

GFOA's 2021 Virtual Conference

Leading Through Changing Times

BY NATALIE LAUDADIO



GFOA would like to thank the nearly 3,600 attendees of our 2021 Virtual Conference, which streamed live from July 12 to 23. GFOA is pleased to have provided attendees with the information they were looking for, including ways to prioritize their communities' needs in the face of COVID-19, to develop practices that promote long-term sustainability, and to prepare for any future challenges.

The Annual Business Meeting

GFOA Executive Director/CEO Chris Morrill opened the conference on July 12 by introducing Finance Director for the Metropolitan St. Louis Sewer District and GFOA President Marion Gee.

The president's address. GFOA highlighted the work we've done over the past year, along with our ability to both maintain critical programs and refocus initiatives to provide members with support for challenges created by the pandemic. This included:

- Updating our Fiscal First Aid research and providing members with new research reports, forecasting models, and case study focused webinars.
- Advocating for member needs through the Federal Liaison Center in Washington, D.C., and providing ongoing guidance on federal aid.
- Launching a new learning management system, which has been a critical platform for meeting members' educational needs while they're working remotely. (learn.gfoa.org)

- Continuing its practical research initiatives including rethinking budgeting, building trust, and applying lessons from the work of GFOA's Financial Foundations Framework.
- Beginning rollout of the redesigned Certified Public Finance Officer (CPFO) Program.
- Rolling out GFOA's new online member community which allows members to tap into GFOA's most valuable resources—its members (community.gfoa.org).

Honor to assist, honor to serve.

Gee reiterated that the entire GFOA team is motivated to serve and to help with the remarkable work our members are doing every day as you lead your communities through these difficult times.

Policy statement. GFOA members approved a policy statement on new terminology for referring to the comprehensive annual financial report (gfoa.org/materials/reference-comprehensive-annual-financial-report).

New executive board members.

The association's members elected a new GFOA president-elect and five new members to the Executive Board, whose three-year terms begin immediately. Terri Velasquez, director of finance for the City of Aurora, Colorado, is the GFOA president-elect. The five new members-at-large are: Lunda Asmani, chief financial officer, Town of New Canaan, Connecticut; Kenton Tsoodle, assistant city manager, City of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Susan Iverson, finance and accounting manager, City of Red Wing, Minnesota; Anne P. Harty, chief financial officer, City of Rock Hill, South Carolina; and Bruce H. Fisher, director of policy and planning, Halifax Regional Municipality, Nova Scotia. Learn more about GFOA's Executive Board at gfoa.org/executive-board.

Passing the presidential gavel.

Michael A. Bryant, deputy county manager of Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, took over as GFOA's president, succeeding 2020-2021 President Marion Gee. Bryant said: "GFOA's superpower is its members—dedicated public servants like you who are making a difference every day in their communities. As our states, provinces, cities, counties, school boards, and special districts face the greatest financial challenge in generations, your leadership is more important than ever." As president he will focus on three areas: people, policy, and process. Over the next year, members can look for an expansion of GFOA's Member Communities, a full roll-out of the Certified Public Finance Officer program, continued advocacy and support from GFOA's team in Washington, D.C., and new tools and resources from GFOA's major research initiatives in local government budgeting and local government revenue.

2021 academic scholarship recipients.

GFOA plays an important role in ensuring that the next generation of finance leaders are ready to face the challenges that the future will bring. Awarding scholarships is an important strategy to support students looking to enter the field and promote public finance as a profession. The scholarship recipients were profiled in the August issue of *GFR*, and interviews were also featured in GFOA's member newsletter. Read more at gfoa.org/2021-scholarship-winners.

GFOA Networking Groups

Black Caucus. GFOA's Black Caucus held its annual business meeting on July 15. To learn more about GFOA's Black Caucus and to join, go to gfoa.org/black-caucus.

Small Government Forum.

GFOA's Small Government Forum held a resource roundtable on July 14. Joining the Small Government Forum is a great way to meet other GFOA members who represent communities with populations of 25,000 or fewer. Join at gfoa.org/small-government-forum.

Urban Forum. Attendees from large urban governments met to discuss their complex challenges on July 20. Network and exchange information with fellow GFOA members from jurisdictions with metropolitan area populations of 1,000,000 or more by joining at gfoa.org/urban-forum.

Women's Public Finance Network.

GFOA's Women's Public Finance Network held its annual business meeting on July 19. Learn how you can get more involved with the group at gfoa.org/womens-public-finance-network.



Michael A. Bryant accepted the presidential gavel from GFOA President Marion M. Gee during the virtual Annual Business Meeting. Bryant plans to focus on three areas: people, policy and process.

