

Georgia Fiscal Management Council

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NEWSLETTER

2026 Fiscal Management Council Annual Training Conference

Sunday, September 20 at 2:00 PM - Wednesday, September 23 at 11:00 AM



www.georgiafmc.com



Terry Raiford
CFO

Meet CFO Terry Raiford

Terry Raiford is the Chief Financial Officer for the Georgia Public Defender Council, a state agency with a budget exceeding \$130 million that is responsible for overseeing the public defender system in 153 of 159 counties. Terry has over 15 years of experience administering public funds, beginning at the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget in 2011 and later joining GPDC in 2014. As CFO, she manages a talented team of accountants, analysts, and assistants. Terry is responsible for her agency's year-to-year budgets, purchasing, and fiscal analysis and review. Alongside GPDC's Executive Director, Terry also regularly speaks on behalf of the agency at legislative budgetary hearings.

A Commitment to Public Service, Leadership, and Financial Stewardship

For Terry Raiford, serving as CFO of the Georgia Public Defender Council is about much more than budgets and numbers. It is an opportunity to make a meaningful impact on public defense across Georgia. After 12 years with GPDC, Terry continues to find great fulfillment in helping ensure that attorneys and staff have the resources they need to serve their clients effectively. She enjoys the problem-solving nature of the work, balancing a complex statewide budget, and navigating constraints to find creative solutions to support GPDC's mission.

Just as important, Terry values the people she works with. She describes GPDC's teams as dedicated, collaborative, and deeply committed to public service. Supporting those teams and helping them succeed is one of the most meaningful aspects of her role.

Leading with Clarity and Consistency

The best management advice Terry has received is simple: **lead with clarity and consistency**. Early in her career, a mentor taught her that people perform at their best when they understand the "why" behind their work and feel supported in how they carry it out. That guidance has remained a guiding principle throughout her career as a CFO.

Terry believes that clear communication, setting well-defined expectations, and creating space for people to contribute their expertise are essential to building trust and strengthening an organization. In a mission-driven environment like GPDC, Terry believes that fostering transparency and collaboration are not simply good management practices; they are essential to serving the public effectively.

Advice for Those New to Government Finance

Terry encourages anyone beginning a career in government finance to approach the work with **patience, curiosity, and a commitment to understand the bigger picture**.

Public-sector finance operates differently from many other environments with layers of policy, compliance, and process shaping every decision.

Terry believes that taking the time to understand why those structures exist can make new employees more effective and confident in their roles.

Her advice? Ask questions early and often. The work can be complex, but they are surrounded by people who want to help them succeed. Above all, Terry encourages them to remember that their work has a direct impact on public service. She says, keeping that mission in mind brings purpose to even the most technical tasks.

Connecting Through FMC

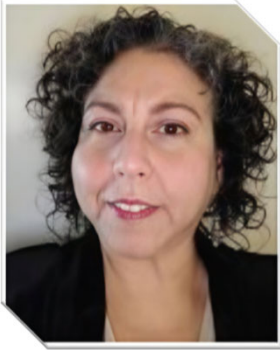
As an active member of the Georgia Fiscal Management Council, Terry values the opportunity to learn and connect with finance professionals from across state government. One of the things she enjoys most about the Fiscal Management Conference is learning from peers who face many of the same challenges. FMC brings together a community of professionals who share a commitment to improving financial stewardship and public service.

Terry returns from the annual conference with new ideas, practical tools, and a broader perspective. She also appreciates having the opportunity to step away from the day-to-day demands of her role and think strategically about ways to strengthen processes at GPDC.

Just as important are the relationships built through FMC. Terry considers the networking opportunities invaluable, noting that connections made at the conference help colleagues across agencies collaborate, share knowledge, and work more effectively together throughout the year. For Terry, that is what makes public-sector finance and FMC so rewarding: **the opportunity to solve problems, support people, build relationships, and ultimately contribute to a mission that serves communities across Georgia**.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Carmen Freemire



Carmen Freemire is the Senior Director of Finance for the State Charter Schools Commission, where she helps state charter schools navigate the world of smart financial management. She joined the SCSC in May 2023, bringing a wealth of experience and a passion for making school finance approachable and effective. Before stepping into this role, Carmen served as Assistant Budget Director at the Georgia Department of Education and held key positions in school finance with the Governor's Office of Planning and Budget and Fulton County Schools. She earned her master's degree in public administration from the State University of New York at Buffalo. Carmen is the proud parent of a high school teacher at Tri-Cities High.

