

# NORTH CAROLINA ASSOCIATION OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



## PRESIDENT'S STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION TASK FORCE: REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

PUBLISHED JUNE 2016



# Task Force Letter of Transmittal

Dear President Webb:

On behalf of the NCACC Strategic Plan Implementation Task Force, I would like to present our final report and recommendations to the NC Association of County Commissioners. Thank you for giving me the honor and privilege of leading this task force this year.

Your charge to the task force was to develop a roadmap of ideas that would equip our organization with strategies to carry out the 2015 Strategic Plan. The four goals adopted by our members at the annual conference last August are goals that can strengthen the counties over the next decade. Our over-arching premise is that the Association is stronger today than we have ever been, the challenges our counties face are not insurmountable, and together we can and will preserve the unity and integrity with which we all approach governing at the county level.

We have a tremendous asset in our staff. It is now up to them and the Association's Board of Directors to create and enhance the programs and services that draw us together. I am indebted to the task force members who gave their valuable time and energy to develop the recommendations you see in this report. They brought diverse perspectives to all the discussions and shared their ideas with passion and commitment to our purpose.

It is our fervent hope that the Board of Directors will approve these recommendations in the spirit in which they are offered: that flexibility is a virtue, that we learn from mistakes as well as from success, and that new ideas arise. We want our staff to be empowered to explore their own ideas and talents as they and the Board move forward together to accomplish our 2015 Strategic Plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kitty Barnes". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kitty Barnes, Catawba County Commissioner  
2015 Strategic Plan Implementation Task  
Force Chair



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This report is available online at:  
[www.ncacc.org/strategicplanimplementation](http://www.ncacc.org/strategicplanimplementation)



*Above:* NCACC Second Vice President Larry Phillips speaks during a March 2016 meeting of the Strategic Plan Implementation Task Force.

# Executive Summary

## **OUR VISION:**

**“Empowering 100 counties to work together  
for the betterment of one state.”**

## **OUR MISSION:**

**“Our Association supports and promotes the well-being of all North Carolina counties through advocacy, education, research, and member services.”**

At the 2015 Annual Conference of the NC Association of County Commissioners, our membership adopted the organization’s second 10-year Strategic Plan, the first having been adopted in 2005. The 2015 strategic plan was developed over an 18-month period, and included extensive information-gathering about challenges the counties are facing and how the organization can best help address the counties’ needs.

As an initial step, the Board of Directors reviewed in detail the Association’s 2005 goals, discussed their continued relevance, and assessed our accomplishments. At the same time, the organization collected widespread membership input and external feedback about new county challenges and needs through the following mechanisms:

- regional membership input sessions to learn more about the changing county government landscape, and challenges counties see on their horizon;
- personal interviews with members of the NC General Assembly to learn their views about county government and its place in the governmental structure of our state;
- partner organization interviews to hear their views on county government and the NCACC organization;
- focus group discussions with county managers and affiliate groups to assess their level of need for support and to hear their observations about county government challenges.

An important fact we learned was that, in the 100+ years of the organization's existence, the Board of Directors and members of the organization had never discussed a vision for counties in North Carolina nor defined our core mission. One of the counties' greatest challenges at this point in time is that fundamental questions are arising about the roles of government at the federal, state, and local levels, as a result, having a common vision of the counties' role in our governmental system and having a defined core mission to guide the Association over the next decade became critically important.

When the membership adopted our 2015 Strategic Plan, in addition to adopting the Vision and Mission Statements highlighted above, the Association adopted four goals to guide our work programs and efforts in the coming decade:

Goal 1: Promote the positive impact of county government on the lives of people.

Goal 2: Enhance county leadership capabilities to address challenges, provide efficient and effective governance, and develop future leaders.

Goal 3: Empower counties to be strong, proactive, and effective voices on local, state, and national issues.

Goal 4: Facilitate and enhance relationships, collaboration, and strategic partnerships.

With our Vision, Mission, and Goals in place, President Glen Webb of Pitt County appointed a select task force of commissioners and managers to work with our Association staff to develop concrete strategies and tactics to accomplish these four goals. The task force defined all four strategic goals as equally important, and established three broad categories of initiatives to finance and implement over an initial three to five year timeframe. These categories are Education & Communications, Research, and Relationships. The Board of Directors will continue to have the vitally important role of on-going evaluation of our accomplishments over time.

