



SOUTH CAROLINA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES

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S^{OUTH}
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C^{COUNTIES}



The
Institute of Government
for
County Officials

The Institute of Government for County Officials

The South Carolina Association of Counties (SCAC), in cooperation with the Governmental Research and Service Unit of the Institute for Public Service & Policy Research at the University of South Carolina, and the Strom Thurmond Institute of Government & Public Affairs at Clemson University, offers the Institute of Government for County Officials. The Institute is a training program designed to provide county officials with the tools needed to enhance their skills and abilities to function more effectively in their positions.



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INSTITUTE FOR
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**The Strom Thurmond Institute
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**Clemson University
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History of the Institute of Government

The Institute of Government for County Officials was first established in 1989. Level II was added in 1992, and the Advanced Level was added in 1994. A lot has changed since that time, and the courses and curriculum were completely updated in January of 2003 to reflect the information that county officials need to know to be effective leaders.

When is the Institute Offered?

Each year, a minimum of 16 courses are offered. Courses are offered prior to the Association's Mid-Year Conference, Annual Conference, and Fall Meeting of the County Council Coalition. Participants must complete a form at the end of each class to certify that they have attended and completed the course.

What are the Levels of the Institute?

The Institute is composed of three levels:

- **Level I:** All courses offered are three contact hours. County officials must attend 27 contact hours of instruction composed of six required courses (18 contact hours) and any three elective courses (9 contact hours). Level I courses are offered three times per year. Graduates are awarded a certificate upon graduation.
- **Level II:** Open to graduates of Level I or persons within 9 hours of graduating from Level II. All courses offered are three contact hours. County officials must attend 18 hours of instruction composed of any six courses (18 contact hours). Level II courses are offered three times per year. Graduates are awarded a certificate upon graduation.
- **Advanced:** Open to graduates of Levels I and II. Typically, two courses (three contact hours each) are offered once per year prior to the Association's Annual Conference. The courses offered change each year. The Advanced Level is not a certificate level, but provides a means for graduates of Levels I and II to continue their training and increase their knowledge of county government issues.

NOTE: Credits for courses in Levels I and II are valid for four years, after which time they are removed from the county official's record.

The Institute of Government for County Officials

Level I

To graduate from Level I, county officials must attend 27 contact hours of instruction composed of six required courses (18 contact hours) and any three elective courses (9 contact hours). All courses offered are three contact hours. **NOTE: Credits for courses are valid for four years, after which time they are removed from the county official's record.**

Required Courses

– ALL SIX COURSES ARE REQUIRED IN ORDER TO GRADUATE –

ORIENTATION TO COUNTY GOVERNMENT I – This course is offered in December following the November election in even-numbered years as part of the Orientation for Newly-Elected Council Members and again at the Mid-Year Conference that follows. It lays the groundwork for achieving maximum effectiveness as a county official. Participants will learn about the roots and evolution of county government. Attention will be given to the roles and responsibilities of county council to include an overview of council's job description; the difference between policy and administration; areas in which council must provide policy leadership; and forms of county government.

ORIENTATION TO COUNTY GOVERNMENT II – This course is offered in December following the November election in even-numbered years as part of the Orientation for Newly-Elected Council Members and again at the Annual Conference that follows. It continues to lay the groundwork for achieving maximum effectiveness as a county official. Participants will learn about county government service provision in the 21st Century as well as ethics in government and the characteristics of an effective council. Attention will be given to budget basics and funding sources; communication with constituents; relationships with other county officials and staff; and monitoring and evaluating organizational performance.

LEVEL I COURSES

ETHICS AND PUBLIC SERVICE – Through lecture and small group discussions, participants will review the ethical environment in which public officials must function and the standards which they are expected to meet. Topics include a discussion of ethical values and principles, models for resolving ethical dilemmas, and an overview of the South Carolina Ethics Act.

LEGAL ISSUES IN COUNTY GOVERNMENT – In order to govern effectively, county officials must understand key legal issues. Because South Carolina counties act under powers granted to them by the state, the first part of this course is devoted to the legal foundation of county government. Forms of county government, county government authority, powers and duties of council members, and county liability issues will be covered. The South Carolina Freedom of Information Act will also be discussed. The second part of the course will concentrate on legal issues that shape county personnel administration. Public sector labor law issues will be discussed to include the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Family and Medical Leave Act, Americans with Disabilities Act, as well as employment at will, discrimination, sexual harassment, drug testing, and grievance procedures.

PLANNING AND ZONING – This session is a facilitated discussion of local government planning and zoning. It will review the requirements of the Comprehensive Planning Act of 1994. The roles and relationships of County Council, the Planning Commission, and the Zoning Board of Appeals will be discussed. Topics will include recruitment and orientation for members of the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Appeals, the importance of rules of procedure and bylaws, and the value of long-range community planning.

PUBLIC BUDGETING – Participants will learn about county revenues, expenditures and the county budget process to include budget preparation and control, capital budgeting and debt administration. Financial planning and policies and an overview of investment strategies will be discussed. How to talk to your county financial personnel will also be covered.

Elective Courses

– ANY THREE COURSES ARE REQUIRED IN ORDER TO GRADUATE –

BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE COUNTY TEAM – This session focuses on the importance of the council functioning as an effective policy-making team. Participants will have the opportunity to discuss the level of teamwork of their council (team) and their own contributions to and role in that team. Group dynamics, the effect of individual goals and personality, and group problem-solving will be explored. Strategies and techniques for building a more effective council team and for expanding the team to include county staff will be examined.

