

THE BOND BUYER

Laura Allen takes the helm at GFOA

By

[Connor Hussey](#)

Published

May 22, 2023, 8:00 a.m. EDT

Laura Allen, budget analyst for the Maryland Department of Budget and Management, takes over as president of the Government Finance Officers Association from Terri Velasquez in a role she feels can be instrumental in bringing members together and addressing the most pressing challenges for the industry.

"We're in a really rapidly changing world and public finance really needs to change," Allen said. "GFOA has launched several initiatives to rethink our approach to budgeting, revenues, and financial reporting and we've done that in a very collaborative way with the members," she added. "A lot of them have participated in these initiatives and share their ideas and their thoughts on how public finance needs to adapt and change, so it's a pretty exciting time."

First order of business for Allen is ensuring all their members have adequate access to the federal pandemic aid, despite conditions for that funding changing [rapidly](#).



"We're in a really rapidly changing world and public finance really needs to change," said the GFOA's incoming president, Laura Allen.

"I just want to make sure that everybody has the resources and that our members have the information that they need in order to receive all the benefits of ARPA, the IIJA and the Inflation Reduction Act," Allen said. She also wants to make some impact on how state and local governments staff their offices.

"One of the biggest issues we're facing is finding talent and hiring people," Allen said. "There are staffing shortages all over the country and I even believe there's some in Canada. One of the things we're working on is trying to help our members by providing tools and resources so that they can attract and retain talent, with the goal of making sure that they're able to effectively serve their communities."

Laura Allen brings over 30 years of local government experience to her term as president of GFOA, serving eleven years at the executive level in California and specializing in small communities in Maryland.

She began her career as an assistant transportation planner and analyst for AC Transit, an Oakland-based public transit agency. She then became a senior management analyst for the city of Berkeley from 2000 to 2005, then moving on

to become assistant city manager for the Town of Colma before being promoted to city manager after 3 years.

It was towards the end of her time in California that she first was introduced to GFOA and first began to see the potential of the organization.

"I fell in love with GFOA when I went to my first conference in San Francisco when I was living there in 2013," Allen said. "I really felt like I found a group of people that really thought like I did and really just had the best interest of their communities at heart. It sort of took off from there."

Allen went on to become the town administrator for the City of Berlin, Maryland, from 2013 to 2019 and then in 2019, took on a role as city treasurer for the City of Greenbelt, Maryland, for just seven months, before moving on to interim town manager for Berwyn Heights, Maryland. She now serves, in addition to being president of GFOA, as budget analyst III, capital budgeting for the Maryland Department of Budget and Management.

In her capacity as a GFOA member, Allen has also served as a reviewer for the Distinguished Budget Presentation Award program for over twelve years, became a member of GFOA's Certified Public Finance Officers Program in 2012, joined the Committee on Economic Development and Capital Planning in 2013, became vice chair of that in 2016 and joined the GFOA's Executive Board in 2019.

She has presented at many GFOA conferences, speaking on topics such as capital planning, infrastructure and creative placemaking for small communities. She co-authored *What Governments Look for in a CFO*, published in the *Government Finance Review* in 2016.

She holds a master's degree in public administration from the University of Nevada, Reno, where she also got her bachelor's degree in political science and economics. She is a graduate of the Leadership ICMA and the Senior Executive Institute at the University of Virginia, Darden Graduate School of Business and is the past-president of the Maryland City/County Management Association.

She noted the close relationship she shares with Emily Brock, director of the federal liaison center at GFOA, and plans to continue that close relationship into her term as president.

"Our folks at the federal liaison center do a really nice job of keeping their finger on the pulse of what's happening in Washington," Allen said.

But she really wants her tenure at GFOA to be focused on all of the people they serve and wants to continue this dialogue with members so they can share their thoughts on the job GFOA is doing.

"My focus is really going to be on our people, our members, our partners, and our employees," she said. "GFOA has amazingly talented people and coming out of this pandemic, I want to make sure that they have all the support they need so they can effectively serve our members."

"I'd like our members to know that I see my role as the President as a way of giving back to an organization that has made a substantial difference in my career," Allen said. "I'm hoping that they will take the time to share their thoughts on how we can do better and serve them better."