



LOCAL GOVERNMENT TRAINING
POLITICAL SCIENCE & PUBLIC AFFAIRS
WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

2010-2011 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 education, training and technical assistance to local governments in Western North Carolina (WNC).

II. Program Activities

School of Government Training

The LGTP surveys public officials in WNC annually to identify training and education needs. The program director then works with school faculty to design and deliver seminars, workshops and conferences to address those needs.

In 2010-2011, nineteen SOG programs and one multi-site video conference were offered. New offerings this year included a medical confidentiality program for public health departments, a seminar for jail administrators, and a group facilitation workshop.

Regional Workshops and Conferences

In 2010-2011, the LGTP partnered with the Asheville Regional Office of the NC Division of Community Planning (DCP) to deliver two workshops for citizen planners--a planning board workshop in Morganton and a board of adjustment workshop in Montreat. The program also co-sponsored with Land-of-Sky Regional Council and other regional and state entities "Creating Affordable Housing Opportunities in the New Economy," held at Western Carolina University.

Additional Program Services and Support

The LGTP administers the WNC City and County Managers Association (WNCMA), which meets quarterly to share information on state and regional issues. The program director engages speakers, publicizes meetings and manages the group's finances. This year, the WNCMA met four times, with an average of 44 city and county managers and staff attending each meeting.

In 2009-2010, the LGTP served 1015 participants at 31 programs. Attendee numbers declined this year, due to low registration and programs that were postponed or cancelled. (*For details, see this year's training calendar.*)

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 for the program and to 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, and serves on a subcommittee of the Masters of Public Administration (MPA) program. She also serves on the grants committee for the Southwestern Commission's Next Steps Fund of the Mountain Landscapes Initiative and on its CEDS¹ committee.

III. Annual Survey

Since 1987, the LGTP has conducted annual training assessments. This year's survey had a response rate of 28 percent. Three-quarters of those who responded were city or county managers, department heads, directors, and supervisors.

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.

This year, "Best Practices in Capital Planning, Budgeting and Finance" was the most requested program (at 41 percent) in the **Budgeting, Finance and Accounting** heading, followed by "Governmental Accounting and Financial Reporting" (32 percent) and "Financial Condition Analysis in Local Government" (26 percent).

In the **Community and Economic Development** category, "Essentials of Economic Development" was chosen by 53 percent of respondents. "Development Finance for NC Local Governments" followed at 47 percent.

In the **Elected Officials** category, “Managing Conflicts: How to Disagree and Still Work Together” was the most desired program (14 percent), followed by “Open Meetings Law” and Essentials of Municipal Government (both at 13 percent) and “Building Your Governing Team” (12 percent).

Under **Environmental Management**, 43 percent of respondents requested “Capital Improvement Planning, Budgeting and Asset Management of Water and Wastewater Systems,” followed by “Paying for Green Government: Financing and Implementing Environmental Initiatives” (35 percent).

Under the **Health and Social Services** heading, 56 percent of respondents requested “Animal Control Law” (the most requested topic in this category last year as well), followed by “Medical Confidentiality” (24 percent).

In the **Information Technology** category, “Electronic Public Records and Electronic Discovery” was first at 33 percent, followed closely by “Emerging Technology Trends and Best Practices” (at 30 percent).

Under **Management, Administration and Personnel**, the most requested topic was “Public Records Law,” followed by “Effective Supervisory Management” and “Performance Measurement in Local Government,” both at 11 percent, and the “Public Employment Law Update” (10 percent).

In the **Planning and Land Use** category, the “Board of Adjustment Workshop” was first (garnering 33 percent of responses), followed by the “Planning Board Workshop,” which received 29 percent of responses.

This year, the most requested course under **Property Tax Assessment and Administration** was “Property Tax Collection Essentials” (52 percent), followed at a distance by “Fundamentals of Property Tax Listing and Assessing” (28 percent).

Under **Purchasing and Contracts**, “Local Government Purchasing” was the most desired topic (59 percent), followed by “Contracting for Construction and Design Services” (41 percent).

Additional Training Requests

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

In the **Management** category, “Linking Performance Measures and Citizen Satisfaction” and “Succession Planning” both received 27 percent of responses, followed closely by “Public Debt and Financing Strategies” (26 percent) and “Gauging Public Opinion” (21 percent).

In the **Communication** category, the most requested topic was “Communicating With Citizens: Strategies and New Technologies” (34 percent), followed by “Grant Proposal Writing” (27 percent) “Grants Management” (21 percent).

Under **Environment**, “Managing Growth and Development” was the first choice, garnering 34 percent of responses. “Water Resource Issues” received 30 percent. “Stormwater and Watershed Finance” received 28 percent of responses.

In the **Development** category, respondents most desired “Community-based Development” (31 percent), followed closely by “Planning for an Aging Population” (30 percent).

Additional Comments

Comments this year centered upon the need for more programs in the western region. As one person wrote, “Going to classes at the School of Government is not always feasible for small town employees. My municipality can’t afford for me to travel to Chapel Hill for classes, so each year I am forced to narrow my education choices.”

V. Conclusions

This year, as in the last, survey respondents desire the training that will equip them to effectively serve their units and constituents. Staff reductions and increased responsibilities (particularly for those in smaller units) heighten the need for increased training and education offerings closer to home.

VI. Recommendations for 2011-2012

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;
- Identify faculty at Western Carolina University to lead additional programs for local governments;
- Partner with regional, state and community-based organizations to address unmet education, training and technical assistance needs in the western region;
- Work with WCU Department of Political Science and Public Affairs, Master of Public Administration Program and Public Policy Institute to expand departmental and program linkages;
- Provide networking and educational opportunities for city and county managers in the western region.

¹ Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy