



LOCAL GOVERNMENT TRAINING
POLITICAL SCIENCE & PUBLIC AFFAIRS
WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

2011-2012 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

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 SOG programs, one multi-site video conference and two UNC Environmental Finance Center (EFC) workshops were offered. New classes this year included a state and local government procurement program, a conflict management workshop for local elected officials and a utilities law program that attracted attendees from all over the state.

Regional Workshops and Conferences

The LGTP also partnered with the Asheville Regional Office of the NC Division of Community Planning (DCP) to deliver a regional board of adjustment workshop; organized with the SOG, the NC Small Business and Technology Development Center and the NC Department of Public Safety a statewide program on disaster preparedness; and with the SOG, State Historic Preservation Office, DCP and Preservation North Carolina designed and delivered a workshop for historic preservation commissions.

Additional Program Services and Support

The LGTP administers the WNC City and County Managers Association (WNCMA), which meets quarterly to exchange information on regional and state 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 55 city and county managers and staff attending each meeting, a 12 percent increase from last year.

In 2011-2012, the LGTP served 1266 participants at 31 programs. While the number of programs offered remained the same as in 2010-2011, attendee numbers increased this year by more than 250. (*For details, see the online 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, 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 on the homepage.*

Committee Membership and Service

The LGTP director co-directs the internship program in the Department of Political Science and 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 Southwestern Commission's Community and Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) committee and on the grants committee of the Mountain Landscapes Initiative. This year, the LGTP became an American Planning Association certificate maintenance credit provider.

III. Annual Survey

Since 1987, the LGTP has conducted annual training assessments. This year's survey had a response rate of 32 percent. Ninety 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 programs would most benefit public offices in the western region. 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 47 percent), followed by "Governmental Accounting and Financial Reporting" (at 36 percent).

In the **Community and Economic Development** category, “Local Government Financing Tools” was chosen by 52 percent of respondents. “Essentials of Economic Development: Tools and Strategies” followed at 47 percent.

In the **Elected Officials Programs** category, “Strategic Planning for Elected Officials” was the most desired program (21 percent), followed closely by “Building Your Governing Team: Board Roles and Responsibilities” (19 percent) and “Open Meetings, Public Records” (17 percent).

Under **Environmental Management**, 35 percent of respondents requested the UNC Environmental Finance Center’s “Capital Planning for Water and Wastewater Utilities.” “Financing and Implementing Energy Initiatives” garnered 27 percent.

Under the **Health and Social Services** heading, 51 percent of respondents requested “Animal Control Law” (the most requested topic in this category last year as well), followed closely by “Medical Confidentiality” (49 percent).

In the **Information Technology** category, “Emerging Technology Trends and Best Practices” was first at 34 percent, followed by “Electronic Public Records and Electronic Discovery” at 31 percent.

Under **Management, Administration and Personnel**, the most requested topic was “Strategic Public Leadership: Setting Priorities, Getting Results” (25 percent), followed by the “Effective Supervisory Management Program” at 21 percent.

In the **Planning and Land Use** category, the “Planning Board Workshop” was first (garnering 48 percent of responses, up 14 percent from last year), followed by the “Board of Adjustment Workshop,” which received 38 percent of responses.

The most requested program under **Property Taxes** was “Fundamentals of Property Tax Listing and Assessing” (64 percent). Written requests included “conveying to the public how taxes are spent,” bankruptcy law,” “collection of difficult accounts,” “legal collection procedures” and “more on privilege license regulations.”

Under **Contracting, Purchasing and Bidding Requirements**, “Local Government Purchasing” was the most desired topic this year (and last), garnering 64 percent of responses. Written requests advocated programs that address transparency in purchasing practices and “workshops geared toward non-purchasing employees.”

Additional Training Requests

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

In the **Management** category, “Public Debt and Financing Strategies” was first (39 percent), followed by “Gauging Public Opinion” (31 percent) and “Creating and Maintaining Citizen Advisory Boards” (28 percent).

In the **Communication** category, the most requested topic was “Grants Management” (38 percent), followed closely by “Grant Writing” (36 percent).

Under **Environment**, “Water Resource Issues” was the first choice, garnering 44 percent of responses, followed by “Stormwater and Erosion Control” (37 percent).

In the **Development** category, “Community Planning” received 38 percent of responses, followed by “Engaging Citizens: Strategies and New Technologies” and “Workforce Development” (at 31 and 30 percent, respectively).

Additional Comments

Comments this year again centered upon the need for more programs in the western region. As one person wrote, “Small towns have limited resources, making it hard to send people to school. Not only is it expensive to send someone to the middle or eastern part of the state (where most of these classes are offered), it is hard to do without your employees who wear several hats.”

Managers and budget officers asked that finance programs be held before the last quarter of the fiscal year, when budget cycle and tax assessment demands intensify.

V. Conclusions

This year, survey respondents asked for more courses aimed at mid-level employees, many of whom perform a variety of functions. Respondents also asked for help in increasing the public’s understanding of the legal and fiscal constraints under which they operate and in building public support for the work they do. Finally, respondents asked for lower registration fees where possible and more scholarship opportunities.

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.