

# A Panel Conversation with Northeast Women in Public Finance Featuring Freda Johnson '68

**MONDAY, MARCH 27, 2023 • 12:15–1:30 PM**

Student Union, Room 301

The public finance industry encompasses a variety of possible career paths, from working for public sector and not-for-profit bond issuers to private sector opportunities at ratings agencies, investment banks, buy-side asset management firms, bond insurers, and law firms. This event will bring together a group of women representing a cross section of the industry, who will describe their varied roles and answer questions about the public finance industry specifically, as well as any general career-related questions students may have.

The event is sponsored by Northeast Women in Public Finance (NEWPF), a professional organization for women working in all facets of the industry. NEWPF hosts networking gatherings and panel discussions on topics relevant to public sector finance and infrastructure throughout the year and provides career development advice for women in the industry.



**FREDA S. JOHNSON** spent her entire professional career in the public finance industry. The first half of that career consisted of her significant tenure at the rating agency, Moody's Investors Service, first as a municipal bond rating analyst and then as head of the Public Finance Division for twelve years – the first woman at any rating agency to hold this position and the first woman executive vice president at Moody's. For many years, she was the most senior woman of the approximately 40,000 employees of the Dun & Bradstreet Corporation, which owned Moody's until it went public.

The second half of her career was as president of Government Finance Associates, Inc. (GFA), an independent public finance advisor consulting on debt and financial management and strategic planning for large and complex state and local governments and public authorities such as the States of Alaska, Louisiana, and Vermont; the Massachusetts Port Authority; the Detroit Metropolitan Airport Authority; the American Red Cross, and many others.

Freda has been honored by *The Bond Buyer*, the daily publication of the public finance industry, and Northeast Women in Public Finance (NEWPF), which together annually present an award in her name to two trailblazing women in public finance—one from the public sector and one from the private sector. Past winners of the Freda Johnson Award include Denise

Nappier, treasurer of the State of Connecticut; Gina Raimundo, governor of Rhode Island; Katano Kisaine, director of finance, City of Oakland, Ca; Carole Brown, CFO of the City of Chicago; Fiona Ma, treasurer of the State of California; and Deborah Goldberg, treasurer of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, among others.

Freda is a founding member of NEWPF, for which she also serves on the Board of Directors and until recently on the Executive Committee, and she started NEWPF's mentoring program. She is a member of the Board of Trustees of the Queens College Foundation, is active with Carnegie Hill neighborhood groups, and is an advisory committee member to the Board of Directors of Tri-State Maxed Out Women's PAC—which works to expand the participation of women in our government.

In 2021, she was elected to the Vestry of the Church of the Heavenly Rest on Fifth Avenue and 90th Street where she is a member of a task force on inclusivity and invitation. She is the editor and marketing guru for her husband, J. Chester Johnson, a writer in both poetry and non-fiction. She has also been a member of the Board of Directors of Four Way Books, a selective publisher of poetry and short fiction, and the co-chair of the Senior Program Committee of the Harvard Business School Club of New York.

She was an adjunct professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Business, past president of The Municipal Forum of New York, and treasurer of the National Board of Directors of The Transition Network, a not-for-profit organization which works to promote women.



**VIVIAN ALTMAN** has worked as an investment banker in the public finance industry for over 40 years. She has had a managing role in structuring and financing an extensive range of issues nationwide, across several sectors of the market, and as both a financial advisor and an underwriter.

Altman serves on the FINRA Fixed Income Committee which advises and makes recommendations to FINRA about regulatory initiatives, rules, policies and public policy issues involving debt securities, including municipal securities and municipal advisory activity. She also is a member of the SIFMA Municipal Securities Committee Leadership Group, which is composed of 15 municipal department heads across the industry that convene to inform SIFMA’s legislative, regulatory, and market practice advocacy on behalf of their broker dealer members and guides the full Committee.

Altman served on the Board of the NJ Educational Facilities Authority from 1994–2010 and chaired the Authority for ten years under six different governors. She was also a member of the NJ Transportation Trust Fund and was on the Executive Committee and treasurer of the CARES Foundation Board, an organization for families affected by Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia, from 1999–2011. In 2014, she was named “Woman of the Year” by the Connecticut Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. In 2011, *The Bond Buyer* named her a “Trailblazing Woman in Public Finance.” She is co-president of Northeast Women in Public Finance and a founding member of Janney’s Women’s Interactive Network (WIN).

Altman earned an MA in economics from the University of Pennsylvania and a BA in economics from Barnard College.



