



Building Leadership Skills in the Finance Office

CHRISTOPHER P. MORRILL | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/CEO

Finance professionals increasingly operate in environments that are defined by “VUCA” challenges—volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. When asked to identify their biggest concerns, members often cite problems with funding/revenue pressure, federal and state uncertainty, staffing challenges, technology issues, and political polarization. Each of these is a VUCA issue that can’t be solved by technical competency alone. The solutions also require leadership skills, including problem solving, communication, collaboration, innovation, and adaptation.

GFOA advocates for finance professionals to be leaders. Technical skills are needed to get work done, while leadership skills provide the capacity and environment that allow everyone on staff to get work done. And we’ve honed our best practice statements, technical training courses, resources, and tools—but when faced with dynamic situations, static recommendations aren’t necessarily enough. GFOA’s Research and Consulting Center

staff have a saying to describe this: “Finance officers should strive to be chefs, not cooks.” Both chefs and cooks can make delicious food and are well-trained with appropriate skills, including the use of various tools in the kitchen; however, cooks generally follow a recipe, while chefs use their experience and knowledge of ingredients and techniques to improvise, innovate, and solve problems.

In the world of public finance, templates, tools, case studies, and checklists (i.e., recipes) will always have value. They allow us to share experiences and ideas, communicate lessons learned, and highlight what works in other governments. But finance officers also need the depth, breadth, and flexibility to adapt as circumstances dictate, and to help prepare others for the challenges they face.

We don’t just become leaders; it takes work. And GFOA continues to invest in affordable leadership training opportunities to help you along. Here are some of our offerings:

GFOA Annual Conference. In addition to three leadership-themed keynote

presentations, the 120th annual conference in Chicago will feature at least ten concurrent sessions with a leadership focus. We’re also bringing back our popular leadership workshops—small skill-building sessions held each day of the conference that feature facilitated group exercises to explore managing political relationships, public speaking, conflict resolution, and persuasive communications. Additional sessions will highlight value-based decision making, leading in polarized organizations, ethics, and more. For more information, visit gfoa.org/conference.

GFOA Leadership Academy.

This five-day immersive training experience provides public finance professionals with an opportunity to build leadership skills, network with peers, and be more prepared to lead teams, deal with politically sensitive topics, set policies, and work with other leaders. The Leadership Academy is offered each year in Phoenix, Arizona (March); Chicago, Illinois (August); and Charleston, South Carolina (November). For more information or to apply, visit gfoa.org/leadership-academy.



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GFOA Financial Foundations

Framework. Published in 2019, the framework helps guide finance professionals in creating a collaborative structure for supporting sustainable change and long-term support for collectively owned initiatives or assets. This body of knowledge and approach to financial leadership advocates for a collective approach to finance via five primary values or pillars for sustainability. For more information, visit gfoa.org/financial-foundations.

GFOA Code of Ethics. The code recognizes that people are imperfect and that we are all subject to biases that can lead to ethical behavior challenges. Our code asks the members of government finance offices to recognize and confront these challenges so we can serve communities to the best of our abilities. The code also identifies integrity and honesty, producing results for the community, treating people fairly, diversity and inclusion, and reliability and consistency as values

that all finance professionals should strive for. It also provides tools and guides for practical implementation in your organization. For more information, visit gfoa.org/ethics.

GFOA Research. GFOA has recently published additional research papers highlighting critical skills for finance professionals. These materials provide options for building capacity in communications, fairness, behavioral science, decision architecture, combating polarization, and more. To download copies of current research, visit gfoa.org/research.

GFOA Education. Building leadership skills is a goal of all GFOA training. Budget classes like the Advanced Budget Academy provide opportunities for developing team building and facilitation skills that will help you work better with department leaders. Procurement classes offer tips for leading evaluation teams, and ERP-focused training highlights opportunities for building capacity in change management and project management. We also offer on-demand training in ethics, and we're creating additional on-demand offerings in leadership. For scheduled courses, visit the events calendar at gfoa.org/events, and for more information on GFOA's on-demand training offerings, visit gfoa.org/on-demand.

As GFOA removes barriers for more finance professionals within each government to become GFOA members, the need for leadership training will grow for members at all levels. Yes, chief financial officers and budget directors rely on leadership skills, but those skills are also critical for accountants, budget analysts, procurement professionals, and others who want to build a successful career in the public sector. As you work on enhancing your skills, don't neglect leadership—and don't forget that GFOA is your trusted partner in navigating your leadership journey. 📧

Sincerely,

Chris