

Appendix D

Best Practices
Education and Training Programs for New County Commissioners

GEORGIA

ACCG County Commissioners Training Program – This program is run under the partnership of the Association of County Commissioners of Georgia and the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia. It is designed to enhance the skills of elected county officials. Each of the courses in the program is offered at least once every other year. Courses can be offered as part of ACCG events or as stand-alone sessions. Five courses are required for completion, a total of 48 hours of instruction. Once completed, the commissioners receive a certificate of recognition. There is no testing done in the program.

According to Carol Baker, meeting planner and special events manager for the ACCG, the Association County Commissioners acts as the manager and administrator of the program. The Institute of Government at UGa creates the content and structures the courses for the program. Many of the speakers are professors from the IOG or local county officials. Most courses are day-long sessions. One session is available with each ACCG conference, but other stand-alone sessions are offered throughout the year.

The ACCG program has been well received in Georgia. According to current numbers, 90 percent to 95 percent of commissioners participate in the training program (about 825 participants). The program is also open to all county staff members who wish to participate. To date, 75 to 100 administrators have completed the program, as well as 175 county clerks.

Three notable best practices of the ACCG are:

1. Training courses are moved throughout the state (Atlanta, Savannah, Athens, Macon, etc).
2. The ACCG has a training advisory committee, made up of commissioners, ACCG staff and IOG representatives that meets twice a year to discuss changes to the curriculum.
3. The effect of the statutory requirement is that all commissioners are exposed to the value of education and are more inclined to sign up for the program.

ACCG County Commissioners Training Program is *optional*.

Certified Commissioners Advanced Program – The CCAP is designed for commissioners who have attended the County Commissioners Training Program and are already certified. Successful completion requires:

- Seven programs or courses adding up to a minimum of 48 hours of training
- Participation on the two-day advanced leadership institute
- Completion of the summary project report

Approximately 50 percent of those who have completed the Level 1 training program also participate in the CCAP.

In recent months, there has been new demand from county commissioners in Georgia

for a third level of training, but it has yet to be established. This demand is a testament to the success and usefulness of Georgia's training program.

Other surveys have shown that commissioners want courses designed specifically for large and small counties. The counter argument given is that all counties need to be taught the same skill set and kept aware of issues in facing other counties. Georgia is still considering whether or not to create these new courses.

The Certified Commissioners Advanced Program is *optional*.

Newly Elected Commissioners Conference – Sponsored by the ACCG and the Carl Vinson Institute of Government, this conference is provided under Georgia State Law, which requires newly elected county officials to attend 18 hours of training before assuming office in January. It is sponsored during election years only. The three-and-a-half day program is a separate event from the training program and other ACCG conferences. However, attendees do receive six hours of credit toward the County Commissioners Training Program if they choose to register later.

The Newly Elected Commissioners Conference is *required*.

For more information, visit the Carl Vinson Institute of Government online at www.cviog.uga.edu/training/local/index.php.

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MARYLAND

Academy for Excellence in Local Governance – This program is a collaborative effort between the Maryland Association of Counties (MACo), the Maryland Municipal League, the Local Government Insurance Trust, and the University of Maryland's Institute for Governmental Service (IGS). The academy is a voluntary program open to all local government officials. Newly elected officials are encouraged, but not required to participate. Individuals may enroll in the certificate program, or take selected courses of their choosing. To be certified, participants must complete all of the core and elective requirements in either the municipal or county track.

Most classes coincide with the association's summer and winter conferences to make it easier to fit into the officials' schedules. The classes are usually one to two hours in length. The Academy does offer a few stand alone seminars, but these must be cleared by the IGS for credit.

Maryland has approximately 147 county officials, most of which participate in the program. Roughly 50 percent of participants are non-elected county officials who either are aspiring candidates, or just wish to improve their knowledge of county government. Overall, the Academy of Excellence has been well received by county commissioners. According to feedback from participants, the core courses seem to offer the most useful

information. Veteran county commissioners have also participated very readily and noted that the courses are highly affective in building new skill sets.

