Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at GFOA
Strategic Framework
July 2021
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I. Our Vision for DEI

GFOA’s mission is to advance professional excellence in government finance. Diversity, equity, and inclusion are at the heart of our mission. Our members shape the policies, programs, and resource allocations in their communities. By building a culture of belonging and inclusion where our employees contribute fully and freely, we both create a rewarding experience inside of GFOA and harness our collective diversity to deliver excellent products and services for our members that support them in equitably recognizing and responding to the needs of the diverse communities they serve. We believe the future and promise of our profession depends on our ability to understand, embrace, and operate with cultural competence. We aspire to lead and advocate so that every person, in every community, has equal access and opportunity for a better future, and to elevate our profession as a career of choice for talent across diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

By embracing and advancing DEI and living up to our values step-by-step, every day, we will achieve a future with:

**Products and services** that are made better by the diverse perspectives, knowledge, worldviews, backgrounds, and experiences of our people.

A **workforce** engaged daily by working in a setting where they feel seen and heard and contributing to their full potential because they see purpose in their work and alignment with their values.

A **reputation** for being a place to build fulfilling careers.

A **model** for our members, demonstrating how they, too, can value diversity within their teams, recognize and challenge bias, and promote equity within their communities.

A **magnet** for a new talent pipeline to increase the hiring of individuals at every level that are underrepresented in public finance both at GFOA, and the profession overall.
We are building out a set of DEI strategic priorities laddered into our business strategy with the input of our leadership, our employees, and the counsel of outside DEI expertise. In the interim, we have outlined here the important steps we will take now in pursuit of our DEI commitment. We look forward to working together to create an environment where we can all grow, thrive, and impact change.

Chris Morrill
Executive Director, Government Finance Officers Association
II. Defining DEI and What it Means to GFOA

At GFOA, our dedication to advance excellence in government finance is interconnected with our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. It is central to our mission as a resource, educator, facilitator, and advocate to ensure that each of our members has full opportunity to thrive in the profession and is fully equipped to create environments that allow the communities they serve to thrive. We believe that shared values in building communities that celebrate diversity and are more inclusive and equitable are key to providing a foundation for excellent public service.

We respect and value our employees, members, and partners who encompass a wide range of backgrounds, beliefs, experiences, perspectives, and differences. We embrace their unique identities and strive to ensure they are seen and welcomed at GFOA. These include, but are not limited to, characteristics such as national origin, language, race, color, physical and mental ability, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, veteran status, and family structure.

When we initiated this process, our first step was to get fully grounded in what the words Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion mean. Below are those definitions.

- **Diversity:** The presence of differences within a setting. The categories of identity that inform our unique experiences, backgrounds, and self-understanding.
- **Equity:** Creating fairness by providing people with individualized resources, treatment, and support to compensate for differences between individuals. Equity acknowledges the privilege afforded to certain individuals and attempts to level the playing field.
- **Inclusion:** The act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate and bring their full, authentic selves to work. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in the words/actions/thoughts of all people.
With this understanding we then moved to the question: so, what do these words mean for us and our mission at GFOA. What we developed is an interpretation deeply connected to our organization, which will help guide how we engage with and activate against diversity, equity, and inclusion at GFOA.

**Diversity:** We commit to celebrating diversity as a competitive advantage within our organization. Diversity broadens our perspective, enabling us to deliver high-quality products that reflect both the full needs of our members – *and the citizens within the communities where they serve*. We will pursue deliberate efforts that further increases the diversity of our employees (at every level) and our membership base and creates a pipeline for recruiting more diverse talent into the profession– making government finance a career of choice for all.

**Equity:** We commit to working actively to inform and advocate for equity in public finance. We also take seriously the responsibility to increase access and opportunities for under-represented populations in the government finance profession. For our diverse and dispersed workforce, we strive to provide equal access to the same professional resources and career advancement opportunities.

**Inclusion:** We commit to building a culture and environment where every individual feels a sense of belonging, shows up as their authentic self, and contributes freely and fully. We know that by creating a vibrant climate of inclusiveness we can more effectively harness the diversity of our organization to advance our collective capabilities, which will in turn demonstrate an example of diversity leadership for our members.
III. Infusing DEI into GFOA

We believe to be successful we must infuse DEI into the core of how we operate to increase transparency, visibility, and accountability for our efforts. With the support of the Executive Director as our top champion for DEI, we are making the following shifts to further embed DEI into our day-day activities.

