

CGFM Profile

Associate Sees Benefits of CGFM in His Work with Federal Clients

Enhanced stature, broader experience in government financial management and a certification that is respected by his employer and his clients.

Christopher Gayle, an associate with Booz•Allen & Hamilton, Inc., got all those things after earning the CGFM designation in January. And though he called the experience of taking the three examinations “humbling,” he urges other professionals to register for the preparatory courses and take the exams.

Gayle said that like himself, many government financial managers don’t have the time to go back to school and get a master’s degree. The CGFM is perfect for people in his position—it’s a designation that puts them above the crowd without having to make the type of financial or time commitment another degree requires.

“It’s a great way to get comprehensive experience,” he said. “It really broadens one’s horizons, so I definitely would encourage it.”

Gayle works as part of the Economic and Business Analysis team that works primarily with federal clients, providing a range of services, particularly enterprise resource planning (ERP) solutions. Prior to his year with Booz•Allen & Hamilton, Inc., he worked for the CPA firm Clifton Gunderson LLC for more than three years.

It was at Clifton Gunderson that Gayle was first introduced to the CGFM designation. He saw that his partners and managers had earned the certification through their education and experience during the grandfathering period. Gayle, who had already earned the CPA credential, knew that the CGFM was the designation to get, but he also knew that unlike his counterparts, he would have to earn it by passing the three comprehensive exams.

Gayle said the three Courses in Government Financial Management offered through AGA’s partnership with Management Concepts, Inc. were invaluable in preparing for the exams. Clifton Gunderson was supportive, paying for the time off to take the courses as well as the exam application fee. His managers and partners also served as references to validate his federal government experience. “They looked at this as a plus because the federal government is always looking for distinguishing credentials on which basis contractors are sometimes selected,” he said.

Gayle also believes the CGFM is one way to help attract people to government service. Few universities teach government accounting, making it very difficult to bring new people into the profession, he said. Through its CGFM Program, AGA promotes better training and also encourages universities to teach the skills needed so professionals can work toward a more accountable government.

AGA’s Courses in Government Financial Management are not solely used by CGFM candidates. Some professionals take the courses to earn continuing professional education hours.

Gayle said he found Course 1, The Governmental Environment, to be a fairly straightforward description of the workings of government. But because Gayle grew up in Jamaica, he said the information was not second nature to him. The text was particularly helpful. He found the second course, Governmental Accounting, Financial Reporting and Budgeting, to be the most challenging. Course 3, Governmental Financial Management and Control, was not as difficult as he expected. Through the classes, he learned where his weak areas were and could concentrate his studies.

The three courses are taught by experienced financial managers who have vast institutional knowledge, Gayle said. The reference materials, especially the study questions at the end of the chapters, were very helpful. Passing the exams takes more than just knowing the material, though. It also takes on-the-job experience, as applicants are asked to apply what they've learned through various situations, Gayle said. Practical issues and hypothetical ethical dilemmas are presented in the exams.

He studied intensely and took all three exams over three Saturdays in January. Because the exam is computerized, he knew immediately afterward that he had passed. "Instant feedback is always good."

Soon after the exam, Gayle received a commemorative pin from AGA—and a congratulatory letter from Joan Schwartz, AGA's deputy executive director of professional certification. "What I liked about the letter is the fact that the designation CGFM was typed after my name. The instant recognition is both exciting and humbling. This program illustrates the fact that AGA is making a significant effort in providing professionals a good designator, which helps to set us apart." – CGFM Profiles by Christina M. Camara