

NCACC LONG-RANGE PLANNING AND VISIONING INITIATIVE

Action Planning Summary – October 2005

An action planning group of 32 county commissioners, county managers, NCACC Executive Committee members, and NCACC staff members met on September 22, 2005 at the Aqueduct Conference Center in Chapel Hill to review the proposed strategies and recommend specific actions for adoption by the NCACC Board of Directors. The following table lists the goals and strategies recommended by the action planning group.

| Goals | Strategies |
|---|--|
| Goal 1: Inform and educate the public and the media about county government. | #1 – Help citizens understand county government and how it works. #2 – Share best practices in public information and media relations. #3 – Create a clearinghouse of county information. |
| Goal 2: Strengthen county leadership and board development. | #1 – Create a “board-building” leadership development program. #2 – Share board leadership and development “best practices.” #3 – Develop a continuing education program for commissioners. #4 – Sponsor regional seminars, workshops and training sessions. |
| Goal 3: Redefine the role of counties and the state-county relationship by creating a partnership with the state. | #1 – Engage county and state officials in joint sessions to discuss state and county roles, responsibilities, and relationships. #2 – Create a joint visioning process with the governor, general assembly, school boards, and municipalities for examining the future of North Carolina. #3 – Develop a proactive, collaborative advocacy process to supplement existing advocacy and lobbying efforts. |
| Goal 4: Enhance the ability of county officials to represent counties and NCACC on local and state-wide issues. | #1: Build a grassroots advocacy network using teams of county commissioners and managers. #2 – Inform and educate counties about advocacy issues. #3 – Recognize county diversity but maintain county unity. #4 – Strengthen state and county analysis of policy and legislative impacts. |
| Goal 5: Facilitate regional and intergovernmental collaboration. | #1 – Model collaboration by organizing and convening regular meetings of regional stakeholders. #2 – Forge regional partnerships to strengthen counties’ economic health and quality of life. #3 – Provide information, education, training, and technical assistance to counties in collaborative planning, visioning, and problem-solving. |

The following report summarizes the recommendations of the action planning group, organized around the five core goals listed above. The strategies for each goal (but not actions) are listed in priority order.

GOAL 1: INFORM AND EDUCATE THE PUBLIC AND THE MEDIA ABOUT COUNTY GOVERNMENT.

Strategy #1 – Help citizens understand county government and how it works.

1. Communicate with citizens about how public finance works and how taxes and fees relate to providing services and creating infrastructure.
2. Put together a guide for counties to connect with schools and students.
3. Provide the public with everyday information about how things work, such as the structure and services of county government, county roles and responsibilities, state and federal mandates, and the imitations of government.
4. Share the “good” news about what is happening in counties, e.g., by sending out a one-page list of accomplishments and projects underway with tax notices.
5. Stress “open” government in communication materials and training to demonstrate and exemplify the open and participatory intent of government.
6. Recruit and engage partners in creating an adult civic education initiative to offset negative media coverage, public suspicions of local government, and create grassroots pressure on the legislature.
7. Create talking points and news release templates commissioners can use to talk about county positions and policy issues.
8. Hold “town hall” NCACC board meetings across the state to give local commissioners, citizens, and other public officials a chance to see the NCACC board and learn what they are doing, while at the same time giving state board members a chance to learn more about different parts of the state.

Strategy #2 – Share best practices in public information and media relations.

1. Encourage counties to explore non-traditional methods and outlets in the community for sharing information.
2. Create a tool box of resources, information and material in multiple formats (web, printed, visual and audio) and on multiple issues that can be personalized to an individual county’s circumstances and show counties how to get it out to various audiences using a variety of formats.
3. Provide guides and materials to help counties hold community meetings, public hearings, or create a Youth Council.
4. Research communication and media trends and share that information with counties.
5. Produce short 10-minute video segments on topics such as Medicaid and how to prepare for hurricanes, which can be shown directly or through government access television.
6. Encourage counties to join forces in developing materials and reducing costs.
7. Make greater use of electronic communication for rapid dissemination of information.

Strategy #3 – Create a clearinghouse of county information.

1. Create county profiles with interactive capability.
2. Offer comparative data for counties of similar size.

3. Create a website with a library of resources and links on different topics.
4. Stay on top of emerging issues and trends. Serve as a clearinghouse for county related issues.
5. Create a catalogue of information that could be at the fingertips of managers, PIOs and commissioners.
6. Enhance the current NCACC website with a strong profile of each county and basic information on the roles and services of county government.

