

*The 2008-2009 Annual Report of the*  
**Local Government Training Program**

**I. Mission**

The Local Government Training Program (LGTP) serves local governments in the 26 westernmost counties of North Carolina. In the Department of Political Science and Public Affairs (PS &PA) at Western Carolina University (WCU), the LGTP works in cooperation with the School of Government (SOG) at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to plan and deliver conferences, seminars and workshops where public officials and personnel receive instruction in law, finance and public administration.

**II. Program Activities**

School of Government Training

Each year the LGTP surveys public officials in the region, then works with the school to ensure that the training and technical assistance needs identified on the survey are met.

Throughout the year, the program director assists with the planning, instructional design, marketing and logistics for SOG programs in Western North Carolina (WNC).

In 2008-2009, sixteen SOG workshops and seminars and two multi-site video conferences were offered in the LGTP service area.

Additional Program Services and Support

The LGTP administers the WNC City and County Managers Association (WNCMA), an organization of public administrators in WNC.

The WNCMA meets quarterly to share information, learn about trends in public administration and study regional issues. The LGTP maintains the association's mailing list, plans and publicizes meetings, and manages the group's finances.

In 2008-2009, the group met four times, with an average of 45 attendees at each meeting.

Regional Workshops and Conferences

In 2008-2009, the LGTP partnered with the Asheville Regional Office of the NC Division of Community Assistance (DCA) to deliver Regional Planning Board Workshops. One hundred sixty participants attended the two programs in Asheville and Morganton.

The LGTP worked with School of Government faculty member Fleming Bell to offer two rules of procedure seminars for elected and appointed officials in Morganton and Columbus.

In 2008-2009, the LGTP served 1092 participants in 24 events. Though participant numbers were down this year and some training events had to be cancelled, it was a successful year given the impact of the economic downturn on local governments.

### Resource Library

The LGTP Resource Library lends books, manuals, and video training sets to local government offices for use in on-site training. The library houses a wide selection of SOG publications, which the school provides at no cost as they are published.

### Publications

The LGTP maintains a homepage, at <http://lgtp.wcu.edu>, where program information, resources and scheduled workshops are posted.

### Program Advisory Board

The work of the LGTP is guided by a 20-member advisory board made up of public officials in the five western COG regions. The board meets annually to provide direction for the program and to set the training calendar. Throughout the year, board members relay recommendations for additional programs to the director. *The current advisory board is posted on the homepage.*

### Committee Membership and Service

The program director co-directs the Internship Program in the Department of Political Science & Public Affairs, helping undergraduate and graduate students find public sector opportunities that connect their academic experience to real-world practice. She also serves on the department's MPA External Affairs Committee.

This year, the program director provided editorial assistance for the Southwestern Commission's Mountain Landscapes Initiative Toolbox, which recently won the North Carolina American Planning Association's 2009 Comprehensive Plan Award.

## **III. Annual Survey**

Since 1987, the LGTP has conducted annual training assessments. This year 36 percent of those sent surveys returned them. The majority of respondents (66 percent) were city or county managers, department heads, directors, and supervisors. Elected officials comprised 11 percent of respondents.

## **IV. Survey Results**

### School of Government Programs

Part one of the survey asked which SOG programs would most benefit public offices in the region. Respondents could select more than one training program from each category. They could also choose not to respond to a category.

Under the **Budgeting, Finance, and Accounting** heading, "Governmental Accounting and Financial Reporting" was the most requested program (51 percent), followed by "Capital Improvement Programming and Prioritization" (45 percent).

In the **Community and Economic Development** category, "Essentials of Economic Development" was chosen by 43 percent of respondents. "Community Economic Development Finance" followed at 33 percent.

In the **Elected Officials** category, "Ethical Issues in Local Government" was the most desired program (18 percent), followed closely by "Essentials of Municipal Government"

(17 percent). “Building Your Governing Team” received 12 percent of responses, followed by “Rules of Procedure” and “Managing Conflicts: How to Disagree and Still Work Together,” both at 11 percent.

Under **Environmental Management**, 41 percent of respondents requested “Financing and Implementing Sustainable Initiatives.” “Water Finance and Governance” received 35 percent.

Under the **Health and Social Services** heading, 58 percent of respondents requested “Revised North Carolina Health Law and Ethics,” followed by “Training for County Social Services Board Members” (24 percent).

In the **Information Technology** category, 50 percent requested the Center for Public Technology’s “Emerging Technology Trends and Best Practices,” followed by “Budgeting for Information Technology,” at 27 percent.

Under **Management, Administration, and Personnel**, the most requested course was the “Public Employment Law Update” (16 percent), followed by “Building Your Personal Leadership” (13 percent), “Program Evaluation for Local Governments” (11 percent), “Effective Supervisory Management” and “Resolving Public Disputes: Situation Assessment and Negotiation” (both at 10 percent).

In the **Planning and Land Use** category, the “Planning Board Workshop” received 44 percent of responses. The “Land Subdivision Workshop” and “Board of Adjustment Workshop” followed at 28 and 25 percent respectively.

The most requested course under **Property Tax Assessment and Administration** was “Property Tax Collection Essentials” (39 percent), followed by “Fundamentals of Property Tax Listing and Assessing” (35 percent).

Under **Purchasing and Contracts**, “Local Government Purchasing” was most desired (56 percent), followed by “Contracting for Construction and Design Services” (43 percent).

#### Additional Training Requests

On this portion of the survey, participants were asked to identify other regional training needs from four general categories.

Under the **Management** category, “Public Debt Financing Strategies” elicited 43 percent of responses, followed by “Succession Planning” (33 percent).

The most requested training under **Communication** was “Grant/Report Writing” (50 percent), followed by “Public Process Design” (26 percent) and “Surveying Citizens” (24 percent).

Under **Environment**, “Managing Growth and Development” was the first choice, garnering 35 percent of responses. “Water Resource Issues” followed at 32 percent.

In the **Development** category, respondents most desired “Planning for an Aging Population” (50 percent), followed by “Expanding Your Community’s Housing Options” (34 percent).

#### Additional Comments

The majority of those who made written requests asked that more programs be offered in the western region. They also asked for more online training and interactive video conferences.

Several noted that time and budget constraints made training opportunities in the region all the more vital. As one respondent powerfully asserted, “Offering governmental education courses in Western North Carolina has greatly improved the level of knowledge, which has led to better governing by elected officials and staff.”

### **V. Conclusions**

Survey respondents desire the training that will keep public officials and personnel current in the work they perform. They also ask that more programs be offered in the region and via digital communication systems and the Internet.

### **VI. Recommendations for 2009-2010**

To fulfill its mandate and meet the needs identified in this report, the LGTP will:

- Deliver workshops and programs identified on the survey
- Manage the contract with the school, marketing and delivering programs, surveying constituent groups and contributing to program design
- Work with the school and university to increase the use of web-based seminars and interactive video conferences
- Identify university faculty, regional practitioners and state presenters to lead programs not offered through the school
- Contribute to departmental and university programs and initiatives
- Partner with regional and state organizations to address training and technical assistance needs in the western region.