

# ***Bridging the Divide: Establishing the Public Finance Journal***

Bruce D. McDonald III<sup>1</sup>, Craig S. Maher<sup>2,c</sup>


The creation of *Public Finance Journal* (PF) is the culmination of several years of discussion about how best to address the divide between practitioners' research needs and academic scholarship. PF's origin is predicated on the expectation that for a professional discipline such as public administration and the subfield of public budgeting and finance, in particular, there needs to be an easily accessible forum for the dissemination of ideas and solutions. This journal would not be possible without the support of the Government Finance Officers Association, the oversight committees, the editorial board, and those helping with the journal's management. We are excited about the inaugural edition, where we have reviews of three important books, three thought-provoking research articles, and an article that surveys current research needs in the budget and finance field as expressed by faculty and practitioners.

Keywords: Engaged Research, Public Budgeting and Finance, *Public Finance Journal*

Public administration, in general, and public budgeting and finance, in particular, is a professional discipline. While theory is core to much of the academic research, the key questions asked by scholars are primarily normative. How can we help governments be more efficient and effective? What are the implications of policy changes? How can we better insulate government programs from economic shocks? What is a sound fiscal policy? What are the impacts of certain taxes and the combination of tax systems? What does a fiscally healthy state and local government look like? These are just a sample of questions pursued by public budgeting and finance scholars.

There are excellent outlets for disseminating research by public budgeting and finance scholars, and there are great resources for practitioners provided by organizations such as the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA). What we have learned from sessions with public budgeting and finance practitioners and researchers, however, is that there are few opportunities where research is shared across these disciplines and practitioners are actively

<sup>1</sup>Department of Public Administration, North Carolina State University.  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8963-8606>.

<sup>2</sup>School of Public Administration, University of Nebraska Omaha.  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5562-3473>.

<sup>c</sup>Corresponding Author: [csmaher@unomaha.edu](mailto:csmaher@unomaha.edu).

engaged in the process. Furthermore, getting access to most academic journals is too costly for most government officials. This is a void we envision being filled by *Public Finance Journal (PF)*.

*PF* is an open-access, online journal developed and sustained through a collaboration of academics and practitioners. This collaboration is nurtured through all phases of the process, beginning with the journal's conception and development (see our advisory board). Another example of this collaboration is the double-blinded manuscript submission review process. The editors are intentional about soliciting reviews that consist of a combination of practitioners and academics.

Similarly, in an effort to attract research on issues germane to public budgeting and finance professionals, GFOA recently launched the GovFi Prize, where they solicited research on a set of topics and offered cash incentives to awardees. Recipients of the 2024 prize include faculty and practitioners, such as a senior economic analyst for Bellevue, WA, and a debt analyst for the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority. The goal is for these award recipients to write articles that are timely, relevant, and publishable in *PF* (still requiring approval through the double-blind review process).

## **Establishing the Journal**

Given the unique mission of *Public Finance Journal*, we want to take this opportunity to provide some background on the formation and establishment of the journal. The creation of the journal began in the fall of 2021. After observing the limited involvement of practitioners in the annual conference of the Association for Budgeting and Financial Management, Bruce McDonald (North Carolina State University) and Shayne Kavanagh (GFOA) began discussing ideas for how to improve the academic-practitioner divide within this field. Several ideas were discussed over the next several months, including the establishment of academic tracks within the GFOA conference and the establishment of a webinar series where academic research could be presented to practitioners, among others. While McDonald and Kavanagh saw promise in each of the ideas, they kept coming back to the same challenges. Much of the research being conducted in the field does not address the questions that practitioners need to have answered. Further complicating the issue is that most research is inaccessible to the field of practice. Access to most academic research is cost-prohibitive due to the closed, subscription-based models of publishing, and the style of academic writing is often difficult for the typical person to read and understand.

Given the challenges of the relevancy of the research questions being studied and the accessibility of the research produced, any attempt to bridge the academic-practitioner divide would need to address them head-on. To encourage the academic community to engage in research relevant to the community, the work would need to count towards tenure requirements. This meant that it would need to appear in an academically managed, peer-reviewed journal. At the same time, the research would need to appear in a journal that overcomes the barriers of access by publishing on an open-access platform. A new journal was required to create a link between the two communities.

