

Government Treasury Teams Deserve Better: The Case for Purpose-Built Technology in Public Finance

By Greg Person, CTP

Chief Revenue Officer, DebtBook | Former Treasury Professional

An Underserved Constituency

There is a workforce that sits at the financial foundation of every American community — the government finance and treasury professional. They are often small teams, sometimes a department of one, managing the cash, debt, investments, and compliance obligations of cities, counties, school districts, and public universities. Their work funds the roads we drive on, the schools our children attend, and the emergency services we depend on. And yet, as an industry, we have largely left them behind when it comes to technology.

These teams carry a disproportionate burden. They operate under intense public accountability, strict regulatory requirements, and the constant pressure to do more with less, all while managing workforces that are aging and, in many cases, shrinking.

The institutional knowledge walking out the door when a veteran treasurer retires is not easily replaced, and the manual, spreadsheet-driven processes they leave behind are not a sustainable foundation for the next generation of public finance professionals.

"We do our best with the information we're given, but we don't always have the full story in a timely way." — County Treasurer, Midwestern County

That quote, shared with us by a client, captures the central frustration of government treasury operations today. It's not a complaint about effort or capability. It's a structural problem, a technology gap that has persisted far too long.

The Private Sector Gets Tools. Government Gets Spreadsheets.

The treasury technology market is robust, if you work in corporate finance. There are sophisticated, well-resourced platforms built for Fortune 500 treasury departments, commercial banks, and asset managers. These tools handle multi-entity cash consolidation, real-time bank connectivity, forecasting engines, and investment analytics with elegance and depth.

Government treasury teams, by contrast, have been largely served by tools built for someone else and adapted, imperfectly, for their needs. The problem is not just a matter of feature gaps, but a matter of fundamental domain fit. Government treasury operations have requirements that

are structurally different from private sector treasury, and generic tools simply cannot address them well.

Consider what is unique to the governmental context: tax-exempt debt and the regulatory compliance that surrounds it; GASB 87 and GASB 96 accounting standards for leases and subscription-based IT arrangements; the rigid seasonality of cash flows driven by property tax collection cycles, debt service payment schedules, and legislative appropriations; bond proceed spend-down requirements and private business use tracking; and the multi-fund, multi-entity reporting structures that characterize virtually every government balance sheet. These are not edge cases. They are the daily reality of public finance, and they are largely invisible to platforms designed for the private sector.

The Cost of Siloed Data and Partial Visibility

When technology fails to harmonize the myriad systems, spreadsheets, and departmental data sources that government finance teams depend on, the result is not merely inefficiency. It's a fundamental inability to manage liquidity with confidence.

A recent study conducted by the University of Chicago across 168 local governments, including state agencies, cities, counties, school districts, and higher education institutions, found that treasury teams spend approximately 50% of their time on data assembly: pulling bank balances from multiple portals, reconciling spreadsheets, chasing ERP exports, and manually aggregating information that should be available instantly. Another 30% goes to reporting and disclosure. That leaves just 20% of capacity for the strategic work that actually matters such as forecasting, scenario analysis, investment optimization, and capital planning decisions.

This is not a reflection of the people doing the work. It's a reflection of the tools they have been given. When your cash position requires logging into five different bank portals, when your debt service schedule lives in a spreadsheet disconnected from your cash forecast, and when your investment maturities are tracked separately from your liquidity planning, you are not managing treasury, you are assembling data. And the decisions that suffer as a result are not abstract. They are decisions about whether to draw on a line of credit, whether to invest idle cash, whether bond proceeds are being spent on schedule, and whether the community has the liquidity it needs to fund the services its residents depend on.

Government treasury teams spend 50% of their time assembling data, leaving only 20% for the strategic work that actually protects community liquidity.

Unfortunately, many governments are forced to make consequential financial decisions based on partial information, not because they lack diligence, but because the data they need is not accessible in a timely, integrated way. That is frustrating. And in 2026, with the technology that exists, it is also unacceptable.

What Good Looks Like: A Case for Tiered, Disciplined Forecasting

The GFOA has long recommended that governments maintain at least two months of operating expenditures in unrestricted fund balance, and conduct ongoing cash forecasting on a rolling 12-month basis. These are sound guidelines, but they represent a floor, not a ceiling. And critically, they leave open the question of how, operationally, governments should build and maintain the forecasting discipline that makes those guidelines meaningful in practice.

