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# DOLLARS *AND* \$ENSE PERSPECTIVE

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## Is Change Important? No, it's Essential!

I've been privileged in my career to be associated with the GFOA as a local government finance officer and volunteer for both the GFOA of the US and Canada and GFOABC. Now, as your Executive Director, it's become crystal clear to me that GFOABC has one singular responsibility, and that's to assist you in being successful as a local government finance professional.

Working closely with your Board of Directors, our staff team is truly excited about meeting this challenge! We know that change is essential for GFOABC to deliver quality programs, conferences and current topical information that you can count on to meet your needs.

Over the next several months, we will be working on a 3-Year Development Plan that supports the Association's Strategic Plan and its priorities of Education, Communications and External Relationships. We are exploring and prioritizing a long list of ideas for program development including how best to present them to you, whether that be classroom style, webinars, e-learning or some other means.

We think it's critical to hear from our members and invite you to send us your thoughts about current training gaps that we can explore. Any and all thoughts about how we can support your learning can be sent to [office@gfoabc.ca](mailto:office@gfoabc.ca) and we promise to engage with you. We will also be initiating a member survey and making phone contact with some members on the path to 'getting it right'.

There are many players in the professional development and training market. GFOABC wants to be your 'go-to' partner, fulfilling your Board's vision to be the leading association for local government financial management in Canada. This will require a major commitment that we intend to meet over the coming 3 years. We will be, without question, 'Better Together'!

Paul Macklem, Executive Director

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# GFOABC Member News and 2017 Programming

## 2017 Member Renewal

### **Renewal notice will be emailed the first week of January.**

GFOABC has updated its member registration software, and this new system will be used to renew your membership for 2017. It is important that you confirm your personal profile within our new system in order to continue to receive information on GFOABC programs and to renew your membership for 2017.

### **Your Organization's Membership Renewal**

The designated primary contact for each organization will receive a renewal notice from GFOABC. The primary contact will be responsible for confirming their organization's named members and will receive the

renewal invoice after confirming membership on our new system.

### **Affiliate Membership Renewal**

GFOABC also has an Affiliate classification that is generally comprised of individuals from the sectors closely involved with municipal finance.

[For more information on membership renewals or to inquire on becoming a member please click here.](#)

## Procurement Toolkit

### **The Toolkit will be available for sale in the new year!**

LGMA and GFOABC have partnered to provide support for senior administrators who are responsible for managing their local government's procurement practices. In response to the recommendations for capital and operational procurement from the Auditor General for Local Government, a Procurement Toolkit, First Edition 2016, has been created to provide practical tools such as

sample bylaws, policies, forms and procedures to assist local governments in their procurement practices.

Following the successful completion of the four part webinar series, we are pleased to announce the Toolkit will be available for sale including the recording of the four webinars.

Details of how to purchase will be included in the January update.

## Taxation and Assessment Webinar

### **Semi-Annual Registration is Now Open!**

Are you responsible for the property taxation function in your municipality? This monthly webinar series covers the material presented at the GFOABC Boot Camp over a one year period on a monthly basis.

**Occurs every third Wednesday of the Month, 10:00 –11:00am**

[To register for this 12 Month Webinar Series please click here](#)

## Collectors' Forum

**Collectors' Forum occurs every three months on the fourth Wednesday of the month.**

### **Next Session (Free)**

Wednesday , January 25, 2017

9:00—10:30am PDT

### **Agenda**

1. "What's New for 2017?" – Update on changes from BC Assessment, Home Owner Grant, Deferment, School Tax reporting

2. Q&A and Round Table

[Please Click Here to Register](#)

## Tax Sale Webinar for Improvement Districts

**March 22 & 29, 2017 via GoToWebinar**

Tax Sale is the ultimate tax collection tool. Selling a person's property at Tax Sale is a big responsibility and includes an element of risk to the municipality. If you have to do it, you need to know the procedural and legal pitfalls to do it correctly. This webinar has been specifically created to provide a comprehensive discussion of Tax Sale for Improvement Districts.

