



# Local Government Training Program

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

## *2013-2014 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 training and education needs. The program director then works with SOG faculty to design and deliver seminars, workshops, and conferences that address those needs.

In 2013-2014, twenty-six School of Government programs were offered in the LGTP service area. New offerings this year included nine webinars on an array of topics: local foods and local government, human resource management (a 3-part series), local occupancy taxes, open meetings law (a 3-part series), and ethics for elected officials.

#### Regional Workshops and Conferences

This year the LGTP partnered with the Asheville Regional Office of the NC Division of Community Assistance (DCA) in the Department of Commerce to deliver two workshops for citizen planners (boards of adjustment and planning boards), a planning law update, and a small area planning workshop for planning professionals.

The program also co-sponsored the NC Finance Officers Fall Conference in Morganton, a Carolinas Association of Governmental Purchasing regional workshop in Asheville, a community planning program at WCU, and two SOG focus groups at WCU's Biltmore Park facility in Asheville.

#### Additional Program Services and Support

The LGTP administers the WNC City and County Managers Association (WNCMA), which meets quarterly to discuss 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 meeting.

In 2013-2014, the LGTP served 1426 participants at 34 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 24-member advisory board. The board, director, and SOG faculty liaison meet annually to provide direction for the program and set the training calendar. The board, faculty liaison, and director recommend additional programs as the year progresses. *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 find public sector opportunities that connect their academic experience to real-world practice, and serves on the advisory committee for the 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. The response rate for this year's survey was 30 percent.

### IV. Survey Results

#### School of Government Programs

Part one of the survey asked which SOG offerings were considered critical to respondent success or to 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 Local Government Finance category, "Governmental Accounting and Financial Reporting" was the most requested program (at 63 percent), followed by "Best Practices in Capital Planning, Budgeting and Finance" (at 35 percent). Written comments in this category included "best practices in governmental accounting" and "local government accounting and finance for non-finance officers."

In the Community and Economic Development category, "Essentials of Economic Development: Tools and Strategies" was chosen by 68 percent of respondents. "Redevelopment, Reuse and Revitalization: Local Government Law, Finance and Community Economic Development" followed at 32 percent.

In the Programs for Elected Officials category, "Strategic Planning for Elected Officials" ranked first (at 19 percent), followed by "Building Your Governing Team: Board Roles and

Responsibilities” and “Open Meetings and Public Records Law” (both at 17 percent) and “Liability of Local Governments and Elected Officials” (at 15 percent).

Under Environmental Management, 51 percent of respondents requested the UNC Environmental Finance Center’s “Financing and Implementing Energy Initiatives,” followed closely by “Topics in Financial Management for Water and Wastewater Utilities” (at 48 percent). Written requests included programs on sedimentation and erosion control.

Under Health and Social Services, 70 percent of respondents requested “Human Services Basics: What Every Commissioner Needs to Know.”

In the Information Technology category, “Emerging Technology Trends and Best Practices” received 33 percent of responses, followed by “Electronic Public Records and Electronic Discovery” (at 25 percent). Written requests included “cloud-based systems” and “advancing better broadband service.”

Under Management, Administration and Personnel, the most requested topic this year was “Strategic Public Leadership: Setting Priorities, Getting Results” (at 21 percent), followed closely by the “Effective Supervisory Management” and “Liability of Local Governments and Personnel” (both at 19 percent).

In the Planning and Land Use category, the most requested program (this year and last) was the “Planning Board Workshop” (at 45 percent), followed by the “Board of Adjustment Workshop,” which received 28 percent of responses.

The most requested program under Property Taxes was “Fundamentals of Property Tax Listing and Assessing” (at 59 percent), followed by “Fundamentals of Real Property Appraisal” (at 40 percent).

Under Bidding and Property Disposal Requirements, “Local Government Purchasing” was the most desired topic this year, at 49 percent. “Surplus Property Disposal” and “Construction Contracting and New Construction Methods” received 26 and 25 percent respectively.

#### Additional Training Requests

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

In the Management category, “Managing Conflicts, Negotiating to Achieve Results” was first (at 41 percent), followed by “The Right Fit: Personality Assessment in Public Administration” (at 33 percent).

In the Communication category, the most requested topic was “Designing and Facilitating Public Meetings” and “Engaging Citizens: Strategies and New Technologies” tied for first (both at 35 percent), followed by “Grant Writing and Grants Management” (at 31 percent).

In the Environment category, “Water Resource Issues” was the first choice, garnering 43 percent of responses, followed closely by “Environmental Protection” (at 40 percent).

In the Development category, “Community Planning and Development Strategies” received 44 percent of responses, followed by “Public-Private Partnerships to Stimulate Growth” (at 40 percent).

#### Additional Comments

Most of those who provided written comments praised the programs held in the western region and the Web-based seminars offered this year by the SOG. Webinars work well for local governments with few staff and limited travel funds and for appointed boards with membership turnover. The UNC School of Government was deemed an “invaluable resource” by one respondent. Another expressed “Thanks for continuing the excellent partnership with Western Carolina University to make training available in the West.”

#### V. Conclusions

Training and education programs offered in the region or via the Web are important to local governments in WNC. As one survey respondent commented, “Classes at Western or other sites are helpful for smaller local government entities who are trying to work within very tight budget parameters.” In addition to more programs, survey respondents desire expanded offerings, week-long SOG programs (held in the region or via the Web), and more web-based training opportunities.

#### VI. Recommendations for 2014-2015

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).