Building a STATE OF EXCELLENCE

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Support Our Mission

The University of Georgia
Building a **STATE OF EXCELLENCE**

**Director’s Message**

What does it mean to pursue a state of excellence? That is the driving question for us at the Carl Vinson Institute of Government as we work every day throughout the great state of Georgia. The dedicated faculty and staff at the Institute are constantly looking for opportunities to partner with governments around Georgia in preparing communities for growth and helping them achieve their individual vision for the future, whatever it may be.

In 2012, the Institute engaged in a number of initiatives focused on helping governments find new ways of addressing challenges and being proactive in creating and taking advantage of opportunities. More is being asked of our state and local governments to help communities thrive in evolving economic and political circumstances. Through hands-on technical assistance, customized applied research, and training and professional development for thousands of officials and staff, we helped governments serve people and improve quality of life in their areas.

The work of the Institute of Government in Georgia in 2012 not only had an impact on what governments around the state were able to do for their constituents in the present but also laid the groundwork for sustainable excellence into the future. The Institute helped make the state more prosperous by working with governments to promote economic development. It collaborated with agencies and departments to make their organizations more dynamic in the face of change. The Institute helped make Georgia a more connected state by facilitating important relationships both at home and abroad. Institute faculty and staff worked to enhance efficiency in the state with assistance in improving organizational management. Last but certainly not least, the Institute partnered with governments to find innovative solutions in an increasingly competitive environment.

There is no question that Georgia is a state on the move. One of the great pleasures of my position as director of the Institute is to be able to meet many individuals in governments around Georgia striving to find new and better ways to serve the public. At the Institute of Government, we continue to provide the services and training that governments in the state rely on, and we look forward to partnering with governments to engage in creative approaches to building a state of excellence together.

Laura Meadows  
Director

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**Building a Prosperous State**

The state of Georgia and its communities are well poised to engage competitively in growing state and local economies and attracting jobs. Everyone agrees that we must think diligently about the steps our communities and governments should take to ensure that the future remains bright and Georgia continues to thrive economically. The Institute of Government was active around the state in 2012, working with cities, counties, and state agencies to provide the information and assistance that help them make knowledgeable decisions about ways to promote prosperity and competitiveness.

Institute researchers worked closely with the Department of Education and the Georgia Chamber of Commerce to assist in the redesign of the state’s high school Career, Technical, and Agricultural Education (CTAE) curriculum with the goal of getting students college- and career-ready before graduation. The Institute conducted a series of surveys of businesses throughout the state to discover what skills and knowledge are in demand in Georgia’s workforce. The resulting report will help DOE emphasize those skills and prepare students in ways that fulfill the needs of the state’s labor market.

Institute of Government faculty have also helped a number of communities set goals and action plans for economic development through strategic planning. In 2012, Institute facilitators teamed up with Athens–Clarke County to engage in an in-depth strategic planning process at the request of the mayor. The Institute helped manage meetings for the Citizen Economic Development Task Force and lead its visioning process. The Institute also produced a final report describing the vision created by the task force and strategies for accomplishing the community goals laid out.

Another important consideration in economic development—access to transportation—was explored when the Institute conducted a study for the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) and provided a report detailing the labor market impact of Atlanta’s mass transit system. The Institute’s Wes Clarke estimated the number of jobs created by MARTA’s operation in addition to the economic activity generated. The report also examined the importance of MARTA in expanding labor market mobility in the metro area, which allows employers to draw from a greater number of potential workers with diverse skill sets.
Building a Dynamic State

Georgia is a state on the move. Communities around Georgia are experiencing transitions in their economies, populations, environments, and more. At the Institute of Government, we provide government leaders with the information and tools they can use to be responsive in the face of change and proactive and forward-thinking with their planning.

Understanding population shifts that are under way and expected in the future is critically important for governments that are implementing new policies and evaluating service delivery strategies. The Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia (USG)—which oversees the state’s 31 public colleges and universities—was keenly aware of its need to have a clear picture of Georgia’s growing and diverse population. It called on the Institute’s demographer, Matt Hauer, to develop enrollment projections for each of the USG institutions looking 10 years into the future. The Board of Regents was able to include Hauer’s estimates about upcoming growth in student enrollment in the development of its strategic plan.

The City of Tybee Island partnered with the Institute, Georgia Sea Grant, the UGA College of Environment and Design, the Department of Natural Resources, and Chatham-Savannah Metropolitan Planning Commission in 2012 to take a long-range look at the challenges presented by sea level rise in the community. Historic records have shown a continuous increase in the average level of tides in the area, which are further exacerbated certain times of the year when waters encroach on city infrastructure and personal property. Risks posed by further sea level rise include intense storm surge, flooded roads, damaged water treatment facilities, and more. Institute environmental researcher Jason Evans and his colleagues used advanced technology to project the amount of sea level rise likely to occur on Tybee Island and identify at-risk land and assets. They then used cost-benefit analysis programs to assess a number of different mitigation strategies that the city could deploy in order to help it find the most efficient and effective options.