1. **Incorporate a specific DEI focus in our annual strategic planning process to identify big-picture organizational initiatives and key results that will advance our DEI commitment**

   - GFOA’s organizational-wide strategic planning process for the next cycle will begin in the fall of 2021. The next strategic plan will be finalized and implemented by the next fiscal year, April 2022. This strategic planning process will be purposeful in including a DEI lens and the plan will include organizational initiatives and key results that will advance our DEI commitment.
   - This Taskforce has contributed to several initiatives during the past year that will help infuse DEI. Other examples of initiatives to infuse DEI at an organizational level are:
     - Incorporating DEI into our leadership competencies (work on this was paused while this group worked on definitions of DEI);
     - Creating a learning and professional development curriculum for employees that has a focus on cultural competence, and
     - Implementing the “Return to Next” plan in a way that supports our employees equitably.

2. **Renewing the focus of the Racial Equity Taskforce**

Ahead in this document is an inaugural charter for the Racial Equity Taskforce. Our intention is that this charter will provide a directional framework for the group with the right level of flexibility, so they are empowered to contribute in a way meaningful to them and to GFOA’s mission.
IV. Renewing the Focus for the Racial Equity Taskforce

How We Started

In 2020, we formed a Racial Equity Taskforce in response to the murder of George and other unarmed African Americans to come together as collective to determine how GFOA can lead on “calling out unfair discrimination of any kind” as committed to in our code. The Racial Equity Taskforce is comprised of GFOA staff across levels, functions, and geographies. Additionally, the Taskforce provided a safe place for employees to share their feelings around the turbulent times that we faced as a nation related to racial injustice and served as a vehicle for education and critical conversations to happen amongst staff.

We are proud of the progress we have made over the past year. Using the all-staff trainings – “How We Got Here: The Hidden History of Diversity in America” and “Unconscious Bias: Can We See Our Own Blind Spots?” – as a launching pad, we took the following actions:

- Surveyed our employees to get a benchmark of demographic data and understand experiences of racial bias in the workplace. We aim to use this data to proactively increase awareness of diversity at GFOA.
- Surveyed our member base to gather demographic data, so that we can better assess how GFOA employees reflect the diversity of our members, and find opportunities to promote diversity, address gaps, and identify programs to better support our members.
- Identified opportunities for greater equity. At the recommendation of the Taskforce, GFOA has created a resolution policy (the final draft will be discussed with this group at our next meeting) which is supported by an expanded Employee Assistance Plan (EAP) for employees who are having a conflict at work or feel they are experiencing harassment or bias. GFOA also plans to roll-out conflict resolution training to management to shift
the mindset of complaints as valuable opportunities for sparking positive organizational change.

- Provided invaluable insight that helped inform the “End the Acronym” campaign, a GFOA initiative that set a new, bold standard in creating safe spaces for our members and partners around the world.

Where We Are Now

There is still much to do. There is an opportunity to make an even greater impact by providing increased clarity on this group’s mission, its governance structure, and the important, specific role it plays in advancing GFOA’s values. To do that, we engaged an outside advisor and began a series of workshops and discussions to determine our next steps. As part of this process, in late July 2021, we asked the Taskforce three questions to seek their input in key decision areas. The questions included:

Q1. What do you think the mission of this group should be going forward? In other words, what are we trying to accomplish?

Q2. Looking back on the past year, is there any unfinished business that you would like to see addressed?

Q3. Currently, our group name specifies racial equity as a key focus area. As we move forward, what do you think should be our focus:
   - Racial equity
   - Racial equity, plus initiatives across diversity, equity, and inclusion

We received 100% participation from the Taskforce with 19 responses. The key takeaways include:

1. There is not one broadly accepted view of the what the Taskforce mission is and what it is has left to do, but there are strong themes around:
   - Racial equity and equity as a key focus for the group
   - The Taskforce as an advocate/promoter of racial equity
• The internal employee audience as a priority
• The need for greater clarity of purpose and communication both within the group and to the broader GFOA employee base about the purpose of the group

2. 15 of the 19 respondents would like the group to focus on racial equity, plus initiatives across diversity, equity, and inclusion

These survey comments in addition to feedback received from Taskforce members during one-on-one discussions, meetings, and workshops, along with the engagement of an outside advisor, and review of best practices have fueled our efforts in developing an inaugural charter for the Racial Equity Taskforce.

a. A Charter for the Racial Equity Taskforce

**Purpose:** This group was assembled to support GFOA in taking the lead on “calling out unfair discrimination of any kind,” a value stated in its code of ethics.

