

South Carolina Association of Counties

**J. Mitchell Graham Memorial &
Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation**
Awards Celebration

**Tuesday, October 27, 2026
Pastides Alumni Center, Columbia S.C.**

The SCAC Annual Awards Program recognizes counties implementing innovative projects that have made a difference during the past two fiscal years.

The J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award recognizes counties that address community challenges, implement operational improvements or enhance their residents' quality of life in a unique way.

The Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation Award highlights the growing need for regional partnerships, strategies, and solutions. Competition for this award is open to two or more political subdivisions (counties, cities, districts or councils of government) that worked together on a project.



Entries are judged via a written submission and oral presentation to a panel of judges.

Special thanks to this year's judges:

- **Carla Flink**, associate professor and director of the University of South Carolina Master of Public Administration Program
- **Milton Pope**, local government consultant and a former county administrator
- **Debra Summers**, past SCAC president and former Lexington County Councilmember
- **William "Bill" Tomes**, executive in residence at the Joseph P. Riley Jr. Center for Livable Communities at the College of Charleston



Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation Award

Regional Collaboration for Meaningful Conservation: Greenspace Programs in South Carolina

Beaufort and Jasper Counties



Recognizing that growth and conservation challenges do not stop at county lines, Beaufort and Jasper counties are taking a regional approach to protecting the Lowcountry landscape.

Beaches, salt marshes, forests and waterways are more than defining features of this landscape. They provide critical wildlife habitats, help protect water quality and support a tourism economy tied closely to the region's natural beauty.

Protecting these valuable environmental and cultural assets intertwined with the area's geography has become increasingly challenging as the region grows. Beaufort County and neighboring Jasper County have experienced tremendous growth in recent decades, bringing increased demand for housing, commercial development and the infrastructure needed to support growing communities. At the same time, changing weather patterns and other environmental pressures underscore the need for thoughtful, long-term planning.

Beaufort County has embraced a regional approach to conservation that extends into neighboring Jasper County and beyond.

The Beaufort County Green Space Program, created following legislation enacted by the South Carolina General Assembly in 2022, provides a powerful tool for that effort. The program preserves land, protects critical habitat and natural resources and expands

opportunities for public recreation. Most notably, it allows Beaufort County to invest in conservation beyond its own jurisdiction when protecting that land provides benefits to the broader region.

That innovative authority is already producing results. In 2024, the Green Space Program made history by helping conserve Gregorie Neck in Jasper County, marking the program's first investment outside Beaufort County. More recently, the Buckfield and Chelsea tract projects extended the program's conservation impact across Beaufort, Jasper and Hampton counties.

The program's success is rooted in collaboration. Working with landowners, land trusts, municipalities, neighboring counties, state and federal agencies, and national conservation organizations, Beaufort County has helped protect more than 10,000 acres in and around the county. By looking beyond jurisdictional boundaries and pooling resources and expertise, Beaufort and its regional partners are demonstrating how local governments can work together to balance growth with conservation and protect resources that benefit the entire region.

J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award Entries

From Waste to Resource: Beaufort County's Residential Food Waste Diversion Program



Food waste represents one of the largest remaining components of the solid waste stream, and Beaufort County saw an opportunity to tackle the problem before rising disposal costs or new regulations demanded action.

It developed South Carolina's first county-operated residential food waste diversion program using an in-vessel composting system.

What sets Beaufort County's approach apart from existing programs in the state is the comprehensive system it created. Rather than simply collecting food scraps for composting, the county combined convenient residential drop-off locations, participant education and training, contamination prevention, data tracking and in-house compost processing into a single county-operated program.

Supported with funding from the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture, the South Carolina Department of Environmental Services and a \$68,400 county match, Beaufort County created a practical, scalable program for turning food waste into a useful resource.

The program delivered results quickly. In six months, the program diverted over 30,000 pounds of food waste collected through County Convenience Centers and local small businesses. The in-vessel composting system now produces approximately two tons of finished compost every two weeks, reducing dependence on landfills, improving environmental stewardship and creating long-term value for taxpayers. Based on current disposal costs, full residential participation could save Beaufort County more than \$1 million annually in landfill disposal costs, excluding reduced transportation expenses.