Once the decision was made to propose the establishment of an academic journal by the GFOA, the next step was in drafting the proposal. While the GFOA has a record of publishing

Table 1. Journal Formation Committee

---

---

Shayne Kavanagh, Government Finance Officers Association
Craig S. Maher, University of Nebraska Omaha
Bruce D. McDonald III, North Carolina State University
Michael A. Pagano, University of Illinois Chicago
James L. Perry, Indiana University
Kurt Thurmaier, Northern Illinois University
Kyle Wedberg, Government Finance Officers Association
Katherine Willoughby, University of Georgia

---

---

Table 2. Journal Oversight Committee

---

---

John Hird, University of Massachusetts Amherst
Shayne Kavanagh, Government Finance Officers Association
Chris Morrill, Government Finance Officers Association
James L. Perry, Indiana University
Kyle Wedberg, Government Finance Officers Association

---

---

books and a professional magazine, the proposed journal would be their first foray into academic publishing. From the fall of 2021 through the late spring of 2022, McDonald and Kavanagh drafted, revised, and polished a proposal for a new journal. The primary questions at hand in drafting the proposal were what the focus of the journal would be, how the journal would ensure accessibility to the field of practice, and what it would cost to create and produce the journal.

Kavanagh presented the proposal for the establishment of a journal to the GFOA's board of directors in June of 2022, receiving their approval to begin the formal planning process. To assist in planning, McDonald and Kavanagh recruited an eight-person formation committee. (A list of the members of the journal formation committee is provided in Table 1.) The committee was tasked with establishing a mission statement for the journal, drafting its aims and scope, choosing a name for the publication, and selecting its first editor(s)-in-chief.

Taking on this task, the committee quickly formalized the mission and direction of the journal. In September 2022, based on the recommendation of the committee, the GFOA announced Bruce D. McDonald III (North Carolina State University) and Craig S. Maher (University of Nebraska at Omaha) as the inaugural editors-in-chief of *Public Finance Journal*. While future terms of the editor-in-chief will be three years, McDonald and Maher were appointed for an initial five-year term to provide additional time to establish the journal and provide stability in production during its early years. In the months that followed, McDonald and Maher recruited Meagan M. Jordan (Old Dominion University) to serve as the book review editor, Sarah E. Larson (Miami University) to serve as the social media editor, and doctoral student Saman Afshan (North Carolina State University) to serve as the editorial assistant.

In addition to recommending the appointment of the current editors-in-chief, the journal formation committee also recommended the establishment of an oversight committee. This committee's focus was to provide oversight to the journal on behalf of the GFOA and serve as the points of contact to which the editors would report (See Table 2 for a list of membership in the journal's oversight committee).

Table 3. Editorial Board

<b>2023 Appointees</b>	<b>2024 Appointees</b>
Eugenia Gorina, University of Texas Dallas	Beverly Bunch, University of Illinois Springfield
Kenneth Hunter, Town of Rocky Mount, NC	Laure Celerier, University of Ottawa
Philip G. Joyce, University of Maryland	Dean Michael Mead, Carr, Riggs & Ingram, LLC
Onuyumbe E. Lukongo, Southern University	Samual B. Stone, California State University Fullerton
Christine Martell, University of Colorado Denver	David Swindell, Arizona State University
Charles E. Menifield, Rutgers University	Tammy R. Waymire, Governmental Accounting Standards Board
Francisco Ordaz, U.S. Department of State	Michelle L. Lofton, University of Georgia
Michael A. Pagano, University of Illinois Chicago	Brian Sigritz, National Association of State Budget Officers
Kurt Thurmaier, Northern Illinois University	Carolyn Bourdeaux, University of Georgia
Kyle Wedberg, Government Finance Officers Association	Ben Noble, City of Seattle, WA

With the journal’s leadership established, the formal launch took place in January 2023 with the beginning of the editors’ term and the announcement of the first members of the editorial board. According to the policies of the journal established by the formation committee, ten individuals are appointed annually to the editorial board, each serving a three-year term. Five of these members are to be appointed by the current editorial team, and the other five are to be appointed by the oversight committee. Given the journal’s focus on connecting research to practice, members of the editorial board come from both the field of practice and the academic communities. An overview of the 2023 and 2024 appointees to the editorial board is provided in Table 3.

While the journal formally launched in January 2023, its first year was one primarily centered around planning and recruitment. This included the creation and launch of the journal’s website ([www.PublicFinance.org](http://www.PublicFinance.org)), the recruitment of manuscripts to appear in the issue, and managing of those manuscripts through the review process. On February 19, 2024, the journal began posting accepted articles on its website each Monday in the lead-up to the release of the first issue on April 1, 2024. After the release of the first issues, articles will be posted to the journal’s website on an ongoing basis as they are accepted and emerge from the production process.

### **Mission, Aims, and Objectives**

The mission of *Public Finance Journal* is to serve those engaged in public budgeting and finance through the publication of significant advances in the science of the discipline that conveys both theoretical importance and timely application. Timeliness, rigorous research, and applicability are key to the journal and our editorial process. We aim to process manuscripts as quickly as possible.

The journal has four guiding principles. These are:

- *Public Finance Journal* is an open-access journal that is committed to the community of practice;
- All articles published adhere to the standards of peer review and the ethical standards of the Committee on Publication Ethics;
- We encourage posting open data and methods for all published articles to our Dataverse; and,
- Both replications and manuscripts with null results are important to the scientific process.

