

# The Institute of Government for County Officials



## SCAC's Premier Education Program

The Institute of Government for County Officials is the South Carolina Association of Counties' flagship education program, designed to equip county officials with practical skills and knowledge to serve their communities effectively.

Elected officials, chief administrative officers, finance officers, clerks to council, and other county staff participate in the Institute each year.

The program offers a structured curriculum with three levels of certification, **Level I, Level II and Advanced**, allowing participants to build on their expertise over

time. Clerks to council typically serve as the local point of contact for enrollment and registration for council members.

SCAC is proud to partner with the **Joseph P. Riley Jr. Center for Livable Communities at the College of Charleston** to deliver the Institute. The program is also sponsored by the **Clemson University** and the **University of South Carolina Master of Public Administration** programs, reflecting SCAC's commitment to high-quality, collaborative education for county government professionals.

### Certification Levels



## When Is The Institute Offered?

Courses are offered annually in conjunction with SCAC's Counties Connect: A Legislative Action Day (February), Annual Conference (July/August), and Fall Advocacy Meeting (October). SCAC's conference and meeting notices include Institute registration information, and participants may register online. Certain courses are offered online for class credit through the SCAC learning portal.

## Requirements For Earning A Certificate

- Level I – Must attend six required courses and any three elective courses to graduate from Level I.
- Level II – Must attend any six courses to graduate from Level II. **Graduates of Level I and participants who have completed six Level I courses are eligible to earn credit for Level II courses.**
- Advanced Level - Must complete any six Advanced courses to graduate from the Advanced Level. **Graduates of Level II and participants who have completed four Level II courses are eligible to earn credit for Advanced courses.**
- SCAC offers a full day of orientation training for newly elected county council members in even-numbered years. By attending this orientation, new council members are enrolled in the Institute and earn two course credits toward their Level I certificate.
- **To receive credit for Institute courses, participants must be present for the entire in person course and return a form to SCAC staff to certify that they have completed the course; or attend the entire online course.**
- **Credits for courses in all levels are valid for four years. If a county official does not graduate within the four-year period, expired credits are removed from their record.**
- County officials are awarded a certificate upon graduation from Level I, Level II and the Advanced level. Certificates are presented at SCAC's Annual Conference.
- SCAC's staff coordinates registration, maintains all records of credit and awards certificates to graduates. 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 South Carolina Planning Education Advisory Committee for continuing education credit for local government planning/zoning officials and employees. These courses are:

- Level I – Ethical Leadership and Public Service and Leading and Conducting Meetings
- Level II – Economic Development 101 and Planning and Land Use

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.

## Level I - Required

**All six courses are required for a Level I certificate.**

### **Orientation to County Government I (online only)**

This session lays the groundwork for achieving maximum effectiveness as a county government official by focusing on the structure of county government. Participants learn about the evolution of county government in South Carolina. A discussion of the change from “supply bills” to “Home Rule” is featured. Additionally, attention is 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 (online only)**

This session builds on the foundation provided in Orientation I and focuses on service delivery and funding county government. Participants closely look at the services provided by county government, including economic development, law enforcement, public safety, parks and recreation, and public works. The discussion provides an overview of funding options and alternative service delivery methods like intergovernmental agreements and outsourcing. The session concludes with a discussion of the importance of the county functioning as a team and tools for monitoring and evaluating the county’s performance.

### **County Government Finance**

This course provides a broad overview of county financial planning and budgeting concepts and examines the vital role elected officials play in county financial decision-making. Participants learn about budget preparation and control, capital budgeting and debt administration, financing tools for local government, and interacting effectively with the county’s financial officials.

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

Through the use of lecture, group discussion, scenarios and current events, participants 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**

South Carolina counties act under powers granted to them by the S.C. Home Rule Act. In order to govern effectively, county officials must understand key legal issues that impact local government. This course is devoted to the legal foundations and forms of county government and the powers and duties of council members and professional staff. In addition, this course covers statutes impacting county government activity including the S.C. Public Records Act, Freedom of Information Act, Ethics Act and Tort Claims Act.

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

This course is designed to help council members understand and carry out their responsibility as the governing policymaking body. Forms of government and roles and responsibilities of council and staff are discussed. Through a public policy model lens, participants explore how community issues evolve into adopted policies and learn strategies for navigating policy development and implementation challenges.