What is your favorite part of your job and why?

The State Charter Schools Commission (SCSC) is Georgia's state-level, independent charter school authorizer. For the upcoming 2026-2027 school year we will have 52 schools serving over 41,000 students. We have smaller schools that serve less than 500 students as well as two virtual schools with a combined enrollment of just under 17,000. The best part of my job is working with our charter schools to understand their funding needs so they can thrive and provide a great education for their students.

What is your biggest work challenge?

State charter schools are public schools as well as school districts. Many of our schools are small with big responsibilities. The biggest of which is to provide great educational opportunities for their students. My biggest challenge is looking for early indicators of distress before they become significant challenges for a school.

Advice to other professionals seeking a long-term career in finance with the state.

Network with everyone you meet. Be curious, ask questions. Don't be afraid to be wrong, it is how you will learn and grow.

What do you enjoy most about your FMC membership?

My FMC membership has given me the opportunity to network with so many people who toil "behind the curtain" making the numbers run. The monthly learning opportunities, the ability to reach out when I am stumped about an issue and the yearly conference have been invaluable.

What is the best career advice you've ever received?

Give your people the tools and time to do their jobs and then get out of their way.

What's a fun fact about you that your colleagues might not know?

I once sang on the stage at Lincoln Center as part of a school choir.

Which of your professional accomplishments are you most proud of?

I used to be the program manager for the Georgia Special Needs Scholarship Program. In this position I spoke with many parents some in very difficult circumstances. Often, I had the opportunity to help them overcome an obstacle for their children which was very rewarding.

GA@WORK TEAM MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Jason Dunn

Jason is the HCM Operations and Support Manager at the State Accounting Office, where he leads a team providing payroll support. In his 20 years with SAO, Jason has also supported HR and benefits management and recently helped to lead the Payroll workstream on the GA@WORK implementation team. He earned a Bachelor of Science degree in International Business and Finance from Auburn University and a Master's degree in HR Management from the University of Phoenix. Outside of work, Jason enjoys making music with orchestras around Atlanta.



QUESTIONS

During the design and implementation phase of the project, what was your top priority for GA@WORK? What were your hopes for the new system?

My top priority was to make sure all workers get paid accurately and on time. My hopes were that it would be as seamless as possible, and the initial hope was that we would not disrupt the prior processes any more than we had to. As the project progressed, I found that in order to get our workers paid accurately and timely, we would be disrupting most of our processes, and in a very good way!

What surprised you most after go-live?

I have been pleasantly surprised at how incredibly adaptable our payroll partners have been throughout the process of going live. When we completed the first payroll in July, we had only 10 errors across the entire state! This is a testament to how engaged our payroll community has been throughout the project.

What is your favorite feature in GA@WORK?

I like how reports work in GA@WORK. We get results real-time from the system, and we can download reports to Excel to begin analyzing data right away.

Do you have any tips for finance users?

Show some love to your payroll folks – they have worked hard and they've been terrific at learning what needs to be done to make sure you're paid right!

What excites you most about this system?

I love that we are all looking at the same system now, fully integrated between HCM and Finance. This has streamlined processes between payroll and finance, and we all benefit from this change in how we interact with the system.

GA@WORK TEAM MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Lenesia Cooper

Lenesia is a Financial System Business Analyst for the State Accounting Office (SAO). With 18 years of experience as a Systems Analyst, she supports Budget Management, Adaptive Planning and Procurement in GA@WORK, and specializes in procure-to-pay functionalities. She has also served as the Budget Management and Adaptive Planning Workstream Lead on the GA@WORK implementation team. Before coming to SAO, Lenesia had engagements with Accenture and IBM. In her free time, she enjoys cooking and traveling with family.

QUESTIONS

During the design and implementation phase of the project, what was your top priority for GA@WORK? What were your hopes for the new system?

My top priority during the design and implementation phase was making sure I fully understood the procure-to-pay functionality, while also embracing the future-state processes, terminology, and overall way of working in GA@WORK. I wanted to understand not only how the system worked, but also how the different processes connected from beginning to end. My hope for the new system was that agencies and end users would see GA@WORK as a tool that makes their work more streamlined, transparent, and compliance-focused, while giving them better access to the information they need to make informed decisions.

