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## GFOA's Evolving Strategic Framework

**S**trategic planning is a long-standing “best practice” in public finance that helps all organizations think strategically about the future in a volatile and resource-constrained environment. As it is often practiced, though, strategic planning has limitations and fails to live up to its promised benefit.

In 2022, GFOA conducted research to “rethink” strategic planning. Traditional strategic planning often involves a structured process of identifying a vision statement, goals, and set of strategies. The work of preparing the plan is conducted at predetermined interval—once every five years, in our case—and the result of these efforts—the strategic plan document—is expected to guide the organization for the timeframe identified in the plan. And once they’ve been created, these strategic plan documents quickly become obsolete in an ever-changing world.

GFOA's recommended approach, as identified in our research paper, “Rethinking Strategic Planning,” emphasizes forward thinking and continuous strategy development, and it minimizes detailed planning.

Based on this, GFOA has established several recommendations for strategic planning:

- Accept uncertainty.
- Define the problem before defining the solution.
- Provide focus by introducing constraints.
- Develop a rolling planning process.
- Make sure planning is collaborative.
- Make sure planning is fair.

This approach has changed the way GFOA conducts its own strategic planning. We now develop a strategic framework for the organization and update it often to reflect the challenges and opportunities that face not only our association, but also the audience we serve. The plan is allowed to evolve as we learn more about our own programs, our members, and the overall environment we operate in. At the same time, we also recognize that we will never have a complete set of information about the many factors that influence our decisions. As we continuously scan our environment and the services we offer, our revised framework now focuses on addressing two main problems:

1. GFOA continues to grow, but our membership isn't representative of the public finance profession. Our current membership structure provides organizations with a limited number of membership slots, based on the size of the organization, and those are almost always filled by the most senior employees at the organization. As a result, less senior finance professionals, who are most likely to benefit from GFOA professional development and educational offerings, don't have access.
2. A significant portion of GFOA members don't take advantage of our educational offerings. The reasons vary, but common issues involve awareness, accessibility, and affordability.

In the next year, we will be rolling out two major initiatives. The first aims to expand GFOA's membership and create new opportunities for finance staff at all levels of the organization. Under our current membership structure, which has been in place for many years, organizations receive between one and seven membership slots, based on the size of the organization, and they can add additional members for a fee.

Many governments don't add members, though, and their slots are filled by the most senior staff in the organization. GFOA allows members to share some of their benefits, like discounted pricing, with their non-member colleagues, but some benefits—like access to our online communities, affinity groups, or the Certified Public Finance Officer program—can't be shared. GFOA will therefore make several changes to streamline and align our membership structure with our organizational values. The most significant change GFOA's Executive Board is now considering is an organization-based membership model that makes all employees of a member organization eligible for membership at no additional cost. We look forward to exploring the benefits of this change and welcoming many new members to our network.

Our second strategic initiative will improve access to professional development. Each year, less than half of our members take a class, attend our annual conference, or attend similar GFOA events—so we've developed several strategies to make professional development more

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accessible. We'll get started in late February 2024 with new on-demand learning modules that will provide continuing professional education (CPE) credits and allow members to access content on their own time.

Second, we'll continue to expand our affinity group offerings and will provide more complimentary events from the Small Government Forum, Urban Forum, Utility Finance Forum, Alliance for Excellence in School Budgeting, Black Caucus, Women's Public Finance Network, LGBTQIA+ Caucus, and

Community for Canadian Issues than ever before. Third, we will release our "Learning Pathways" resources, which will help members better define career options and set educational goals to achieve them. Learning Pathways will explain common career paths in the public sector and provide direction on the common skills, competencies, and qualifications needed for advancement. Organizations will find that these resources are helpful in building position descriptions, recruiting new talent, or engaging in succession planning.

Following recommendations we received as part of our "Rethinking Strategic Planning" initiative, each of these initiatives was developed through a collaborative process. Our strategic approach to all programs and services prioritizes diversity, equity, and inclusion; integration and alignment; and the importance of partnerships. GFOA's ever-evolving strategic framework also increases our responsiveness and allows us to adjust to changing conditions. These are exciting times for GFOA. We don't know exactly what the future will bring, but I am confident that our strategic framework has us pointed in the right direction.

If you have any questions or would like to learn more about what GFOA can do for you, please let us know. We look forward to working with you in the coming year, growing GFOA, and supporting the work you do to build thriving communities across the United States and Canada.

Sincerely,

*Chris*



Download GFOA's Rethinking Strategic Planning report at [gfoa.org/materials/rethinking-strategic-planning](https://gfoa.org/materials/rethinking-strategic-planning)