



Concept for Regional Commission Councilmember Development

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The Georgia Regional Commissions (RCs) exist to assist member local governments by providing required and discretionary services. Since they are organized as member-driven organizations, it is important that representatives serving on the RCs understand their role and responsibility as policy-makers.

Developing stronger councilmembers to serve the Regional Commissions requires additional councilmember development. The Carl Vinson Institute of Government proposes a four-step method: (1) “Orientation to the Regional Commission” Workshop, (2) online tutorials, (3) policy workshops for councilmembers at meetings of the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions, and (4) an internal review process for regional commissions to evaluate effectiveness.

Step One: Orientation to the Regional Commission workshop (6 hour training)

Orientation to Regional Commission workshop will be offered at various locations around the state several times during the calendar year. To promote creativity and the sharing of best practices, councilmembers may register for a location near them and will train with members from other regional commissions. The workshop will be offered as a 3-hour block from 2-5 pm and a second block the next morning from 9 am – 12 pm. The break allows for the participants to reflect on and process information from the first day before tackling the content of the second day. The alternative option is to provide the training in Athens at the University of Georgia allowing for the council members to leave their communities and be focused only on the training away from the distractions of their home community.

The first day will be dedicated to reviewing why the RCs exist and the tasks that each regional commission must accomplish. The second day focuses on how RCs accomplish their work and showcases best practices.

Enrollment for the workshops would be available through the Institute of Government website and links to the training provided on each of the 12 Regional Commissions websites.

Schedule

Day One (2-5 pm):

Why do we exist and What do we do?

1. Overview of O.C.G.A 50-8-30
2. Review of Bylaws
3. Statutory Requirements (must do, may do)
 - a. Streamlined delivery of services
 - b. Equitable, quality service
 - c. Four core regional planning functions
 - d. Discretionary activities
4. Accountability and consequences of failure to meet obligations
 - a. Federal money and sub recipient monitoring
5. How do Regional Commissions create public value?

Day Two (9 am – Noon):

How do we do it?

1. Funding Sources and Financial Statements
2. Management & Best Practices – how do you operate?
3. Committees
4. Ethical Decision Making
5. Implement Work Plan
6. Performance Measures – audit as a scorecard

The following are examples of material to be covered in a section of the training. Full course objectives, learning outcomes, agendas, and materials will require further development.

How Do Regional Commissions Create Public Value?

1. Developing Regional Priorities: Vision, Mission, Core Values, and Goals
 - a. Four Types of Public Values
 - i. Security and Community Cohesiveness
 - ii. Efficiency, Professionalism, and Productivity
 - iii. Social Equity
 - iv. Individual Rights and Freedom
2. Reconciling Politics and Administration
 - a. Aligning Expectations and Contributions of Commissioners and Staff
 - b. Fundamental Considerations of the Political Environment
 - c. Roles of Councilmembers and Staff
 - d. The Function of Councilmember and Staff Communication Styles
3. Special Considerations of Political Decision Making
 - a. Open Meetings/Open Records issues
 - b. Meeting Management
 - i. Rules of Order and Procedure
 - ii. Agenda as mechanism for participation

Funding Sources and Financial Statements

1. Use a RC audited financial statement, create and complete the worksheet for certain elements such as:
 - a. Audit Reports
 - i. Audit opinion – where is it and what to look for
 - ii. Single Audit Requirements, pass-through from state, federal requirements follow
 - iii. Yellow Book Reports, required
 - b. Government-wide vs fund level
 - c. Fund categories
 - d. Asset/liability ratio
 - e. Equity balance – restricted and restricted
 - f. Transfers in/out
 - g. Loans between funds
 - h. Operating revenues > operating expenditures
 - i. Impact of funding streams
 - j. Change in fund balance

- k. Accounts receivable collection
 - l. Capital assets schedule
 - m. Budget to actual – initial budget, final budget, actuals
- 2. Internal Controls
 - a. Framework – COSO and Green Book
 - b. Control environment
 - i. Tone at top
 - ii. Ethics
 - iii. Employee evaluations
 - iv. Policies and procedures
 - v. Job descriptions establish roles and responsibilities
- 3. Financial Performance measures by Georgia Department of Audits and Accounts
 - a. Go over and explain what they mean
 - b. Where are they
 - c. How to calculate them
 - d. How to monitor and build trends over time

