

BOOKS ARE BORROWING!

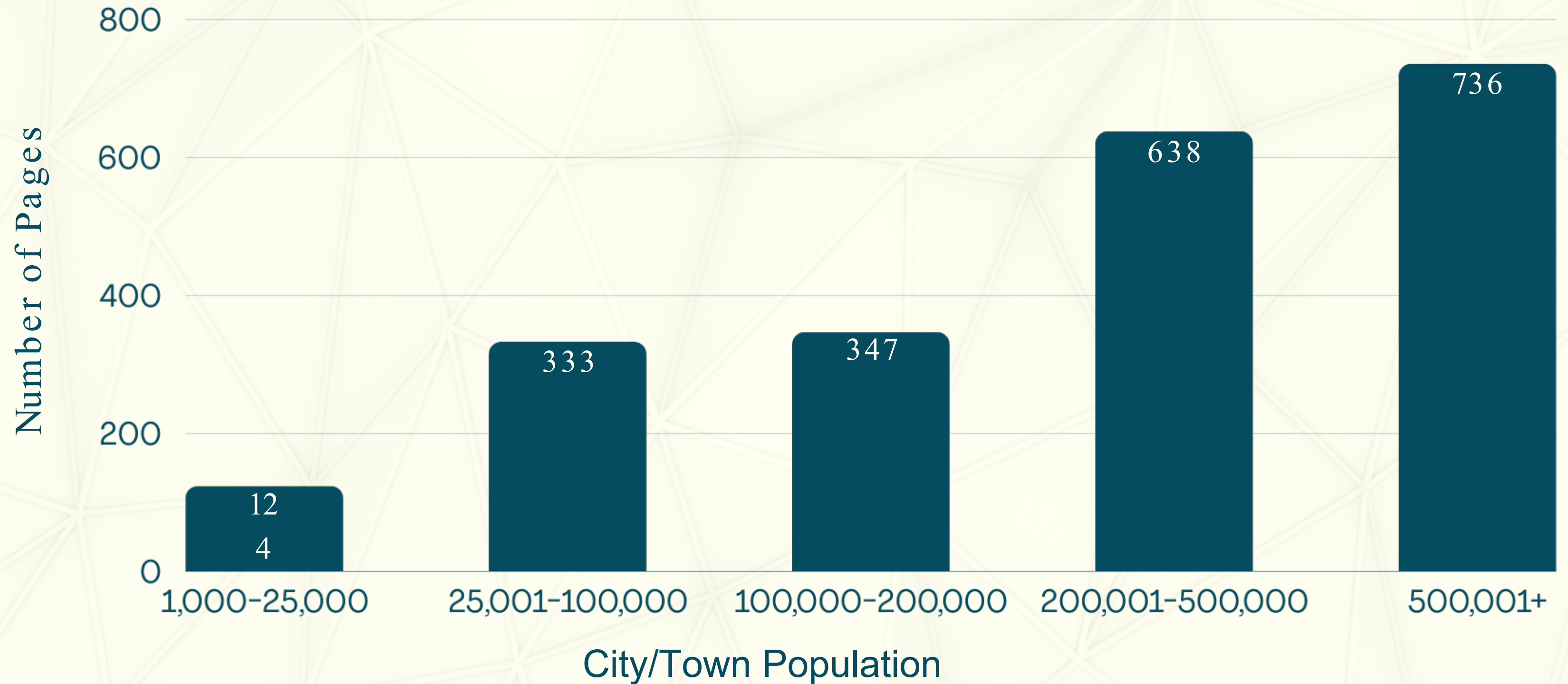
Exploring the Art of Budget
Communication

