



SCAC 2025
Awards Luncheon



**J. Mitchell Graham &
Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Awards**

2025 SCAC Annual Awards Competition

The J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award and Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation Award recognize innovative projects completed by South Carolina's counties during the past two fiscal years. Winners represent the best qualities of local governance—attention to details, service to citizens, efficient use of tax dollars, and improvement in the quality of life. They demonstrate how creative problem-solving and collaboration can achieve impressive results, and offer new ideas for other counties to consider. Each project is judged on a written entry and an in-person presentation before a panel of judges on the day of competition.

The J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Award recognizes counties that address community challenges, implement operational improvements or enhance their citizens' 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 (county partnerships formed with other counties, municipalities, districts, or regional government organizations) that worked together on a project.

Information on previous years' award winners can be found at sccounties.org/awards

Entrants

2025 J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Awards

Chester: Animal Spay/Neuter Initiative in the Community (Under 50,000 population)

Dorchester: 2025 Hurricane Preparedness Campaign (150,000+ population)

Edgefield: Edgefield County Law Enforcement Center (Under 50,000 population)

Georgetown: Outdoor Adventure Trails (50,000-150,000 population)

Richland: Leveraging Public Funds for Public Good (150,000+ population)

Spartanburg: Community Emergency Response Team as the First Responder (150,000+ population)

2025 Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation Awards

Berkeley, Charleston and Dorchester: Tri-County Biological Science Center

Fairfield: Fairfield Joint Water and Sewer System Commission

Georgetown: Safer Shores

Greenville and Pickens: Table Rock Wildfire Incident: A Multi-Agency Coordination Effort

2025 J. Mitchell Graham Memorial Awards

Animal Spay/Neuter Initiative in the Community *Chester County*

Pet overpopulation is one of Chester County's most urgent and persistent public service issues.



Instead of relying solely on enforcement and shelter intake, the county's Community Spay/Neuter initiative

focused on prevention, accessibility, affordability, and community trust.

Through key partnerships with local animal rescues, veterinarians, clinics and grant providers, the county made low-cost spay/neuter services available to all residents. These include sterilization, microchipping, vaccinations, and a \$20 Trap-Neuter-Return option for feral cats.

Innovative systems, such as "Trap on Pick-Up Day," allow residents to schedule feral cat trapping in advance, with staff collecting and transporting the animals on a single

designated day. This approach has improved efficiency and public participation. Software upgrades streamline scheduling and data tracking, while public education campaigns and supply banks (including free traps, crates, and pet care supplies) help residents become part of the solution.

Chester County Animal Control coordinates field support and community outreach, and partners provide critical infrastructure for surgical care.

Since launching, over 950 animals have been altered, cutting shelter intake, nuisance complaints, and health risks. Mobile units, year-round clinic access, free supplies, and streamlined scheduling remove barriers for residents, while a new shelter opening in 2026 will add an on-site surgical suite and allow Chester County to expand year-round services and respond to community needs with greater flexibility.

This collaborative approach meets residents where they are geographically and economically, and transforms animal control from reactive enforcement to proactive, community-based care.

2025 Hurricane Preparedness Campaign *Dorchester County*

Dorchester County
Emergency
Management Department
(EMD) found a way to keep
residents alert as they get ready
for hurricane season—Storm
Surge coffee.



The coffee was just one creative tactic in EMD's recent public awareness campaign to educate residents, many of whom moved to the area from places where adverse tropical weather is not a threat, on the importance of preparing for natural disasters. The county is home to more than 80,000 residents who live in one of three hurricane evacuation zones.

EMD worked with a Summerville coffee shop to launch a special coffee and bag which includes a QR code directing java drinkers to hurricane preparedness

information as a new way to spread important safety messages.

Other innovative strategies to broaden the public's access to preparedness information included a livestream prep talk while the county's emergency management specialist and meteorologist ran and took questions during the Cooper River Bridge Run. County Administrator Jason Ward wrote

and sung the parody "Storm Surge" to the tune of The Temptations' "My Girl," emphasizing the importance of an emergency supply kit.

The county also hosted one of largest

hurricane expos in the state. To further amplify the campaign, the county's public information office coordinated media to increase opportunities for on-air interviews, event promotion and coverage, and general information sharing to audiences throughout the region.

Dorchester County's 2025 hurricane preparedness campaign demonstrates that public safety education can be both effective and engaging when rooted in creativity, community partnerships, and cross-platform outreach.

