



**NCACC PRESIDENT'S MENTORING INITIATIVE MEETING SUMMARY
OCT. 23, 2012, ALBERT COATES LOCAL GOVERNMENT CENTER, RALEIGH**

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chairman Jonathan Barfield, Jr., New Hanover County Chair
Anna Baucom, Anson County Chair
Gary D. Blevins, Wilkes County Chair (via phone)
Bob Davis, Scotland County Chair
Brenda Howerton, Durham County Commissioner
Tracey Johnson, Washington County Commissioner
Judy Porter Poe, Ashe County Chair

OTHERS PRESENT:

President Howard Hunter III, Hertford County Commissioner (partial)

STAFF PRESENT:

Jason King, Associate Director of Education, staff liaison to initiative
Patrice Roesler, Deputy Director, staff liaison to initiative
David F. Thompson, Executive Director (partial)
Jo-Ann West, Risk Management Underwriter

DEFINING MENTORING

Chairman Barfield led members in a discussion about what mentoring means to them. Several members discussed their own experiences as either a mentor or a protégé. Baucom said that since most newly elected county commissioners don't have a full understanding of the responsibilities commissioners have, a mentor can be a peer you can communicate with about county government. The experienced commissioner can help the newly elected member what they can and cannot do as a county commissioner.

Johnson said that a mentor provides a positive message and motivation, and helps to steer someone in the right direction. Poe said a mentor provides constructive criticism by giving straight, honest answers and facts; and gives advice on how to conduct yourself as a public figure – including how to dress in public at all times.

Howerton said a mentor needs to set expectations for his/her protégé, and vice-versa. She said that she was provided a mentor at leadership school at Peace College, but the relationship had no function until she realized that she was not asking her mentor for anything. Mentors serve as a resource. The role is a difficult one because mentors and protégés get to know each other on a personal level.

Blevins said that mentoring promotes transparency, bipartisanship and values, and helps restore positive public perception of politics and public service. Part of what the group develops needs to promote a passion for leadership. The job of county commissioner is not just a title – it's a function of managing the affairs of a county, and is a scholarly activity if done properly. With that in mind, commissioners need to properly prepare themselves for the job through education and research on issues (i.e., do your homework).

Davis stressed the need for accountability, trustworthiness and integrity. As in any relationship, honesty seeds trust. Roesler said that it's hard to assign a mentor to an individual because of the importance of

trust. If a supposed mentor is a person whose opinion you do not value, the relationship is superficial. Mentoring should be long-term, one-on-one and focused, and with someone you admire. Poe said a mentor does not use their status to persuade. She said that a female commissioner who preceded her reached out to her, and told her to assert herself at board meetings.

Chairman Barfield sees a mentor as someone who provides direction and shares accountability. He said that he can see the members of the initiative becoming mentors to each other over the course of the year.

PREVIOUS NCACC ATTEMPTS WITH MENTORING PROGRAM

Roesler described two previous attempts of NCACC staff to create a mentoring program under a strategic goal to strengthen county leadership and board development. The first approach occurred during the 2006 election cycle. Staff identified newly elected commissioners and paired them with their respective NCACC District Directors. The newly elected commissioner would receive a phone call and invitation to have lunch together, and District Directors would again take the newly elected commissioners to dinner during an Essentials of County Government course. The pitfalls of this approach, Roesler said, were that it was too structured and the relationships were not built upon trust; they were thrust upon the newly elected official. The second attempt came about during the 2010 election cycle and was intended to be more casual, West said. Roesler said that the effort was overdesigned at the outset and was ultimately not implemented.

HOW COULD A PROGRAM BE STRUCTURED?

Chairman Barfield stated the value of relationships and shared one of his experiences. He and another member of his board (from the opposite political party) have struck up a friendship that began with a breakfast. The two rely upon each other as accountability partners, and often talk about how they conduct themselves.

Davis shared that he had no interest in becoming a politician, but began attending Board of Commissioners meetings when he took interest in a landfill issue. Over the course of several years he began to see John Crumpton, who was then the Scotland County manager, as a mentor because he was always open and willing to share information with him, even though he was not a commissioner at the time.

Johnson shared that she has reached out to a 23-year-old county commissioner candidate who has no general election opposition and will take a seat on the Washington County Board of Commissioners in December. In her conversations with him she has established lofty expectations for the young man, something that Howerton said is difficult for an elected official – telling a protégé that they expect them to best their own accomplishments. Baucom added that in that situation, commissioners serving as mentors to one another can be similar to the relationship between parent and child.

Roesler reiterated the need for trust – not only of mentor or protégé, but also trust of others around you. Maintaining integrity is of utmost importance. Davis said that trust and integrity will go a long way to diffusing issues that may come up, such as fellow board members viewing a commissioner-mentor relationship as one commissioner simply lining up future votes. Barfield suggested that seeing fellow board members at LELA and statewide educational events help commissioners move past ill will created during a campaign or during a local contentious issue, and added that had LELA been in existence 20 years ago there would be more cohesion on many county boards of commissioners.