2021 GFOA HERO AWARDS

GFOA's Third Annual Hero Award recipients were recognized during the Annual Business Meeting. The award spotlights finance officers who have demonstrated extraordinary actions during a time of health, financial, natural, or human-made crisis. The below six recipients of the award were profiled in GFOA's member newsletter, and you can also read about them at gfoa.org/2021-hero-award. We'd like to thank all this year's nominees. Nominations for the Fourth Annual Hero Award will open in January 2022.



Catherine McClary, treasurer, Washtenaw County, Ann Arbor, Michigan, worked on several critical measures specific to the COVID-19 pandemic and racial inequity in her community over the past year. Pandemic safety requirements gave her and her staff an opportunity to rethink old business practices and accept change.



Darin Kamradt, director of finance, WaterOne, Lenexa, Kansas, provided pandemic leadership that helped ensure the safety of the organization's essential workers and the reliability of water service to the public.



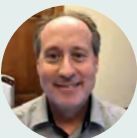
Matthew Trine, assistant city manager/finance director, City of Rockledge, Florida, helped monitor the city's revenue streams almost weekly and monthly throughout the pandemic.



Paul Miller, director of finance, Ohio Public Employees Deferred Compensation Plan, Columbus, Ohio was instrumental in helping the plan modify its unforeseeable emergency program to allow participants to self-certify their needs for fund access, increasing funds available to participants during the pandemic for medical bills, mortgages, rent, and other critically important financial needs.



Jené Jess, finance director, City of Bondurant, Iowa, worked with customers to develop payment plans during the pandemic and reduced the city's overall delinquent utility balances, while helping customers figure out how to cope with individual financial setbacks.



Albert Stanley, chief financial officer, City of Ventnor, New Jersey, was instrumental in keeping the city operating, including the finance department.



Conference Sessions

Nearly 200 speakers presented more than 50 sessions that streamed from July 12 to 23. Attendees participated in timely sessions about relief and recovery, cybersecurity, disaster management, equity in budgeting, police budgeting, how to lead through these unprecedented and changing times, and other sessions on GFOA's core topics of accounting, budgeting, debt, and treasury management.

The following are some highlights of this year's offerings.

The Relief and Recovery Infrastructure Panel (July 12). The panel kicked off with opening remarks from Congresswoman Jackie Walorski (IN-2) on aid for workers, families, and small businesses severely impacted by the COVID-19 public health emergency. She emphasized providing state and local governments with proper resources for targeted investments in their communities, particularly through the efforts of the House Municipal Finance Caucus.

In addition, a panel comprising members of GFOA's Executive Board discussed their plans for the \$350 billion Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF). Attendees were asked to participate in a brief SLFRF survey before the session started, and the results were shared and discussed to provide better insight on local governments' priorities.

Finally, Jacob Leibenluft, counselor to the Secretary of the Department of Treasury, spoke about the SLFRF. He answered additional questions about topics including advice on using the funds on infrastructure, the public comment process for the interim final rule, and advice to recipients on how to successfully implement their SLFRF allocations.

Looking at Leases: Implementing GASB Statement No. 87 (July 13). Three speakers—Trevor Agrelius, controller for the Moulton Niguel Water District in California; Roger Alfaro, a partner in Eide Bailly LLP; and Kirk Johnson, finance director for the City of Ridgefield, Washington—shared their firsthand experience in implementing GASB 87 in discussing how to identify existing leases and the term for each

Conference Sessions (continued)

identified lease, how to perform the calculations necessary to implement the statement, and future considerations such as identifying new leases, modifying an existing lease, and tracking all applicable leases.

Promoting Trust and Respect with Design Speaking

(July 13). Panelists Nicole Grabel, principal of Behavioral Science at BehavioralSight; Sam Evans, senior director of Egg Strategy; and Shannon White, a researcher on Facebook's Central Integrity team, who are experts across behavioral design fields, shared tips, tricks, and proven methods for designing processes that create a smooth experience for both internal and external customers. Some of the questions discussed were: Is the core barrier to better customer behaviors awareness, intention, or action? Are you designing for where your customers are, or where they should be? When should you give your customers more versus less information? When does your customer know what they want? When do they express it? And when are you listening? Is your customer in a "cold state" or a "hot state" when making key decisions? Which "state" are you designing for? Spoiler: The answer to all these questions is "it depends."