**LISA COLE** is a principal and senior municipal bond credit analyst for PGIM’s (Prudential) Fixed Income’s Credit Research Group, covering tax-backed bonds issued by states and local governments, higher education, transportation and utility revenue bonds, and bonds issued by Canadian provinces. Prior to joining Prudential in 2011, Cole spent eight years at Moody’s Investors Service, where she was a member of Moody’s

rating committee and acted as lead analyst for a range of state and local government credits.

Cole has a Master of Public Administration degree from New York University and a BS from Cornell University. She is on the board of Northeast Women in Public Finance and is a member of the Municipal Analysts Group of New York and the National Federation of Municipal Analysts. In 2021, Cole was named a “Trailblazer” by Northeast Women in Public Finance.



**JENNIFER FREDERICKS** is the director of business development for Ice Miller, supporting national sales initiatives with a focus on the needs of public clients across the firm in practice areas such as traditional public finance, P3, housing, higher education, healthcare, cybersecurity, ESG, and cannabis. On the conference circuit as well as through social media, Fredericks can be found making connections around the country to expand

the network of Ice Miller partners and matching the needs of clients and intermediaries with the depth of experience Ice Miller offers.

Prior to joining Ice Miller in August 2021, she was a vice president of business development at BNY Mellon, where she led corporate trust business development efforts for the public finance sector in the Midwest and Northeast. She previously served as regional president and vice president of product program and retail operations for the Girl Scouts of Greater Chicago and Northwest Indiana. Previously, Fredericks worked in corporate escrow and commercial paper with JPMorgan.

Fredericks currently serves on the executive committee as vice president of conference and board member of national Women in Public Finance, on the board of directors for the Civic Federation of Chicago, Chicago Summer Business Institute board, the Miller Community Fund board, and is a member of CHIEF. She is a prior board member of Chicago Women in Public Finance and previously was the chair of BNY Mellon’s Women’s Initiative Network. She also knits for several charitable organizations in need of hats, gloves, and scarves, such as Knots of Love and Indiana Youth Group. Fredericks is also a member of Northeast Women in Public Finance, recognized by the group as a 2021 “Trailblazer,” honoring women in public finance who are helping to define a new generation of leaders.

She is also an adjunct professor at her alma mater, Calumet College of Saint Joseph, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Science. She earned her Master of Business Administration from Purdue University.



**LEIGH NADER**, CFA, is a managing director and head of Assured Guaranty’s Public Finance Healthcare and Higher Education Underwriting Group. Her team is responsible for the origination and underwriting of bond insurance for hospital, higher education, and nontraditional not-for-profit transactions nationwide. Nader joined Assured Guaranty in 2005 as a vice president in the healthcare group.

Prior to joining Assured Guaranty, Nader was a founding member of the healthcare underwriting group for bond insurer CIGF. She also worked as an underwriter in the public finance group of XL Capital Assurance, where she was responsible for not-for-profit transactions. Leigh began her career as an analyst in the Merrill Lynch Investment Managers Municipal Funds Group, where she was the lead analyst for the senior living and high yield hospital sectors.

Nader is a board member and secretary of the Northeast Women in Public Finance and an advisor to the Board of the Municipal Bond Women’s Forum. She was named a “Bond Buyer Rising Star” in 2016 and a “Trailblazing Woman in Public Finance” in 2022. She received a Bachelor of Science degree in finance from Boston University and is a CFA charter holder.



**VANESSA YOUNGS** is a vice president of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at Moody’s Corporation where she develops and communicates the DEI strategy towards the achievement of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion goals.

Youngs joined Moody’s in 2012 as a member of the Public Finance Group Surveillance Team and then become an associate analyst team manager for the

Local Government and State rating groups. Most recently, she served as a VP-Strategic Planner for the Office of the Moody’s Investors Service (MIS) President, building and executing MIS strategic priorities across business lines and geographies.

Prior to joining Moody’s, Youngs was a White House intern for the National Economic Council focusing on the role of women and African Americans in the economy. Prior to her internship, she worked for the New York City Mayor’s Office of Management and Budget as a senior revenue analyst for four years.

Youngs received her Master of Science in urban policy and management from the New School University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology, economics and business from Lafayette College.

Youngs also sits on the Board of Mercersburg Academy in Mercersburg, PA, and is vice president of Northeast Women in Public Finance. She is the virtual host and Trustee of Grace Baptist Church in Mount Vernon, NY.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:**  
Yifat Anteri at 718-997-2920

Sponsored by the Office of Institutional Advancement

