One Source of Truth

How Outreach Traded a 25-Tab Spreadsheet for a System That Scales

CFO David Knutsen on ditching a legacy system, choosing a CPA firm integration partner over a software reseller, and what a realistic first year on Sage Intacct looks like.

Implemented by GRF CPAs & Advisors

The Organization

Outreach is a $15M-revenue Christian multi-service, human-services nonprofit whose mission is to restore hope and provide opportunities for people to become all that God intends them to be.

The Challenge

Outreach's finance team was managing a growing nonprofit on a system that could no longer keep pace. Budgeting was the most visible pain point — a 25-tab Excel workbook with thousands of rows — but it was only one part of the problem. Bank activity, wage allocations, grants tracking, and reporting all depended on manual workarounds that made the finance function harder to scale and harder to hand off.

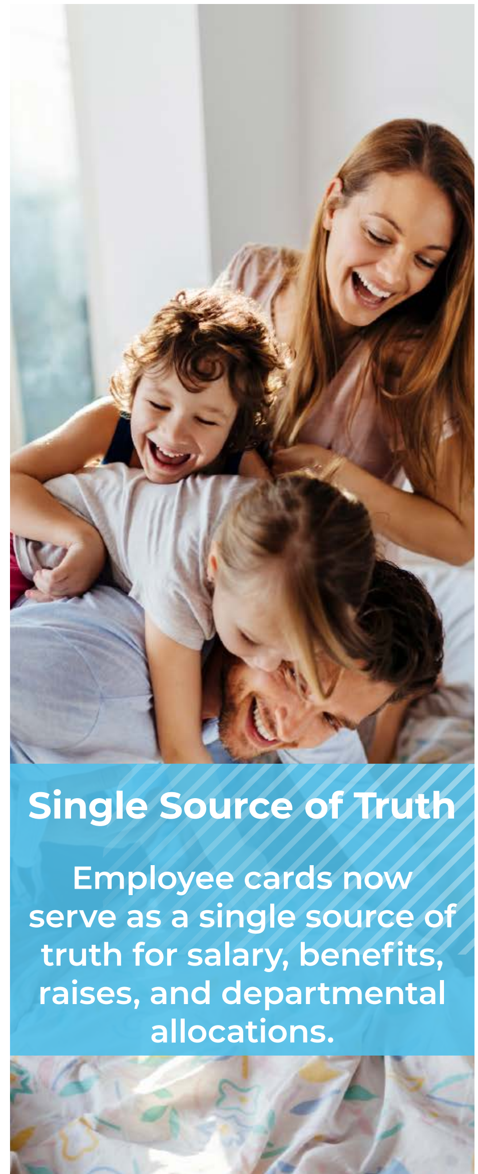
David Knutsen, CFO, Outreach

"I equate the old system to buying a really old house and trying to make it new. There's only so many things you can do," says CFO David Knutsen.

The system started to show its age, performance lagged and updates and support requests didn't aways keep pace with what our team needed. Nearly every core finance process ran through Excel instead: the annual budget, bank transactions entered twice (once in Excel, again in the old system), and wage allocations sliced by hand across departments. That last piece carried real weight: with wages representing 70% of Outreach's budget, even small allocation errors could distort program costs, grant reporting, and management decisions.

"If all that knowledge resides with one or two people and in a collection of Excel worksheets, the organization is vulnerable," Knutsen says. "Someone else needs to be able to step in, find the information, and understand how the process works."

The problem wasn't just a spreadsheet. It was that too much institutional finance knowledge lived outside the accounting system.



Single Source of Truth

Employee cards now serve as a single source of truth for salary, benefits, raises, and departmental allocations.

If all that knowledge resides with one or two people and in a collection of Excel worksheets, the organization is vulnerable. Someone else needs to be able to step in, find the information, and understand how the process works.

— David Knutsen,
Chief Financial Officer, Outreach

Wage Allocation

Sage Intacct moved payroll allocations out of manual spreadsheets and into a structured system.

Choosing a Partner, Not Just a Product

When it came time to migrate, Outreach weighed doing it themselves, going direct with Sage, or bringing in a CPA firm. They chose GRF CPAs & Advisors, reinforced by prior positive experience with the firm. “From the outset, my preference was to work with a CPA firm because of their overall accounting knowledge and their understanding of how we would use and leverage the system,” Knutsen says.

The choice paid off during setup: the initial license configuration didn’t include the dynamic-allocation module for two staff who, on the grants side, needed it. GRF’s team, drawing on deeper accounting-side expertise, flagged the gap after the contract was already signed and helped Outreach adjust the setup before it became an implementation problem. This mattered because grants work depends on the ability to allocate costs accurately across programs, departments, and funding sources, not just enter transactions after the fact. “The sales representative was very helpful throughout the process but did not bring the same depth of accounting expertise or implementation experience from an end-user perspective that the GRF team brought,” Knutsen says.

