

A CGFM Story

The ultimate value of earning a professional certification is the demonstration of mastery of a particular skill set. The maintenance of that certification shows a commitment to excellence and lifelong learning. The CGFM is the first certification broad enough to cover the whole field of government financial management—federal, state and local. It measures a wide range of knowledge and skills that a professional needs to succeed in the federal government financial environment, or to meet the unique challenges faced by state and local government financial managers.

I applaud all CGFMs for their dedication and commitment to our profession, and encourage non CGFMs to pursue this certification for their own personal and professional development. I recently earned the CGFM and would like to share my experiences with our members.

There are 9 steps to earning the CGFM designation. The process is very straight-forward and the national office staff is extremely helpful and very responsive to any questions you have.

Step 1 – Applying for the CGFM Program

Applying for the CGFM program is very simple. You can submit an application online, by email or can mail in a paper copy. The application is available at http://www.agacgfm.org/cgfm/start/application_form.aspx. The application fee is \$85. In addition to the application form and fee, you need to submit a copy of your college transcript. Specific degree documentation requirements can be found on <http://www.agacgfm.org/cgfm/start/>.

Step 2 – Eligibility Letter

Once your application, payment and degree documentation are received and processed by the Office of Professional Certification, AGA will mail you an eligibility letter with instructions on how to purchase your CGFM examinations. The letter is usually sent out within 2-3 weeks of receipt of your CGFM application and degree documentation.

Step 3 – Work Verification

Submit a Work Verification Form as soon as you have at least two years of professional-level experience in the government financial management field (you do not have to submit this form before taking the examinations, but it must be submitted before the designation can be granted).

Step 4 – Studying for the Examinations

You can prepare for the examinations by attending a classroom course, purchasing a study guide or studying on your own. I utilized AGA study guides that I borrowed from my local chapter. At first it looked very intimidating. However, the study guides are very easy to read. Most of my studying occurred during my one hour commute to and from work. The quizzes and end of course summary questions really helped drive home the reading material. I estimate that it took me a total of 100 hours to study for the three examinations. Most of the chapters in our region have study guides available for use through a free library program. If your chapter doesn't have study guides, or they are not available, contact me and I can make arrangements for you to borrow study guides from another chapter. Whatever method you choose to study, be sure to review the examination content outline found on <http://www.agacgfm.org/cgfm/exams/>, including the sample examination questions.

Step 5 – Exam Purchase

Following the instructions on your eligibility letter, register with Pearson VUE, pay for CGFM examination(s) and schedule your testing appointments. Examination fees are \$109 for each of the three examinations. Purchasing and scheduling the examinations was extremely easy through the Pearson VUE website. You can set up and change test dates via the internet. Ask your local chapter CGFM coordinator if your chapter has a CGFM scholarship. I utilized my chapter's scholarship to pay for all of the costs associated with earning the CGFM designation.

Step 6 – Taking the Exam

Take the CGFM Examinations at a Pearson Professional Center. I sat for tests at 3 different testing centers. The environment is comfortable and quiet which makes testing easy.

Step 7 – Score Reporting

After you complete a CGFM examination at a testing center, you will immediately receive a pass/fail score on your computer. This is great as you don't have to wait for days or weeks to find out if you passed or failed. If you did not pass your exam, there is a 30-day waiting period before you can retake the examination (90 days if you don't pass more than once).

Step 8 – Award Letter

Once you pass all three CGFM examinations, and your Work Verification Form has been submitted and accepted by the Office of Professional Certification, AGA will send you an official award letter announcing your new CGFM designation. The letter is usually sent out within 2-3 weeks.

Step 9 – CGFM Certificate

Within 6-10 weeks of receiving the award letter, you can expect to receive your CGFM certificate in the mail.

Overall, I found the administrative process relating to earning the CGFM to be very simple. Applying for the program and scheduling the tests were quick and easy. The study guides which I used to prepare for the tests were well written, easy to read and covered the material well. The tests were fair, not overly complex, but still demanding. My overall experience was excellent. If you have any questions or would like some advice, please don't hesitate to contact me.

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