What surprised you most after go-live?

What surprised me most after go-live was how calm, collaborative, and focused everyone remained throughout go-live. Whenever challenges or hiccups occurred, the focus was not on the problem itself, but on how quickly we could work together to resolve it and keep transactions flowing. The collaboration between the implementation teams, support staff, and agencies really stood out to me. Everyone wanted the transition to be successful, and that willingness to work together reinforced for me that the project was a success.

What is your favorite feature in GA@WORK?

My favorite feature is the ability to access real-time data. Being able to see transactions and activity as they happen provides greater visibility and allows us to troubleshoot issues, identify discrepancies, and make corrections much more quickly. That real-time visibility is extremely helpful when supporting agencies.

Do you have any tips for finance users?

My biggest tip for finance users is to embrace the system and take the time to understand the full lifecycle of a transaction, not just the individual task you are responsible for completing. Understanding how procurement, budget, accounting, and other financial processes connect makes troubleshooting much easier. I would also encourage users to become comfortable with the terminology, use the available reports and real-time data, and ask questions when something does not look right. The more you work within GA@WORK and understand how transactions flow through the system, the more valuable the system becomes as an important financial management tool.

What excites you most about this system?

What excites me most about GA@WORK is how I have greater visibility into transactions and can identify and resolve issues more quickly. I am also excited about the system's future potential. Go-live was not the finish line—it created a foundation that we can continue to improve. As agencies become more comfortable with GA@WORK and we continue enhancing processes, reporting, and functionality, I believe the system will become an even more powerful tool for supporting financial management, accountability, and decision-making across the State of Georgia.

GFMC SCHOLARSHIPS

As part of the mission of the Georgia Fiscal Management Council (FMC), there is the availability of up to two scholarships, one for eligible rising or current juniors or graduate students and one for eligible Technical College System of Georgia students. FMC scholarships are valued up to a maximum of \$1,500.

Congratulations to this year's scholarship winners:

College/University:

Julia Grant - UGA

TCSG:

Megan Meindl - West Georgia Technical College

For more information and to apply for the GFMC Scholarship, please follow the link below.

<https://georgiafmc.com/gfmc-scholarship/>



MEMBERSHIP

Membership to the Georgia Fiscal Management Council is open to any government employee engaged in a function related to fiscal operation and/or management. Each applicant for membership must be endorsed by the Executive Board member for their agency. For more information and to apply for membership, please follow the link below.

<https://georgiafmc.com/membership/>



Join Today

Updating or Changing your Password - need email verification

When you know that you are getting ready to change jobs, access the FMC website, <https://georgiafmc.com/> and change your email (login) to a personal email address, then change it to your new work email when you start your new position.

Instructions on how to change your email (login).

Log into the FMC website

Top ribbon: Membership

Drop Down: My FMC Account

Under "Manage Account", change the email address, click "Save and Continue".

Your email address (login) is changed.



Georgia Fiscal Management Council

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

Benefits of being an FMC Member

- **Professional Development.** An FMC membership gives you access to up-to-date information on fiscal matters. When a change in methodology, policy or procedure is required, FMC usually hears about it first.
- **Mentorship.** FMC is made up of many leaders across the state of Georgia. These leaders are seasoned professionals and career state government employees. The depth of knowledge is vast and they provide a strong support system within the fiscal community.
- **Leadership Development.** An FMC membership gives you access to an organization where the possibilities of participation is unlimited! Build your leadership skills by serving/chairing on a committee or leading an effort.
- **Networking.** Being a member of FMC allows you to mix and mingle with others in the fiscal community within the state of Georgia. You can establish relationships with other FMC members who share common professional interests and similar business concerns.
- **Jobs.** Most fiscal officers in FMC share open job or vacancy announcements with the FMC since it represents the state's fiscal community.

Council Leadership and Committees

Jackson DeFore	President
Dave Lakly	President Elect
Kelly Dudley	Past President
Chad DaBella	Treasurer
Alicia Hautala	Secretary

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Newsletter (Chair: [Carla Morris](#))

Program and Professional Development (Chair: [Dave Lakly](#))

Scholarship (Chair: [Teresa Loggins](#))

Sponsorship (Chair: [Kenley Finlayson](#))

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