By managing the process in-house, tracking results and engaging residents from collection through composting, Beaufort County is demonstrating an innovative approach that other communities can adapt to reduce waste and extend landfill capacity.

Turning Recommendations into Action: Berkeley County's Overdose Fatality Review Project

Berkeley County transformed its response to the opioid epidemic by creating a county-led system that turns lessons learned from overdose deaths into coordinated

prevention, community action and lasting systemic change.

Led by the Berkeley County Coroner's Office, the Berkeley County Overdose Fatality Review (BC OFR) first convened in June 2023. Today, it brings together 25 partners from healthcare, behavioral health, treatment and recovery, law enforcement, emergency medical services, education, social services, local government, faith communities and people with lived experience.

Through confidential, multidisciplinary reviews, partners examine not only how an overdose death occurred, but where intervention might have been possible, where systems failed to connect and what practical steps could prevent another loss.

Recommendations helped make the Coroner's Office a community Narcan distributor and launch a deputy "Leave-Behind Program" providing lifesaving and recovery resources to households affected by fatal overdoses. The county later installed NaloxBoxes for 24-hour public access to naloxone, developed resource cards connecting residents with services and launched an online overdose dashboard.

The results are encouraging. From 2023 to 2025, fatal overdoses fell 27%, from 84 to 61, Berkeley County's lowest annual total since 2020. Nonfatal overdoses declined 34%, from 503 to 332. While many factors influence overdose trends, the progress coincides with sustained collaboration, expanded resources and data-informed prevention efforts.

Berkeley County also helped launch the Tri-County Overdose Fatality Review with Charleston and Dorchester counties, and, in 2026, hosted South Carolina's first statewide Overdose Fatality Review conference.



Fairfield County's Student Leadership Summit



Fairfield County saw a gap in community engagement and an opportunity to address it: Young people were largely absent from conversations about their local government. Students rarely attended community forums, and county leaders with backgrounds in education recognized that many high school students had limited knowledge of how town and county government worked or affected their daily lives.

Rather than wait for the next generation to become engaged, Fairfield County decided to bring local government directly to high school students.

Launched in 2024 in conjunction with National County Government Month, the Fairfield County Student Leadership Summit gives high school students an inside look at county government while encouraging them to become informed, active citizens. Students from the county's three high schools toured the County Administration Building, explored county operations and career opportunities and put civic engagement into practice through a student-led mock county council meeting.

The county has continued to expand the initiative, creating connections among students and leaders at the municipal, county, state and federal levels. Community partners have included the Fairfield County Sheriff's Office, Voter Registration, the Town of Winnsboro, Fairfield County Chamber of Commerce and U.S. Sen. Tim Scott's office. Voter Registration also provided eligible students an opportunity to register to vote. This year, 65 students and five chaperones from three high schools participated in the summit.

Most importantly, the summit is inspiring students to take the next step. Following this year's event, students and advisors

contacted the county about internships and job-shadowing opportunities. Fairfield County responded by adding career-specific shadowing days, extending the summit beyond a one-day experience.

What began as a creative approach to civic outreach is developing into a pipeline for both an engaged citizenry and Fairfield County's future workforce.

Solving the Silver Tsunami in Florence County



Florence County is preparing now for a challenge facing local governments across South Carolina: the coming "silver tsunami" of experienced leaders reaching retirement age. With as many as half of its senior managers and department heads potentially eligible to retire within five years, the county recognized that succession planning could not wait.

In fall 2025, Florence County created the Florence County Institute (FCI), a nine-month, internally developed leadership program designed to prepare county employees to step into and succeed in supervisory roles.

While the county already invests in employees through programs such as Leadership Florence and the Local Government Leadership Institute, FCI fills a different need. The program focuses specifically on the practical management and supervisory skills employees will need to successfully lead county departments.

