

10 Steps

TO BETTER COLLABORATION BETWEEN FINANCE OFFICERS AND FIRE CHIEFS

GFOA and the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC) are working together to develop resources to promote better collaboration between finance officers and fire chiefs. An introductory public finance curriculum geared toward firefighters is in the works, along with checklists that finance officers can use when meeting with their counterparts in the fire department (and vice versa for fire chiefs).

As a first step, the working group, which is made up of GFOA and IAFC staff and members, developed this list, with items geared toward both central office finance professionals and fire department executives. We encourage you to share this list with your colleagues in the fire department to precipitate a larger conversation about how to work together better.

1 For both: Go to lunch or have coffee together without specific work-based tasks in mind. Get to know each other as individuals, which allows you to build a relationship and earn each other's trust, an important precursor to effective collaboration.

2 For Fire Department staff: Get Finance involved early with purchases that are outside the norm. If you need to purchase a new fire engine or fire truck (yes, Finance folks, there is a difference), talk to your Finance colleagues as soon as the need arises. Even better, work with Finance to develop a long-term equipment replacement schedule for all gear and apparatus.

3 For Finance Department staff: Ask questions and do some basic due diligence to learn more about firefighting. Start by learning the difference between a fire engine and a fire truck! (In the simplest terms, an engine holds water and hoses, and a truck is a mobile toolbox that can include large ladders that extend from the truck and don't come off.)

4 For both: Express your gratitude and appreciation for each other's work. It demonstrates that you're paying attention and genuinely appreciate each other's contributions.

5 For Fire Department staff: Invite Finance Department staff to get an up-close-and-personal view of your department. Invite them to come out and see new equipment when it arrives. Ask them to go on inspections with you. These efforts will give finance folks a much better understanding of your job and the challenges you face.

6 For Finance Department staff: Build a more collaborative budget process and involve the Fire Department early on. Ask them to provide a representative to participate in any multi-department committee work, opportunities, or initiatives. When a department makes you aware of a concern and wants to work together to develop solutions, embrace the opportunity. Make sure you understand the need and urgency, so you can assist with developing a plan.

7 For both: Hold monthly meetings with members of both departments. Review Fire Department budget reports and performance indicator reports to better understand how the money is being spent and how the community benefits. Also, share information about revenue collections, expenditures, and community priorities across the entire government so the Fire Department staff can see how they fit into the bigger picture.

8 For Fire Department staff: Don't be afraid to ask for advice from Finance staff when needed. If you anticipate a need for additional funding or foresee a decrease in revenue, reach out to Finance right away so they can help develop solutions.

9 For Finance Department staff: Know your fire department's staffing model. Fire suppression, rescue, and emergency medicine are 24/7 jobs, and the Fire Department may need to use more overtime and acting pay than you'd expect. If you really want to see this schedule in action, ask to do an extended ride-along with a fire crew.

10 For both: Be open to questions and finding new ways of doing things. Don't be offended if someone asks questions about processes. Model this behavior at all levels of your department to promote an organizational culture that fosters curiosity, learning, and innovation.