



## Partnerships and Collaboration

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I want to mention a trend that I am seeing with some of the School's most important partners.

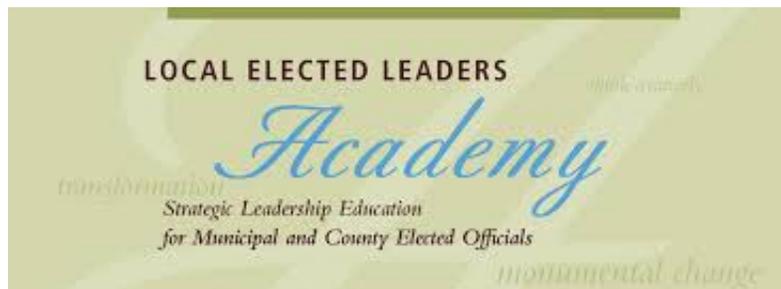
Let me start with a little background. Three of our leading institutional partners are the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), the NC League of Municipalities (NCLM), and the NC Association of County Commissioners (NCACC).

Courts. North Carolina has a unified state court system and all of its officials are state employees. We have a contract with the AOC that covers the cost of providing our training and publications for most court officials. The AOC generally covers travel expenses for court officials who attend our training.



Cities and Counties. Our work with cities and counties is structured very differently. Faculty members provide programs and write publications for different audiences of local officials, and each city and county separately decides whether to pay for training and publications. They also decide independently whether to pay their local government membership dues. We have not traditionally worked with NCLM and NCACC in planning our training for municipal and county officials other than elected officials.

We partner closely with the NCLM and NCACC—the professional associations for city and county elected officials—on programs for their members. In addition to our *Essentials* programs for newly-elected officials, we responded to a joint request from NCLM and NCACC years ago to develop programs on leadership and other topics for their veteran elected officials. This work comes under the umbrella of the [Local Elected Leaders Academy](#), which is a recognition program that encourages a commitment to lifelong learning and professional development. City and county elected officials earn credit toward different levels of recognition by attending School programs, association conferences, and through participation in various other programs and activities.



Here's the trend. In each case, and in slightly different ways, the leaders of the AOC (Judge Marion Warren), NCLM (Paul Meyer), and NCACC (Kevin Leonard) are seeking greater involvement in determining the content and delivery of programs for their constituents—also our clients. In some cases they are interested in offering their own training, including leadership training, as well as other services—such as the facilitation of meetings with local governing boards.



Paul Meyer

I have been talking separately with the leader of each organization at their request, and each one brings different interests and experiences to the conversation. All of them see training as critical to the professional development of their different constituents. That is a good thing. They also see themselves as our partners—also a good thing.

As partners, and as customers for our services, however, they are seeking greater input into the training offered for their constituents by the School. They recognize that there has been input in the past, but also that they and their predecessors generally have been passive and perhaps overly deferential to our ideas about training. Our partnerships going forward are likely to include more conversations with the leaders of these organizations at the outset about the goals of our training programs and greater give-and-take about particular courses. In other words, each relationship will be more of a true partnership that includes all of the challenges associated with genuine collaboration, and each relationship may be slightly different.



Kevin Leonard

I decided to write this post because some people already are anxious and defensive about this interest by our partners in greater involvement. There are lots of issues to be worked out as we move forward with future conversations, and there will be questions about how to navigate our relationships with individual clients groups and with the AOC, NCACC, and NCLM.

This trend may require us to get even clearer about what we are trying to accomplish through our training and other services. How do we align our vision of continuing education with the visions of the leaders of these organizations? I am optimistic that we will end up in a good place as long as we approach this trend with clear communication about our interests and a willingness to listen to our clients. We need to learn more about their interests with an open mind and see how they align with our own interests. My caution is against automatically seeing this trend as competition, or necessarily even seeing all competition as bad.



Judge Marion Warren

I had a good conversation with the Dean's Advisory Council about this question a few weeks ago. Most people said they are not seeing changes along these lines with their individual local government client groups. But there were exceptions consistent with the trend that I have identified. A leader for one client group has been pushing strongly for more online educational offerings (budget officials), however, and another long-time partner (the Local Government Commission) is offering basic training through community colleges for finance officers in jurisdictions with financial troubles. The LGC talked with us about the new training and they see it as preparing certain officials for our introductory finance course rather than competition.

I have had several interesting and wide-ranging conversations with Judge Warren, and Jeff Welty as Director of the Judicial College will be involved in those conversations going forward. Peg Carlson as Director of the Center for Public Leadership is organizing meetings with NCLM and NCACC to talk about their interests in leadership training and any other issues around their relationship with the School. As I said earlier, it is possible that each organization ultimately will have a slightly different set of interests that translates into different kinds of partnerships with the School. It is too early to know where these conversations will lead and at this point I mostly want you to know that they are happening.





This all feels like a natural evolution in our relationship with key partners, and I am optimistic that it will end up in a good place for everyone. At the same time I think we need to be thoughtful in clarifying our own interests and in bringing our expertise as professional educators to the conversation. The DAC didn't think we needed a face-to-face meeting with faculty members to discuss this trend. Let me know if you see it differently. Please share your thoughts and feedback about this set of issues.