John Thomson | Town of Northlake



A REVIEW OF BUDGET BOOKS

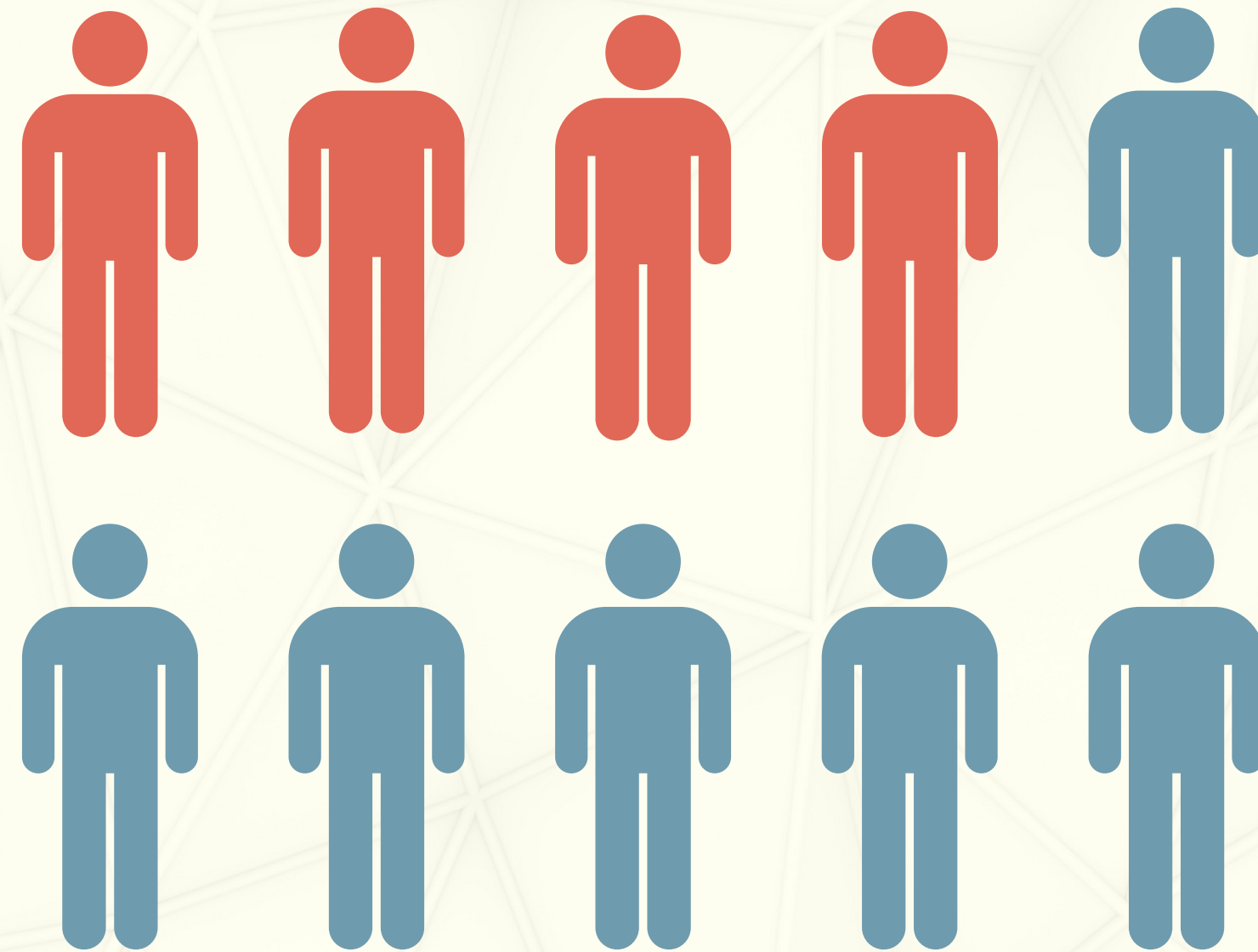
Average Number of Pages for Texas Local Government Budget Books



* Data is a random sample from a population data set of 1,163 Texas towns and cities subdivided by population