Management and Best Practices

- 1. Board Policies, Roles and Responsibilities
 - a. Employing and evaluating an executive director
 - b. Adopting an annual budget and work program
 - c. Establishing committees
 - i. Executive Committee
 - ii. Budget and Finance Committee
 - iii. Audit Committee
 - iv. Personnel Committee
 - v. Nominating Committee
 - vi. Ethics Committee
 - vii. Other Committees as needed
 - d. Selecting an independent auditor
 - e. Adopting and amending its bylaws
 - f. Making rules and regulations for the conduct of its officers
 - g. Making and entering into all contracts necessary or incidental to the performance of its duties and functions
 - h. Contracting for the provision of direct governmental services at the request of and on behalf of local governments, in accordance with the requirements of law
 - i. Acquiring and disposing of real and personal property
 - j. Adopting personnel policies and practices with specific reference to job descriptions and qualifications
 - k. Determining the policies and programs to be implemented and operated by the commission as may be authorized by law

- l. Providing, in addition to compensation, any or all of the following benefits to its employees, their dependents and survivors:
 - i. Retirement
 - ii. Disability
 - iii. Medical, life and hospitalization insurance coverage
 - iv. Sick leave
 - v. Annual leave
 - vi. Military leave
 - vii. Holiday leave
 - viii. Other benefits as deemed appropriate within the authority granted to the commission
 - m. Creating a nonprofit corporation to administer federal or state programs as authorized in O.C.G.A. §50-8-35(f)(1)(A)
 - n. Other powers and duties required or authorized by law
2. Best Practices Examples
 - a. Share best practices of Regional Commissions or Regional Development Councils from the nation

Step Two: Online Tutorials

As an additional resource, the Institute of Government proposes access to an online tutorial library for the board members in topics on finance, state statutes, and funding sources. These tutorials will be available on demand.

- **Tutorial on HB 1216 and its history** – the Institute of Government is designing this custom tutorial now for the Regional Commissions and will interview DCA and Regional Commission Executive Directors to add to the narrative. Utilizing a team of instructional technology graduate students from the UGA College of Education, this course will be complete by the end of April.

These tutorials could be available now to Regional Commission council members through the Institute of Government.

1. **Understanding Bases of Accounting** – An interactive participant-driven tutorial defining the term, “basis of accounting” and explaining the differences between accrual and modified accrual bases of accounting. Regional Commission audited financial statements include financial information determined by both of these bases of accounting. Therefore, an understanding of the Basis of Accounting is essential to interpreting financial statements.
2. **Fund Accounting** – An interactive participant-driven tutorial that defines what a fund is, provides an overview of fund structure as defined by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB), and classifies the eleven generic fund types within the three categories of funds. Fund accounting is fundamental to those financial statements required to be prepared based on

GASB accounting standards. Therefore, an understanding of Fund Accounting is essential to interpreting a Regional Commission's financial statements.

3. **Major Funds** – An interactive participant-driven tutorial defining major and nonmajor funds and providing an in-depth discussion of the major fund selection and reporting criteria. Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) accounting and financial reporting standards require the selection of and the presentment of financial information based on a mathematical calculation of determining major and nonmajor funds. Therefore, an understanding of what comprises a major fund is essential to preparation of financial statements in accordance with generally accepted governmental accounting and auditing standards.
4. **Measurement Focus** – An interactive participant-driven tutorial defining the term “measurement focus” and comparing the recording of financial transactions using both the current financial resources measurement focus and the economic resources measurement focus. Regional Commission audited financial statements include financial information from both of these measurement foci. Therefore, an understanding of differences between the two measurement foci is essential to the preparation of and the interpretation of those financial statements.
5. **Statements of Position** – An interactive participant-driven tutorial presenting elements of both a governmental fund and a proprietary fund's statement of position as required by accounting standards prescribed by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB). Since a Regional Commission must prepare statements of position for both of these fund categories, it is essential to understand the format and elements of each.
6. **Operating Statements** – An interactive participant-driven tutorial presenting elements of both a governmental fund and a proprietary fund's operating statement as required by accounting standards prescribed by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB). Since a Regional Commission must prepare operating statements for both of these fund categories, it is essential to understand the format and elements of each.
7. **Grant Calculations** – An interactive participant-driven tutorial providing guidance of calculating grant revenues, grant receivables and unearned revenues, as required by accounting standards prescribed by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB). Regional Commissions receive millions in federal and state grants. Therefore, knowing how to correctly calculate grant revenues, receivables and unearned revenues ensures correct financial statement information.