[Please click here for more details and to register.](#)

## Spring Training

In April, GFOABC will be holding its Spring PD programming across British Columbia.

### **Proposed Courses:**

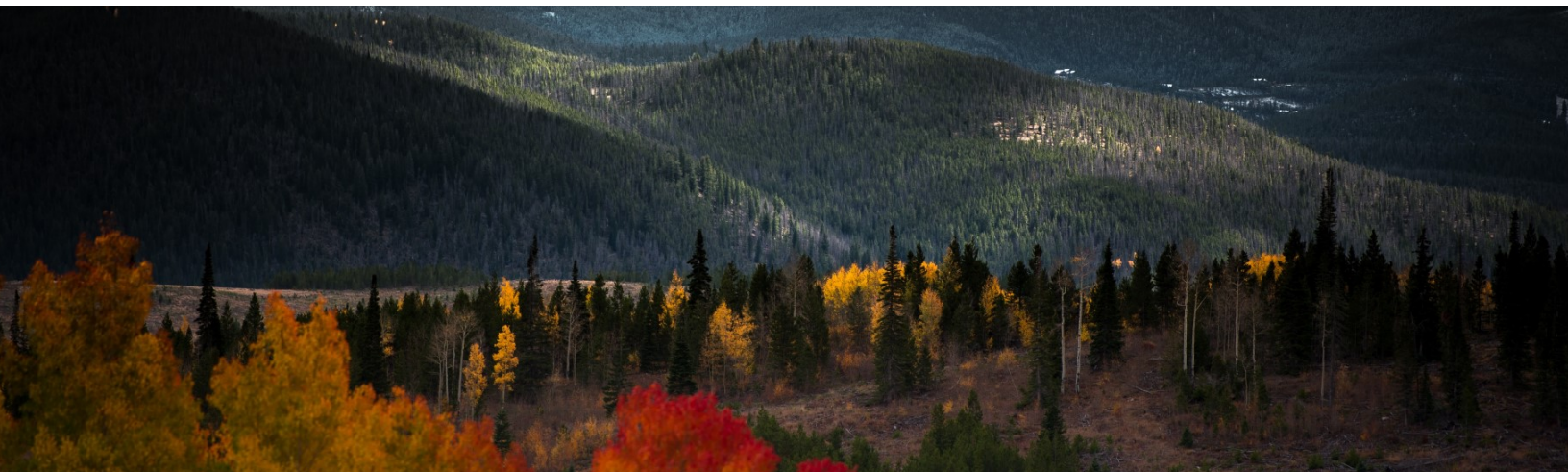
- Taxation
- Long Term Financial Planning
- Internal Controls
- Payroll
- User Fees

### **Proposed Locations:**

- Prince George
- Kamloops
- Vernon
- Campbell River
- Abbotsford

## GFOABC Forum

The GFOABC Forum is back in business. Thank you to all the members who have created posts for their fellow finance officers. With the new member renewal process you will be prompted to create a MyAccount which will also act as your forum login. Once the forum is secure our hope is that the replies will be made in the forum as opposed to personal email. This will allow all British Columbian finance officers the opportunity to learn from each other. Thanks for your patience with the forum, we hope you enjoy the improvements.





# 2017 Annual Conference

**June 14-16, 2017 in Victoria, BC at the Fairmont Empress Hotel**

## **Accommodations**

**Fairmont Empress - [Direct Reservation Link](#)**

721 Government Street, Victoria, BC  
Standard Room \$229.00, Deluxe  
\$279.00

Please quote "GFOABC-2017" to  
receive the group rate.

1-250-384-8111

**Conference Registration to open in the  
new year.**

## **You do not want to miss our Keynote!**

### **Paul Huschilt**

There's no other conference closing like it. All of the key lessons, messages, and highlights of your conference are played back to you in an amazing comic summary. Paul attends your sessions and uses his sharp wit, imagination, and talent as a performer to create an instant replay of the conference.

