

# THE COLUMN

Newsletter of  
the Virginia Institute  
of Government

Fall 2007

## INSIDE

### Online Compensation Survey System

Now accepting  
subscriptions

2

### EBIS

Information network  
reaches milestone

2

### Training Seminars Fall 2007

Wednesday Series runs  
through December  
Germanna & Lord Fairfax  
Community Colleges  
offer local government  
academies

3

### Cooper Center News

Sorensen Institute holds  
Southside speaker series

Demographics &  
Workforce Section to  
advise Census Bureau

4

## Williamsburg Promotes Ethics in Government

JACKSON C. TUTTLE

**N**ext year will mark the 100th anniversary of a local government experiment that began in Staunton, Virginia. The council-manager form of government was established in reaction to the worst excesses of political control: patronage, corruption, incompetence, and inferior governance.

Then, it was all about ethics.

Today, it is still all about ethics — those personal and organizational standards of conduct that arise out of deeply felt notions of public trust and public service. In the words of the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) Code of Ethics we, as managers, must

- “Be dedicated to the concepts of effective and democratic local government ...,”
- “Affirm the dignity and worth of government services ...,” and
- “Be dedicated to the highest ideals of honor and integrity in all public and personal relationships.”

As ICMA/Virginia Local Government Management Association (VLGMA) members, we continually look to ourselves and our city, town, and county organizations asking: How well do we measure up against those high ideals? We realize, from sometimes painful experience in the bright lights of press and citizen scrutiny, that we live and die by our reputations. Public confidence is easily lost and difficult to rebuild. We realize that every day everyone we work with makes ethical choices, which define the whole; the ethical group culture either promotes or pulls down good individual behavior.

With so much at stake, VLGMA/ICMA members know that we cannot go about our jobs just hoping nothing bad happens.

We need a disciplined approach to promoting what is right and deterring what is wrong, both personally and within our organizations.

We cannot be so sure of our ethical judgment as to leave it on autopilot. Here are three safeguards to help keep you on course:

- 1. Consultation** Discuss difficult choices with colleagues — in fact, keeping a questionable ethical decision to yourself is a red flag.
- 2. Newspaper Test** Ask yourself: If the facts of this situation were accurately and fairly reported in tomorrow’s paper, would it embarrass my local government or call my integrity into question? Taking the test forces you to step back and get an objective snapshot.
- 3. Humility** Recognize that you *can* get it wrong. This is especially true for people who normally get it right.

What are we doing in the city of Williamsburg to get it right?

This June, I formed a workgroup of thirteen employees from every department to take a close look at ethics in Williamsburg’s city government. The group’s assignments fell under three categories: assessment — to evaluate the city’s ethical culture; articulation — to recommend a new code of ethics; and education — to develop and implement an ongoing ethics awareness program.

The assessment team has already conducted four focus groups of employees from throughout city government. The team found that knowledge and awareness of our existing ethics policy is weak and that many of the city’s written ethical standards of conduct are vague. For example, it is clear that the standard disallowing personal use of city property is not being followed.

*continued on page 2*

*“...unless we make employees aware of ethical issues through an ongoing educational program, written codes mean little. Obviously, employee orientation is a good place to start, but ethics needs career-long reinforcing.”*

*“At the beginning of the 20th century, ethical concerns prompted a radical change in the way municipalities were governed. As today’s headlines show, however, this change did not eliminate the need for each of us to continually foster a culture of ethical behavior in our organizations.”*

## Williamsburg

*continued from page 1*

In one department, city tools, e.g., a post hole digger, are occasionally checked out on weekends for personal use. Employees were surprised to learn that there is a rule against this and saw no reason to stop the practice, which they consider a fringe benefit. On the other hand, employees in other departments were surprised that anyone would even consider borrowing city equipment. Clearly, we have a disconnect between policy and practice, and the gap needs to be closed. The assessment team believes that the city of Williamsburg is overall a principled and ethical organization, but more needs to be done.

Based on the assessment team’s findings, the articulation team has drafted a revised set of values and standards. Their challenge was to write standards that are neither too vague and general nor overly detailed and specific. The entire workgroup is now grappling with how to apply the amended principles to the everyday choices that confront city employees.

Finally, unless we make employees aware of ethical issues through an ongoing educational program, written codes mean little. Obviously, employee orientation is a good place to start, but ethics needs career-long reinforcing.

In the end we must all be engaged in a preemptive effort to promote an ethical culture in our city, town, and county governments — before a scandal forces us to do so.

Staunton’s 1908 experiment caught on quickly. By 1915, the National Municipal League had adopted the council-manager plan as its model city charter. Today, sixty percent of large U.S. municipalities operate under this plan, as do most Virginia localities.

At the beginning of the 20th century, ethical concerns prompted a radical change in the way municipalities were governed. As today’s headlines show, however, this change did not eliminate the need for each of us to continually foster a culture of ethical behavior in our organizations.

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*The author is city manager of Williamsburg. Contact him at [jctuttle@williamsburgva.gov](mailto:jctuttle@williamsburgva.gov) or 757/220-6100.*

## EBIS Reaches Milestone

The Institute’s Email Broadcast Information Service recently handled its 2,500th local government topic. Since each inquiry generates an average of 11 responses, the library of local government information now contains 27,500 entries. Only Institute members can submit inquiries, but responses are welcome from members and non-members. If your locality is not receiving the Institute’s broadcast inquiries, please designate a contact person whose name we will add to the listserv. EBIS will save your locality countless hours of staff time.

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Contact Tedd Povar at [tep3e@virginia.edu](mailto:tep3e@virginia.edu) or 804/371-0202.



