



# The Institute of Government for County Officials

**An Education Program of the South Carolina Association of Counties**

*in cooperation with*

The Joseph P. Riley Jr. Center for Livable Communities at the College of Charleston and  
The Strom Thurmond Institute of Government and Public Affairs at Clemson University

# The Institute of Government for County Officials

The South Carolina Association of Counties (SCAC), in cooperation with the Joseph P. Riley Jr. Center for Livable Communities at the College of Charleston, and the Strom Thurmond Institute of Government and Public Affairs at Clemson University, provides the Institute of Government for County Officials (the Institute).

The Institute offers training to provide the knowledge and skills that county officials need to become effective leaders. Elected officials, chief administrative officers, clerks to council, and other executive staff members typically attend this training program; and clerks to council serve as the local contact for enrollment and registration. The curriculum includes two levels of certification and also offers advanced courses to permit graduates to increase their knowledge of timely issues.



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COLLEGE of  
CHARLESTON

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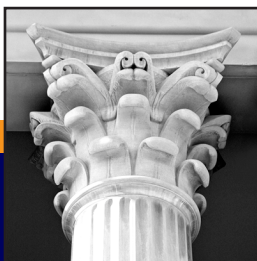
THE RILEY CENTER FOR  
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## When is the Institute Offered?

Each year, courses are offered prior to SCAC's Mid-Year Conference (February), Annual Conference (August), and Fall Meeting of the County Council Coalition (October). SCAC's conference brochures and meeting notices include Institute registration information, and participants may register online via <http://www.sccounties.org>.

## Requirements for Earning a Certificate

- **Level I** – County officials must attend 27 contact hours of instruction composed of six required courses (18 hours) and any three elective courses (nine hours) to graduate from Level I.
- **Level II** – County officials must attend 18 hours of instruction, composed of any six courses (18 contact hours) to graduate from Level II. **Graduates of Level I and participants who are within nine hours (three courses) of completing Level I are eligible to earn credit for Level II courses.**
- SCAC offers a full day of orientation training for newly-elected county council members in even-numbered years. By attending orientation, new council members are enrolled in the Institute and earn six hours of credit toward their Level I certificate.
- **In order to receive credit for Institute courses, participants must be present for the entire course and return a form to certify that they have completed the course.**
- **Credits for courses in Levels I and II are valid for four years. If a county official does not graduate within the four-year period, expired credits are removed from his/her record.**
- County officials are awarded a certificate upon graduation from Level I and Level II. Certificates are presented at SCAC's Annual Conference.
- SCAC's staff coordinates registration, maintains all records of credit, and awards certificates to graduates of Levels I and II. Please call (803) 252-7255 (in-state: 1-800-922-6081) or send a message to [scac@scac.sc](mailto:scac@scac.sc) to address questions about registration, the requirements for earning a certificate, or participants' records of credit.

## Courses that Offer Continuing Education Credit for Planning/Zoning Officials and Employees

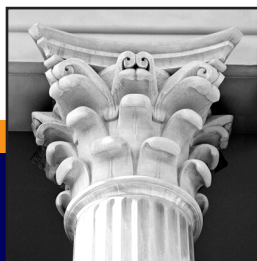
Four Institute courses are approved by the S.C. Planning Education Advisory Committee for continuing education credit for local government planning/zoning officials and employees. These courses are:

- Level I – Planning and Land Use; Ethical Leadership and Public Service; and Managing and Conducting Meetings
- Level II – Economic Development

All courses offered are three contact hours, so a single course can be used to fulfill the annual continuing education requirement for local government planning/zoning officials and employees.

## Advanced Courses for Level II Graduates

Advanced courses offer a means for graduates of Levels I and II to continue their training and increase their knowledge of timely issues. Typically, two courses are offered prior to the Association's Annual Conference, and the topics change each year. SCAC does not maintain records of credit or issue certificates for Advanced courses.



