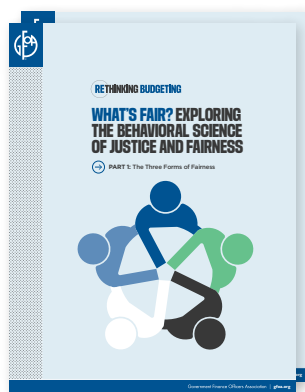


Is GFOA Getting Political?



Christopher P. Morrill
Executive Director/CEO



Read the full *What's Fair* series of reports at gfoa.org/fairness

GFOA is known for its research, reports, educational sessions, and online resources on current issues that affect local government finance professionals and the communities that they serve. Recently, a few of these topics, like police budgeting, have been part of a wide-ranging cultural discussion that includes strong opinions on both sides of the issue. The divide is often associated with political ideology, which has led a handful of members to ask if GFOA is “getting political.”

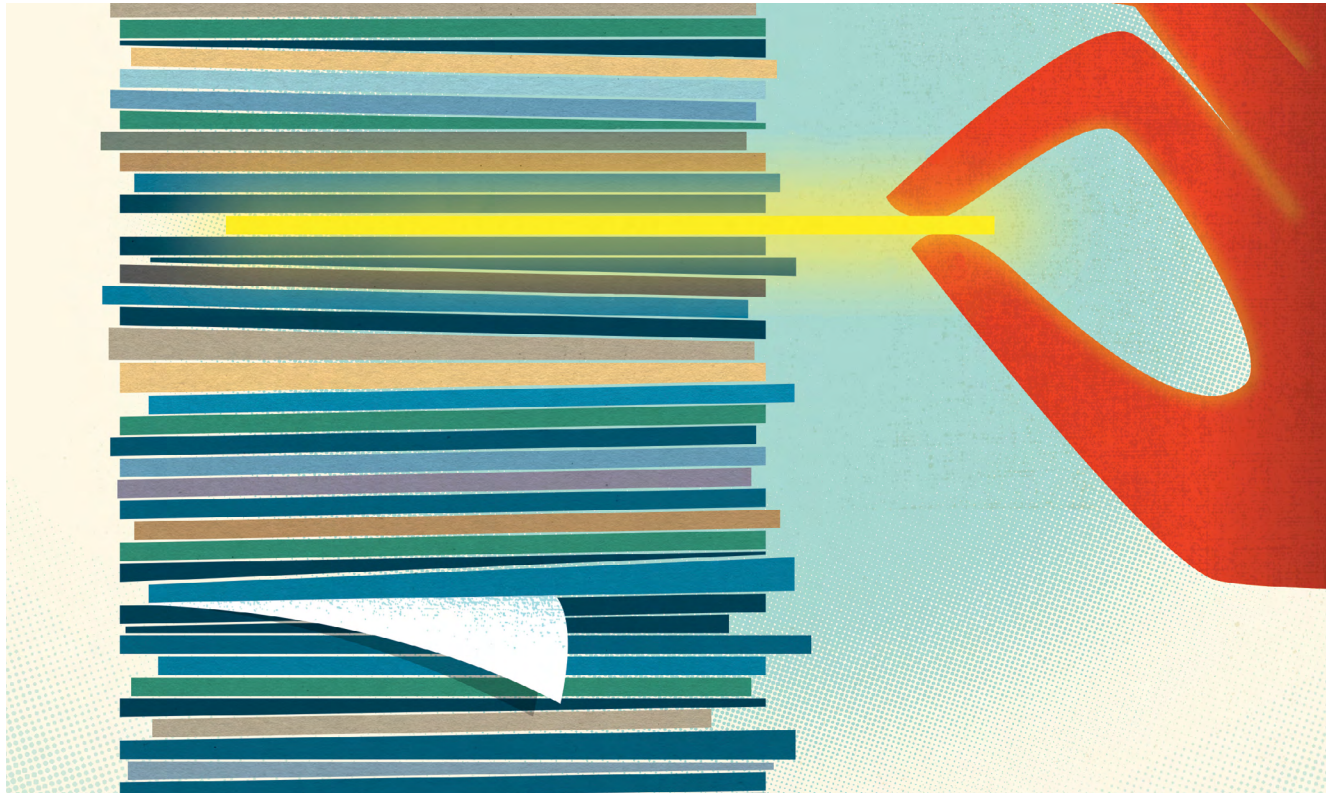
It’s a reasonable question. Political polarization is one of the leading issues of our time and many facets of our society have become politicized—which is why we wanted to comment publicly. GFOA is conducting research on some of the topics that have become political talking points, and while we do work in Washington, D.C. to support local government interests—in the municipal bond market, favoring retirement security, advocating against additional, burdensome reporting from GASB, or working to sustain funding for infrastructure or COVID relief—our non-partisan position remains extremely important. We serve *all* communities, and the people who live in them.

That said, the political polarization we’re seeing at all levels of government is a threat to the financial sustainability for our member governments. That’s why GFOA has been addressing issues like fairness, equity in budgeting, sustainability of local government

revenue, fragmentation and consolidation of local governments, and environmental or social considerations for procurement, capital planning, and budgeting—because many of our members are confronting these issues. Some of our members have called GFOA “the R&D department for local government finance,” and as such, we must help governments work with these topics and encourage debate about the issues affecting the public finance profession. We believe that all members benefit from the ability to exchange ideas, discuss topics, and learn about practices that have been successful (or not) from their peers.

GFOA’s guidance on these issues is based on solid research and evidence, rather than political ideology. We believe that all members should be free to have discussions in an environment that is open to new ideas. As an example, we recently developed a series of reports called *What’s Fair* (available at gfoa.org/fairness). These reports explain how finance officers can promote fairness in public finance. We worked with experts in behavioral ethics and psychology to reflect the ways that different people—conservatives and liberals—view issues of fairness. We also recently completed a pilot project for an educational program called OpenMind. OpenMind helps people work through political polarization in the workplace, including budgeting.

We also want to acknowledge that members don’t share the same views or may need more time to solidify



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their views. We view our role as helping to facilitate the conversation. If you attend our conference this June in Austin, Texas, you will notice that some of our sessions will take on difficult topics—with a mix of research, diverse perspectives, and open discussion. And as always, we encourage you to join the conversation and share your views in a respectful way.

GFOA is a professional association that supports a diverse network of more than 21,000 practitioners from across the United States and Canada, and our job is to inform our members and give you the opportunity to engage in the conversations that will shape best practices, values, and perspective

for the industry. GFOA's members are its main strength, and we plan to use that strength to advance the conversation about the more challenging issues facing our communities.

We always love hearing from our members. If you have questions or comments, don't hesitate to get in touch. We also encourage all of you to join your peers in attending the conference, online communities, training opportunities, and networking events that are available through GFOA.

Sincerely,

Chris