



Local Government Training Program

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

2012-2013 Program Report

I. Mission

The Local Government Training Program (LGTP) serves municipal 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. LGTP Activities

UNC School of Government Programs

Each year the LGTP surveys public officials in WNC to identify educational and training needs. The program director then works with SOG faculty to design and deliver seminars, workshops, and conferences that address those needs.

In 2011-2012, twenty-three SOG programs and one video conference were offered. New offerings this year included a purchasing basics workshop, a workshop on strategic human resource management designed for human resource officers in the western region, an interactive workshop on managing difficult public meeting and hearings, and four information technology sessions at the NCLGISA conference in Asheville.¹

Regional Workshops and Conferences

This year the LGTP partnered with the Asheville Regional Office of the NC Division of Community Assistance (DCA) to deliver regional board of adjustment and planning board workshops and joined the western office of the NC Department of Cultural Resources, Preservation North Carolina and the DCA in offering a workshop for historic preservation commissions and planners in the region.

The program also co-sponsored the NC Finance Officers Fall Conference, in Morganton; partnered with WCU's Department of Political Science & Public Affairs to deliver a gauging public opinion seminar; hosted the Western District Meeting of the NC Association of County Commissioners, at WCU; and was a sponsor of Land-of-Sky Regional Council's 2013 Rockslide Conference.

Additional Program Services and Support

The LGTP administers the WNC City and County Managers Association (WNCMA), which meets quarterly to exchange information on local, regional, and state issues. The

program director engages speakers, publicizes meetings and manages the group's finances. This year the association met four times, with an average of 52 city and county managers and staff attending each program.

In 2012-2013, the LGTP served 1253 participants at 30 programs. *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 22-member advisory board. The board, director, and SOG faculty liaison Norma Houston meet annually to provide direction for the program and set the training calendar. Throughout the year the board, faculty liaison, and director recommend additional programs. *The advisory board is posted online at the LGTP website.*

Committee Membership and Service

The LGTP director co-directs the undergraduate internship program in the Department of Political Science and Public Affairs, helping undergraduate students (and graduate students as well) find public sector opportunities that connect their academic experience to real-world practice, and serves on the advisory committee for the department's Masters of Public Administration (MPA) program.

She also serves on the grants committee of the Mountain Landscapes Initiative's Toolbox Implementation Fund and on the Community and Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) committee of the Southwestern Commission.

III. Annual Survey

Since 1987, the LGTP has conducted annual training assessments. This year's survey had a response rate of 27 percent. Eighty-seven percent 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 offerings were considered critical to their success or the success of their organizations. Respondents could select more than one program from each category. They could also choose not to respond to a category.

In the Budgeting, Finance and Accounting category, "Best Practices in Capital Planning, Budgeting and Finance" was the most requested program (at 46 percent), followed by "Governmental Accounting and Financial Reporting" (at 38 percent).

In the Community and Economic Development category, "Redevelopment, Reuse and Revitalization: Local Government Law, Finance and Community Economic Development"

was chosen by 54 percent of respondents. “Essentials of Economic Development: Tools and Strategies” followed at 45 percent.

In the Elected Officials category, “Strategic Planning for Elected Officials,” “Building Your Governing Team: Board Roles and Responsibilities,” and “Open Meetings and Public Records Law” were the first choices, each at 19 percent.

Under Environmental Management, 29 percent of respondents requested the UNC Environmental Finance Center’s “Capital Planning for Water and Wastewater Utilities.” “Financing and Implementing Energy Initiatives” garnered 26 percent.

Under the Health and Social Services heading, 55 percent of respondents requested “Medical Confidentiality,” followed by “Animal Control Law” (41 percent). Both programs were offered in the spring and summer of 2013.

In the Information Technology category, “Emerging Technology Trends and Best Practices” and “Electronic Public Records and Electronic Discovery” both received 33 percent of responses.

Under Management, Administration and Personnel, the most requested topic this year was “Strategic Public Leadership: Setting Priorities, Getting Results” (27 percent), followed closely by the “Effective Supervisory Management” at 26 percent.

In the Planning and Land Use category, the “Planning Board Workshop” was first (this year and last) with 49 percent, followed by the “Board of Adjustment Workshop,” which received 42 percent of responses.

The most requested program under Property Taxes was “Fundamentals of Property Tax Listing and Assessing” (64 percent). Written requests focused primarily upon property tax collection, e.g., “collection optimization,” “tax reporting and collection,” and “property tax collection laws.”

Under Contracting, Purchasing and Bidding Requirements, “Local Government Purchasing” was the most desired topic this year, at 78 percent (up 20 percent from last year despite the well-attended “ABCs of Purchasing” offered in the fall of 2012).

Additional Training Requests

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

In the Management category, “Customer Service Training” was first (at 38 percent), followed closely by “Public Debt and Financing Strategies” (37 percent).

In the Communication category, the most requested topic was “Grants Writing” (37 percent), followed closely by “Grants Management” (36 percent).

In the Environment category, “Stormwater and Erosion Control” was the first choice, garnering 49 percent of responses, followed by “Water Resource Issues” (41 percent).

In the Development category, “Engaging Citizens: Strategies and New Technologies” received 40 percent of responses, followed by “Community Planning” (31 percent).

Additional Comments

The majority of comments this year expressed appreciation for the programs and services the LGTP at WCU provides through its twenty-nine-year partnership with the UNC School of Government. More online and web-based training, programs geared toward small towns, and more programs for county human services offices were also requested.²

V. Conclusions

Training and education programs offered in the region make it possible for WNC local governments to operate as efficiently and effectively as local governments in better situated parts of the state. As one survey respondent commented, “travel time away from the office can make a big difference in deciding whether to participate.”

VI. Recommendations for 2012-2013

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 and SOG faculty liaison;
- Manage the contract with the School, marketing and delivering programs, surveying constituent groups and contributing to program design as needed;
- Identify faculty at Western Carolina University to lead additional programs;
- Partner with regional, state and community-based organizations to address unmet education, 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;
- Provide networking and educational opportunities for city and county managers in the western region, through the WNC City and County Managers Association (WNCMA);
- If time permits, pursue a request by human resource officers in the western region for quarterly meetings with speakers and activities.³

¹ NC Local Government Information Systems Association: SOG faculty member and Center for Public Technology director Dr. Shannon Tufts led sessions on open data, security, agile project management and criminal justice information systems (CJIS) compliance.

² Including offerings addressing “issues of inclusion and diversity.”

³ Instituting and administering an association for HR professionals similar to the WNC managers association. Note: the LGTP director is a three-quarter-time employee with limited staff support.