## **Recommended Strategies**

### **Education & Communication (Goals 1 & 2)**

Strategy 1: Undertake a multi-faceted marketing campaign to increase residents' awareness of county services.

Strategy 2: Develop on-demand training and toolkits for county commissioners and county staff.

### **Research (Goal 3)**

Strategy 1: Develop focused topical reports that provide for peer county comparisons.

Strategy 2: Develop a library of position papers, economic forecasts, presentations, and research publications.

Strategy 3: Develop an extensive database of federal, state and county contacts, accessible by membership.

### **Fostering Relationships with Government & Business Partners (Goal 4)**

Strategy 1: Develop a comprehensive approach to fostering closer relationships between county commissioners, and with state and federal elected officials.

Strategy 2: Promote constructive dialogue with municipalities, school boards and other local and regional partners to advance mutual interests and better serve our citizens.

*The full report of the Strategic Plan Implementation Task Force follows; it provides additional insights about how the strategies relate to the goals, and offers recommended tactics for each strategy.*

# President's 2015 Strategic Plan Implementation Task Force Final Report to the NCACC Board of Directors



*Above:* NCACC President Glen Webb makes implementation of the 2015 Strategic Plan his Presidential Initiative during the 2015 Annual Conference.

The 2015 Strategic Plan Implementation Task Force was appointed by NCACC President Glen Webb subsequent to the adoption of the plan by the membership at the 2015 NCACC Annual Conference in Pitt County. The role of the Task Force was to work with key Association staff members to develop concrete ideas that would help the organization accomplish the four goals included in the strategic plan. The Task Force members acknowledged that the Association staff would be responsible for the ongoing work, through their work plans and programs, through enhancements to ongoing initiatives, and through expanded services to the membership over time.

**Below:** NCACC Past President and Task Force Chair Kitty Barnes speaks during a meeting of the Strategic Plan Implementation Task Force.



Three meetings of the Task Force were held between December 2015 and March 2016.

**December 3, 2015** – The first meeting included discussion of organizational issues, historical background on the 2015 Strategic Plan, and detailed group work, building upon and adding to preliminary strategies developed by the NCACC Board of Directors in October 2015.

**February 10, 2016** – At the second meeting, NCACC staff provided an analysis of identified themes from the previous meeting's work, and then provided an opportunity for the task force members to delve into those themes more deeply to create ideas that would relate to the strategy themes. This was the first time the themes of Education & Communications, Research, and Relationships began to emerge.

**March 31, 2016** – The third and final meeting of the task force included a table of all strategies and tactics developed, and catalogued according to the relevant theme. Staff provided an initial outline for a draft report, and discussed final steps towards completion of the task force work. Task force members are indebted to the following staff members for their concerted efforts on behalf of the Association in developing the recommended strategies and tactics that follow:

*Elizabeth Floyd, Chief Financial Officer*

*Charlie Eaton, Risk Management Deputy Director*

*Cassandra Hoekstra, Legislative Counsel*

*Jason King, Associate Director of Education*

# Recommendations

## Education & Communications

**Goal 1: Promote the positive impact of county government on the lives of people.**

**Goal 2: Enhance county leadership capabilities to address challenges, provide efficient and effective governance, and develop future leaders**

To further these two goals, the NCACC should expand its communications and education programs. New efforts should include a focus on public awareness and utilizing elected officials to tell the story of what counties do. Educational programming should include more electronic offerings and expand on conference programs and themes.

**Strategy 1: Undertake a multi-faceted marketing campaign to increase residents' awareness of county services.**

Corresponding Tactics:

- Develop a “Why Counties Matter”-type campaign, modeled after the one offered by the National Association of Counties
- Provide assistance to counties to develop a “Chairman Chat” program on government access channels that allows the commission’s chair to discuss various local government-related topics with guest speakers
- Develop and promote social media training to commissioners so they are equipped to participate in these communications channels
- Develop a guide targeted towards educators and students on topics related to local government (e.g., County Government Day, Citizenship Focus, etc.)