**Mission:** As an employee-led group within GFOA, the Racial Equity Taskforce strives to promote equal opportunity, awareness, and inclusion of GFOA’s rich and diverse employee community. We aim to:

- Educate GFOA employees on issues that affect historically marginalized communities and create cultural appreciation opportunities within GFOA;
- Provide learning, leadership, and networking opportunities to Taskforce members;
- Improve diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging within the workplace; and
- Give voice to the experiences and perspectives of GFOA employees, and provide GFOA leadership with input on DEI initiatives.

**Role and Responsibilities:** The Taskforce is an employee-led group that plays an integral role in advancing GFOA’s DEI commitment as a partner of the executive leadership team. The group determines each year how it will activate against a key organizational priority and works together to manage their progress throughout the year.
**Governance structure:**

*Committee Chair*, the chair of the Taskforce provides leadership for the committee and plays a key role in facilitating discussion and setting the annual priorities for the committee. They drive committee meetings, track committee progress, work directly with the Executive Sponsor, keep the committee informed as needed on larger organizational initiatives, and represent the committee whenever necessary. This is an opportunity for real-time leadership development.

Committee chairs are expected to comfortably demonstrate professional courage, excellence in stakeholder engagement, strong communications, networking, and collaboration skills in order to deliver results.

Requirements:

- Approximately 3–5 years’ professional experience
- High performer with demonstrated Leadership Capabilities
- 2 – 3-year commitment (TBD)
- Knowledgeable of GFOA business
- Willingness to learn
- Supervisor’s approval

*(if needed) Sub-committee chairs*, the sub-committee chair(s) of the Taskforce overseas the progress of a sub-committee. They drive sub-committee meetings, track subcommittee progress, work directly with the Committee Chair, keep the subcommittee informed as needed on larger initiatives, and represent the subcommittee whenever necessary. This is an opportunity for real-time leadership development.

Requirements:

- Approximately 2–4 years’ professional experience
- High performer with demonstrated Leadership Capabilities
- 1 year commitment
- Knowledgeable of GFOA business
- Willingness to learn
• Supervisor’s approval

*General membership*, Open to all employees on a volunteer basis. It is encouraged that any employee who volunteers makes a commitment to be an active contributor for one-year, meaning attends meetings regularly, takes ownership over Taskforce priorities, and participates in getting the work done. Every year, volunteers will have an opportunity to recommit to the committee.

*Executive-sponsor*, a member of the executive team vested in the success of the committee to help remove roadblocks, provide access to needed resources, and offer coaching. The sponsor is a champion of the committee and assists in developing the annual committee workplan. They meet with the Taskforce frequently, no less than 6 times a year.

**b. 2021-2022 Racial Equity Taskforce Planning**

**A Process for Annual Planning and Evaluation:**

The below outlines a process for future planning.

• In February, aligned with the annual planning process, leadership from the Taskforce will participate in meetings with Executive Leadership to determine how best to align the Taskforce with the strategic business objectives for the year. This creates a clear, business-aligned objective for the Taskforce each year.

• The Chair of the Taskforce will then organize a process within the Taskforce to determine how the Taskforce will help support and activate against the objective. It may decide to continue or build upon past efforts or launch entirely new efforts. The Taskforce will develop a work plan each year and share it with Executive Leadership for visibility into what they will implement in the coming year.

• At the end of the year, Taskforce leadership and Executive Leadership are involved in a two-way end of year results share out and feedback session for increased partnership and transparency. Throughout the year, Taskforce leadership and Executive Leadership will determine the right frequency of pulse surveys or other metrics as progress checkpoints.
The below workplan template will help guide future annual planning.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASKFORCE Mission</th>
<th>Impact Goals</th>
<th>Initiatives</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Communication</th>
<th>Owner(s)</th>
<th>Key Relationships</th>
<th>KPIs</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>What are your goals that align with the TASKFORCE mission?</em></td>
<td><em>What initiatives will you lead to advance each goal?</em></td>
<td><em>What actions will you take to execute each initiative</em></td>
<td><em>What communication systems or processes are needed for success?</em></td>
<td><em>Who on the (sub) committee will lead, who will contribute?</em></td>
<td><em>What relationships need to be cultivated and leveraged?</em></td>
<td><em>How will you define success?</em></td>
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