



## PROGRAMS

## How GFOA's International Partnerships Came About

**G**FOA's annual conference welcomes attendees from across North America, including almost all states, provinces, and U.S. territories. GFOA also hosts delegations from several other countries, who bring unique perspectives but common values and experiences as leaders in public finance from across the world.

GFOA's international program started in 1988, when former GFOA CEO Jeff Esser met Amir Bartov at a Sister Cities conference in Jerusalem. Amir was in charge of the Municipal Finance Directors Association (MDFA) of Israel, and Jeff invited him to attend a GFOA conference. Amir attended that year, and thereafter, GFOA started sending delegations to the MFDA's annual conference. In turn, MFDA also started sending a delegation to the GFOA conference.

Amir's vision of bringing countries together to share information was the impetus of the international program. In Israel, municipal finance officers were just starting to get organized and provide training, and they were eager to work with their counterparts in the United States and Canada.

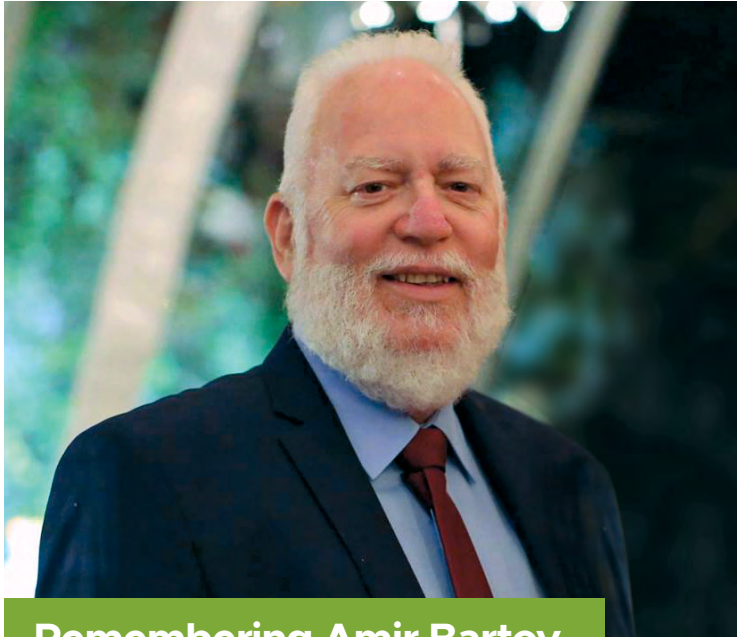
Many international local governments are controlled by their federal government and did not share best practices the way GFOA members do. Program participants signed agreements to formalize their role in sharing information and learning from each other.

GFOA's first agreement was with the MDFA in Israel. Using that relationship as a model, GFOA went on to develop formal relationships with others including the Swedish Association of Local Government Finance Officers, the Association of the Financiers of the Local Self-Governing Units

of Georgia, the Chartered Institute of Government Finance Audit and Risk Officers of South Africa the German Association of Treasurers, the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India, and the Brazilian Navy Office of the Budget, and the Institute of Public Works and Engineering Australasia. For many of these organizations, Amir was influential in helping GFOA establish the initial connection.

Over the years, GFOA's executive leadership has represented GFOA at numerous conferences hosted by our partner organizations. Recently, GFOA President Terri Velasquez attended a conference in Sweden, and this year GFOA will send delegations to Israel, South Africa, and Georgia.

With the news of Amir Bartov's passing on August 7, 2022, at age 73, GFOA recognizes his contributions to the association and the many friendships that developed through these international partnerships.



## Remembering Amir Bartov

Amir Bartov will be missed by his family, friends, and the many finance officers he worked with over the years. Amir was passionate about advancing the work of government finance, and his vision was global. He also informed finance directors around the world about the work being done by GFOA and the international program.

Jeff Esser became close friends with Amir, fondly remembering him as a brilliant man who had an amazing memory, an impressive grasp of languages, and a drive for bringing people together.

"Amir was an incredible person," Jeff said. "He could converse with just about anyone, from any country or any culture, and learn about them and establish a friendship almost immediately. He was very outgoing, gregarious, and inquisitive. He became instant friends with whomever he interacted with. And he was incredibly hard-working."

Jeff noted that Amir led an organization that did youth exchanges between Israel and Germany, in part to establish relations between the two countries in light of the Holocaust. He also included Israeli Arabs and Christians in the Israeli group, an important gesture, given the political situation in the Middle East. "He made sure to include them in everything they did and ensured that they had representation on committees and on their executive board," Jeff explained. "That was part of who he was. And the atmosphere was always welcoming and friendly."

Amir also translated classic works like the *Odyssey* and other English texts into Hebrew and put them online as part of a free literacy project called the Hebrew Literature Computing Association. Amir was a member of the managing committee and treasurer of the association, and he contributed to the organization by giving lectures and raising funds.

GFOA remembers and recognizes the significant ways Amir advanced the work of government finance and his role in the inception of GFOA's international outreach program.

## Our Common Goal

GFOA is fortunate to have invaluable partnerships with several foreign countries. In March 2022, I had an opportunity to travel to Israel to attend the Municipal Finance Directors of Israel Conference in the beautiful city of Eilat. We were also joined by a German delegation, which afforded us an opportunity to exchange ideas and learn about our cultures.

**GFOA's international partnerships provide an opportunity to advance excellence in public finance globally.**

GFOA's international partnerships provide an opportunity to advance excellence in public finance globally. Our international partners hold GFOA in high regard and look to our organization to assist them with promoting sound financial practices. One of the experiences I will value most from my trip to Israel is having an opportunity to discuss fiscal policy with Israeli leaders from across their country in an intimate setting. In moments such as these, you realize that people are more alike than different. We discussed policies such as aging infrastructure, intergovernmental relations, and of course responding to a pandemic. However, regardless of the challenge, we all share a common goal—to improve the quality of life for the residents in our communities that we serve.

—GFOA Past President Michael Bryant