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Playing the Long Game in Public Finance.

Success in the coming years will require sustainability, adaptation and perseverance, especially as AI both enhances and disrupts government. Professional leaders need to look beyond the short term, facilitate change where needed, and reinvent themselves.

As 2025 comes to a close, this is a worthwhile time for public finance professionals and public officials to reposition themselves to master a shape-shifting fiscal landscape, new technologies, staffing challenges and unknown unknowns. Many of their contemporaries will try to cope with the accelerating pace of change by muddling through and playing it safe. Traditional bureaucratic responses may work for some, but they run the risk of leaving the foot-draggers hopelessly out of touch and eventually obsolete.

Survival and success for most professionals in the field of public finance will come easier to those who accept the inevitability of change, adapt to new technologies, avoid gimmicks, promote and practice continuous improvement, orchestrate long-term thinking by those around them, and brush up on their own self-awareness and interpersonal skills.

The most familiar and quantifiable aspect of this long game is fiscal sustainability. For starters, that requires a sober review and projection of the jurisdiction’s revenue and expense trends to question whether each year’s budget has habitually become a game of kicking the can to the next year and one’s successors. At a minimum, a fresh five-year financial forecasting exercise is now timely.

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