## Level I - Elective

**Any three courses are required for a Level I certificate.**

### **Building an Effective County Team**

This session focuses on the importance of the council functioning as an effective policy-making team. Participants 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 personalities, and group problem-solving are explored. Strategies and techniques for building a more effective council team and for expanding the team to include county staff also are examined.

### **Building Your Civility Foundation**

This foundational course introduces the core skills needed for respectful and effective engagement in everyday interactions. Participants develop practical communication skills that support clarity and active listening. They also learn how to set norms and structure expectations for tough conversations, so dialogue remains respectful, focused and productive. The course emphasizes how trust is built and maintained over time, and how collaborative decision making can lead to more durable outcomes.

### **Developing Successful Intergovernmental Relations**

No governmental entity can afford to function in a vacuum. This course explores 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 also are noted.

### **Leadership Skills for County Officials**

During this course participants learn about various styles of leadership, effective leadership strategies, the differences between management and leadership, and the complex, interactive system in which county leaders must function.

### **Leading and Conducting Meetings**

This course is designed to help elected and appointed county officials plan and conduct effective, productive meetings. Issues covered include the roles and responsibilities of chairs/vice chairs and individual members, strategies for promoting civility and the importance of established parliamentary procedure. Participants learn the legal requirements and key elements of successful public meetings. Through guided discussions and activities, participants practice and strengthen their meeting management skills.

### **Public Speaking**

This course develops essential public speaking skills for effective county leadership. Participants will examine key elements of clear, professional presentations, including message organization, audience engagement and delivery techniques. The course also addresses common challenges such as managing nervousness and responding to questions. Through guided practice, participants will strengthen their communication skills and confidence in public settings.

### **Strategic Governing**

This course focuses on the importance of planning and goal-setting within the policy-making process. Participants are introduced to models of annual and strategic planning, goal development and prioritization and methods for determining goal progress and accomplishment through organizational performance measurement. The importance of a shared county vision and mission and linking the plan with the budget is emphasized. The class highlights best practices of county governments.



## Level II

**Any six courses are required for a Level II certificate.**

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

This course focuses on strategies for advancing legislative action, from minimum winning coalitions to consensus building. Topics include decision-making theory and practice in local government, problem identification, factfinding, criteria for evaluating alternatives, and the political dimensions of decisions. The course emphasizes analyzing policy options, evaluating outcomes and applying decision-making frameworks to complex public sector challenges.

### **Economic Development 101**

If planned and implemented effectively by local government leaders, economic development strategies can yield more jobs, higher incomes and greater resource productivity for the community. This course explores the economic development planning process, locally-based economic development strategies, financing tools for economic development projects, and methods for evaluating economic development efforts. The class also discusses roles of the major players in the economic development process and economic development incentives available to local governments.

### **Effective Communications**

This course reinforces the importance of ongoing communications on council, with the chief administrative officer and with county residents. Participants learn the value of determining the county's message and identifying communication opportunities and strategies. Other topics addressed include media relations, news releases, Q&A sessions and social media.

### **Emergency Management 101: Roles and Responsibilities**

This introductory course provides a practical overview of how emergencies are managed at the local level. Participants will learn about key players often involved in county emergencies—including emergency management staff, first responders, public health partners, and state and federal agencies. The governance and policy leadership role of county elected officials will be explored, including the importance of clear emergency management policies and executive orders to enable timely, coordinated decision making. An overview of state emergency management regulations is also included. By the end of the course, county officials will be better prepared to fulfill their

responsibilities and support effective emergency response and recovery efforts.

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

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

### **Enhancing Your Conflict Competence**

Building on concepts introduced in Building Your Civility Foundation (Level I), this course equips county officials with the skills to navigate conflict productively rather than avoid or escalate it. Participants explore healthy conflict, recognize different conflict styles and apply structured approaches for resolving disagreement effectively. The course also emphasizes practical de-escalation techniques and the ability to discern when to challenge facts versus when to prioritize listening, understanding and strengthening relationships.

### **County Audits and Annual Financial Reports**

This course is designed to provide a fundamental understanding of county financial documents. Key aspects of annual county financial reports and external audits are covered, and the interpretation of specific items within each report type is discussed.

### **Planning and Land Use**

This course provides an overview of the county's comprehensive planning program and legal requirements. It covers the S.C. Land Use Planning Act and the roles and relationships of county council to the various land use planning bodies they are authorized to create. Other topics include Constitutional issues impacting local land use regulations and development, recruitment for members of the land use planning bodies, the importance of rules of procedure and bylaws, and the value of community involvement.

