

# Bond Case Briefs

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## GFOA Hosts Meeting to Discuss Implementing School Budgeting Best Practices.

Alliance for Excellence in School Budgeting members met last week at GFOA's office in Chicago to develop a set of guiding principles for the budget process, based on GFOA's new best practices. These guidelines center on aligning district resources with the areas that will have greatest impact on student achievement. The Alliance members are from 35 school districts across the country, from the largest to some of the smallest, and from urban, suburban, and rural areas. They worked on developing communication ideas and analyzing goals and priorities (see below for more information about their process).

Alliance members will be implementing [GFOA's new Best Practices in School Budgeting](#) over the next year. GFOA will support their efforts in several ways through online training courses and eLearning sessions. In addition, resources available on GFOA's website - based on the best practices - help academic and finance staff align resources with student outcomes by incorporating research-proven practices into a cohesive budget process.

### **Working on Implementation**

At the meeting, Alliance members - superintendents, chief finance officers, chief academic officers, budget directors, and more - worked on implementing best practices that GFOA staff has developed in conjunction with school district staff and other education finance experts. Specifically, they developed communication ideas and analyzed goals and priorities.

**Communication.** The components of a communication strategy start with an overview of the organizations' processes, which allows them to find ways of engaging stakeholders and explaining how and why decisions are made. Next, districts must identify who will deliver the message, and to whom. Messages should then be tailored to that target audience, but it's not that easy. Districts must also determine which communication channels will be most effective. And once the message is delivered, it's time to gather feedback and adjust the message accordingly.

**Goals.** Districts also need to develop goals. One way to approach this step is by using the SMARTER framework. Goals should be specific - that is, they specify a precise outcome or result. They should also be measureable (verifiable and, ideally, quantifiable); achievable (grounded in reality); relevant (focused on student achievement); time-bound (laying out both short- and long-term objectives); exciting (reaching for ambitious improvement); and resourced (aligning finances with goals).

To define goals for academic achievement and make those goals understood by the schools, districts need to assess their strategic environment; set SMARTER goals for multi-year, district-wide improvement; understand baseline performance at the school level; and set goals for each school. To take that first step, start with goals that include specific outcomes, and aim for outcomes that are significant but manageable. Establish what data will the district will use to show whether progress is being made on a goal, and begin collecting evidence. Next, identify the root causes of gaps between the district's goals and its reality.

**Best Practices.** Alliance members will be implementing GFOA's new Best Practices in School Budgeting, which was recently passed by GFOA's executive board, over the next year. The best practices center on aligning resources with areas of greatest impact on student achievement. GFOA will support these efforts with collaborative meetings, newly developed eLearning modules, and other resources. GFOA will begin recruiting members for the next phase of the Alliance in early 2016.

GFOA's best practices for school include steps that are organized in five major phases: plan and prepare, set instructional priorities, pay for priorities, implement a plan, and ensure sustainability. The best practices include specific examples and guidance on implementing the process. Alliance members have benefitted from adopting the process, and GFOA will document and share their successes over the course of the project.

**Training.** GFOA is developing eLearning courses to help districts with these steps. The courses are self-paced and take approximately 30 minutes and 1 hour to complete.

**Budget Award.** GFOA's Award for Best Practices in School Budgeting and Award for Best Practices in Community College programs are based on the best practices in school budgeting. GFOA is finalizing the award criteria, which will allow school districts and community colleges to demonstrate process excellence and receive deserved recognition. Applications will be available for budgets with fiscal years beginning in calendar year 2017.

### **Contact GFOA for More Information**

To find out more about the alliance, the best practices, or any other information regarding the project, please contact Mike Mucha, director of GFOA's Research and Consulting Center. More information on the project is also available on GFOA's website.

Thursday, October 8, 2015