Rethinking Police Budgeting: Practical Approaches for a Better Community

(July 14). Attendees heard from public safety leaders LaDon Reynolds, chief of police for the Village of Oak Park, Illinois; Larry J. Yium, retired deputy director/consultant, formerly with the Houston, Texas, Police Department; and Lisa Perez, chief administrative officer for the City of San Jose, California, Police Department, who discussed the challenges facing public safety goals across the United States.

Chief Reynolds defined the current environment, including calls for "defunding," and Lisa Perez provided insights from a larger community. Larry Yium brought his decades of experience to put current discussion under the practical light of how to move forward.

Year in Washington: 2021 GFOA Federal Update

(July 15). Speakers provided attendees with a thorough update on federal and congressional activity from the capitol so far in 2021. Attendees were brought up to speed on the 117th Congress, the Biden administration, and a recap of GFOA's legislative priorities before taking a deep dive into the potential for an infrastructure package. Recapping the infrastructure bills introduced over the years as well as the negotiations that followed between Congress and the White House allowed attendees to better understand the current direction the discussions on infrastructure were headed in. There was also a rundown of the \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), focusing on the \$350 billion SLFRF. The session concluded with GFOA's guiding principles, which were developed to provide attendees with a flexible framework to help them approach their federal funds.

Chefs versus Cooks: Applying a Problem-Solving Approach to Public Finance

(July 20). This session was about the difference in approach between the way a chef creates a meal, with a focus on innovation, results, and adaptability, and the way a cook does it, with caution and a focus on details and process. The panelists—Stacey Teachey, financial strategy manager for the Town of Cary, North Carolina; Scott Huizenga, director of management and budget for the City of San Antonio, Texas; and Tara

Baker, city treasurer, City of Guelph, Ontario—provided examples of how operating as a chef has benefited them and their organization.

They also discussed how trust and organizational culture are related to a finance officer's ability to operate as a chef.

More than a Buzzword: Understanding Equity in Budgeting

(July 20). Attendees were treated to a panel discussion among presenters Glen Lee, finance director for the City of Seattle, Washington; David Schmiedicke, finance director for the City of Madison, Wisconsin; and Bertha Johnson, budget director for the City of Durham, North Carolina. Participants learned how each of these organizations embed equity into the budgeting process, including ways to define what equity means for each unique community; internal equity education and priority identification; and finally, how to incorporate the budget into advancing racial equity and other social justice initiatives to foster thriving communities.

Time to Talk Equity: When, How, and Why to Have the Discussion

(July 23). Harpreet Hora, budget manager for the City of Roswell, Georgia; Lisa Marie Harris, director of finance/treasurer for the San Diego County Water Authority; and Kecia Dougherty, strategic workforce equity coordinator for the City of Dubuque, Iowa, discussed the difference between equity and equality, as well as implicit bias and its impact on hiring. The panelists also provided examples of how to begin developing an organizational culture that values diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), even if your organization doesn't have a formal DEI initiative.



Did you miss any of the sessions? All registrants for the virtual conference can view session recordings through GFOA's learning management system at learn.gfoa.org.

Meet the Speaker. Many attendees asked questions after the sessions were over, and they were able to engage with presenters and network during this year's "Meet the Speaker" panels. Meet the Speaker opportunities were available for: *Rethinking Police Budgeting: Practical Approaches for a Better Community*; *Year in Washington: 2021 GFOA Federal Update*; *Thinking Probabilistically—The Essential Risk Management Tool*; *Life Cycle Costing: Promoting Long-Term Thinking in Asset Maintenance*; *Know Your Why: How the Finance Officer can Advance Community Well-Being*; and *Rethinking Local Economic Development in Travis County (Austin), Texas*. Attendees were also able to meet the new director of research and technical activities for the Governmental Accounting Standards Board.

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Virtual Sponsors and Exhibit Hall

GFOA also wants to thank the 106 sponsors and exhibitors who provided valuable resources to conference attendees. For information about upcoming opportunities, stay tuned to gfoa.org/2021-sponsor-and-exhibitor-resource-center. We also encourage GFOA's Virtual Conference attendees to keep in touch with this year's sponsors and exhibitors. Their tiles will be available 24/7 on-demand through October on GFOA's LMS.

And finally, the Buyer's Guide Community Forum is a place for online discussion where GFOA members can interact with vendors throughout the year. It is open to GFOA members and to sponsors and exhibitors who are GFOA associate members. Log in by using your GFOA username and password at community.gfoa.org.



SAVE THE DATE

We look forward to gathering again in-person for GFOA's **116th Annual Conference**, June 5 to 8, 2022, at the Austin Convention Center in Austin, Texas. Watch for updates about registration at the beginning of 2022.