

BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTIONS



Fazal Syed, CGMS

Assistant Director
City of Houston

Background

As assistant director of finance at the City of Houston, I have over 14 years of experience in accounting, financial reporting, and grants management for federal and state-funded programs. I hold a bachelor's degree in accounting, management information systems, and political science, and a Master of Accountancy (MAcc). Additionally, I am a Certified Grants Management Specialist (CGMS) and possess several professional accounting certifications. Currently, I lead a large team and oversee the governance of the City's multi-billion-dollar grant portfolio. Throughout my career, I have contributed to several significant initiatives, including implementing the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Public Assistance program and collaborating with FEMA executives to enhance FEMA's National Grants Portal System. I have co-led a multidisciplinary team managing a \$1 billion pandemic grant from the U.S. Department of the Treasury. In my current role, I also oversee the accounting section and have spearheaded initiatives to adopt various government accounting standards. I have taught courses in accounting, auditing, and business administration as an adjunct college instructor, and before joining the City, I worked as an auditor.

Candidate Profile: Local Government

I meet all three criteria from NGMA's candidate profile listings, including experience in local government, financial operations, and policy development. To start, I work in the finance department's financial reporting and operations division, where I manage the audit of the City's Annual Comprehensive Financial Report, including the Single Audit, with total annual expenditures in the billions. I also manage several departmental sections, including general accounting, capital assets, and internal controls.

Coupled with my background in teaching and professional certifications, this experience has given me a deep understanding of financial statement analysis, risk identification, and government auditing. My policy development background at the City comprises creating, reviewing, and revising various policies. It also includes developing and delivering training programs aligned with those policies. A few examples are the grants acquisition, management, and compliance administrative policy, capital asset management policy, and the Disaster Cost Recovery Policies and Procedures Manual. Furthermore, my background in audit informs my understanding of how policies are implemented and when improvements are needed.

Board Experience

In addition to managing governance for the City's multi-billion dollar grants portfolio, I am a key member of the City's COVID-19 Steering Committee (set to end in 2026). The committee directs \$1 billion in pandemic-response grant funds received from the U.S. Department of the Treasury. In that capacity, I am responsible for overseeing program setup, management, project approvals, compliance, and reporting. I presently serve as treasurer on the board of the Houston Foundation (HF), representing the director of finance. HF is an endowment that provides financial assistance to non-profit organizations serving the humanitarian needs of Houston's residents. From 2023- 2025, I served on the Texas-based FEMA Region 6 Advisory Council. While on the Council, I advised the regional administrator on the effective use of the region's multi-billion dollar budget. From 2012-2014, I was on the board of a small Houston-area not-profit organization that served the basic needs of low-income residents.

NGMA Experience/Volunteering

I currently serve on NGMA's Certification Council Nominating Committee. The Certification Council, which is separate from the nominating committee, independently governs, oversees, and manages NGMA's CGMS program.

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Goal of NGMA's Strategic Framework That Most Resonates with Me

Strategic Goal #2, stating that NGMA will support the competency of grants management professionals by offering targeted educational and online resources, resonates the most with me. Over the past year, federal grants have often been in the news, and the rapidly changing landscape requires members to have up-to-date knowledge of issues such as rule changes and new federal directives. As a past educator, I know how effective and targeted educational resources can empower grant professionals to overcome hurdles related to compliance and program management. Furthermore, I hold several accounting certifications and understand the challenges and dynamics of an industry with evolving rules, regulations, and practices. Early in my career at the City, I saw the need to create a robust training program for the grants I managed. In response, I worked with cross-functional teams to develop a suite of educational resources, including SOPs, manuals, and live exercises to address the gap. My experience showed me how creating a robust training regimen helps to strengthen the programmatic and compliance structure of an organization's grant infrastructure.

Top Two Challenges Over the Next 3-5 Years for the Profession

As the technology boom centered on Artificial Intelligence (AI) accelerates, aiming to drive growth and productivity, grants professionals must be ready to adopt and integrate new skills and automation tools into everyday grants management processes. NGMA can assist by leveraging its relationships with corporate partners to continue expanding opportunities for members to learn, network, and access resources, including best practices and industry-specific recommendations.

Another challenge is that professionals nationwide must better understand and align their organization's grants management structure with the President's Executive Order: Improving Oversight of Federal Grantmaking (EO). It is expected that the EO will result in increased scrutiny, the potential for termination, and a more stringent approval process and documentation requirements. NGMA can support members by monitoring agency guidance, educating them on diversifying funds, strengthening internal compliance systems, documenting alignment with the Administration's goals, and, most importantly, developing contingency plans for funding shifts.