Edgefield County Law Enforcement Center

Edgefield County

The Edgefield County Law Enforcement Center, which opened in March 2025, represents the county's most ambitious infrastructure project. It successfully unified the sheriff's office, a state-of-the-art detention center, magistrate offices, a courtroom, and a law enforcement training hub.

The \$42 million, 74,000 square foot public safety complex opened in March 2025. With funding from South Carolina's Plutonium Settlement and a voter-approved 2020 Capital Project Sales Tax, the project was completed under budget and replaced a 1978 facility.

The sheriff and his team spearheaded the effort, conducting extensive research by visiting facilities in South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia to identify best practices. This informed the integration of advanced features, such as a central monitoring tower for inmate oversight and digital inmate

communication systems, ensuring the facility met modern safety and operational standards.

The county administrator provided critical oversight, managing logistics, coordinating contractors, and ensuring the project stayed under budget, a significant achievement for a project of this scale.

The site also features the county's first Animal Care and Control Facility and a recreation park with sports fields, a splash pad, and trails.



Georgetown Outdoor Adventure Trails

Georgetown County

Georgetown County's signature outdoor wellness program promotes physical activity, environmental appreciation, and community connection.



Launched in 2023 by Georgetown County Parks and Recreation, the Georgetown Outdoor Adventure Trails or GOAT program encourages residents and visitors of all ages and abilities to “Join the Herd” and explore trails, rivers, beaches and parks throughout the county.

The parks and recreation team identified and developed trails across multiple ecosystems—from dense woodlands and creeks to beachfront and urban corridors. Trails were marked, mapped, and are maintained. Unique elements like Compass Navigation Courses

and “Forest Bathing” Guides were developed in-house to create deeper engagement.

GOAT offers an ongoing calendar of free, inclusive events—such as guided hikes and paddles, cleanups, educational activities, and family festivals—that connect residents with nature and one another.

Activities like the FIT GOAT/IRON GOAT challenge encourage individuals to set and achieve personal fitness milestones. Programs were designed to reach key demographics like senior and youth.

In just two years, the program has engaged thousands of residents, fostered a love for nature, and turned passive green spaces into vibrant community assets. With more than 20,000 miles logged annually across hiking, biking, and paddling, GOAT exemplifies how a county can creatively utilize its natural assets to deliver meaningful public health and community-building.

GOAT has become more than a recreation program—it's a movement that has helped Georgetown County redefine how local government promotes public health, community, and environmental stewardship.

Leveraging Public Funds for Public Good

Richland County

Richland County and Nonprofit Serve and Connect joined forces to address a critical gap in community infrastructure in one of the county's most economically and socially disadvantaged regions. With limited access to public facilities, recreation, or consistent human services, Woodfield and Dentsville area residents were without a central, safe space to gather, receive resources, and build social trust.



Serve and Connect— a local nonprofit dedicated to building safe, healthy communities through police and community partnerships—had a vision to convert a closing church into a hub for community wellbeing. Richland County's Community Development

Block Grant staff helped turn that vision into reality.

The collaboration included shifting the initial scope from a small rehab to a full acquisition and transformation of the property. The facility's improvements included ADA-accessible restrooms, HVAC upgrades, water damage repair, and the transformation of a former sanctuary into a flexible meeting space.

The initiative created a permanent headquarters for Serve and Connect and established a multipurpose community center in the heart of the historically underserved community.

Located near high-poverty schools, it hosts food drives, youth events, and health outreach, and will soon include a welcome center for international families in partnership

with Richland School District Two. Positioned along the Decker Boulevard "International Corridor," the project shows how targeted public investment and nonprofit collaboration can drive sustainable community revitalization.

Community Emergency Response Team as the First Responder

Spartanburg County

Public safety challenges do not always require more equipment or staff.

Sometimes, they require rethinking how a community uses its existing resources.

Just ask Spartanburg County Emergency Management, which saw a critical need to address the rising volume of non-urgent 911 calls that often strain EMS resources and delay response to life-threatening emergencies. Spartanburg County Emergency Management starting in 2024 developed and launched CERT91, a 911 response program that leverages trained volunteers to respond to lower-acuity service calls.

CERT91 serves as a volunteer-based extension of the county's emergency services infrastructure and Community Emergency Response Team (CERT). The program responds to lift assists, welfare checks, medical alarms, and provides first-response support when needed. Volunteers undergo structured preparation to ensure they are equipped to respond professionally, ethically, and safely. Many volunteers have

a background in healthcare, public safety, or military service, and the program gives them an opportunity to continue serving their community.