GOAL 2: STRENGTHEN COUNTY LEADERSHIP AND BOARD DEVELOPMENT.

Strategy #1 – Create a “board-building” leadership development program.

1. Provide affordable facilitation services for meetings and retreats with new board members to help boards start off on the “right foot.”
2. Develop leadership resources and materials on planning and visioning, cross-jurisdictional meetings, board self-assessment, communication styles and skills, active listening, reflection and feedback, team building and development, personal styles, cooperation, collaboration, conflict, power, influence, negotiation, planning, problem solving, and decision making.
3. Recruit and develop former county managers and commissioners as peer trainers.
4. Develop and make available “trouble-shooting” teams to assist counties.
5. Develop an informal peer mentoring program for new commissioners.

Strategy #2 – Share board leadership and development “best practices.”

1. Serve as a clearinghouse of best education, training, and leadership development practices and share them with counties.
2. Share information from networking events such as regional, state and national conferences.
3. Create a “how-to” resource library for counties to research best practices.
4. Expand the NCACC Ketner Awards Program make best practices available on line.
5. Engage risk management staff in documenting and compiling best practices.

Strategy #3 – Develop a continuing education program for commissioners.

1. Create a better, faster and harder-hitting orientation for new county commissioners that can serve as the foundation for continuing education.
2. Look at existing state association models that provide continuing education and how they use certification, credentialing, or recognition to encourage participation.
3. Emphasize leadership development, effective public communication, governing relationships with managers and staff, roles and functions of county government, and intergovernmental and inter-jurisdictional relationships.

Strategy #4 – Sponsor regional seminars, workshops and training sessions.

1. Partner with Councils of Government (COG) to offer education and training sessions at regional and district meetings.
2. Emphasize training that is easily accessible.
3. Focus regional training on smaller counties with fewer training and development resources.

GOAL 3: REDEFINE THE ROLE OF COUNTIES AND THE STATE-COUNTY RELATIONSHIP BY CREATING A PARTNERSHIP WITH THE STATE.

Strategy #1 – Engage county and state officials in joint sessions to discuss state and county roles, responsibilities, and relationships.

1. Engage state and county officials in discussions about state/county roles, relationships, and services; the changing role of counties; and the increasing metropolitan and urban nature of the state.
2. Train and educate commissioners on the history, evolution, and changing nature of state-county roles and relationships.
3. Engage county commissioners on legislative study committees that impact counties.

Strategy #2 – Create a joint visioning process with the Governor, General Assembly, school boards, and municipalities for examining the future of North Carolina.

1. Develop a proactive, collaborative process for considering and proposing comprehensive structural changes to the current system of county/state governance and taxation. Look at the structure of county government over the next 15-20 years. Talk about how services are provided and how county government is structured
2. Study more issues together. Create a joint strategic view of key “big-picture” issues over the next twenty years with joint assumptions and knowledge, e.g., population growth, transportation, and health care.
3. Support electing legislators to 4-year terms.

Strategy #3 – Develop a proactive, collaborative advocacy process to supplement existing advocacy and lobbying efforts.

1. Develop white papers and “talking points” on issues the NCACC has taken positions on. Propose solutions to joint problems. Help legislators look good.
2. Keep local delegation up-to-date on local issues all year long. Share copies of agendas and other important correspondence. Invite local delegations to special events, dedications and ribbon cuttings. Invite legislators to join county commissioners at regional meetings.
3. Visit General Assembly members right after the election to discuss issues.

GOAL 4: ENHANCE THE ABILITY OF COUNTY OFFICIALS TO REPRESENT COUNTIES AND NCACC ON LOCAL AND STATE-WIDE ISSUES.

Strategy #1: Build a grassroots advocacy network using teams of county commissioners and managers.

1. Develop a “cadre” of county advocates - 50 commissioners and managers who have the potential to represent issues on a state-wide basis. Create an “advocacy and representation” training program for them. Mobilize them on big, state-wide issues.
2. Create an “off-election year” training camp and offer a basic (Legislative Affairs 101) and an advanced program (Advocacy Skills Training).
3. Keep a team of county advocates “on deck” in Raleigh while the General Assembly is in session.
4. Designate a member of each board as a legislative specialist/liaison to keep other board members up to speed.

