

POWER, POLITICS & BUDGETING

**DON'T HATE THE PLAYER,
DON'T HATE THE GAME,
CHANGE THE GAME!**



“Power politics” is the use of power for selfish gain at the expense of the broader community. This is incompatible with the purpose of local government budgeting. However, the finance officer can “change the game” and redirect the energy of power politics to more constructive ends.

PERSUASION

“YES, IF...”

Dr. No



Finance officers can gain the reputation as “Doctor No” by rebuffing ideas for programs or services that spend public money. The solution is not to say “yes” to everything. Rather, say “yes, if ...”, as in “yes, we can add that new position if we identify a new source of ongoing revenue to pay for it or reduce expenses elsewhere.”



How to Play. Power in modern society hinges on persuasion. **Persuasion power** does not require a high profile or grabbing the proverbial spotlight. Persuasion comes by effectively deploying ideas. Persuasion power is supported by the **power of agenda setting**. The finance officer is well positioned to persuade by offering compelling ideas and to set the agenda through design of decision-making processes for financial issues like budgeting.

PERSUASION



The power of knowledge comes from sharing it, not hoarding it

If others can better appreciate the finance officer’s worldview, they will be more receptive to the finance officer’s ideas.



Cultivate professional credibility

Trust is a finance officer’s most valuable asset. The GFOA ethics program shows how to enhance trust: gfoa.org/trust

PERSUASION



Provide facts and expertise

As one mayor said, the finance officer “knows things others don’t”.



Communicate ideas effectively

Keep ideas simple, use metaphors and stories, and tune your language to suit the political environment.



Relationships and Network

Cultivate relationships inside and outside of local government that can enhance your persuasive ability.

AGENDA SETTING



The finance officer often may not be the final decision-maker, but the public finance officer often designs the decision-making process.



Design the process to provide a better context for decision-making. For example, when faced with unhelpful either/or framing of a problem, design the process to expand the number of options that are considered.



Asking the right questions, establishing clear priorities, and considering wise options is the essence of agenda setting and thereby “changing the game” of power politics.