As of August 1, 2025, CERT91 has contributed over 11,000 volunteer hours, representing the manpower of five full-time EMTs and saving an estimated \$206,850 in EMS personnel costs. Beyond financial impact, with CERT91 handling over 2,100 non-transport calls to date, EMS units have avoided more than 1,000 hours of out-of-service time.

By mobilizing trained volunteers and coordinating with county services, Spartanburg County has created a replicable model that improves care, supports first responders, and delivers a high return on community investment.

While other volunteer rescue squads exist across the state, CERT91 is distinct because it is an extension of Spartanburg County's CERT and embedded directly within the county's emergency communications framework.



2025 Barrett Lawrimore Memorial Regional Cooperation Awards

Tri-County Biological Science Center

*Berkeley, Charleston and
Dorchester Counties*

The Tri-County Biological Science Center is more than just a lab. It's a powerful symbol of the region's commitment to public safety, scientific excellence, and responsive government.



Charleston, Berkeley and Dorchester counties represent some of the fastest-growing areas in South Carolina, and with population growth comes a corresponding rise in criminal cases requiring DNA analysis.

Previously, forensic evidence from these Lowcountry counties had to be submitted to the South Carolina Law Enforcement Division, contributing to significant backlogs in processing times and delays in justice.

DNA evidence is critical in

criminal investigations, but long delays in processing have led to extended court case timelines and overcrowded detention centers. The Center, South Carolina's first regional forensic DNA lab, was created to reduce delays, allowing for quicker case resolutions and more efficient court proceedings.

A collaborative effort with each county contributing financially and administratively, all three counties' sheriffs and coroners, along with the 1st and 9th Judicial Circuit Solicitors, are in full support of the lab.

Charleston County staff used a data-driven approach to engage stakeholders and gather input on their priorities for the lab. Combined with population growth projections, this informed a lab design that meets current needs and has a projected lifespan of 30 years, with capacity for future expansion.

The Center's ability to localize DNA analysis, help alleviate statewide forensic backlogs, and provide cutting-edge services to law enforcement and the judicial system makes it a transformative project, setting a new standard for forensic services in South Carolina.

Fairfield Joint Water and Sewer System Commission

Fairfield County

Fairfield County has been losing population over the past 25 years due to a variety of factors including businesses closing, fewer jobs and housing scarcity.



At the core of attracting new businesses, jobs and the subsequent quality of life elements that appeal to residents, is infrastructure.

The Fairfield Joint Water and Sewer System Commission was created out of necessity to focus on a critical infrastructure need—wastewater treatment capacity.

The partnership between Fairfield County, the Town of Winnsboro and the Town of Ridgeway was formed to not only make more

wastewater treatment capacity available but also supply access to wastewater treatment to parts of the county in need.

A new treatment facility is necessary to provide wastewater treatment capacity to the Fairfield County Industrial Park, the Walter Brown Industrial Park and eventually the 1,500-acre Mega Site, located adjacent to I-77.

By June 2026, the Winnsboro Connector Line Project will add 500,000 gallons per day of treatment capacity by linking the Fairfield Commerce Center to the Winnsboro facility. By 2029,

the county aims to complete a new wastewater treatment facility on the Broad River to provide sustainable service for the county and its towns.

While the Commission's immediate goal is addressing wastewater treatment capacity needs, its long-term goal is ensuring that the county's infrastructure needs are continually addressed ultimately enhancing economic development efforts, attracting residents, and boosting quality of life.

Safer Shores

Georgetown County

Georgetown County's **Hammock Coast**

beaches are among the most visited destinations in South Carolina, attracting thousands of residents and tourists a year. While the shoreline is a major driver of local tourism and economic activity, it also presents inherent safety challenges: rip currents, changing weather conditions, and difficulty in pinpointing exact locations during emergencies.

Georgetown County Government, the Chamber of Commerce, and Leadership Georgetown Class 32 partnered on the Safer Shores beach signage initiative. This project produced

a consistent, easily identifiable system across Georgetown County's beach accesses to help visitors — especially children — describe their location to emergency responders.

In a crisis, precious minutes could be lost trying to determine exactly where help was needed.

The signs use color-coded animal identifiers linked to beach access numbers and include QR codes

for real-time National Weather Service updates, with all locations integrated into the county's 911 system for rapid emergency response.

By combining regional partnerships, tourism networks, and government resources, the project enhances public safety, accessibility, and the visitor experience, showcasing the impact of coordinated, community-driven initiatives. The concept — easy-to-recognize identifiers paired with safety information and integrated emergency response mapping —



could be replicated in other coastal or recreational areas statewide.