Notable best practices by Maryland are:

1. IGS at the University of Maryland acts as the administrator of the program, handling the registration, transcripts and general paperwork. All the fees from the program go to the IGS. The role of the county association is to create a governing board and decide on new courses and speakers.
2. The core courses in the curriculum are primarily taught by the same people from year to year. For example, “Consensus and Team Building” is taught each year by the head of the local mediation center each time it is offered.
3. Offering courses as part of the regularly scheduled conferences greatly helped in increasing conference attendance. As an added benefit, many incumbents have used their Academy certification as a selling point for re-election.

Program requirements are as follows:

- The majority of participants register in their first year of office or employment
- Participants must complete 10 core units plus four elective units
- On average, each certified participant must have completed between 25 and 40 hours of training
- Participants are expected to complete requirements within two or three years, but exceptions can be made for personal situations and elections

The Academy for Excellence in Local Governance is *optional*.

For further information, visit the Maryland Association of Counties at www.mdcountries.org/academy/default.cfm.

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PENNSYLVANIA

Academy for Excellence in County Government – This is a certificate training program for county commissioners, chief clerks, administrators, solicitors and their counterparts in home rule counties offered by the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania. To receive the Academy certificate, participants have to complete the required courses (eight total) plus 18 credits via elective courses. Required courses range from three to six hours of instruction and generally are offered at the CCAP offices. Elective courses are usually scheduled in conjunction with conferences or events.

Participants who have registered with the Academy and completed the required and elective courses will receive a certificate and be recognized at the annual CCAP conference.

Feedback on the program has been positive. In response to requests from past graduates, the CCAP has created an Advanced Academy Certification program requiring additional course work.

Notable best practices from Pennsylvania:

- The program rotates its speakers between paid and unpaid speakers. The list includes lawyers, past county commissioners, associate firms and vendors, and staff.
- The Academy is a voluntary program that operates on a four-year cycle of courses. Interested students may join at any time. As an incentive to join the academy, members are allowed to pay a flat fee of \$700 for all courses in the program. Non-academy members may still take the courses, but must pay individually to attend and cannot receive credit or certification until they have joined the program.
- Through a partnership with Penn State University, professors from the Political Science and Public Policy departments can be tapped as speakers and course instructors.

The Academy for Excellence in County Government is *optional*.

For further information, visit the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania at www.pacounties.org/commissioners/lib/commissioners/academybroch_march2004.pdf.

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TEXAS

The majority of county officials in Texas are required to obtain continuing education on an annual basis. According to Sec. 81.0025 of the e-Local Government Code, Texas requires county commissioners to have 16 hours of training every 12 months. They may carry forward up to eight hours.

Sponsored educational programs can be created by county officials, professors at local universities, and members of other associations, as long as they are approved by the Commissioners' Education Committee of the Judges and Commissioners Association. Programs must also be accredited by an institution of higher learning. Once approved, these programs are made available through annual, regional and sub-regional conferences. The course sponsor must keep track of who attends and submit it to Jim Allison, general counsel for the County Judges and Commissioners Association.

Some of the most notable approved sponsor programs include:

Texas Leadership Institute – The Institute's primary focus is to promote sustainability and economic expansion through education of local leaders in planning and economic development. Participants include elected officials, volunteers, chambers of commerce, community and economic developers, convention and visitor bureau personnel, health professionals, and school administrators.

www.lcra.org/develop/community/tli

LBJ School for Public Affairs – A variety of professional development programs have been developed by the school to serve the development needs of elected and appointed officials in government. These programs include conferences for state legislators as well as programs for city and county officials. Major program categories include the Governor's Center for Management Development and the Seminar for Newly Elected County Judges and County Commissioners.

www.utexas.edu/lbj/profdev/candt/index.php

The V.G. Young Institute of County Government (Institute) is part of Texas Cooperative Extension and The Texas A&M University System. The Institute annually offers continuing education conferences and seminars for county judges and commissioners, county treasurers, county and district clerks, and county tax assessor-collectors. vgyi.tamu.edu

Advanced Curriculum – This is an optional educational program sponsored by the County Judges and Commissioners Association of Texas. Advanced Curriculum courses are offered by the V.G. Young Institute of County Government, the University of Texas LBJ School of Public Affairs and at statewide and regional county judges and commissioners meetings. The program requires 64 hours and results in a certificate upon completion. Many of the courses in this program count as part of the mandatory yearly training for all commissioners.