The following tutorials are proposed and recommended for Regional Commission training. A completion date is not known, but can be set if the tutorials are determined to be part of the training mix:

1. **Capital Assets** – An interactive participant-driven tutorial defining capital assets, illustrating necessary elements of tracking each capital asset, and providing presentation examples for governmental fund financial statements, proprietary fund financial statements and government-wide financial statements. Capital assets comprise approximately 50% of a Regional Commission’s Government-Wide Statement of Net Position. Therefore, it is essential for Regional Commission Board Members and financial staff to understand the accounting and reporting standards as prescribed by the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB) relating to capital assets.
2. **Financial Performance Measures** – An interactive participant-driven tutorial explaining the performance measures contained in the Regional Commissions’ Performance Audits and how to calculate those performance measures. This tutorial recaps and supplements the training received in the Orientation to the Regional Commission Workshop. By providing immediate, on-call access to the financial calculations through this tutorial, a much higher performance audit success rate can be achieved.
3. **Financial Policies** – An interactive participant-driven tutorial defining financial policies, in general, outlining steps involved in policy development, and providing examples of more common financial policies that should be developed by all Regional Commissions. Creating found financial policies improves awareness of financial condition, improves public confidence and helps to prepare for a financial emergency.
4. **Internal Controls** – An interactive participant-driven tutorial defining internal controls and emphasizing the five components and 17 principles necessary to create an effective system of internal controls. Federal and State grants comprise a significant portion of a Regional Commission’s governmental fund revenues. Familiarity with federal single audit requirements relating to internal control is essential to ensuring reporting requirements are met.
5. **Open Meetings, Open Records, and Records Management -**
This course familiarizes Regional Commission Council members with Georgia’s open meetings and open records laws and the potential consequences for failing to adhere to them. Hypothetical scenarios are used to give participants a better understanding of their responsibilities and obligations for complying with these statutes. The course will also focus on the elements of a strong records management and open records program.
6. **Effective Meeting Management -**
The course is intended for Regional Commission council members who want to make their meetings run more smoothly, efficiently, in a manner that minimizes unnecessary conflict, and which affirms the tenets of democratic governance and meaningful public participation in decision-making. Upon completion of the course, participants will have a basic knowledge of parliamentary procedure, how to effectively plan for meetings in advance,

strategies for conducting successful meetings, the roles and responsibilities of the meeting chairman, and how to deal with conflicts and disruptive behaviors in public meetings.

7. Understanding Your By-laws -

As a council member what do you need to know to be able to operate on this new board? Learning your by-laws and understanding what they mean is explained in this tutorial. Participants are introduced to model by-laws and encouraged to review their Regional Commission's by-laws during the tutorial.

Step Three: Policy Workshops for Councilmembers at the Georgia Association of Regional Commissions Conference

In order to provide continuing education for councilmembers, the Institute of Government proposes the offering of 3-hour workshops at the GARC annual conference each year. These workshops allow councilmembers to focus their additional learning around policy and councilmember roles and responsibilities. Proposed topics for 3-hour sessions include:

1. Organization and Management: Policy Making and Implementation -

Regions and communities have tremendous challenges facing them today. In responding to these challenges, new policies are developed and implemented. This course will explore how policy is made at the regional and local levels, different policymaking models, policy implementation and evaluation, and theories and models of management and administration.

2. Council and Staff Relations: Roles, Functions, and Responsibilities -

Regional Commissions need both good policies and good administration to be effective. This course explores the unique perspectives of Regional Commission Council members and staff and how a greater understanding of these different approaches to public service delivery can improve how each works with the other on behalf of citizens. Role expectations in different environments and situations, identifying the distinction between policy and administration, how a greater understanding of each other's perspectives can reduce friction and misunderstanding and result in improved public service delivery.

3. Workforce Development -

Workforce development can and should be understood broadly; in a way that goes beyond jobs. It sits at the heart of economic development strategies. While the desired outcome is jobs, it is important that council members recognize workforce development is a tool that assists in the fulfillment of the region's aim to provide health, safety, and welfare to citizens. Participants in this interactive course will gain knowledge about the many ways workforce development may be achieved with an emphasis on policy setting and

collaborative roles. They will also learn of available data and resources as well as community success stories in Georgia and around the country.

4. Economic Development -

Economic development is a central theme for all communities – large, medium, and small, and urban, suburban, and rural. This course will explore the regional role in economic development, the roles of private and non-profit entities, strategies, tools, and best practices, identification of a region's assets, the economic development process and key components of an economic development plan, identifying regional partners, and basic tools and approaches available to develop a region's economic development plan.

5. Comprehensive and Regional Planning -

This course examines the difficult choices regions encounter in stimulating economic well-being, protecting public infrastructure investment, and maintaining environmental integrity. It examines legal considerations for planning and zoning, the role of the Regional Commissions, and practical steps for developing and implementing a comprehensive plan and effective zoning procedures. In addition, the course highlights issues, barriers and policy solutions associated with efforts to achieve desirable patterns of development.

6. The AAA – Area Agency on Aging–

Understanding the role of the Regional Commission in providing support to the AAAs of the state is covered in this workshop. Participants learn about the structure of the AAA, funding sources, and policy implications. Performance measures are also covered.