5. Lobby state agencies and the Governor on common issues, such as preparing for emergencies, routine system maintenance, etc.

Strategy #2 – Inform and educate counties about advocacy issues.

1. Keep counties up-to-date on bill activity. Draft “talking points” papers on key legislation. Develop capacity to get this information in front of county commissioners and managers when NCACC needs calls made to legislators.
2. Create a County Public Issues Program. Select a handful of key public issues each year. Get county-level data and personalize and publish for all counties. Create joint county teams to develop a video component to supplement print materials.
3. Create a website where county commissioners can easily find their legislator’s home phone number, cell phones, Raleigh residence number when calls need to be made.
4. Highlight legislators in County Lines, particularly members of the county coalition. Interview legislators to learn what is going on in their counties and districts. Develop stories for local media. Create a “Legislator of the Week” on the website.

Strategy #3 – Recognize county diversity but maintain county unity.

1. Challenge disagreements among counties. Create a forum for regional interests that might not be statewide, e.g., urban/rural issues, transportation. Help counties keep in mind that unity on issues can overcome a splintered legislature. Bring forum results back to the Board of Directors.
2. Update steering committee assignments to reflect changing county needs.
3. Facilitate coalitions of counties with similar issues, e.g., impact fees. Put resources behind issues that affect all counties. Provide information on legislative issues where it is necessary for counties to be “on the same page.” Build coalitions to strengthen the voice of local governments.

Strategy #4 – Strengthen state and county analysis of policy and legislative impacts.

1. Provide legislators with a more comprehensive information base for use in decision-making by creating a county database to provide disaggregated information on key issues. Ask county managers to identify priority issues at legislative goals conference. Collect and post key county data and indicators on these issues.
2. Develop NCACC and county capacity to conduct fiscal impact analysis of proposed legislation and policy.
3. Create a model to study the fiscal impact of tax loopholes and property exemptions.

GOAL 5: FACILITATE REGIONAL AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL COLLABORATION

Strategy #1 – Model collaboration by organizing and convening regular meetings of regional stakeholders.

1. Sponsor pilot projects that promote intergovernmental cooperation and regional partnerships.
2. Convene joint executive committee meetings with NCLM, NCSBA, COGs, and other associations to discuss cross-cutting issues, such as land use.
3. Institute regular meetings with affiliate organizations rather than waiting until a specific issue arises. Attend affiliate statewide policy and planning meetings. Invite local county board members.

4. Lobby the General Assembly to fund regional strategic plans. Identify legislative obstacles to regional planning and collaboration. Draft legislation and advocate for statutory change to remove barriers.

Strategy #2 – Forge regional partnerships to strengthen counties’ economic health and quality of life.

1. Work with educational associations to identify what schools, community colleges, and counties need to develop an educated population and work force and
2. Enlist partner associations, educational institutions, and local officials and leaders in joining forces to persuade the state to help counties find other sources of revenue to support education, training, and other regional services.
3. Facilitate regional meetings to help local officials and leaders define and discuss regional issues, e.g., bringing health and medical folks, employers, Chambers of Commerce, NCCBI, etc. to the table to begin discussing ways of addressing health and health care challenges.
4. Look for opportunities to create more effective joint advocacy between NCACC and NCSBA with the General Assembly.

Strategy #3 – Provide information, education, training, and technical assistance to counties in collaborative planning, visioning, and problem-solving.

1. Identify and disseminate models and best practices for regional and intergovernmental collaboration. Encourage effective communication among all stakeholders and provide information that crosses jurisdictions and boundaries.
2. Share regional and intergovernmental success stories. Celebrate efforts by counties and other jurisdictions to develop collaborative efforts and partnerships.
3. Provide education, training, and technical assistance to counties in conjunction with the School of Government, e.g., sponsor with NCLM a joint initiative to help commissioners understand the value of zoning, annexation, and joint land-use planning.
4. Engage district directors in sponsoring joint regional forums and use them for collaborative planning and problem solving. Help counties and other stakeholders identify common ground, define objectives, clarify roles and responsibilities of all participants, and ensure equal standing. Invite legislators to forums; place them on agenda. Present information and results from forum at NCACC annual conference. Evaluate effectiveness of joint regional forums and their role.

Prepared by Leading & Governing Associates, October 2005