## Journal Format

*PF* is a biannual journal publishing peer-reviewed research that examines and analyzes contemporary issues in budgeting and finance and explores the applicability of solution sets. The GFOA publishes the journal and serves as a forum for discussion on significant issues related to the advancement of our scientific understanding. Articles go through a rigorous, double-blind peer-review practice that includes three reviewers, two from the academic community and one from the community of practice and is chosen for publication based on their originality, importance, interdisciplinary interest, timeliness, and accessibility. Regarding the latter, the style of writing and language used must be accessible to a broad, non-academic audience.

We publish three types of articles: research articles, survey articles, and book reviews. This first edition is a good example of this practice as we include three book reviews, three research articles, and one survey article. Research articles are original studies whose conclusions represent a substantial advance in the understanding of an important problem and have immediate, far-reaching implications. The typical research paper published by the journal should not exceed 6,000 words in length.

Survey articles are reflections on the status of the field's understanding of a particular topic or issue. A survey article intends to help readers understand what we know about the given topic, where the gaps in the research are, and where future studies should focus. Surveys that are included in the journal are expected to be between 10,000 and 12,000 words. While survey articles are typically editor-solicited, we encourage interested authors to contact us to discuss contributing a survey to the journal.

Book reviews are short, 1,000-1,800-word evaluations of recently published books that offer a brief description of the text's key points and a short appraisal of the strengths and weaknesses of the work. These reviews aim to introduce our community of readers to public budgeting and finance books and to get an overview of their contributions in a quick and accessible format.

## Conclusion

The focus and dissemination of public finance research is at a critical stage. There are challenging questions facing public officials, from managing under greater oversight to pivots in the economy that affect revenue collections (Decker, 2023, 2024). There are pulls on expenditures driven by shifts in demographics and intergovernmental relations. There are additional questions about transparency that include processes regarding how to solicit input on

budgetary decisions, engaging citizens in resource allocations, and the degree to which diversity and equity drive these decisions (Guzman et al., 2023). On top of this, the recent explosion in AI and machine learning offers opportunities for fiscal analyses and policy generation, as demonstrated in this inaugural edition of *PF* (Larson & Overton, 2024; Lee et al., 2024).

As you consider the journal as an outlet for your research, we encourage you to engage with the work of McDonald et al. (2024), published in this issue. McDonald et al.'s (2024) article is the result of more than 200 academics and practitioners who have come together to establish a research agenda for the discipline that includes both the needs of the community of practice and the research interests of the academy. We also encourage your engagement with the "Research Needs Bulletin Board," which appears on our website. The bulletin board is an interactive way for the *PF* community to share research needs, find research questions, or share research opportunities. We hope that this board will be an asset to the field and will help provide guidance and recommendations on what to study and where we can go next.

These are exciting times, and *PF* has the attention of researchers and professionals. We at *PF* offer a unique forum for thought leaders to engage in these research questions, which is free access and includes the perspectives of researchers, academics, and practitioners. We, as editors, are excited about the opportunity to help in the formation of *PF* and sincerely appreciate the time and effort of the journal's formation and oversight committees, the editorial board, and GFOA for enabling this to become a reality.

## References

- Decker, J. W. (2023). An (in)effective tax and expenditure limit (TEL): Why county governments do not utilize their maximum allotted property tax rate. *Public Administration*, 101(2), 376-390. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12756>
- Decker, J. W. (2024). Adoption of property tax expenditure and limitations by U.S. States: A multiple events history analysis. *Public Finance Journal*, 1(1), 66-79. <https://doi.org/10.59469/pfj.2024.7>
- Guzman, J. P. M., Jordan, M. M., & Joyce, P. G. (2023). Towards inclusive public administration systems: Public budgeting from the perspective of critical race theory. *Public Administration*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12956>
- Larson, S. E., & Overton, M. (2024). Modeling approach matters, but not as much as preprocessing: Comparison of machine learning and traditional revenue forecasting techniques. *Public Finance Journal*, 1(1), 29-48. <https://doi.org/10.59469/pfj.2024.8>
- Lee, M., Hayes, D., & Maher, C. S. (2024). AI as a budgeting tool: Panacea or Pandora's box? *Public Finance Journal*, 1(1), 49-65. <https://doi.org/10.59469/pfj.2024.6>
- McDonald, B. D., Larson, S. E., Maher, C. S., Kavanagh, S., Hunter, K. W., Goodman, C. B., Minkowitz, H., McCandless, S. A., Afshan, S., Jordan, M. M., et al. (2024). Establishing an agenda for public budgeting and finance research. *Public Finance Journal*, 1(1), 9-27. <https://doi.org/10.59469/pfj.2024.15>