Roesler said one of the first rules of being a mentor is that you do no harm. She asked if a mentor and protégé could serve on the same board. Blevins suggested the group could set up guidelines about how to handle mentoring within a county, and could possibly establish a pool of commissioners willing to serve as mentors. He said the most valuable lessons he has learned during his first term in office have come from commissioners he met through the NCACC. He mentioned Valerie Foushee, an Orange County

commissioner who is seeking a seat in the N.C. House, and said he would contact her for guidance on the mentoring initiative.

Blevins added that mentoring and networking go hand-in-hand, and a multifaceted mentoring/networking system in which a protégé has two to three commissioner mentors might work best. He suggested that the NCACC could hold small focus group meetings at events for those interested in either mentor or protégé roles. Thompson reiterated that one-to-one mentoring is something that occurs naturally, and a forced relationship is one that fails. He stressed that it's hard for a new commissioner to accept the role of protégé because often they are running on a platform that they are different, and once they are sworn in they see themselves as being on the same level as the veteran commissioners. Thompson said that the NCACC misses from time-to-time in lining up agendas and conference venues that are conducive to those relationships taking place – smaller venues force commissioners together in the hallways, where conversations take place. The structure for NCACC and LELA events needs to be one that allows relationships to form and grow. Thompson added that he thinks the Association does not provide enough avenues for commissioners to develop those relationships. He said that the group should maybe not think about how to structure the mentor-to-protégé relationship, but rather how the Association can facilitate it, such as setting up a foundation to fund facilitation of retreats, etc.

OUTCOMES AND NEXT STEPS

Members discussed potential outcomes and work products for the mentoring initiative. Davis said that potential mentors need to be careful about approaching newly elected commissioners because they might resent the idea that you are offering to help them. Johnson suggested regional workshops on how to become a mentor or a protégé. Barfield said that veteran commissioners should speak for 5 minutes to newly elected members about the importance of attending LELA and NCACC events, and/or send a letter to newly elected commissioners encouraging them to register for Essentials of County Government. Mentoring Initiative members could divvy up the four Essentials programs and reserve time on the agenda to speak to the importance of networking and learning at statewide and regional meetings and training programs. Roesler said that step would show that veterans are interested in the professional development of newly elected commissioners.

President Hunter joined the meeting and discussed his vision for the initiative. He said it is instilled in him to listen to the older generation. Hunter said when he first attended a NACo conference, several veteran commissioners approached him – Breeden Blackwell, Billy King, DuPont Davis (all NCACC Past Presidents) – and showed him that they were interested in his future by instructing him what to do and what not to do. These individuals encouraged him to do better, and were honest with him in their constructive criticism. Hunter expressed his desire to see a handful of Past Presidents (suggestions included Kitty Barnes, Joe Bryan, Terry Garrison, Mary Accor, Breeden Blackwell, Kenneth Edge), county managers and retired commissioners (suggestions included Ken Richardson and Danny Wright) participate in the Mentoring Initiative.

Roesler pointed out the high rate of newly elected commissioners who attended an Essentials of County Government course in 2011. Barfield asked staff to draft talking points that a representative of the group could use when addressing new commissioners. Roesler also suggested a workshop on mentoring at the 2013 Annual Conference. Staff will also revisit the letter that is sent to newly elected commissioners from Thompson to make sure it includes encouragement to attend an Essentials course. Roesler also said that newly elected commissioners who attend the January Legislative Goals Conference can be provided a ribbon attached to their nametag that identifies their newly elected status. Board of Directors members could be challenged to seek out those new commissioners for conversation. The NCACC could also sponsor an event at Legislative Goals Conference, such as a “new commissioner coffee.”

NEXT MEETING

Mentoring Initiative participants will next convene on Tuesday, Dec. 11, from 10 a.m. – 1 p.m. at the Albert Coates Local Government Center (Board Room) in Raleigh.



State of North Carolina
Department of Justice

Roy Cooper, Attorney General

October 11, 2012

The Hon. Howard Hunter, III, President
N. C. Assoc. of County Commissioners
215 N. Dawson Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27603

Dear Howard:

Congratulations on becoming President of the N. C. Association of County Commissioners. This is an outstanding honor and one which is richly deserved. You will be a valuable asset in this capacity.

I applaud your selection of mentoring as a priority during your term. Learning from the experience of those who have gone before us makes us more effective public servants.

With kind regards, I am

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Roy Cooper".

Roy Cooper

RAC/sm

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Howard Hunter, III".



President's Mentoring Initiative Participants

Updated Oct. 25, 2012

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