



**EMPOWERED BY KNOWLEDGE. STRENGTHENED BY
COMMUNITY**

Fast Facts and
Frequently Asked Questions

Updated for Cohorts: Class of 2027 & Class of 2028

FAST FACTS FOR SUPERINTENDENTS & SCHOOL BOARDS

Purpose: A structured, two-year professional development program supporting new School Business Officials (SBOs).

Who It's For: SBOs with limited or no school finance experience.

Why It Matters: The SBO role carries high financial, compliance, and operational risk. This Academy reduces costly mistakes and accelerates competence.

Training Structure: Each year's tuition includes 4 quarterly New SBO Trainings and access to a dedicated New SBO Academy discussion forum. Additional trainings on a number of topics are available, and highly encouraged, but must be purchased individually.

Time Commitment: Quarterly trainings (in-person or virtual) plus online forum participation.

Cost Structure: Seat-based enrollment owned by the district. Tuition is non-refundable.

Return on Investment: Faster onboarding, reduced compliance risk, stronger financial oversight, and statewide peer support.

Recognition: Graduates receive a certificate, public recognition at the MASBO Summer Conference, and a district press release.

IS THE PROGRAM RIGHT FOR ME?

This program is a good fit if:

- You are new to the SBO role or school finance.
- You are expected to manage budgets, payroll, audits, and compliance quickly.
- You want structured guidance instead of learning through trial-and-error.
- You value peer support and shared problem-solving.

This program may NOT be a good fit if:

- You are not willing to engage in trainings or the Academy community.
- You are looking for a one-time workshop instead of ongoing development.

Reality Check:

The SBO role is complex and unforgiving. This Academy won't remove the pressure- but it will give you tools, support, and confidence you need to better handle it.

Bottom Line:

If you are expected to protect your district financially and legally, this program is worth the investment.



FAQ

I'm brand new. Like...brand new. Is this program actually for me?

Yes. This program is built specifically for people who are new to the SBO role, including those with little or no prior school finance experience. You are not expected to “already know” budgets, audits, or Montana school finance when you start.



What exactly does a School Business Official do?

In short: you manage the district's money, compliance, and operational systems so schools can function. That includes budgeting, payroll, purchasing, audits, grants, contracts, reporting, and working closely with administrators, boards, and state agencies. If that sounds overwhelming—it is at first. That's why this Academy exists.



Will this teach me how to do the job, or just talk about it?

This is practical training. The Academy focuses on real-world scenarios, common mistakes, timelines, and “what I wish I had known” guidance from experienced SBOs—not just theory.



How long is the program and what's the time commitment?

The Academy runs over two years, following a July–June program year. Expect:

- Quarterly New SBO training sessions (some in person, some virtual)
- Access to recordings if you can't attend live
- Ongoing participation in the Academy forum

You don't have to do everything at once— but you will be more successful as long as you commit to staying engaged.



What if I feel lost or behind compared to others?


That's normal. Many participants start out feeling exactly the same way. The cohort model means you're learning alongside others who are also new, and second-year participants help support first-year members. You're not expected to have it all figured out.



FAQ


Is this a certification or a license?

The Academy is not a state license, but graduates receive a New SBO Academy Certificate, public recognition at the MASBO Summer Conference, and professional validation that you completed a structured, two-year development program.




What is the Academy Forum and do I really need to use it?

The forum is where a lot of the real learning happens. It's a shared online space to ask questions, see what others are dealing with, and learn from real situations across the state. Participation is strongly encouraged—it's how you avoid reinventing the wheel.



What if I'm hired mid-year? Do I have to wait to start?

No. Depending on when you register, you may be eligible for the Pre-Academy Bridge Program, which gives early access to the forum and selected trainings before your official cohort year begins.




What if I can't attend a training live?

Recordings are available for Academy participants. Live attendance is encouraged, but flexibility is built in because MASBO understands how demanding this role is.




What does it cost and who pays?

Annual tuition is set by MASBO and is typically paid by the district. Costs depend on your cohort and whether you enroll in the optional Pre-Academy Bridge Program. Annual tuition is not prorated or refundable, even if participation changes.



If I leave my district, do I take the Academy with me?


No. The Academy is seat-based and belongs to the district, not the individual. If you leave, the district may reassign the seat to another employee before the cut off date.



FAQ

What if I feel overwhelmed or make mistakes along the way?

That's expected. The Academy is designed to reduce trial-and-error, not eliminate it entirely. The goal is progress, confidence, and support- not perfection.




What happens if I don't participate much?

Graduation and recognition require meaningful participation over the two-year program. MASBO reserves the right to set minimum participation standards for graduation recognition.



Is this worth doing if I already feel stretched thin?

Honestly? This program is often most valuable for people who feel overwhelmed. It gives structure, community, and trusted guidance so you're not making high-stakes decisions alone.



Bottom line: why should I do this?

Because the SBO role is complex, high-risk, and fast-paced—and most people are expected to learn it on the fly. The New SBO Academy shortens the learning curve, builds confidence, and connects you to people who have already survived the steepest part of it.

To join the New SBO Academy, please review the New SBO Academy Program Guide and complete the Academy Registration Form. You can access the Program Guide [here](#).

Questions or Support

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