Based on experience working with government finance teams across the country, I would suggest that best-in-class government treasury operations employ a three-tiered forecasting framework:

1. **Strategic horizon (12-month rolling):** Major inflows and outflows analyzed monthly. Investment maturities modeled against forecasted obligations.
2. **Tactical horizon (1–3 months, weekly detail):** Specific large payment flows such as debt service, payroll, capital expenditures are identified and matched against maturing investments or available proceeds. Cash and short-term liquidity investments available for redemption should cover up to 2x the average monthly outflow.
3. **Operational horizon (daily cash position, 3–5 day outlook):** Prior-day bank statements reviewed daily. Near-term payment flows forecasted using invoice-level detail, payroll schedules, debt service settlement dates, and other material flows.

Each tier serves a different decision and together they create the layered confidence that transforms a treasury operation from reactive to proactive.

The Forecast-to-Actual Feedback Loop: The Most Underappreciated Best Practice

Of all the operational disciplines in government treasury management, the one I would most want to see elevated in formal best practice guidance is the forecast-to-actual variance process. No forecast is perfectly accurate, the nature of governmental cash flows, driven by legislative cycles, grant timing, tax collection patterns, and factors outside treasury's direct control, makes perfect prediction impossible. It's simply reality.

What matters is the discipline of regularly comparing forecast projections against bank-reported actuals, identifying where and why variances occurred, and using those insights to tighten future forecasts. This should be done at minimum monthly and more frequently for governments managing complex or high-volume cash flows.

The value of this discipline extends well beyond forecast accuracy. A structured variance review enables finance teams to roll forward late receipts that did not materialize in the forecasted period; identify unexpected disbursement behavior, which also functions as an important internal fraud control; monitor bond proceeds drawdowns and confirm that expenditures are executing on schedule; and capture new investment maturities that may affect near-term liquidity. It also enables finance directors and CFOs to respond with confidence when city managers or finance committees ask about cash flow budget performance, a question that too often catches treasury teams flat-footed because the analysis was not being done in real time.

The bank statement is the source of truth. The forecast is a hypothesis. The variance analysis is how you learn. Governments that build this discipline into their operating rhythm, rather than waiting until month-end or quarter-end to see where cash landed, are fundamentally better positioned to manage liquidity and protect the communities they serve.

Modern Technology Changes What Is Possible

The good news is that the technology to support all of this now exists and for the first time, it is being built specifically for government. Modern bank connectivity solutions, ERP integrations, and purpose-built treasury platforms now make it possible for government finance teams to have a single, integrated view of cash positions across multiple banks and custodians; a living cash flow forecast that draws automatically from debt service schedules, investment maturities, payroll systems, and AP data; real-time forecast-to-actual variance analysis without manual data assembly; and the compliance and disclosure outputs that government finance requires, from GASB compliance across debt, investment, lease and subscription management, to ACFR footnotes and investment policy reporting.

The vision is not incremental improvement on a spreadsheet model. It's a fundamentally different operating posture, one where the data speaks for itself, where decisions are informed by a confident and complete picture, and where treasury professionals spend their time on the analysis and judgment that only they can provide.

This matters not just for the efficiency of finance departments. It matters for the communities those departments serve. When a government treasurer has a confident, real-time view of liquidity, they can make better decisions about when to invest idle cash, when to draw on a credit facility, when bond proceeds are available to fund a capital project, and whether the government has the financial resilience to absorb an unexpected shock. When that visibility is absent, when the picture is assembled from stale spreadsheets, partial bank data, and disconnected systems, those decisions are made with less confidence than they deserve.

The Obligation to Do Better

Government finance professionals have accepted a level of technological limitation for too long, not because they lack ambition, but because the market did not offer them viable alternatives. That is changing. And as it changes, I believe those of us who work alongside these teams have an obligation to advocate loudly for the standards, tools, and practices that will allow them to do their jobs with the confidence and capability that their communities deserve.

The GFOA guidelines on cash forecasting and fund balance reserves are a strong foundation. But guidelines are only as powerful as the operational infrastructure that supports them. Technology that unifies data, automates the routine, and surfaces insight is not a luxury for government treasury operations, it is a necessity. And the communities we live and work in are better served when the finance professionals protecting their liquidity have the tools to do so.

Greg Person, CTP

Chief Revenue Officer, DebtBook

Greg Person, CTP, serves as Chief Revenue Officer at DebtBook, a unified treasury management platform serving more than 2,100 government, nonprofit, and higher education entities. A former treasury practitioner with experience across corporate treasury, cash management, and public finance treasury operations, Greg brings a practitioner's perspective to the intersection of governmental finance and financial technology. He leads DebtBook's revenue strategy and capital markets partnerships, working closely with public finance teams, municipal advisors, and financial institutions nationwide.

greg.person@debtbook.com | www.debtbook.com