## Compensation Survey System (CSS)

The CSS, which allows subscribers to quickly and easily compare salary scales and benefits online, has just completed its first fully self-supporting year. 139 entities subscribed to the system in FY 2007, and the FY 2008 renewal rate so far is strong. The Institute is pleased with the level of participation in the CSS.

Two features have been added to the system recently:

1. You can subscribe an individual as “read-only” (unable to make data entries or changes).
2. A skilled CSS user is available to assist you with inputting or updating data.

The CSS welcomes all Virginia local governments, public service authorities, libraries, social services departments, and similar entities. Institute members receive a 10 percent discount on their subscriptions.

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Contact Tedd Povar at [tep3e@virginia.edu](mailto:tep3e@virginia.edu) or 804/371-0202.



**VIRGINIA**  
INSTITUTE OF  
GOVERNMENT

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WELDON COOPER  
CENTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE  
University of Virginia

**VIRGINIA INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT TRAINING PROGRAMS**

**WEDNESDAY SERIES FALL 2007**

*In partnership with Chesterfield County*

Classes are held at U.Va.'s Richmond Center from 8:30 am - 3:30 pm. Registration fee: \$100 per person. Lunch and materials included. Discount: for every three registrants from the same organization, the fourth person can attend at no cost (all registrations must be submitted together for the same class).

Contact Jessica Smith at  
jessicasmith@virginia.edu or 804/371-0202,  
or visit [www.VaInstituteofGovernment.org](http://www.VaInstituteofGovernment.org)

**Teamwork Skills and Group Dynamics**

NOVEMBER 14, 2007

**WHO SHOULD ATTEND**

Front line, supervisory, management — anyone who wants groups to be more productive; not exclusive to team leaders

**AFTER COMPLETING THIS SEMINAR, YOU WILL BE ABLE TO**

- Lead or participate in teams more effectively
- Describe the interpersonal skills required for effective teamwork
- Identify the different stages of group development
- Determine strategies for creating strong teams
- Clarify when and how to intervene when problems arise

**Succeeding as a First-Time Supervisor**

DECEMBER 5, 2007

**WHO SHOULD ATTEND**

Those who are new to a supervisory role, oversee the work of one or more employees, and wish to increase their knowledge and skills as first-time leaders

**THIS SEMINAR WILL PROVIDE YOU WITH**

- Strategies for delegating effectively
- Approaches for fostering initiative, risk taking, and trust
- Techniques for problem solving, decision making, and conflict management
- Methods for motivating, rewarding, and recognizing employees
- Principles of setting performance expectations, monitoring performance, and establishing a progressive discipline program
- Latest changes in employment laws

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACADEMY**

*In partnership with Germanna Community College, Rappahannock Area Development Commission, town of Culpeper, and counties of Henrico and Chesterfield*

**2007 Fall Semester**

Classes held on the Fredericksburg campus of Germanna Community College.

Contact Susan Brown at  
sbrown@gcc.vccs.edu, or 540/891-3012, or  
visit [www.germanna.edu/workforce/](http://www.germanna.edu/workforce/)

**FOR THOSE IN A SUPERVISORY OR LEADERSHIP ROLE**

**Train the Trainer**

MONDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2007

**Behavioral Interviewing, Part II**

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2007

**Writing Accurate and Defensible Performance Evaluations, Part II**

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2007

**FOR ALL EMPLOYEES**

**Writing for Effect**

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2007

**Whale Done: The Power of Positive Relationships**

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2007

**Lord Fairfax Community College Offers Classes for Local Governments**

Lord Fairfax Community College is offering a series of classes this fall designed for local government employees in its service region (Northern Shenandoah/Rappahannock).

Classes run through mid-November at all three Lord Fairfax CC campuses in Middletown, Warrenton, and Luray. Topics include

- Leadership and Supervision
- Human Resources Law
- Environmental Regulations
- Emergency Management
- Spanish
- Customer Service
- Welding

Contact Bill Pence at [bpence@lfcc.edu](mailto:bpence@lfcc.edu) or 540/868-7061. To download brochure, visit [www.lfccworkforce.com/schedule.cfm](http://www.lfccworkforce.com/schedule.cfm)

UPCOMING SEMINARS  
FALL 2007

LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
ACADEMY

Germanna CC

Contact Susan Brown  
sbrown@gcc.vccs.edu

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
EMPLOYEE DEVELOP-  
MENT ACADEMY

Lord Fairfax CC

Contact Bill Pence  
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WEDNESDAY SERIES  
Richmond

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jessicasmith@virginia.edu

804/371-0202

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Sorensen Brings New  
Series to Southside

The Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership is hosting a new speaker series that explores leadership and public service opportunities in Southside Virginia. The six-part Southside Public Leadership Series is funded by the E. Stuart James Grant Charitable Trust.

Upcoming speakers this fall:

- Paul Harris, former Virginia Delegate and former deputy associate attorney general for the Justice Department (October 24)
- Chris Gates, executive director of Philanthropy for Active Civic Engagement and former director of the National Civic League (December 6)

The series, held in Danville, continues through May 2008.



Contact Amber Capron at  
anc4k@virginia.edu or 434/982-5234.  
Visit [www.sorenseninstitute.org](http://www.sorenseninstitute.org)

Demographics and  
Workforce Section To  
Advise U.S. Census

The United States Census Bureau has awarded U.Va. a federal grant to provide research and advice on improving federal population estimates. The Cooper Center's Demographics and Workforce Section was one of only five agencies nationwide selected to participate in the project.

The center's research will help the bureau improve its methodology for county population estimates after 2010. The center's estimates for Virginia localities have been evaluated by the bureau to be more accurate than its own.

"This is not the first time that our expertise has been recognized by the Census Bureau," said Qian Cai, director of the Demographics Section and lead project investigator.



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or 434/982-5581.