A Structured Implementation

Weekly meetings ran start to finish, with direct access to GRF whenever questions came up and issues fixed as they surfaced. GRF rebuilt the organization’s entire tangle of Excel budget worksheets inside Sage Intacct Planning, getting them “95% of the way there” for the first live budget cycle, with the remaining work focused on first-year refinements such as validating templates, training users, and adjusting the process as the team worked in the system.

“A few people warned me that the implementation would take longer and cost more than quoted,” Knutsen says. “Neither happened. We completed the implementation on time and on budget.” Support also continued beyond go-live, with the same GRF team members who led the implementation still available to answer questions today.

> A few people warned me that the implementation would take longer and cost more than quoted. Neither happened. We completed the implementation **on time** and **on budget**.
>
> *— David Knutsen,*
> *Chief Financial Officer, Outreach*

The Results

The biggest win was not simply replacing a spreadsheet. Outreach began moving core finance processes into one connected system — budgeting, wage allocations, daily cash visibility, and eventually grants and board reporting.

Wage Allocation

Because wages represent 70% of Outreach's budget, payroll allocation was one of the most important areas to move out of manual spreadsheets. Employee cards now serve as a single source of truth for salary, benefits, raises, and departmental allocations, helping enforce 100% allocation across departments and reducing the risk that personnel costs are understated, overstated, or split inconsistently.

For a grant-funded nonprofit, that matters beyond budgeting: cleaner wage allocations help strengthen program costing, grant tracking, and the reporting leadership relies on to understand where resources are going.

Cash Visibility

A daily bank feed replaced double entry of every transaction, once in Excel and again in the old system.

Budget Cycle

Outreach's full multi-department budget now runs in Sage Intacct Planning instead of a 25-tab Excel workbook. The first live budget cycle in Sage was a heavy lift because it required building budget templates, cleaning up data, and training budget users. Knutsen expects the new system to reduce the roughly 500 hours historically spent on the budgeting process by half next year.

On Time, On Budget

Despite concerns by some about the project timeline and total costs, Outreach went live as planned on January 1, with the implementation completed on schedule and within budget.

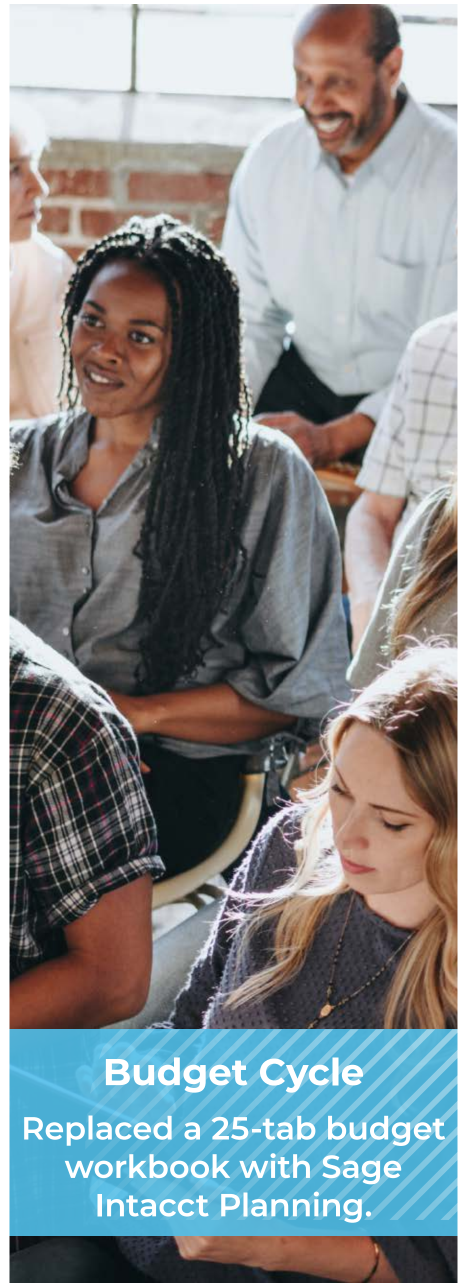
What's Next:

Grants tracking: Outreach's grants team is still in the transition period, but the goal is clear: retire the parallel Excel tracking within the year and manage grant activity inside the same system as the rest of finance. That would give the team a more consistent way to track grant-related costs, allocations, and reporting needs without maintaining a separate source of truth.

Board reporting: Once Outreach has two full fiscal years of data in Sage Intacct, Knutsen expects the organization to further streamline and enhance its board-reporting process.