7. Intergovernmental Agreements and Private Partnerships -

Intergovernmental agreements and private partnerships oftentimes offer the opportunity to more wisely use scarce resources while providing services that local governments could not offer alone. In this course, participants will come to better understand and recognize the facilitating role of the Regional Commissions with regard to intergovernmental agreements and private partnerships. Participants will increase their knowledge regarding intergovernmental agreements and private partnerships in order to maximize cost efficiencies and effectiveness in the delivery of services and understand the “good and the bad” through actual examples.

8. Environmental Management -

This course examines how unmanaged growth impacts fiscal, natural and other community resources; how Regional Commissions working in concert with local governments can exert meaningful direction over how their region grows with basic tools and planning. This course explores the environmental issues the State of Georgia currently faces, such as water quality and quantity, energy conservation, air quality and the handling of solid and hazardous waste. Participants will learn what communities and regions are doing to address these environmental challenges and how to get citizens engaged.

9. Strengthening Your Region through Children and Families -

This course examines how the well-being of children and families affects the success of community and economic development. The course reviews trends in Georgia and identifies specific strategies that officials can implement in

their own communities. “Family Connections” and other state-run programs aimed at reducing the number of at-risk youth and juvenile delinquents are addressed. Problem issues such as teen pregnancies, truancy and teen drug and alcohol use are also discussed.

10. Effective Use of GIS in Planning -

Geographic Information Systems (GIS) support regional planning with mapping and data products. GIS is a rapidly evolving technology involving computers, mapping information, and people to help analyze and plan for the future. Participants will learn how to maximize the use of GIS in their regions.

11. Examining Regional Commission Powers -

Understand the discretionary powers of the Regional Commissions and services that RCs can provide to their member governments. Participants will explore innovative approaches to regional planning and service delivery.

12. Community and Media Relations -

This course examines the importance of building effective working relationships with the media and the role the media plays in informing the public and shaping their opinion. Advice for repairing poor relationships is provided, along with insights on when and how to speak with bloggers, journalists, and the community reporters, especially during times of crisis.

13. Financial Policies -

Participants will learn to define financial policies and recall why financial policies are important, identify common characteristics of effective financial policies, describe the steps involved in financial policy development, and develop strong financial policies for the Regional Commission.

14. Internal Financial Controls -

This course helps participants define internal financial controls, identify the five interrelated components of an effective internal control structure, and discuss the 17 principles within the five interrelated components.

15. Understanding Financial Statements -

This course guides participants to the ability to define “Statements of Position” and describe the elements of a governmental fund and a proprietary fund statement of position, to define “Operating Statement” and describe the elements of a governmental fund and a proprietary fund operating statement, to describe the purpose of an operating statement, and to identify balance sheets, statements of net position and operating statements of the different fund categories.

16. Overview of Audited Financial Statements -

This course helps participants learn to compare a Comprehensive Annual Financial Statements (CARF) to other types of issued audit reports, locate the audit opinion in audited financial statements, determine if the audit opinion is a desirable or less than desirable opinion, identify the auditor’s responsibility and management’s responsibility of the financial statements, describe other reports required for those receiving federal grants, and locate audit findings and examine the elements of those findings as required by Government Auditing Standards

Step Four: An Internal Review Process for Regional Commissions to Evaluate Effectiveness

It is proposed the RC Executive Directors develop a process to verify and substantiate the quality of work and operational components occurring at the 12 Regional Commission locations in Georgia. The rationale for this process is to position the Regional Commissions as a *network* proactively engaged in a self-initiated accreditation process to: (1) guide the development and review of performance standards developed by the network, (2) provide criteria for measuring quality of delivery of service to counties and municipalities, and (3) build capacity across all Regional Commissions.

The plan would include a self-assessment process conducted annually by each Regional Commission and an onsite review conducted once every three years by a team of 5 professionals composed of RC Executive Directors, regional commission staff and stakeholders. The annual self-assessment process and the triennial onsite review would validate key work areas such as coordinated planning, aging services, coordinated transportation, other services and the operational components of financial, customer, learning and growth, and internal business process.

Timeline and Metrics

Timeline for training for board members

1. January – feedback on draft concept presented by the Institute of Government
2. February – approval of the training curriculum with Executive Directors
3. March – April – course design and development
4. May-August – hold the pilot class(es)
5. November - Annual Conference for GARC
 - a. Rollout the new curriculum with feedback from pilot course
 - b. Hold at least one policy session training for council members at GARC
 - c. Announce schedule for 2017 training classes in regions.

Performance metrics for training

- 100% of executive committee from each Regional Commission complete Orientation workshop (committee chairs and officers)
- 65% participation of all commission councilmembers in each regional commission in Orientation workshop.