



LOCAL GOVERNMENT TRAINING
POLITICAL SCIENCE & PUBLIC AFFAIRS
WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

2009-2010 Program Report

I. Mission

The Local Government Training Program (LGTP) serves city and county 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 provide instruction in law, finance and public administration to public officials and personnel in Western North Carolina (WNC).

II. Program Activities

School of Government Training

At the end of each fiscal year, the LGTP surveys public officials in WNC to identify educational and training needs. The program director then works with school faculty to deliver seminars, workshops and conferences to address those needs. In 2009-2010, nineteen SOG programs and one multi-site video conference were offered.

New offerings included three grant writing seminars led by the school's Civic Education Consortium director, two programs for probation officers in the western region and two workshops led by the UNC Environmental Finance Center, which works in cooperation with the SOG. All were well attended and received.

Regional Workshops and Conferences

In 2009-2010, the LGTP partnered with the Asheville Regional Office of the NC Division of Community Assistance (DCA) to deliver a planning board workshop in Shelby and a board of adjustment workshop in Morganton. Fourteen units of government participated in the first program, 16 in the second.

The program also partnered with the NC Division of Cultural Resources and its western regional office to provide a workshop for over 25 historic preservation commissions, worked with faculty in the Department of Political Science & Public Affairs to deliver a new program on gauging public opinion (attended by 22 jurisdictions) and hosted a seminar for purchasing officers statewide on the campus of Western Carolina University.

Additional Program Services and Support

For nearly a decade, the LGTP has administered the WNC City and County Managers Association (WNCMA), which meets quarterly to share information on regional and state issues. The LGTP engages speakers, publicizes meetings and manages the group's finances.

This year, the WNCMA met four times, with an average of 42 city and county managers and staff attending each meeting.

In 2009-2010, the LGTP served 1233 participants at 32 programs. Participant numbers increased this year, in part because of new offerings, in part because the economic downturn has reduced local government funding for travel and training outside the region.

Publications

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

Program Advisory Board

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

Committee Membership and Service

The LGTP 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 a subcommittee of the MPA program.

The director is a member of the WNC Community Foundation's Next Steps Funding Committee, which awards up to \$10,000 in matching funds to local governments and nonprofits that employ the best planning and land use development practices set forth in the Southwestern Commission's award-winning Mountain Landscape Initiative Toolbox. *For additional information, see <http://www.mountainlandscapesnc.org/>.*

III. Annual Survey

Since 1987, the LGTP has conducted annual training assessments. This year's survey had a response rate of 31 percent. The majority of those responding (68 percent) were city or county managers, department heads, directors, and supervisors. Elected officials comprised 14 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 western 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, "Best Practices in Capital Planning, Budgeting and Finance" was the most requested program (41 percent), followed by "Governmental Accounting and Financial Reporting" (29 percent) and "Financial Condition Analysis in Local Government" (24 percent).

In the **Community and Economic Development** category, "Essentials of Economic Development" was chosen by 57 percent of respondents. "Development Finance for NC Local Governments" followed at 43 percent.

In the **Elected Officials** category, “Ethics for Local Government Officials” was the most desired program (14 percent), followed by “Open Meetings Law” (11 percent). “Building Your Governing Team,” “Strategic Planning and Capital Budgeting” and “Managing Conflicts: How to Disagree and Still Work Together” tied for third, all at 10 percent.

Under **Environmental Management**, 40 percent of respondents requested “Paying for Green Government: Financing and Implementing Environmental Initiatives.” “Capital Improvement Planning, Budgeting and Asset Management of Water and Wastewater Systems” received 34 percent.

Under the **Health and Social Services** heading, 45 percent of respondents requested “Animal Control Law,” followed by “Medical Confidentiality” (31 percent) and “Training for Social Services Board Members” (21 percent).

In the **Information Technology** category, “Emerging Technology Trends and Best Practices” and “Electronic Public Records and Electronic Discovery” both received 33 percent. “Budget for Information Technology” and “Security: Physical and Logistical Preventive Measures” followed at 18 and 16 percent respectively.

Under **Management, Administration and Personnel**, the most requested course this year was the “Public Employment Law Update” (14 percent), followed by “Public Records Law” (13 percent) and “Effective Supervisory Management (12 percent). “Building Your Personal Leadership” and “Performance Measurement in Local Government” received 10 percent.

In the **Planning and Land Use** category, the “Planning Board Workshop” received 31 percent of responses. The “Board of Adjustment Workshop” and “Land Subdivision Workshop” followed at 26 and 24 percent respectively.

The most requested course under **Property Tax Assessment and Administration** was “Property Tax Collection Essentials” (41 percent), followed by “Fundamentals of Property Tax Listing and Assessing” (31 percent).

Under **Purchasing and Contracts**, “Local Government Purchasing” was most desired (55 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 additional needs from four general categories.

Under the **Management** category, “Motivating Without Money: Keeping Employees Engaged During an Economic Downturn” elicited 24 percent of responses, followed by “Improving Public Perception Through Good Public Policy” (20 percent) and “Public Debt and Financing Strategies” (18 percent).

The most requested topic under **Communication** was “Communicating With Citizens: Strategies and New Technologies” (29 percent), followed by “Grants Management” (23 percent) and “Grant Proposal Writing 101” (20 percent).

Under **Environment**, “Managing Growth and Development” was the first choice, garnering 29 percent of responses. “Stormwater and Watershed Finance” followed at 24 percent. “Alternative Energy Sources” and “Water Resource Issues” received 20 percent.

In the **Development** category, respondents most desired “Engaging a Broad Cross-section of Citizens” (23 percent), followed closely by “Aging in Place: Demographic Issues and Strategies for Local Governments” (22 percent) and “Engaging the Next Generation: Strategies for Effective Youth Outreach” (20 percent).

Additional Comments

Citing budget and travel constraints, those responding to this section asked for more School of Government programs in the western region. One voiced the opinion of several others: “Western North Carolina needs many things, and the opportunity for education and training of local government officials is high on that list. We do not have the same opportunity to travel to the UNC SOG as our colleagues in the eastern part of the state do. We are very thankful to Western Carolina University for providing these educational opportunities.”

V. Conclusions

From managers to elected officials, department heads, clerks, planners, tax administrators, and others, survey respondents desire the training that will equip them to better serve their units and constituents. Classes offered this year reached or exceeded capacity. Whether live or Web-based, educational offerings for local governments in WNC are highly valued.

VI. Recommendations for 2010-2011

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

- Deliver workshops and programs identified on the survey and recommended by the advisory board;
- Manage the contract with the school, marketing and delivering programs, surveying constituent groups and contributing to program design as needed;
- Identify faculty at WCU to lead additional programs for local governments;
- Partner with regional and state organizations to address unmet training and technical assistance needs in the western region;
- Work with PS & PA, the MPA program and the Public Policy Institute to expand departmental and program linkages;
- Continue to provide networking and educational opportunities for city and county managers in the western region; and
- Work with the western office of the NC Division of Community Assistance to design and deliver the 2011 NCAPA Summer Planning Institute, to be held at WCU.