The partnerships built through Safer Shores have strengthened working relationships between government agencies, tourism leaders, and the community, setting the stage for future regional safety and economic development initiatives.

Table Rock Wildfire Incident: A Multi-Agency Coordination Effort *Greenville and Pickens Counties*

What began on March 21, 2025, as a single wildfire inside Table Rock State Park rapidly evolved into a multi-day, multi-jurisdictional emergency spanning two South Carolina Counties and almost 16,000 acres.



Fanned by dry weather, steep terrain, strong winds, and heavy forest debris

left behind by Hurricane Helene, the fires quickly spread, making the Table Rock Complex Fire the largest wildfire in recent Upstate South Carolina history.

Due to the fire's size, speed and impact on public infrastructure, emergency managers and local officials quickly recognized that siloed responses would be insufficient. Instead, they activated joint emergency operations, leveraging each county's strengths, assets, and personnel to meet the crisis head-on.

While each county maintains its own emergency management departments and public safety

teams, this fire demanded a seamless strategy that prioritized public safety, communication, and operational efficiency over administrative boundaries. Shared priorities included evacuation planning, public information dissemination, logistics coordination, fire suppression tactics, sheltering, and infrastructure protection.

The regional impact was profound. Directly affecting more than 4,000 residents and indirectly impacting thousands more, the fire and response efforts mobilized corners of both counties. Highway closures disrupted major travel corridors, smoke triggered widespread air quality alerts, and some business operations were interrupted.

The collaborative effort ensured that all evacuations were conducted safely, no structures were lost, and—most importantly—no fatalities or injuries occurred during the 19-day incident.

While the challenges were great, the experience strengthened regional relationships, revealed key opportunities for future preparedness, and elevated standards for emergency response in South Carolina.

Lessons learned from this incident are already shaping training, planning, and communications frameworks across both counties.

2025 SCAC Annual Awards Judges

Head Judge—William E. Tomes, Executive-in-Residence, Joseph P. Riley Jr. Center for Livable Communities, College of Charleston

Bill Tomes is an Executive in Residence at the Joseph P. Riley Jr. Center for Livable Communities at the College of Charleston and is the former Director of Governmental Research and Service at the Institute of Public Service and Policy Research at University of South Carolina. Through his consulting firm, Bill works with public and non-profit organizations throughout South Carolina.

Bill has his Bachelor's degree in Psychology and a Master's degree in Human Resources. Over the past 30 years, he has worked as an organizational development consultant, specializing in both the private and public sectors in the United States and Canada. He has conducted training programs and written book chapters and articles on various human resources and governance topics. Bill currently serves on the faculty of the Local Government Leadership Institute, the Non-Profit Leadership Institute at Francis Marion University, and the Institute of Government for County Officials.

Carla Flink, Associate Professor and MPA Program Director, University of South Carolina

Dr. Flink is an Associate Professor and the Master of Public Administration Program Director. She earned her Ph.D. in Political Science from Texas A&M University in 2014 and a B.S. in Mathematics from University of the Incarnate Word in 2009. Professor Flink's research interests are in public budgeting and finance, public management, and public policy process. She has published in journals such as the Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, Policy Studies Journal, and Public Administration. She teaches courses in public budgeting and finance, the policy process, and quantitative methods.

2025 SCAC Annual Awards Judges

L. Gregory Pearce Jr., Former Richland County Councilman

Greg Pearce has dedicated more than 50 years to mental health care and civic leadership. He earned a B.S. in Psychology from Presbyterian College and an M.A. in Counseling Psychology from the University of South Carolina, then spent 20 years at SC State Hospital where he eventually became program director. He then served as CEO of Crafts-Farrow State Hospital before transitioning to elected office.

During his time on Richland County Council, he served four terms as council vice chairman. Governor McMaster appointed him to the SC Mental Health Commission in 2019, where he was elected chairman and served from 2020 to 2025.

His professional involvement includes leadership roles as president of both the County Council Coalition and the SC Association of Counties Board of Directors, along with membership in the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill and numerous other mental health-related organizations.

J. Milton Pope, Principal, Parker Poe Consulting

Milton Pope is a principal with Parker Poe Consulting, leading the local government division with more than 25 years of county government experience.

As a former Richland County administrator, he managed 2,000 employees and a \$700 million budget, achieving “All America Community” designation and a Moody’s credit rating upgrade. He previously served as government affairs liaison for the Municipal Association of South Carolina.

Pope is a Certified Manager through the International City/County Management Association and graduated from FEMA’s Emergency Management Institute and the South Carolina Executive Institute.



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