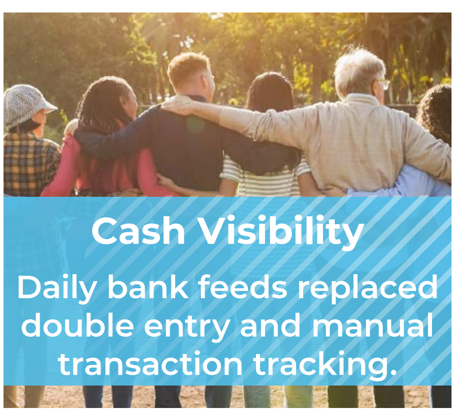
Knutsen is candid that reporting remains a work in progress. Sage Intacct gives Outreach significantly greater reporting capabilities than its previous system, but the organization is still determining how to best organize, review, and present information for different audiences. "We're probably 50% of the way there on reporting," he says. "That isn't a Sage issue; it reflects the internal work we still need to do to fully leverage the system."

In other words, the next phase is less about whether the software can produce reports and more about expanding Outreach's imagination for what those reports can now become after the first year of live data.



Budget Cycle

Replaced a 25-tab budget workbook with Sage Intacct Planning.



Cash Visibility

Daily bank feeds replaced double entry and manual transaction tracking.

Advice for Other CFOs

"It's not going to be easier if you wait a year or three years or five years — it's going to be worse," Knutsen says. He ties that warning to Outreach's own experience: waiting years to make the switch let things get "like a spider web," i.e., more of a challenge than it needed to be.

Advice to Peers Considering the Move:

- **Start with the specific reasons for making the move.** Knutsen identified three priorities going in — budgeting, financial reporting, and day-to-day operations — then measured progress against each one. That helped keep year-one grounded in practical outcomes rather than expecting every benefit to appear at once.

- **Treat year one as an investment, not the whole ROI story.** Outreach's first live budget cycle required significant work across templates, training, and data cleanup. But much of that effort created reusable structure. Year one was the investment; year two is where the efficiency payoff begins.

- **Plan for change management, not just software implementation.** Moving systems is rarely a light-switch moment. It requires decisions, cleanup, training, and new habits, the kind of work that helps the organization move from spreadsheet-dependent processes to a more durable finance operating model.

- **Keep optimizing after go-live.** Knutsen is candid that not everything is fully solved in year one, especially reporting. His view is that the move is a process, not a light switch: first stabilize the core system, then continue refining reporting, grants tracking, board materials, and day-to-day workflows as the team builds confidence in the new model.

- **Use GRF.** "Overall, I would definitely suggest GRF to my nonprofit peers," Knutsen says. "Involve them in the discovery and negotiation meetings with Sage." His reason to recommend GRF comes down to the combination Outreach needed most: accounting fluency, implementation discipline, and a team that stayed involved after go-live. GRF helped identify licensing and allocation needs that could have limited the system's usefulness, rebuilt a complex budgeting process inside Sage Intacct Planning, kept the project on schedule and on budget, and continues to answer questions as Outreach refines the system in year one.

Time Savings

Expected to cut annual budgeting effort from roughly 500 hours to 250 hours.

A Model for Mission-Driven Finance

What Outreach has built in one year is more than a system migration. The 25-tab spreadsheet is gone, replaced by a single source of truth; a budgeting process that ate roughly 500 hours is on track to take half that next year; and a finance team that used to hunt for its own numbers now works from one shared set of them. For a $15M human-services nonprofit, that kind of operational maturity is worth pointing to, proof to the board that the stewardship donors and funders expect is matched by the rigor behind the scenes.

For Knutsen, the implementation also reflects the importance of steady financial leadership during organizational change. He made the business case for the new system, navigated staff vacancies during the process, and remained candid about the areas that are still evolving rather than presenting the implementation as a finished product. His approach combined follow-through, transparency, and a clear understanding of how the finance function ultimately supports the organization's mission.

GRF Can Help

If your current accounting system isn't empowering your finance team to add value to your organization, it's time for an upgrade. GRF works with organizations of all sizes ready to transform their accounting function and implement Cloud Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP).

Our team helps nonprofit organizations build and customize a technology stack that eliminates manual processes, reduces errors, and provides the transparency modern nonprofits need to stay focused on their mission. As this case study illustrates, the right ERP solution doesn't just solve today's operational challenges — it positions your organization for sustainable growth and greater impact.

GRF brings the technical expertise and nonprofit sector knowledge to guide you through every stage of implementation, from system selection to staff training and beyond. Ready to see what's possible for your organization? Contact GRF today to start the conversation.

Heather Broberg

Principal, Accounting Technology Services

hbroberg@grfcpa.com

301-951-9090
grfcpa.com

CPAs & ADVISORS