[Click here for full bio.](#)



## Call for Conference Topics

Proposals for topics and speakers are now being accepted through to January 15, 2017.

[Submit your proposal here](#) or contact [kharris@gfoabc.ca](mailto:kharris@gfoabc.ca) to discuss your ideas.

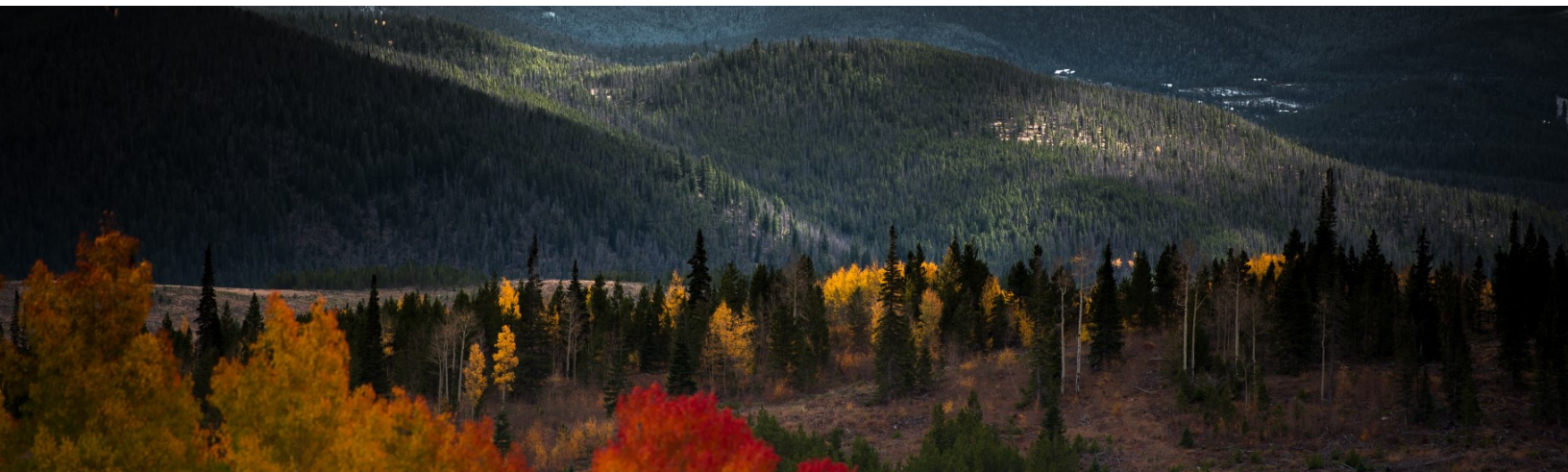
## Member Recognition Awards

The "Member Recognition Awards" will be presented at the GFOABC annual Conference in Victoria. To promote excellence in government service and government finance, GFOABC annually awards individuals who have made significant contributions in the area of local government finance. Awards are presented for outstanding performance and achievement as well as for innovative ideas that will benefit others in the field.

Nominations are currently being solicited and must be received before May 15, 2017. [Click here for more details.](#)

## Sponsorship and Exhibitor Opportunities

Please visit our [website](#) for details on 2017 Sponsorship and Exhibitor opportunities.







# Meetings are a Four-Letter Word

*About the Author: Bill Cox is a partner in BDO Canada usually working out of the Vancouver office. He works exclusively in the Public Sector and is the firm's Western Canadian Lead for the Public Sector. He has over 30 years experience in audit, internal control, accounting research and P3 consulting.*

Okay, not literally obviously. But I do think they can be a curse.

I sometimes think that I have it bad with all the meetings that I, as a public-practice auditor, have to attend. But I am always amazed at how much time the senior financial people at my local government clients spend in meetings. At some municipalities it is downright ridiculous. It makes me wonder how they get any work done. (Actually, I do know how they get things done: by working after hours on non-Council meeting nights. This certainly does not scale, and can't be good for work/life balance.)

