure) and Dallas (47% of total expenditure), but less on capital projects (16% of total expenditure) than San Antonio (23% of total expenditure) and Dallas (18% of total expenditure)."

It's good to remember that AI is not a replacement for human judgment. It is a tool that can augment and enhance your skills and expertise. You still need to review and edit the memo that Bing Chat or ChatGPT generates and make sure that it is accurate, clear and relevant. You also need to be aware of the ethical and legal implications of using AI, such as ensuring data privacy and avoiding bias.

But with these caveats in mind, AI can be a powerful ally for government finance officers who want to communicate effectively with their board members, as well as the public. By using Bing Chat or ChatGPT, you can save time, improve output quality and increase engagement. You can also focus more on the strategic and creative aspects of your work, rather than the tedious and repetitive ones.

So next time you have a memo or presentation to prepare, why not give AI a try? You might be surprised by what it can do for you. I certainly was!

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