## Recommendations

**Strategy 2: Develop on-demand training and toolkits for county commissioners and county staff.**

Corresponding Tactics:

- Develop an “NCACC Overview” presentation for staff to use on-demand, that can be included in other presentations and basic programs that any staff member could present
- Develop “County Government 101” talking points, with templates for handouts and a PowerPoint presentation which could be customized by each county
- Develop toolkits to supplement conference and program themes that include key takeaways and actionable steps for county implementation
- Increase live web conference offerings to cover issues of importance, new authorities, and “expanded basics” – topics not included in the Essentials of County Government classes; record and make available on-demand
- Record live training events; format and archive on the NCACC website and promote among our membership



**Left:** Commissioners (from left to right) Larry Phillips, Gary Blevins, Mark Richardson, and Lisa Barnes during a meeting of the Strategic Plan Implementation Task Force.

## **Research**

**Goal 3: Empower counties to be strong, proactive, and effective voices on local, state, and national issues.**

To accomplish Goal 3, the NCACC should expand its research services to include a searchable data and research library, parts of which are available only to our members. Members must be provided timely, trustworthy information and data, and be taught how to use it to improve their public policy-making decisions.

**Strategy 1: Develop focused topical reports that provide for peer county comparisons.**

Corresponding Tactics:

- Continue to produce and improve “County Snapshots”
- Continue to produce and improve “Budget & Tax Survey”
- Continue to produce and improve “Property Tax Survey”
- Develop a “Governance Survey,” which catalogs best practices on county operations, especially practices related to economic development and public/private partnerships.

**Strategy 2: Develop a library of position papers, economic forecasts, presentations, and research publications.**

Corresponding Tactics:

- Develop a research resources section of the NCACC website that includes comparative data available to members only
- Use webinars in conjunction with research developments and findings (e.g., food stamp resources) to educate members
- Continue to produce and improve economic & revenue guidance and information, and use webinars to educate and inform our members on results
- Assess the fiscal impacts on counties of new state initiatives and mandates to make better informed decisions

**Strategy 3: Develop an extensive database of federal, state and county contacts, accessible by membership.**

Corresponding Tactics:

- Conduct surveys to obtain contact information and store in user-friendly format
- Secure the information so it requires member online access via the website

# Recommendations

## **Fostering relationships with other units of government and business partners**

**Goal 4: Facilitate and enhance relationships, collaboration, and strategic partnerships.**

To further this goal, the Association should create more opportunities for commissioners to learn from each other and should reach out to other governmental partners and organizations to advance mutual interests. As the digital age continues to impact our social interactions and our economies become more and more interdependent, the need for counties to have strong interpersonal relationships with each other and with government officials at all levels is even more critical.

**Strategy 1: Develop a comprehensive approach to foster closer relationships between counties and among county commissioners, state and federal elected officials.**

Corresponding Tactics:

- Use NCACC Steering Committee meetings as an avenue for learning about the urban and rural interdependence in our counties
- Hold steering committee meetings in a variety of locations across the state so members can learn more about issues in different areas
- Create opportunities for personal interaction between NCACC leaders and the North Carolina congressional delegation

**Strategy 2: Promote constructive dialogue with municipalities, school boards and other local and regional partners to advance mutual interests and better serve our citizens.**

Corresponding Tactics:

- Create learning opportunities for NCACC leaders to interact with partner organizations at the state level
- Create opportunities for county officials to interact with local partners and other governmental units, including municipalities, school boards, and local business leaders

## Conclusion

The Strategic Plan Implementation Task Force has concluded its work and will report these recommendations to the NCACC Board of Directors for inclusion in its FY16-17 budget. It now becomes the responsibility of the staff and Board to continue implementation of these recommendations over time.

## Task Force Members

### **Chair Kitty Barnes, Catawba County Commissioner**

Lisa Barnes, Nash County Commissioner

Gary D. Blevins, Wilkes County Commissioner

George Dunlap, Mecklenburg County Commissioner

Craig Honeycutt, Alamance County Manager

Jeffrey Hudson, Onslow County Manager

Steve Jarvis, Davidson County Commissioner

Page Lemel, Transylvania County Commissioner

Carol McCall, Scotland County Commissioner

Brian McMahan, Jackson County Commissioner

Larry Phillips, NCACC 2nd VP, Surry County Commissioner

Ellen Reckhow, Durham County Commissioner

Mark Richardson, Rockingham County Commissioner

Ronald Wesson, Bertie County Commissioner

Rob Zapple, New Hanover County Commissioner



*Above:* NCACC Past President and Task Force Chair Kitty Barnes (far left) listens to comments during a meeting of the Strategic Plan Implementation Task Force.



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