

In Brief

GFOA FORUMS | INTERNATIONAL UPDATE | FEDERAL UPDATE



GFOA FORUMS

Small Government Forum

Providing Targeted Content and Networking Opportunities

BY MARK MACK

GFOA's Small Government Forum is just what it says on the tin—a group of GFOA members from government entities with populations of 25,000 or less, or employee counts of 500 or less. The forum was launched in 2015 to provide networking opportunities that allow GFOA members to connect with peers from similar organizations. Members exchange information on topics unique to the demands of managing small governments.

The forum adds value through targeted content and activities—for example, research on adding capacity and stability by cross-training employees in the finance department. This 18-month project engaged forum members directly with approximately 20 case studies of small governments that

used cross-training to add capacity. An industry survey determined how and where cross-training was currently being leveraged in local government finance. Experts from other industries and academics were also engaged through an advisory committee. This research produced a series of webinars that were provided for free to all GFOA members.

The forum also provides a platform for GFOA members to connect and network with their peers in similarly sized organizations. The forum started in 2015 as a networking luncheon for about 60 members at the GFOA Annual Conference in Denver, Colorado. Since that time, the group has grown to more than 700 members from all regions of the United States and Canada. These members also come from a broad

mixture of organizational types—cities, counties, school districts, utilities, and other special districts.

The forum provides professional development opportunities in a format that's useful to small governments. Many small governments don't have the financial capacity that larger organizations have for staff development. The training sessions available to them are often regional and limited in terms of topic areas. Over the last eight years, the forum has provided relevant content to small governments at no additional cost. The limited staff in small finance offices means that the job of implementing best practices can't be approached in the same way that larger organizations might approach it. For example, implementing and managing a capital improvement plan is normally a long-term project that

must be built out over time, as opposed to a single budget cycle, which might be possible in a large city.

Finally, the forum promotes professionalism in financial management within small governments. In many places, the requirements to serve as a finance officer in smaller organizations is minimal. Many CFOs in small cities and towns come to the job without a finance background, which can result in gaps in knowledge about what's required legally as well as industry norms and best practices. The forum has sought to promote professionalism by making best practices and leading trends in local government finance more accessible to small organizations.

What next for the forum? Looking forward, the Small Government Forum will continue producing its quarterly newsletter, which contains short articles from SGF members addressing issues relevant to small organizations. We also have several free webinars planned for 2023 about effectively communicating financial information, managing grants with a small staff, and other topics. We also have virtual networking opportunities centered on topics including succession planning in small organizations, what you should do if you don't have a state GFOA, discussing capital plans with elected officials, and war stories about "upskilling" your city council. Forum members can also participate at any time in conversations on the GFOA Small Government Forum online community.

Sound interesting? Check out the forum's web page at gfoa.org/small-government-forum and see if you'd like to join us! 📧

Mark Mack is a senior manager in GFOA's Research and Consulting Center.



Urban Forum

Addressing Demands of Large and Complex Entities

BY KATIE LUDWIG

GFOA's Urban Forum provides an opportunity for members of large governments to network and exchange information on topics unique to the demands of managing their large and complex entities. The forum is currently open to GFOA members in urban jurisdictions from the United States and Canada with area populations of one million or more. To join the Urban Forum, all you need to do is complete the form at gfoa.org/urban-forum-registration. Once you are a member, join our online community at community.gfoa.org/home.

GFOA hosts monthly online networking webinars for Urban Forum members. You can register for these free sessions in the events calendar at gfoa.org/events. GFOA welcomes suggestions for discussion topics and guest speakers for these monthly events.

GFOA's Urban Forum is hosting a book club this spring. We will be reading *Fixer-Upper: How to Repair America's Broken Housing Systems* by Jenny Schuetz, senior fellow at Brookings Metro. Schuetz is an expert in urban

economics and housing policy and has written numerous peer-reviewed journal articles on land use regulation, housing prices, urban amenities, and neighborhood change. She has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post*, the PBS NewsHour, The Indicator podcast, *Vox*, and *Slate*.

Fixer-Upper assesses how local, state, and national housing policies affect people and communities. It does more than describe how yesterday's policies led to today's problems—it proposes practical policy changes that can make stable, decent-quality housing more available and affordable for all Americans in all communities.

After reading the book, the Urban Forum will host a networking session with Dr. Schuetz. We are in the process of finalizing the date for this session, so stay tuned!

If you have any questions about the Urban Forum, feel free to reach out to Katie Ludwig (gfoa.org/bio/ludwig) or Jake Kowalski (gfoa.org/bio/kowalski). 📧

Katie Ludwig is director of resource development in GFOA's Research and Consulting Center.