The advanced curriculum program is *optional*.

For further information, visit the *Texas Association of Counties Education Center* at www.county.org/education.

Contacts:

- Mary Manning, Office of Jim Allen, General Counsel of County Judges and Commissioners Association, at (512) 482-0701, or (800) 733-0699.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Institute of Government for County Officials – This program, created by the South Carolina Association of Counties in cooperation with the Governmental Research and Service Unit of the Institute for Public Service and Policy Research at the University of South Carolina, and the Strom Thurmond Institute of Government and Public Affairs at Clemson University, offers the Institute of Government for County Officials. Each year, a minimum of 16 courses are offered. Courses are offered prior to the Association’s mid-year conference, annual conference, and fall meeting of the County Council Coalition.

The Institute consists of three levels. Level 1 requires 27 contact hours and courses are offered three times per year. Level 2 is open to all graduates of Level 1 or those within nine hours of graduating. Both Level 1 and Level 2 graduates receive certificates. Level 3 is an advanced level open to Level 1 and Level 2 graduates. Only two courses are offered each year. Level 3 is merely a means of continuing the training of county officials and increasing their knowledge of county issues.

As explained by the SCAC, this program is open to all county officials, including county managers and support staff. Studies show that almost all county commissioners and most managers and clerks participate in the program. The cost for courses is charged on a course-by-course basis, normally costing between \$45 and \$60.

Most courses are taught in a three-hour block in conjunction with one of SCAC’s conferences. Currently, SCAC is offering teleconferencing courses for its planning and zoning officials. There has been no move to offer teleconferencing or video courses for county commissioners because this would likely involve testing to verify attendance.

The Institute of Government is *optional*.

SC Association of County Elected Officials Leadership Academy – The Leadership Academy is designed specifically to meet the professional management and leadership

development needs of the South Carolina Association of County Elected Officials (SCACEE) membership. The Academy is conducted by the University of South Carolina's Institute for Public Service and Policy Research (IPSPR) for SCACEE. The curriculum includes 12 two-and-a-half hour courses for a total of 30 hours of instruction. Participants who complete all 30 hours of instruction receive a certificate of completion.

This academy is meant to complement other training for county officials, such as the IOG for county officials. The courses in this program focus on planning, managing time and stress, ethics, and leadership.

The Leadership Academy is *optional*.

For further information, visit the South Carolina Association of Counties at www.sccounties.org/education/IOG-homepage.htm.

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INDIANA

DIPLOMA Program – DIPLOMA (Development Improvement & Preparation for Leadership Organizational & Management Achievement) was established in 1993 to allow officials and county employees access to training geared specifically to county government. After accruing 30 credit hours of study within two consecutive years, program participants qualify for DIPLOMA certification. While the program *must* be completed within two years, it *can* be completed in one year. Once the program is completed, the Association of Indiana Counties has a graduation ceremony at its annual conference.

DIPLOMA offers two sections of courses. Full-day courses are worth five hours of credit, and half-day courses (electives) are worth two-and-a-half hours of credit. Most courses are stand-alone sessions, but three hours of credit are available at the annual conference. For those individuals who have already received their DIPLOMA certification, a continuing education certification is awarded for those who take 20 hours of credit within one year. To reward those people who have truly made education a priority, the DIPLOMA Masters Pin is given to those who have accumulated a number of credit hours in the program.

- The Silver Masters Pin requires 75 total credits
- The Gold Masters Pin requires 125 total credit hours.
- The Platinum Masters Pin requires 180 total credit hours.

According to the director of planning and professional development at the Association of Indiana Counties, the AIC arranges all course speakers and handles the program's administration. The program has received excellent feedback on its services, mainly because it offers county officials applicable and important skills.

Notable best practices of Indiana:

1. Most of the speakers are association members or state employees. Most university speakers will charge a fee, while government officials are usually free. Registration is done for each course individually online.
2. The program director uses and continues to use evaluation forms at the end of each course to ask for suggestions on improvements to courses and the program overall.