## Level I — Required Courses

### ALL SIX COURSES ARE REQUIRED IN ORDER TO GRADUATE:

#### **Orientation to County Government I**

This session lays the groundwork for achieving maximum effectiveness as a county government by focusing on the structure of county government. Participants will learn about the evolution of county government in South Carolina. Included will be a discussion of the change from “supply bills” to “Home Rule.” Additionally, attention will be given to the roles and responsibilities of various county officials; communicating effectively with citizens; differences between policy formation and policy implementation; and the importance of ethical decision-making in local government.

#### **Orientation to County Government II**

This session builds on the foundation provided in Orientation I and focuses on service delivery and funding county government. Participants will take a closer look at the ever-increasing services that are provided by county government including, but not limited to: economic development; health and human services; law enforcement; public safety; parks and recreation; and public works. The discussion will provide an overview of funding options and alternative service delivery methods, such as intergovernmental agreements and out-sourcing. The session will conclude with a discussion of the importance of the county functioning as a team, and tools for monitoring and evaluating the county’s performance.

#### **Ethical Leadership and Public Service**

Through the use of lecture, group discussion, scenarios, and current events, participants will review the ethical environment in which public officials must function, the standards which they are expected to meet, and the critical role of an ethical organizational culture. Topics include a brief overview of the S.C. Ethics Reform Act; definitions and concepts of ethics; ethical values; principles of public service ethics; the ethics of compromise; frameworks for resolving ethical dilemmas; and strategies for creating and sustaining an ethical organizational culture.

#### **Legal Issues in County Government**

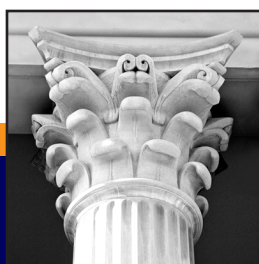
In order to govern effectively, county officials must understand key legal issues that impact local government. South Carolina counties act under powers granted to them by the state; thus, the first section of this course is devoted to the legal foundation of county government. Forms of county government, county government authority, powers and duties of council members, and council liability will be covered. In addition to the S.C. Public Records Act, the S.C. Freedom of Information Act and its impact on counties will also be discussed.

#### **Planning and Land Use**

This course is a facilitated discussion of local government planning and zoning. During the session, participants will review the requirements of the Comprehensive Planning Act of 1994, and the roles and relationships of county council, the planning commission, and the zoning board of appeals. Topics will include legal issues impacting local land use actions, as well as Constitutional standards that apply to county programs. Recruitment for members of the planning commission and zoning board of appeals, the importance of rules of procedure and bylaws, and the value of long-term community planning will also be discussed.

#### **Public Budgeting**

During this course, participants will learn about county financial planning and policies, budget preparation and control, capital budgeting and debt administration, financing tools for local government, and how to interact most effectively with the county’s “financial” people. Various types of budgets, the meaning of budgetary basis, “fund accounting” and why it is used in government will also be addressed. Through class discussion, participants will learn how to estimate and track real and personal property taxes, discuss assessment ratios and millage, and calculate the value of a mil. New or pending legislation that will impact county finances will also be discussed.



## Level I — 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 and their own contributions to the team. Civility, 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 function in a vacuum. Effective intergovernmental relations are no longer an option, but are essential if county governments are to adequately address the needs of their citizenry. 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 relationships; and strategies for building such relationships. Examples of effective intergovernmental relations in South Carolina will be noted.

#### **Developing Good Leadership Skills**

This course will cover the various styles 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 reflect on their own personal leadership style and to consider the impact of this style on county citizens and staff.

#### **Employment Law: What Counties Need to Know**

During this course, participants will learn about the state and federal laws that affect personnel administration in counties. Topics discussed will include employment-at-will, employee handbooks, drug testing, wage and hour issues, discrimination, and grievance procedures. The Family Medical Leave Act, military leave, E-verify, and political activity will also be addressed.

#### **Managing and Conducting Meetings**

The overall goal of this course is to help county officials conduct successful meetings. The ingredients for an effective meeting will be covered with significant attention given to parliamentary procedure. During class discussions, participants will work to develop their meeting management skills.

#### **Public Speaking**

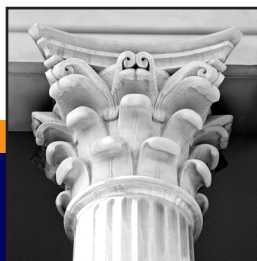
This course provides an opportunity for county officials to enhance their public presentation skills. The characteristics of effective presentations will be discussed, and participants will be given the opportunity to practice their presentation skills.