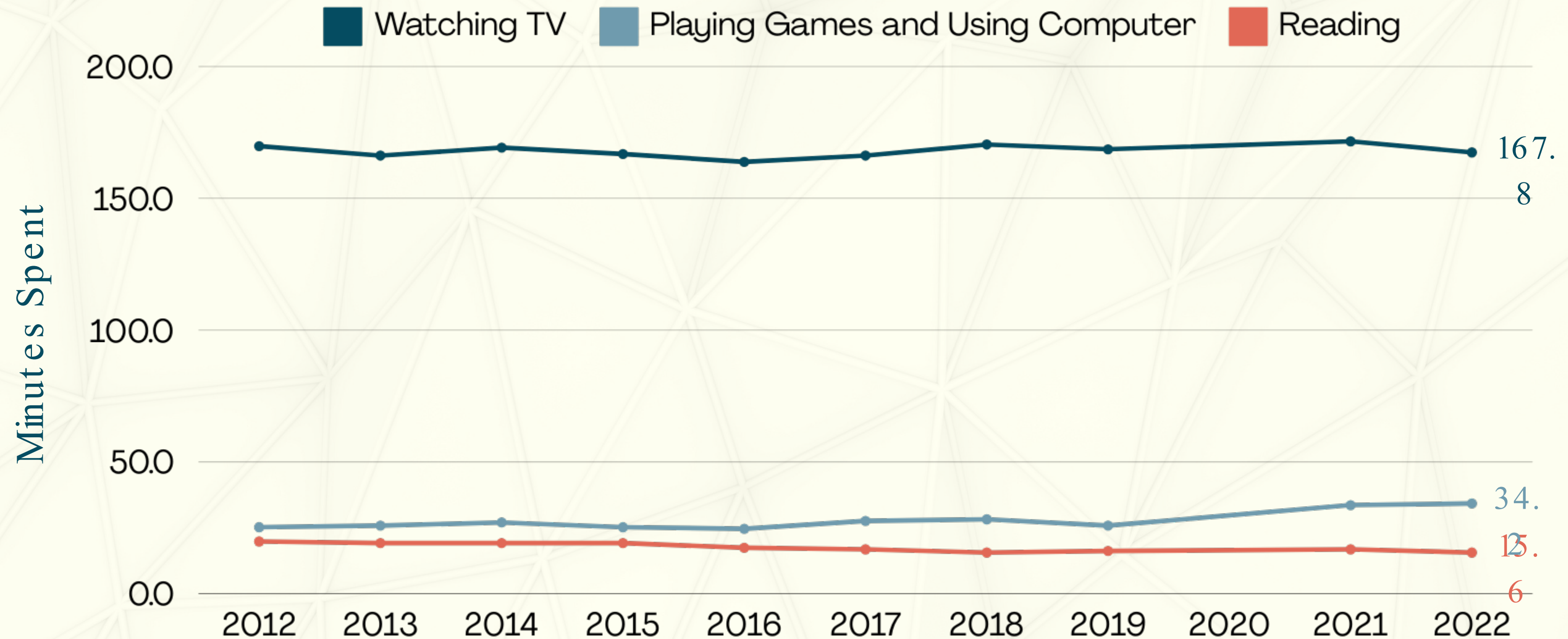
4 out of 10

Americans read or listened to 0 books in 2023.



Reading Is Not Common

Time Spent on Activities Outside Work



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

BUDGET BOOKS ARE GREAT BECAUSE...



- Provide budget data
- Strategic direction & plan
- Identify community priorities
- Can provide transparency and accountability for the right audience

BUDGET BOOKS ARE NOT SO GREAT BECAUSE...



