GFOA's DEI Journey
Using Values and Ethics as a Guide

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Approximately one year ago, I stood on stage at GFOA's annual conference and signed the CEO's Pledge, joining more than 2,000 other chief executive officers who committed their organizations to supporting complex and sometimes challenging conversations about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI); implementing and expanding unconscious bias training; sharing DEI programs; and engaging the board in the development of DEI strategies. I'm proud of the work we've accomplished over the last year, but GFOA's DEI journey didn't start in Austin, Texas. GFOA has recognized the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion for years, and we believe that the work we do to advance excellence in government finance is interconnected with our commitment to those values. Our members shape the policies, programs, and resource allocations in their communities, and their differences make us all stronger.

GFOA's DEI Initiative outlines the actions being taken to uphold the principles of DEI, as stated in GFOA's Code of Ethics. The code defines how finance officers can value diversity and foster inclusion.

- **"Provide people with opportunities to be part of decisions that impact them.** Public finance decisions often have big implications for people outside the finance office. If these people are part of the decision-making process, they are more likely to feel fairly treated and thereby regard the people who work in the finance office as trustworthy."

- **"Support equity in service provision.** Local government services are critical to the lives of our citizens. Finance officers, because of their resource allocation role, can impact the quality of services and how and where services are provided. **I commit to valuing diversity within my organization and within my community, recognizing my own biases, and calling out unfair discrimination of any kind."**

Last year, GFOA members voted to amend the bylaws of the association to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the government finance profession and within GFOA. We created a DEI committee of the executive board and have also been integrating the values identified in the code of ethics into resources for our members.

Our Rethinking Revenue and Rethinking Budgeting projects, in partnership with several other organizations, have provided leadership on reforming unfair financial policies related to imposed fees, fines, and asset forfeitures, and we reviewed the potential for segmented pricing for fees and fines.

GFOA Research has been providing practical recommendations on how to budget through an equity lens. We produced a six-part research series on fairness in public finance that looked at ways of using behavioral science to make better decisions. Issues of fairness and justice are central to the work of all government officials, as their roles and power are granted by the will of their constituents, and their work can empower or limit the livelihood of those same people. As part of this series, we looked at opinions about fairness as it relates to political polarization, equity and equality, group dynamics, and distrust.

We've also partnered with Constructive Dialogue Institute to bring you Perspectives, an online program that helps teams create ideas that reach across divides to develop public finance solutions that are greater than the sum of their parts. Political polarization is the leading social rift of our time, and it won't be an easy problem to solve—but Perspectives provides a science-backed method that can help.

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To organize these resources, GFOA launched a web page focusing on DEI initiatives (gfoa.org/dei). You'll find links to GFOA research, information about GFOA's DEI journey, organizational priorities, and next steps.

We are excited about the future and look forward to introducing GFOA members to a few of our new initiatives in 2023, including:

- An update of the gender diversity dashboard that will include a full look at the public finance profession at all levels. We also will add a diversity dashboard to evaluate ethnicity among GFOA members.

- Enhanced partnership agreements with the Local Government Hispanic Network (LGHN) and the National Forum for Black Public Administrators (NFBPA). These partnerships will provide expanded education offerings, mentorship programs, and networking as we align the mission of all three organizations to support public administrators, their governments, and ultimately the communities they serve.

- An LGBTQIA+ Caucus—launched at our annual conference in Portland—to promote awareness, advise GFOA, and support our members and others in the profession.

- Expanded leadership training, specifically regarding unconscious bias, organizational belonging, and building DEI principles into work culture.

- A public finance DEI assessment tool to help guide improvement efforts in state and provincial and local government throughout the United States and Canada.

DEI is not a fad, but a value that guides our strategies and actions. There are no quick solutions to the challenges governments face in recruiting and retaining top talent, but all organizations can help by focusing on building a more inclusive and welcoming culture. Communities are confronting issues related to political extremes and tackling tough issues where policy disagreements sometimes leave little room for compromise. Finance officers are positioned to provide leadership, promote fairness, live the values outlined in the GFOA code of ethics, and advocate for diversity, equity, and inclusion. We anticipate this journey to be a long one, but we're proud of what we have been able to accomplish and look forward to working with our network of dedicated finance officers to meet the challenges of the future.

Sincerely,

Chris

Learn more

Read more about GFOA's DEI goals, progress and next steps.

➲ **gfoa.org/dei**