Reaching Out: GFOA’s New Member Community

BY TIMOTHY MARTIN

When Mikaela Rhoads, internal auditor for the City of Iowa City, Iowa, had a question about how to handle the city’s grants management process, she turned to GFOA’s new Member Community. Within a few days, she had responses from members across the country, offering input and sharing their policies. Mikaela is just one of many GFOA members who have joined the new community to network with their peers, and this is exactly the kind of engagement we were hoping for when we launched the platform back in April. I’ll talk more about communities in a moment, but first, we need to talk about the beginning of GFOA’s new digital journey—which really began more than two years ago, when we decided to overhaul the new GFOA website.

All about the website
By overhaul, I mean building from the ground up, not just throwing in a new template. As the process began, website consultants met with GFOA members face-to-face to get a good understanding of what they thought about our old site, why they visit, and what they would change. GFOA also dove into the data from the old website to see what the numbers showed. One clear theme emerged. While the old site was filled with important and useful information for members—like best practices and research—important connections were missing, which left visitors sometimes missing out.

From there, GFOA’s new Materials Library was born. When the new gfoa.org launched in June 2020, it quickly became a popular feature. The library allows members to browse best practices, publications, research reports, past articles from Government Finance Review, and more by topic. We’ve also added member-only content to the library, with more on the way. Overall, the site gives GFOA new ways to bring you the latest information on public finance. The navigation at the top allows you to easily log into your member account, or browse the Events Calendar or Materials Library, or head to the new Member Community. Our drop-down navigation allows you to find membership information, best practices, advocacy updates, and more with just the click of a mouse. Need quick help? Use the “I Want To”
drop-down menu to join GFOA and view resources such as the GFOA Job Board, register for training, apply to award programs, or ask about GFOA resources. Browse our front page to find GFOA’s latest updates in different display options, all designed to get you the information you need faster.

The website’s first year has been a success. We’ve had more than three million page views, and more than 50 percent of visitors scroll all the way down on the homepage. Other popular pages include the Jobs Board, Events Calendar, and awards programs.

GFOA’s website was also built with considerations for integration. Members enjoy single sign-on capabilities between GFOA’s website, association management system, and Learning Management System (LMS). GFOA’s new LMS hosts GFOA webinars, e-learning courses, and the virtual conference and since its launch last summer has already been used by over 17,000 people.

**Member Communities**

Now back to communities. GFOA isn’t just working to build thriving communities across the country—we’re working to do it online as well. Members were continuously asking for a new way to connect with other members, and in April 2021, after months of planning, GFOA answered the call with the new GFOA Member Communities. This online engagement portal allows members to join forums, ask questions, upload documents, network with other members, and more. Members use the platform to

> The member communities have provided me with the opportunity to learn how my peers respond to the accounting, managerial, and operating issues at their entities. Although we might work at different types of entities, I read posts which are quite relevant to the needs for my community.”

> – NORMAN ECKSTEIN, CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER & TAX COLLECTOR TOWNSHIP OF BOONTON

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**GFOA’s new Materials Library allows members to search best practices, publications and research reports by topic.**

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**BY THE NUMBERS**

| Pageviews: 3,331,090 | Unique Pageviews: 2,420,438 |

**How do members come to our website?**

- **48%** Organic search
- **36%** Directly by typing gfoa.org
- **9%** From an email
- **4%** From another website

**How far are members scrolling on the homepage?**

- **100%** 73% 61%
- **25% of the page** 50% of the page 75% of the page
- **57%** 38%
- **90% of the page** 100% of the page

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build a network to help with everyday challenges in the public finance world. Since its launch, more than 2,400 members have logged into the platform. Nearly 1,000 members have joined the General GFOA Forum, a place for members to discuss a wide range of finance topics. The COVID-19 Forum has more than 700 members who talk about the challenges of the pandemic and brainstorm ways to spend new funding from Washington D.C. Communities have also been set up for members of GFOA’s affinity groups and for CPFOs.

We’re also launching new communities that allow members to take their ideas a step further. In July, we kicked off the GFOA Test Kitchen Community for members who are interested in developing and testing new ideas and practices. While engaging with GFOA staff from the Research and Consulting Center in the community, the idea is to challenge the status quo, breakdown myths, cultivate and refine raw thoughts, and move beyond “this is the way we’ve always done it” to begin thinking about ways to evolve public finance for the future.

This platform is free—it comes with your GFOA membership. To access it, just visit community.gfoa.org and log in with your GFOA username and password.

On the social front, GFOA continues keeping members up to date every day through Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and now Instagram. Combined, our accounts have more than 36,000 followers—that’s triple the number of followers we had just four years ago.

Understanding that members consume information at different times and through various mediums, we’ve also launched GFOA Podcasts. You can subscribe on iTunes or wherever you listen to podcasts. Topics include Week in Washington updates and episodes about leadership, trust, diversity, and inclusion.

With all the new digital enhancements over the last year, we still see this as the beginning of a journey, and we look forward to continuing to improve and enhance the ways in which we provide information and engage with members.

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