- Complex & lengthy
- Difficult to understand & find information
- Lack narrative storytelling
- Amount of information can obscure information and stories for elected officials and public

BUILDING A BUDGETS STORY

“
Data are just summaries of thousands
of stories - tell a few of those stories
to help make data meaningful
”

Source: Dan Heath - Author and Fellow at Duke University CASE Center

3 KEY COMPONENTS OF A BUDGET STORY



Visualizations

add-ons that simplify data and tells the story clearly, memorably, effectively, and elegantly

Narrative

framework that communicates context, value, and why it matters

Data

story foundation that identifies patterns, trends, comparisons, and outcomes

STEPS TO BUILDING A BUDGET STORY

Identify the Story in Your Data

Ask questions like:

- What are our goals and what do we want to accomplish?
- What do we want to explain?
- What is the value and how does that value compare?

Look for trends, patterns, correlations, comparisons, and outliers in your data



STEPS TO BUILDING A BUDGET STORY

Know Your Audience

Customize the story and visualizations for your audience

Ask questions like:

- Who is this for? Council, public, a committee, etc.
- What information is relevant and meaningful to them?
- Have they heard this before? If so, can I change it to better connect and communicate?



STEPS TO BUILDING A BUDGET STORY

Build Your Story

Describe the context, impact to characters/stakeholders, and any problems or solutions

Ask questions like:

- Who are we talking to?
- Why does this matter?
- What do we want the audience to know?
- How does data support the story and make the point?



STEPS TO BUILDING A BUDGET STORY

Develop Visuals and Content

This is how you share your story. Share your story and visuals through:

- Digital Budget Books
- Handouts and Briefs
- Videos
- Digital Engagement Tools

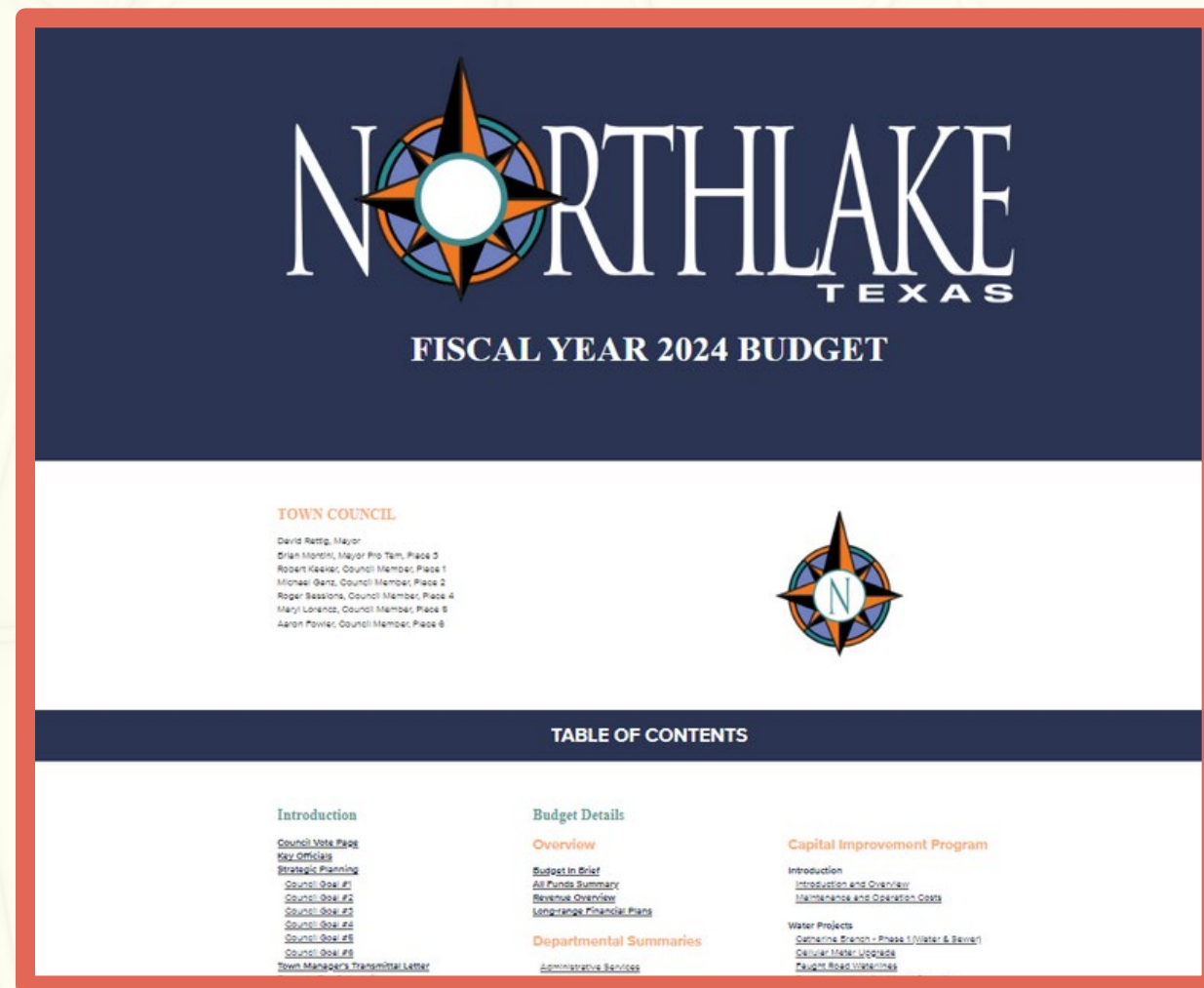


TELLING THE STORY



Digital Budget Books

Similar to traditional budget books, but with interactive charts, updateable and searchable data, and a website like interface



Town of Northlake
OpenGov Digital Budget Book



City of Bedford
ClearGov Digital Budget Book



Briefs & Handouts

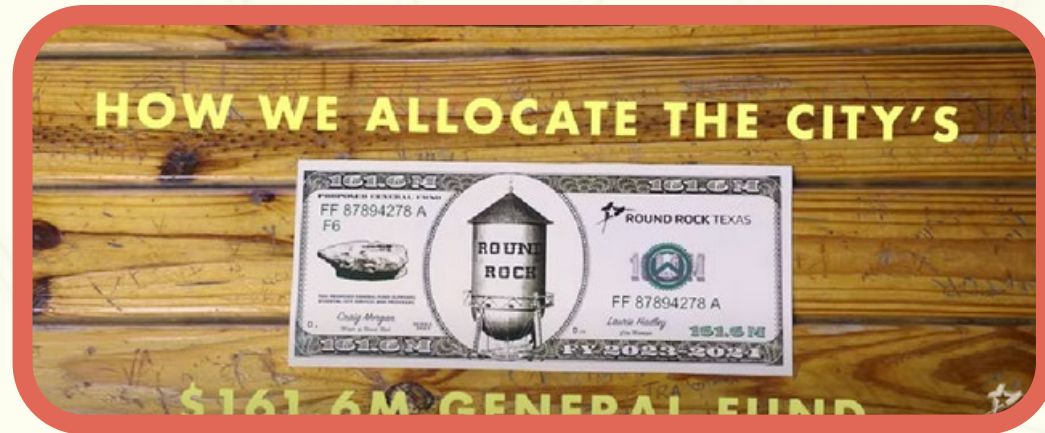
Selectively highlight stories about services and plans that matter to your audience with brief narrative text and custom visualizations, charts, and infographics





Videos

Combine audio and visual content to capture audience attention and convey complex messages with engaging content