It may be difficult to influence Council and Committee meeting agendas and plans (although I do think you should try when you can). However, you can control internal meetings and use some best practices to minimize time required for meetings.

## Meetings are Toxic

This heading is from a book called *Rework* which I thoroughly enjoyed and would recommend. The author has many problems with meetings. Some of the key items I picked out of his list include:

- meetings convey an abysmally small amount of information per minute
- they require thorough preparation that most people don't have the time for
- agendas tend to be vague and no one is sure of the goal of the meeting
- they are usually about words and abstract topics and not about real tangible things

## Meeting Best Practices

There are some ways to buck the norms and make meetings more productive. Some changes are easy to implement and others require a significant makeover of corporate culture. Given that we are all too busy to waste time though, working on meeting efficiency will free up some hours from your work week.





Bill Cox, Partner BDO

**Best practices include:**

- end a meeting as soon as possible, just because a meeting is scheduled for an hour doesn't mean that it has to run for an hour
- never run over the allotted time if the meeting can't be ended earlier
- invite as few people as possible (typically most people don't need to be there, the key decision makers can fill in the others more efficiently after the meeting)
- have a clear, concise agenda that sets out the goal for the meeting (that is the only way to be able to say when the meeting is done)
- follow the agenda strictly - if someone strays off, add that discussion to the end of the meeting (but only if there is available time)
- not everyone is an effective Chair. Only let those skilled at chairing meetings act in that role. Provide training to others to give them the skills to chair meetings in future.
- meet in an informal setting (someone's cubicle or office instead of a conference room) whenever possible. This has the double-benefit of keeping attendees' minds in their work and also helps limit the number of attendees due to space considerations.
- end the meeting with the solution to the goal set in the agenda and make someone responsible for acting on it.

The number one productivity rule for meetings is **not to have one**. But if a meeting really is necessary, following the above best-practices should help.



# Collectors' Corner

## 5 Things to Look For in 2017

*About the Author: Doug Stein has worked in municipal finance for over 30 years. In 2011 he retired from his position as Manager of Revenue Services for the District of Saanich. Doug has been very involved with the Collectors' Forum, is a GFOABC Life Member and a CPA, CMA.*



2016 is almost over and as usual it has been a very busy year. A lot of work has been going on in the background which will be implemented in 2017. Here are 5 things to look for in 2017:

1. **Assessments:** BC Assessment implemented their new website in 2016 and has been implementing the transition to the new Data Advice via the new Data Delivery Website. Municipalities can receive both legacy and the new Data Advice in parallel for up to six months. The old Data Advice will be available until August 2018. In addition, new reporting will replace current reporting (eg RC900 and NMC).
2. **Home Owner Grants/School Tax Reporting:** The Province initiated the RTI (Revenue Transformation Initiative) to replace their legacy system. RTI Phase 2 includes home owner grant changes. For 2017, the HOG application will be revised to include clearer language. The HOG application and Retro HOG process will be simplified (e.g. less documentation required, use of agent declaration). There will be new reporting procedures (eTax) for HOGs and School Tax (including monthly reporting).
3. **Deferments:** There were more than double the new deferment applications in 2016. This trend is expected to continue in 2017. A lot of work was done by the Provincial/Collectors Working Group on implementing eDeferment (or Automatic Renewals). While this initiative has been put on hold, municipalities will be able to report deferment amounts using a CSV file (see the Ministry of Finance Memorandum dated November 14, 2016). Also, municipalities now have the option of providing taxpayers with their own eRenewal application form or even their own automatic renewal plan.
4. **Property taxes:** In November 2016, the Province of BC's *Commission on Tax Competitiveness* issued its report *Improving BC's Business Tax Competitiveness* with recommendations, including "recommendations on property taxation in the 2012 Report of the Expert Panel on BC's Business Tax Competitiveness be implemented". Also, back in 2013, UBCM issued the *Strong Fiscal Futures* report with several recommendations affecting property taxation. Maybe we'll see changes in 2017.
5. **Education:** We in local government are on the front line in communicating with taxpayers. In addition, there is the ongoing challenge of training new staff. GFOA will continue to provide property tax workshops and webinars to assist you in keeping up to date. Check out the GFOA website including the new Forum section. The GFOA Collectors' Forum webinar will also continue to provide timely updates on the changes from the Province and BC Assessment, guest speakers, and provide an opportunity for you to network with your fellow Collectors.