The DIPLOMA program is *optional*.

Newly-Elected Officials Training – Each odd-numbered year, the AIC offers training for newly elected county officials. This event, usually on a Saturday, offers presentations on a variety of topics, such as human resource law, county budgeting, the roles of all county officials, public access law, and legislative information.

The newly-elected officials training is *optional*.

For further information, visit the Association of Indiana Counties at www.indianacounties.org/department/?fDD=4-0.

Contacts:

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NEW MEXICO

County College – Managed by New Mexico State University Cooperative Extension Service, and in collaboration with the New Mexico Association of Counties, County College is a professional development certification program for county officials in New Mexico. Participants can earn units toward County College certification at New Mexico Association of Counties (NMAC) sponsored workshops as well as those sponsored by New Mexico State University. These events include:

- Better informed public officials conference
- Mid-winter legislative conference
- Pre-summer conference
- Statewide training events

The completion of County College requires 36 training units. These consist of 24 core courses and 12 affiliate specific units. Many of the programs are offered in conjunction with regional association conferences or affiliate meetings. Participants must pay a fee for County College, as well as additional registration fees for each course they take.

New Mexico State University handles all applications. The university manages all participant files, as well as provides participants with a curriculum worksheet to ensure timely completion of the certification program. According to the NMAC, the county association primarily acts in an advisory role. It surveys association members, affiliates, and university associates about the changing needs of county officials, and then translates those needs into the course offerings of the college. NMAC has created an Advisory Council for County College, consisting of 21 members of their affiliate groups. This council acts as the ultimate governing body for the program.

According to Mary DeLorenzo at NMAC, participation has been low, but is growing steadily. Class sizes are around 65 per course. The highest number of participants are newly elected commissioners who seem to recognize and relate the value of the program to their success as a county official.

Currently, New Mexico State is working on a distance education program for the County College. Creating helpful courses and finding funding has been difficult, but the NMAC is hopeful that these courses will be offered soon. Instead of testing participants to see if they have completed a program course, NMAC is working to implement a log-in authentication system so that participants can complete the course entirely online.

The County College program is *optional*.

For further information, visit the New Mexico State University County College at spectre.nmsu.edu/dept/welcome.html?t=ccol, and the New Mexico Association of Counties at www.nmcounties.org.

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National Association of Counties (NACo)

Advanced Leadership Training (ALT) – This educational series is offered in a variety of formats. Seminars are held in conjunction with NACo’s Legislative Conference in Washington, D.C., as well as its Annual Conference and Exposition.

ALT seminars can also be scheduled within an individual state or county per request. ALT programs can be scheduled as key-notes, half-day workshops, full-day seminars, consulting or technical assistance for the board or management team; or ongoing training and leadership development for the county workforce.

For further information, visit the National Association of Counties at www.naco.org.

Contacts:

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NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina currently offers a three-day training program, “Essentials of County Government,” through the Institute of Government at UNC-Chapel Hill and sponsored by the NCACC. The IOG also offers additional courses in board relations, board assessment, economic development, managing conflict, ethics and orientation for new board chairs.

The remainder of local government curriculum is county department specific. An advanced program for elected and appointed officials has been created on an “as needed” basis in one- to two-day workshop formats.

The “Essentials” workshop is moved around the state to various locations each year to make it more convenient for commissioners. Fees are paid on a course-by-course

basis, with no annual fee from the IOG. There is no continuing education credit or certification offered by the program.

The response to the IOG workshops has been mixed. Approximately 50 percent of newly elected commissioners attend the program. According to Carl Stenberg at the IOG, there must be needs assessments done about continuing education. County officials must be asked:

- What is the perceived value of the IOG to county government and what changes must be made?
- Is there a need for a higher level of classes beyond the orientation level?
- Does N.C. need a certification program? Will it act as an incentive to officials or have no effect?
- Can the programs be more accessible through distance learning, or will the loss of a peer learning environment make the program less effective?

Essentials of County Government and the Institute of Government are *optional*.

For further information, visit the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners at www.ncacc.org, or the UNC Institute of Government at ncinfo.iog.unc.edu/calendar/bysubject/elected.html.

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