#### **Strategic Planning**

This course focuses on the importance of planning and goal setting within the policy-making process. Participants will be introduced to models of annual and strategic planning; goal development and prioritization; and methods for determining goal progress and accomplishment. The importance of a shared county vision and mission, and linking the plan with the budget will be stressed.

#### **Understanding and Seeking Differences**

This course will explore the reality of working in a diverse environment, as well as the tools that counties can use to recognize, accept, and value differences. During this session, participants will discuss the changing demographics—such as age, race, and ethnicity—of local government communities and the county workforce.



## Level II

### ANY SIX COURSES ARE REQUIRED IN ORDER TO GRADUATE:

#### **Current Issues Facing County Government**

This course will examine critical and significant issues facing county government in South Carolina. Current Issues courses may focus on such topics as jails, solid waste management, privatization of county government services, regionalization and consolidation, the environment, and healthcare-related issues. *A maximum of two of these courses may be applied to the completion of Level II.*

#### **Decision-Making in a Political Environment**

This course provides an in-depth look at decision-making in a political environment. Strategies used to gain passage of a proposed legislative action range from minimum winning coalitions to building consensus. 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. The environment in which county elected officials and top administrators function often requires effective negotiating skills. This class will also introduce a structured negotiation process, different styles of negotiation, techniques for improving negotiating skills, and developing your best alternative to a negotiated agreement.

#### **Economic Development**

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

#### **Effective Communications**

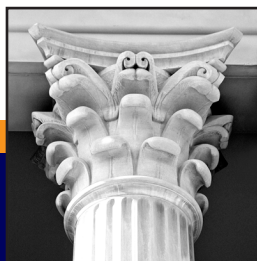
This course will reinforce the importance of on-going communications on council, with the chief administrative officer, and with the citizens of the county. Participants will learn about the value of determining the county's message and identifying communication opportunities and strategies. Other topics such as media relations, press releases, and question and answer sessions will also be addressed.

#### **Financial Management**

The focus of this course will be on understanding the basic elements of financial management and the role elected officials have in county financial decisions. The various budgeting methods of local governments will be explored with particular emphasis placed on the connection between financial decisions and council policy-making and goal setting. Participants will also discuss the basics of fund accounting, financial audits, and county credit ratings. Lessons learned from the recession, updates on any new or pending rules issued by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board, and new or pending state legislation that will affect county government finances will also be discussed.

#### **Measuring and Reporting County Performance**

This course will build on the Level I Strategic Planning course and provide an in-depth discussion of the benefits of tracking and reporting organizational performance. Performance measurement systems can be valuable management tools and aid in a county's efforts to maximize accountability and transparency. The session will address the various types of measures and their appropriate use, the development of a balanced set of performance measures, and ways of reporting organizational performance. Best practices of county governments across the country will be highlighted.



### **The Policy Role of Council**

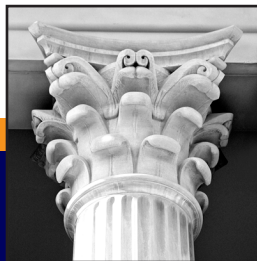
This course is designed to help council members understand and carry out their responsibility as the elected policy-making body. Participants will learn the key role that problem definition plays in setting the stage for policy debate. A public policy model will be used to facilitate a discussion of the challenges that exist in moving an issue of concern to a policy adopted by council and implemented by staff.

### **The Property Taxation Process**

This course will examine the property taxation process in South Carolina with emphasis on the most recent changes. Through class discussion, participants will learn: the history of property taxes in the state; legal considerations; how to compute millage rates; and updates to property tax statutes. Key terms will be defined. Roles and responsibilities of the key players (i.e., county council, auditor, assessor, treasurer, tax collector, and the S.C. Department of Revenue) in the process will also be covered.

**Graduates of Level I and participants who are within nine hours (three classes) of completing Level I are eligible to earn credit for Level II courses.**

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