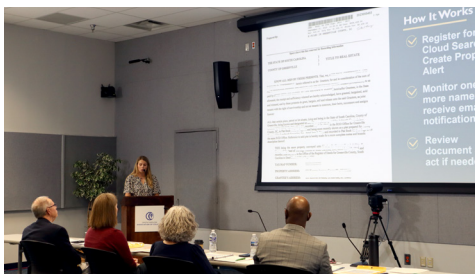
The inaugural cohort of 18 employees participated in monthly lunchtime sessions covering emotional intelligence, employee motivation, communication, delegation, time management, conflict resolution, managing diverse teams and corrective action. Participants also reflected on what they learned and identified ways they would apply those lessons in their work.

Florence County designed FCI to grow and evolve. Feedback from the inaugural class helped shape an expanded second cohort, which began in August 2026, creating a continuous cycle of learning and improvement.

The program is already generating ideas beyond succession planning. Feedback from participants plus comments from a county resident prompted leaders to explore Florence County 101, a potential six- to eight-week program that would introduce employees and residents to all county departments and operations.

Rather than waiting for retirements to create leadership gaps, Florence County is building its next generation of leaders from within.

Greenville County Property Alert Program: Protecting Property Owners Through Proactive Technology



Property fraud and fraudulent deed activity are growing concerns for property owners nationwide. While recording offices cannot prevent someone from attempting to file a fraudulent document, Greenville County recognized it could give residents a powerful tool to help them identify suspicious activity quickly and take action.

In 2025, the Greenville County Register of Deeds Office launched Greenville County Property Alert, a free service that uses technology to put timely property information directly into residents' hands. Through the program, residents can register to receive an email alert whenever a document processed by the Register of Deeds Office matches a name or names they select. The automated notification provides an accessible, convenient way for property owners to monitor recorded activity without repeatedly searching county records themselves.

More than 1,400 people have enrolled in Property Alert since its launch, demonstrating strong community interest in a service designed around their needs.

Greenville County complemented the technology with proactive public outreach to ensure residents knew the resource was available. The Register of Deeds Office promoted the program through social media, the county website, informational materials, local media and a dedicated property fraud prevention day. Together, these efforts increased awareness of property fraud while connecting residents with a simple tool to help safeguard one of their most valuable assets.

The program shows that meaningful government innovation does not have to be complicated. By recognizing an emerging problem, applying technology to an existing service and proactively connecting residents with the solution, Greenville County made government more accessible while giving property owners a new way to protect what matters most.

Horry County Fire Rescue's Prehospital Blood Program



For patients experiencing life-threatening blood loss, every minute matters. Horry County Fire Rescue (HCFR) is making those minutes count by bringing a lifesaving treatment once available only in hospitals directly to patients in the field.

HCFR launched its Prehospital Blood Program to address uncontrolled hemorrhage, a leading cause of preventable death in traumatic injuries and certain medical emergencies. By enabling trained EMS personnel to begin blood transfusions before a patient reaches the hospital, HCFR has fundamentally changed how hemorrhagic shock is treated in Horry County.

The program is significant in a county spanning more than 1,200 square miles and serving more than 427,000 residents, along with millions of annual visitors.

Rapid population growth, heavy traffic, tourism and longer transport times in rural areas can create critical challenges for emergency care. Instead of letting geography or transport time delay advanced treatment, HCFR brings hospital-level resuscitation to the patient.

Implementing the program required more than simply adding blood products to response units. HCFR developed a comprehensive system encompassing medical oversight, specialized training, blood storage and logistics, quality assurance and performance monitoring. Partnerships with healthcare providers and blood-supply organizations help ensure the service can be delivered safely and sustainably.

The result is a higher level of emergency medical care available throughout Horry County, with lifesaving transfusions beginning earlier than previously possible.

By moving critical treatment from the hospital to the patient's side, HCFR demonstrated leadership in executing clinical innovation, collaboration and proactive problem-solving to strengthen public safety and improve the chance of survival for residents and visitors alike.



Learn more about the SCAC Awards Program and see previous winners at sccounties.org/awards.