The Citizen's Guide - Introduction

Introduction

WELCOME TO YOUR GUIDE!

If you've ever opened a government financial report and felt like you were looking at a wall of confusing numbers, you are not alone. These documents are often long and filled with technical language.

Think of this guide as your personal toolkit for understanding government reports. You do not need a degree in finance to use it—you just need to know where to look and which questions to ask.

You do not have to read this guide from cover to cover. Instead, treat it like a map. Go straight to the section that answers your questions about your community's finances.

What this guide helps you do

- **Read the numbers**
- **Ask better questions**
- **Follow the money**
- **Connect reports to services**

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Your Map to the Sections

Section 2. Understanding Government Financial Statements
Explains what these reports are and how they fit together to tell a story.

Section 3. What the Government Owns and Owes (Statement of Financial Position)
Shows what government owns and what it owes.

Section 4. Money Earned and Money Spent (Statement of Financial Performance)
Shows how much money was earned and spent during the year, and whether there was a surplus or deficit.

Section 5. Where the Cash Went (Cash Flow Statement)
Tracks how cash moved in and out of the government's bank, and whether government can pay its bills.

Section 6. Changes Over Time (Statement of Changes in Net Assets)
Shows whether government's overall financial position is improving or weakening over time.

Section 7. Spending vs. the Plan (Statement of Comparison of Budget and Actual Amounts)
Shows whether government spent money as planned and delivered on its budget.

READ THE REPORTS TOGETHER

No single report tells the full story.

To understand what is really happening with government's finances, you need to look at all the reports together.

Annual Plan	Budget	Financial Statements	Performance Reports
Shows non-financial plans	Shows the planned finances	Shows the actual financial story	Shows services delivered

When you read them together, it becomes clearer whether government is managing public money well and delivering services as expected.

LASTLY,

You do not need to understand everything at once.

01. Start with your question.
02. Follow the numbers.
03. Connect them to actual services.

That is how you turn **information** into **insight**.

THE CITIZEN'S GUIDE : Understanding Government Financial Statements
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