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## Level II (Cont'd)



### **The Property Taxation Process**

This course examines the property taxation process in South Carolina with emphasis on the most recent changes. Through class discussion, participants learn the history of property taxes in the state, legal considerations, how to compute millage, and updates to property tax statutes. Key terms are defined. The class also covers 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.

## Advanced

**Any six courses are required for an Advanced certificate.**

### **Advanced Leadership**

During this course, county officials explore their personal leadership styles to become more effective and influential in their county. Topics covered may include emotional intelligence, problem solving and change management.

Attendees may benefit from taking *Level I: Leadership Skills for County Officials* before taking this course.

### **Advocacy Tips and Tools**

This session equips county leaders with practical strategies to advance local priorities at the state and federal levels. Legislative experts demystify how bills move through the policymaking process and highlight key points where county voices can have the greatest impact. In addition, local government practitioners offer proven, real-world advocacy techniques that have worked in their communities. Participants leave with actionable tools to represent county interests and build productive relationships with policymakers.

### **Building Bridges Through Civility and Dialogue**

Building on the skills developed in Level I and Level II civility classes, this course examines the psychological, emotional and social dynamics that contribute to division and polarization in governing. County officials will strengthen their ability to apply emotional intelligence to foster constructive engagement and collaboration, while learning to distinguish between productive debate, meaningful dialogue and unproductive conflict. The course also explores practical strategies for building trust, sustaining engagement, and promoting respectful coexistence among county council members and staff.



## Advanced (Cont'd)

### Building Your Economic Development Toolkit

County officials play a pivotal role when prospective businesses consider locating or expanding in their communities. This course equips county leaders with a practical understanding of the discretionary economic development tools available to help close deals and drive local growth. Topics include fee-in-lieu-of-tax (FILOT) agreements, special source revenue bonds and credits, multi-county industrial parks and public-private partnerships.

### Capital Improvement Planning and Finance

Counties regularly face the need to undertake major capital projects, purchase high-cost equipment or modernize critical infrastructure. This course provides county officials with a practical overview of the capital project planning process—from identifying needs and prioritizing projects to developing realistic timelines and cost estimates. Participants also explore the revenue sources and financing options available to support successful project funding.

### Crisis Management Communications

From elected officials and administrative staff to emergency personnel and public information officers, all county officials must understand and follow established county communications protocols before a crisis occurs to respond effectively during an emergency. This course emphasizes the importance of presenting a unified county message to maintain public trust while coordinating seamlessly across departments. Participants also learn best practices for engaging regional and state communication resources; their role within the county's communications chain of command; and the importance of delivering timely, accurate and consistent messaging during a crisis.



### Current Issues Facing South Carolina Counties

This course examines critical and significant issues facing county government in South Carolina. The specific topic or set of issues varies with each offering.

### Disaster Resiliency

This course provides the tools and information necessary to guide communities through disaster recovery while strengthening long-term resilience. Participants learn how mitigation efforts like planning, policy development and strategic investment can reduce future risk and build stronger, more prepared counties. The class also explores how to effectively leverage key resources to support response, recovery and mitigation. This includes FEMA programs and federal assistance, state government resources, and work with nonprofit and community partners.

### Protecting County Resources: Risk Management

County leadership plays a vital role in protecting employees, managing risk and safeguarding public resources. This course provides county leaders with a practical overview of effective risk management programs and their impact on employee safety, operations and county budgets. Participants explore key elements of a successful program, including strategies and tools for strengthening the county's safety culture like vehicle accident review boards, risk management reporting and performance metrics.





**SOUTH CAROLINA  
ASSOCIATION OF COUNTIES**

PO Box 8207  
Columbia, SC 29202-8207  
Phone: (803) 252-7255  
Fax: (803) 252-0379  
[sccounties.org](http://sccounties.org)



COLLEGE OF  
**CHARLESTON**  
THE RILEY CENTER FOR  
LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

176 Lockwood Drive  
Charleston, SC 29403  
(843) 953-6100  
Fax: (843) 953-6109  
[charleston.edu/riley](http://charleston.edu/riley)

Program Sponsors:



232E Brackett Hall  
Clemson, SC 29634  
Phone: (864) 656-3233  
Fax: (864) 656-0690  
[clemson.edu](http://clemson.edu)



**Master of Public Administration**  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

349 Gambrell Hall  
817 Henderson Street  
Columbia, S.C. 29208  
Telephone: (803)-777-3109  
Fax: (803)-777-8255  
[sc.edu](http://sc.edu)