So stay tuned. 2017 should be an interesting year.



# Get to know your GFOABC Board and Staff



**Sheila Thiessen, CPA, CMA - Director at Large**

I started my municipal finance career in 1999 with the Thompson-Nicola Regional District as an Accounting Clerk. Over the course of the last 17 years, I have worked at the TNRD, City of Surrey, District of Clearwater, and currently am at the City of Merritt. I earned my CPA, CMA designation in 2006.

My role has evolved from Accounting Clerk to Director of Finance & IT. Throughout my career GFOABC has been a great resource, with webinars, professional development, conferences and networking, and the forum.

I am very excited to now be a part of the GFOABC Board, and am pleased to have the opportunity to give back. My experience with regional districts and small municipalities gives me a unique perspective. I have found my career in municipal finance to be very fulfilling and hope to be able to promote municipal finance as an exciting and rewarding career through the GFOABC.

I was born and raised in BC and have been fortunate to experience life in small municipalities as well as in the lower mainland. My other passions include my family, especially my grandchildren, hiking and camping, and generally enjoying all that this wonderful Province has to offer.



**Noreen Kassam, CPA, CGA - Director at Large**

This is my second year on the GFOABC Board, involved in both the External Relations and Communications Committees. It is really rewarding to be part of an organization that is going through such transformation, refreshing its identity yet holding true to its mission: to promote excellence in local government through the support and development of its members. GFOABC provides exciting learning opportunities and networking forums through its many program offerings. I am truly privileged to give back to the municipal community that has helped me succeed in my career endeavours.

A bit about me...I was born in Copenhagen, Denmark but other than my name I can't recognize a single word on my birth certificate. I grew up in Coquitlam, BC, and completed my Bachelor of Commerce at the University of Northern BC in Prince George. My first introduction to municipal government was as a Junior Auditor with the Auditor General of Canada. Subsequently, I have held roles in Finance at Metro Vancouver, City of Surrey and am currently at the City of Burnaby. I enjoy playing soccer and cherish all the time I get with my twelve year old son, eight year old daughter and most supportive husband in the world!



# Get to know your GFOABC Board and Staff



Kala Harris has recently joined the GFOABC team as Program Manager bringing with her over 10 years of not-for-profit and public sector experience.

Kala comes to us from Simon Fraser University, where she was responsible for overseeing finance and human resources as Senior Program Manager for the Human Security Research Group, a federally incorporated not-for-profit organization affiliated with the School for International Studies, and, most recently, as departmental Manager for the SFU Centre for Dialogue.

During her tenure at the SFU Centre for Dialogue, Kala oversaw the development and implementation of internal control processes and procedures, served as departmental lead for the university's new chart of accounts and financial system upgrade and provided procurement and fee-for-service agreement training and support to the Centre and related Fellow programs. Kala takes a systems approach to all that she does and it is this approach that gained her many accolades from her colleagues, ultimately making it possible for the Centre to double its programming while reducing the demands on their small finance team.

With a mandate shared jointly by the Office of Academics and the Office of External Relations, the SFU Centre for Dialogue holds a unique role within the university, connecting the university to the community through the practice of dialogue. The experience that Kala has gained there will indeed serve her well in her role as Program Manager.

Kala also brings practical non-finance officer local government experience to her new role having worked as a program coordinator for the City of Calgary's Water Services department and City of Ottawa's Solid Waste Services department.

Kala will draw heavily on her program management experience as well as the deep local government knowledge of the GFOABC board of directors, staff, instructors and most importantly, its members, to strengthen and grow the opportunities ahead in 2017.



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