



# Making a Plan to Get the Most from Your Membership

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**B**efore becoming GFOA's executive director, I was a GFOA member, as both a city manager and a local government budget director. GFOA programs and services provided tremendous value in navigating technical problems, political challenges, and opportunities for personal and professional growth. I attended the annual conference, volunteered for committees, taught educational sessions, and used consulting services to implement budgeting for outcomes and to procure a new ERP system. As I progressed through my career, I came to value those connections with subject matter experts and interactions with colleagues. At times, though, it was challenging to take advantage of these professional development activities, given the ever-increasing pressures of public service—greater workload, meeting deadlines, and resolving day-to-day issues. And for many organizations, constrained budgets or lengthy approval processes can make it more difficult.

I learned that I needed to prioritize professional development—create a plan for opportunities that would provide the most value to my government and me. I recommend that you be proactive in identifying the opportunities that provide the most value for you and your team. And there are many opportunities available through your GFOA membership! As 2026 gets underway, it is a great time to make a plan and identify those opportunities, resources, training sessions, and investments that

best fit your career goals and the planned initiatives of your organization.

GFOA's new membership structure, implemented last year, provides unlimited membership to employees within member organizations. We made that change because we wanted to provide access to professionals at all levels in their careers and to make GFOA membership more valuable for all organizations. In the past, finance professionals at many of our member organizations didn't have the opportunity to engage with GFOA. With the new all-organization membership structure, we welcome this chance to introduce everyone in your organization to GFOA. For others, who may have been members but not active participants, we hope you'll take time to explore what we have to offer. And for those who thought they'd exhausted everything GFOA had to offer, you might find new services that fit with where you are now in your career, or that could give you further insight into our ever-changing world of public finance. Our goal is to provide all our members with programs, resources, and practical tools that meet their needs.

## Free resources available to all members.

GFOA provides many free options that provide access to resources, other members, or GFOA research and tools.

- **Best practices and research reports.** More than 200 research reports and best practice statements developed by GFOA committees and staff are available in the materials library online at [gfoa.org/materials](https://gfoa.org/materials).

- **Learning Pathways.** You can take GFOA's self-assessments to provide a roadmap for building the skills you need to succeed in your current role and to prepare you for future opportunities.
- **Affinity groups and committees.** As GFOA grows (now at more than 30,000 members), we want you to continue to feel welcome and valued. Our committees and affinity groups provide you the opportunity to connect with members with similar interests and challenges.

**Easily accessible options.** GFOA's paid events cost less than those provided by most of our peers. We price our training and resources intentionally to encourage participation and to make GFOA training affordable for all members from all levels of the organization, including those from small governments or others with limited funds for professional development.

- **Webinars.** Webinars provide one- or two-hour online training on a variety of topics, including an overview of GFOA's practical research, a review of core principles in public finance, and can't-miss information on current events. GFOA has a webinar scheduled almost every week of the year—you can find them in our events calendar at [gfoa.org/events](https://gfoa.org/events).
- **Best Practice Forum.** Staying current in all areas of public finance is difficult. GFOA's Best Practice Forum is set up like a "mini" online conference that provides approximately 10 training sessions as part of a focused week of online professional development.

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- *GAAFR*. For more than 75 years, GFOA has produced *Governmental Accounting, Auditing, and Financial Reporting* (GAAFR). Better known as “the Blue Book,” the GAAFR is an important resource to answer your financial reporting questions. A new edition is expected in summer 2026.

**In-depth programs.** Interacting with GFOA facilitators and instructors is helpful, but the full value of these events is unlocked by developing relationships with your colleagues who are attending the sessions. We provide premium events that focus on educational content and peer-to-peer networking. I encourage you to take a break from your daily grind and attend a GFOA event in person.

- *Annual conference*. The 120th annual conference will be held this year in Chicago from June 28 to July 1, 2026. The largest public finance conference in the world offers members the opportunity to connect with peers while also taking in 75+ timely concurrent sessions, inspiring keynotes, the exhibit hall, leadership workshops, and social events, all in one of the best cities in the world.
- *GFOA in-person training*. GFOA offers more than 25 training courses at our Chicago office and other learning opportunities throughout the United States. In 2026, we are scheduled to be in Charleston (February), Kansas City (May), Santa Clara (September), and Austin (December). These in-person classes provide opportunities for exploring best practices, networking

with peers, and working interactively to improve your skills.

- *GFOA academies*. If you are looking for an immersive learning and networking experience, GFOA also offers our Leadership Academy, Accounting Academy, Budget Academy, and Advanced Budget Academy. Each of these events provides a weeklong retreat that allows you to focus on building skills and relationships.

**Milestones to achieve.** Are you looking for more? GFOA also provides opportunities for deeper levels of engagement that can be defining moments for your career or your organization.

- *Award programs*. Meeting the standards of GFOA's certificate of achievement for excellence in financial reporting, distinguished budget award, Canadian award for financial reporting, or popular annual financial reporting program is no small feat. It provides recognition for the hard work, focus on best practices, and dedication of your team. If you do not currently participate in GFOA's award programs, I encourage you to consider applying. If you do currently participate and you're looking for more, consider becoming a volunteer judge to help coach others in improving the quality of their financial reports or budgets.
- *Certified Public Finance Officer (CPFO) program*. The CPFO program supports the core beliefs of GFOA, including

ethics, leadership, and competencies in finance matters. The program recognizes members who have made the commitment to obtain core public finance knowledge and skills, and to remain current with industry best practices. Join an exclusive—but growing!—cohort of finance leaders who have demonstrated that they have the knowledge and competencies to earn the CPFO designation.

- *Consulting projects*. Is your organization struggling to implement best practices, modernize operations, or transition to new processes, policies, or systems? GFOA's consulting team provides direct engagement for governments. Investing in consulting services provides access to dedicated subject matter experts who will help lead you through enterprise resource planning (ERP) transformation, financial policy development, or organizational assessment/best practice utilization projects.

GFOA is proud to offer a wide variety of options for our diverse members and the organizations they serve. If you have any questions about which offering is the best for you or how you can create a plan to get the most benefit from your GFOA membership, our staff is always available to answer questions.

I wish you a 2026 that is filled with professional development and success for the communities you serve. 🙌

Sincerely,