Round Rock



Flower Mound



Arlington

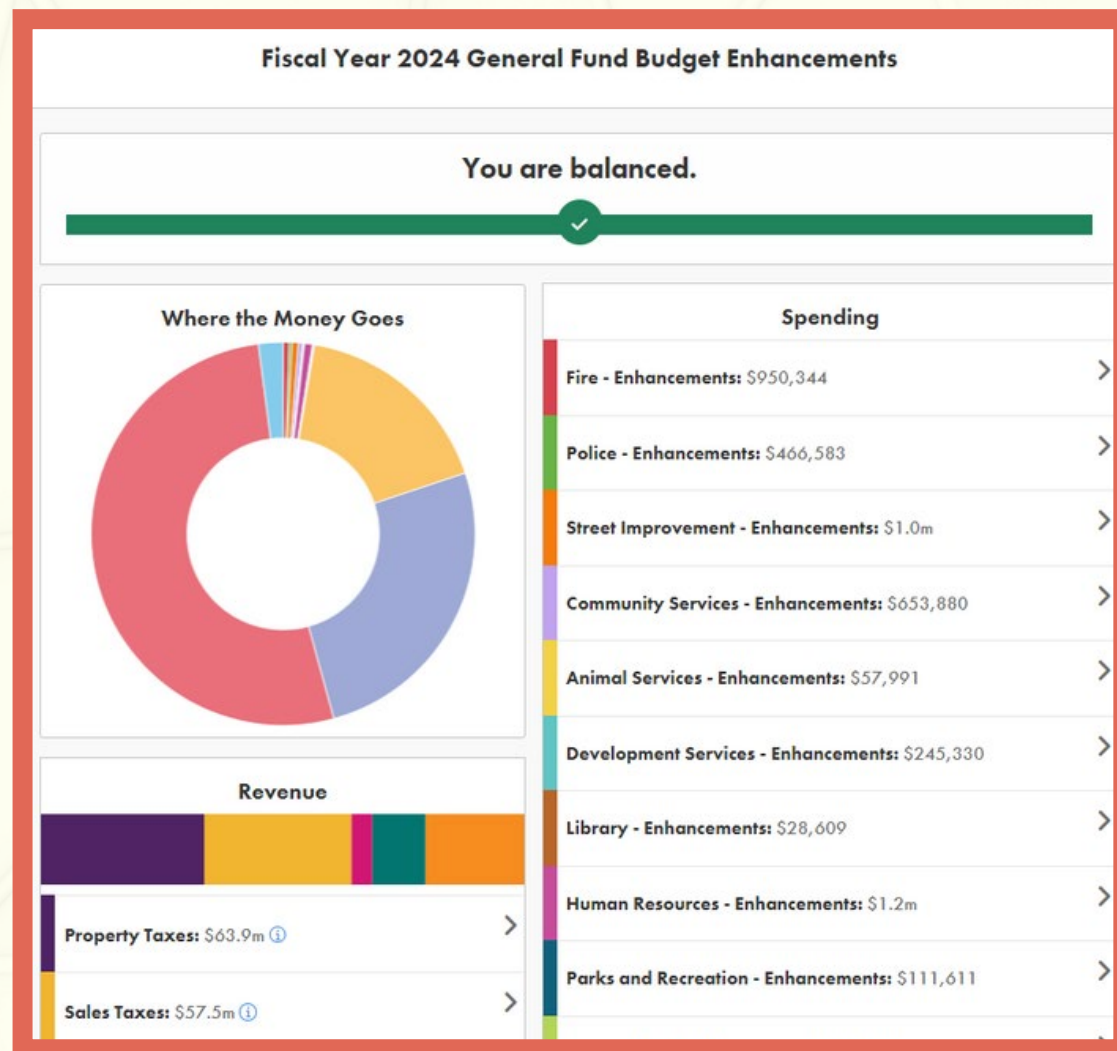


Dallas



Digital Engagement

Explore and identify tools for digital engagement and develop social media plans for sharing your budget stories



City of Denton
Balancing Act

Tools for Story Building

Briefs and Handouts

- [Canva](#)
- [Adobe Express](#)
- [Flip Snack](#)

Charts, Graphs, Infographics

- Excel
- [Canva](#)
- [Lucid Chart](#)
- [Sankey Matic](#)

Digital Budget Tools

- [ClearGov](#)
- [OpenGov](#)
- [Balancing Act](#)

Video Creation

- [Adobe Express](#)
- [Canva](#)
- [Clipchamp](#)
- [VideoScribe](#)

Q U E S T I O N S

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