



Faculty Lunches with the Dean (No. 19) (Rick Morse)

Author : Mike Smith

Categories : [Uncategorized](#)

Date : May 14, 2017



The most recent lunch in this series included Rick Morse, who talked about working on a new book that was just released—[Citizens Academy Handbook](#). One part of Rick's ongoing research is civic engagement, and a few years ago he started learning about citizens academies as a new and innovative approach to civic engagement by a growing number of local governments. The academies are educational programs aimed at creating better and more informed citizens. Rick started his inquiry in 2011 and found that there was little information about these academies and no academic research. The NC City-County Management Association has an active civic education committee, and they gave him some early seed money.





Rick Morse

One reason it made sense for Rick to look at citizens academies is because some of the most successful and longest-running programs are located in North Carolina—Concord, Cary, Greensboro, and Durham. He found that these academies were demonstrating impressive results in building civic infrastructure in communities. For example, in many places the graduates of these academies become a pipeline for continued engagement through local government boards and advisory committees. The graduates also can be pulled together as a focus group of well-informed citizens when a local government is looking for feedback on issues facing the community. Academy graduates in some cases also have been inspired to run for local elected office.

Rick's research gradually moved him in the direction of the Citizens Academy Handbook. He created [a microsite on academies](#) that includes a database of programs from around the country. The site is a clearinghouse of information intended to create a community of practice for local government practitioners working with citizens academies. Rick also has published an article in *Public Performance and Management Review*, and last year he conducted a survey of participants that he hopes will lead to more publications.



The *Citizens Academy Handbook* is a practitioner guide for public officials who are considering an academy and for the staff members who run them. It is filled with nuts-and-bolts advice on all aspects of program planning and delivery, profiles of successful programs, sample materials, and spotlights on innovative practices. Rick was able to complete the *Handbook* thanks to the substantial contributions of two former MPA graduate assistants, Michelle Holder and Sabrina Willard. He generously listed them as co-authors. In fact, the project helped Michelle land her first job as a management analyst with the City of Aspen, Colorado—where one of her duties is coordinator for their citizens academy.

Many of the School's publications are focused on North Carolina and they are not relevant for a national audience. That is not the case with the *Handbook*. It relies on a number of North Carolina examples, but it also includes examples from many other states and is relevant for public officials in any community. It prompted a conversation during the lunch about our ability to market publications that might have a national audience. Rick came away with an impression that we are negative about including publications on Amazon, but it wasn't clear to him why that was the case. This question may be one we have to consider more carefully as we develop more publications that have a national application.



Sabrina Willard



Michelle Holder