

In Practice

116TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE | ACCOUNTING | PERSPECTIVES | INTERVIEWS



EVENTS

GFOA Visits Austin for 116th Annual Conference

BY MIKE MUCHA

June 5 to 8, 2022—GFOA's 116th annual conference, the first one we've been able to hold in-person since 2019 in Los Angeles.

In attendance were representatives from nine countries, all 50 states, the District of Columbia, five US territories, and seven Canadian provinces. In all, GFOA brought more than 5,400 people representing more than 2,500 organizations to Austin.

This year's conference also represented a return to normal after two years of virtual conferences. Attendees had their choice of more than 75 concurrent sessions full of case studies, best practice guidance, lessons learned, and innovations from 250+ speakers. They were able

to attend three keynote sessions with recognized leaders in their fields; meet with more than 175 exhibitors providing information on products and services to support public finance; attend networking sessions hosted by GFOA, state associations, and vendors; and enjoy numerous opportunities to explore Austin, take in live music, and reconnect with old friends.

GFOA's annual conference also serves as the official business meeting for the association, and we were able to celebrate the last year's successes while preparing for new challenges, looking ahead to new initiatives, and ensuring the organization is best positioned to serve all GFOA members into the future.

CONFERENCE SESSIONS

The conference officially started on Sunday, June 5, but hundreds of people took advantage of the additional learning opportunities provided by seven preconference sessions offered on June 3 and June 4. Each of these four (or more) hour seminars provided information on ethics, debt management, basic budgeting principles, federal funds uniform guidance, single audit processes, and more.

GFOA's concurrent sessions once again gave attendees an unparalleled opportunity to hear from industry leaders, experienced practitioners, and recognized experts. These volunteer speakers make the GFOA conference the success that it is, and experience where—unlike other conferences—sessions are well attended and learning is transformed into better policies and practices back home, improving governments across the United States, Canada, and beyond. Conference session topics included core principles in public finance, industry trends and updates, innovative case studies, and leadership skills. Topic tracks allowed attendees to either focus on a single area for the week or get a mix of content relevant to each of the many hats worn in the role of finance officer.

GFOA provided a total of more than 30,000 hours of CPE credits, and delegates could attend up to 11 different sessions. Highlights included sessions on:

- Implementing the latest GASB standards
- Improving your personal productivity
- Dealing with political polarization
- Accepting electronic payments
- Retaining current staff and recruiting to fill finance staff openings



- Understanding current issues in the municipal bond market
- Applying behavioral science to finance
- Developing a capital improvement plan
- Thinking about cybersecurity and what to do if you're attacked
- Following the Town of Paradise, California's journey in recovering from the 2018 Camp Fire
- Budgeting grant funds
- Understanding what issuers need to know about American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)
- Preparing an annual comprehensive financial report statistical section
- Dealing with ARPA compliance
- Applying ethics to finance
- Budgeting for equity
- Avoiding common financial reporting errors
- Implementing GASB Statement No. 87



➔ **Did you miss one of the sessions in Austin?** Session recordings and presentation materials will be available on GFOA's learning management system at learn.gfoa.org in August 2022. All individuals who registered for the conference will receive access to content from each concurrent session.

KEYNOTE PRESENTATIONS

Keynote presentations from recognized leaders in business and finance kicked off each day of the conference. On Sunday, Omid Rahmani and Brian Krebs highlighted the urgent need for active defenses against cybersecurity threats, explaining the finance officer's importance in defending against this ever-growing threat. On Monday, Tasha Eurich provided lessons to help every finance officer focus on self-awareness and how understanding your strengths and weaknesses leads to success. On Tuesday, flight issues forced Ritu Bhasin to deliver her presentation remotely, but she was still extremely effective at explaining the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion, while providing tools for incorporating these principles into an approach to leadership.



EXHIBITORS AND SPONSORS

Walking through the exhibit hall, it was clear that both delegates and vendors had missed being able to attend GFOA's conference in-person. There were larger booths, more attractive displays, and an environment optimized for engagement with both current and prospective partners. Attendees were able to interact with more than 175 firms representing a wide variety of products and services, all catering to the state and local government market. Not everyone realizes that 40 percent of exhibitors also provided sponsorship support for the conference, allowing GFOA to keep attendee costs far below those charged by some of GFOA's peer associations.

NETWORKING

GFOA's conference also offers unique networking opportunities, allowing attendees from very different situations to meet and close peers to catch up. On Saturday, June 4, GFOA's



EXPLORING AUSTIN

When delegates weren't at the convention center, they were able to explore Austin, the fourth largest city in Texas and home to the University of Texas, the state capital, endless live music, award-winning restaurants, museums, unique neighborhoods, and much more. The weather was hot, but it stayed mostly dry, allowing visitors to enjoy the walking trails, kayaks, rooftop pools, and of course the bats, all in close proximity to the convention center. On Tuesday night, GFOA members were treated to an evening at Austin City Live featuring beverages, desserts, dancing, music, and fun with entertainment by Austin's own Shinyribs and Skyrocket.



standing committees spent the day discussing best practices, industry trends, and ways in which GFOA can continue to advise all members about effective practices in financial management. On Sunday, June 5, GFOA hosted the welcome reception where attendees could gather.

GFOA staff also introduced attendees to several affinity groups specifically designed to encourage networking, including the Women's Public Finance Network, the Black Caucus, the Small Government Forum, GFOA's Committee on Canadian issues, and CPFOs. These groups held dedicated events over the four days of the conference.

Networking isn't limited to official events in the program. Vendors held events for customers, and GFOA's many state and provincial associations also provided dedicated spaces around Austin where members could connect in a unique setting.

We'd like to thank everyone who helped bring GFOA members together to work on building and strengthening lasting relationships.

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

The conference brought Michael Bryant's term as president to an end. In his final address, Michael looked back at the past year and reflected on both challenges and the ways in which members rose to the occasion to provide leadership when it was needed most. Significant highlights from the past year included advocacy work related to the American Rescue Plan Act, expanded partnerships with peer organizations, and research to rethink budgeting and revenue structures in local government.

We also celebrated GFOA's scholarship winners, Hero Award Winners, Triple Crown winners, and more. Terri Velasquez, beginning her term as president, focused her opening remarks on two major GFOA initiatives—addressing workforce challenges in public finance and increasing member engagement.



Terri also highlighted GFOA's commitment to diversity and recognized GFOA's new Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion committee, which has worked with the board and Executive Director Chris Morrill, who signed the CEO Pledge for Action on Diversity and Inclusion.

GFOA also thanked Past-President Marion Gee and outgoing Executive Board members Chris Daniel, Dan Huge, Will Jones, and Matt Lentz, for their service while also welcoming Jennifer Brown, Jason Greene, Grace Martinez, and Kendel Taylor as they begin their three-year terms on the board. We also congratulated Laura Allen, who was nominated as GFOA's next president-elect.

A SPECIAL THANK YOU

GFOA would like to thank the many conference sponsors who provided funding to offset costs for attendees; the more than 1,000 attendees from the state of Texas, who were great hosts for the 2022 event; and our dedicated members from across North America and beyond who traveled to attend this event. In addition, special thanks go to Laurie Brewer, Kimberley Olivares, Jason Alexander, Lavern Gaines, Martie Simpson, and Cameron Van Noy for serving on the local conference committee.

We hope to see you all next year in Portland, Oregon. Registration is expected to open this fall. 📅

Mike Mucha is the Deputy Executive Director of GFOA and Director of GFOA's Research and Consulting Center.