BUILDING EFFECTIVE INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS – No governmental entity can afford to operate in a vacuum. Effective intergovernmental relations are no longer an option, but a necessity if counties are to provide services to citizens in the most effective and efficient manner. This course will explore the intergovernmental relations between counties and the federal government, the state, municipalities, and special purpose districts; the need for building effective intergovernmental relations, and strategies for building such relationships. Examples of effective intergovernmental relations in South Carolina will be noted.

DEVELOPING GOOD LEADERSHIP SKILLS – Through a combination of lecture, group discussion, and individual exercises, this course will cover current theories of leadership, the differences between management and leadership, and the complex interactive system in which county leaders must function. Participants will have the opportunity to complete individual assessments of their personal leadership style and to consider the impact of this style on county citizens and staff. The very important role of vision will be discussed.

MANAGING AND CONDUCTING MEETINGS – The overall goal of this course is to help county officials conduct successful meetings. Ingredients for effective meetings will be covered. Group dynamics, meeting leadership strategies and techniques, and the importance of council rules of procedure will be covered. Participants will work on developing their meeting management skills. Significant attention will be given to parliamentary procedure.

PLANNING AND GOAL-SETTING – This course focuses on the importance of planning and goal-setting in the policy-making process. Participants will be introduced to the process of long-range and strategic planning and will learn strategies and techniques of establishing and prioritizing individual and council goals. The overriding importance of a shared county vision will be stressed.

PUBLIC SPEAKING – This course provides an opportunity for county officials to enhance their public presentation skills. Characteristics of effective presentations will be discussed, and participants will be given the opportunity to deliver a presentation to the class.

Level II

To receive credit for Level II courses, county officials must have completed Level I or be within nine (9) hours of graduating from Level I. To graduate from Level II, county officials must attend 18 contact hours of instruction. All courses offered are three contact hours.

NOTE: Credits for courses are valid for four years, after which time they are removed from the county official's record.

– ANY SIX COURSES ARE REQUIRED IN ORDER TO GRADUATE –

CURRENT ISSUES FACING COUNTY GOVERNMENT – This course will provide an opportunity for discussion of current issues facing county government as they come into play that would not otherwise be included in the curriculum. *Current Issues* courses may focus on such topics as jails, solid waste management, privatization of county government services, regionalization and consolidation, the environment, health care-related issues, etc. *A maximum of two of these courses may be applied to completion of Level II.*

DECISION-MAKING IN A POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT – The environment in which county elected officials and top administrators function often requires effective negotiating skills. Topics will include a review of decision-making theory and practices in government, identification of problems, fact-finding, setting criteria for selecting among alternatives, and the political aspects of decision-making. This class will consider the negotiation process, styles of negotiation, techniques for improving negotiating skills, and developing your BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement). This course, together with “The Policy Role of Council”, will provide council members with the basic information they need to address the critical policy decisions facing their communities.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT – If planned and implemented effectively by local government leaders, economic development strategies can yield more jobs, increased incomes, and greater resource productivity. This course will explore the economic development planning process, developing locally-based economic development strategies, financing economic development projects, and evaluating economic development efforts. Roles of major players in the economic development process will be discussed. Economic development incentives available to local government will also be explained.

LEVEL II COURSES

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS – This course will reinforce the importance of ongoing communications with citizens, with county staff, with other elected county officials, and with each other. It will discuss a variety of communication opportunities and strategies. Other topics which will be discussed include creating positive media relations (both print and non-print), preparing for an interview, getting your message out, and what makes for an effective press release.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT – Budget decision-making and format, risk management, cash management and purchasing, alternative budget formats and processes will be examined in this class. Alternatives to be considered are performance and objectives budgeting; program budgeting; zero-based budgeting; and target-based budgeting. Contracting out will also be discussed. Each of these methods will be explored in detail with particular emphasis placed on the connection between financial decisions and council policy-making and goal-setting.

STRATEGIC PLANNING – This course will build on the Level I course, “Planning and Zoning”, and provide an in-depth discussion of strategic planning as a management tool to help the county respond to a dynamic, changing environment. Issues and decisions which could place the county at legal risk such as “takings”, vested rights, rational basis, the linkage of implementation tools (zoning, subdivision regulations, etc.), and the land use element of the comprehensive plan will be covered.

THE POLICY ROLE OF COUNCIL – This course is designed to help council members carry out their role as policymakers in today’s complex policy environment. Topics will include understanding public policy, introduction to policy analysis, political considerations of policy choices, and implementation issues. The importance of lobbying by county officials will also be discussed. This course, together with “Decision-Making in a Political Environment”, will provide council members with the basic information they need to address the critical policy decisions facing their communities.

THE PROPERTY TAXATION PROCESS – This course will examine the property taxation process in South Carolina. Topics will include definition of key terms; legal considerations and responsibilities; key players in the process and their role, i.e., county council, auditor, assessor, treasurer, and tax commission; property tax administration; computing the millage rate; and actual versus assessed value.

WHAT IS SCAC?

The South Carolina Association of Counties was chartered on June 22, 1967, and is the only organization dedicated to statewide representation of county government in South Carolina. Membership in SCAC includes all 46 counties, which are represented by elected and appointed county officials dedicated to improving county government.

SCAC is a nonpartisan, non-profit organization which operates with a full-time staff in its Columbia offices. It is governed by a 29-member Board of Directors composed of county officials from across South Carolina, selected by county officials at the Association's Annual Conference.

The Association strives to “*Build Stronger Counties for Tomorrow*” by working with member counties in the fields of research, information exchange, educational promotion, and legislative reporting.