Noting the complexity of many of the issues faced by local governments, the Institute of Government and the Association County Commissioners of Georgia redesigned their county commissioner certification program in 2012 to better reflect the skills and knowledge needed by today’s elected officials. The new Lifelong Learning Academy is a three-level program that combines a uniform core education, specialized focus areas, and continuing professional development. Achieving Core Certification requires completing courses that cover the fundamentals of county governance, including law, finance, human resources, and economic development. Specialty Level Certification gives officials the opportunity to deepen their studies in a particular area of interest, such as operations and management, revenue and finance, or intergovernmental relations. The Lifelong Learning Academy’s continuing education requirement ensures that officials remain current about new trends and ideas in the dynamic world of county governance.
Building a **Connected State**

The Institute of Government works with governments large and small to help them build strong connections with the people they serve. The state of Georgia is also connected with the rest of the country and the world—and not only through our bustling ports, roads, and airports. Relationships that reach across governments and borders are making Georgia an exciting place to live and do business. The Institute helps facilitate the connections between individuals and governments in Georgia and important actors outside the state in a number of ways.

Understanding the connections between governments and constituents was the topic of a groundbreaking study on civic engagement begun by the Institute in 2012. Along with partners from Georgia Forward, the Family Connection Partnership, the National Conference on Citizenship, and a number of community foundations, Institute researchers set out to develop the first comprehensive picture of the level of civic engagement in the state. Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, researchers gained a better understanding of citizen participation in areas such as voter participation, volunteerism, and political awareness. Researchers further examined the data by race, age, and community characteristics, such as urban/rural status. The final report, now available, will help communities understand current levels of civic engagement and set goals for improvement against the baseline.

In 2012, the Institute’s International Center hosted a number of delegations from China that took part in its Public Manager Training Program. This long-standing program, which promotes cultural exchange by providing training both in China and in Georgia, has seen more than 1,600 Chinese managers participate since its inception in 1998. In November 2012, 20 members of the Shanghai Women’s Federation arrived in the United States for a three-week executive leadership training program coordinated by the International Center. The cohort met with women leaders around the state, including UGA Vice President for Public Service and Outreach Jennifer Frum, Institute of Government Director Laura Meadows, and Athens–Clarke County Mayor Nancy Denson and her daughters, state Representative Margaret Kaiser and Diane Schleicher, city manager of Tybee Island. The group was able to engage in discussions and classes on topics related to gender issues and equality in the U.S. and leveraging the talents and abilities of women in the workplace.

The International Center was also able to connect high-level government and business leaders from Georgia, China, and South Korea during a leadership delegation trip to Asia in July. The Georgia delegation was composed of officials from the University System of Georgia, UGA, the Georgia Municipal Association, and Georgia Power. While visiting Beijing, Shanghai, and Xi’an in China and Seoul in South Korea, the group worked to strengthen existing ties between these areas and the state. Meetings with organizations such as the Beijing Administrative College, the Shanghai Administration Institute, Kia Motors, the Seoul Municipal Government, and the Governors Association of Korea helped promote relationships that could advance mutual economic investments.
Building an

Efficient State

Governments have turned to the Institute of Government for decades in order to find ways to serve the public interest effectively and efficiently. Budget constraints in recent years have upped the pressure for governments to ensure that they allocate resources and efforts strategically to maximize the organization’s impact. The Institute worked with governments across the state in 2012, providing services and training opportunities that help them manage the complex array of activities that improve communities and quality of life for individuals.

The Clayton-Rabun County Water and Sewer Authority in mountainous Northeast Georgia asked the Institute to help it examine the potential for unified, countywide water and sewer service. Institute researchers interviewed representatives from the Authority in addition to municipal and county managers and elected officials, school board officials, and others. The Institute’s study explored structural changes to the Authority that would be necessary under a potential consolidation and financial and practical options for unified services.

To complement its numerous management development courses, the Institute’s training division unveiled a new initiative to help government leaders sharpen their skills. In January, the Institute released GOV360®, the first 360-degree assessment instrument designed specifically for government managers. Built in collaboration with faculty from the UGA Department of Psychology, GOV360® is an online tool that collects anonymous feedback about a manager’s performance from colleagues, superiors, and subordinates along 23 competencies important for effective management. Participants receive a feedback report that details their strengths and areas for growth, which can allow them—with the help of Institute executive coaches—to tailor a professional development plan customized to help them improve their performance.

The Institute led an effort to help counties and cities negotiate the terms of their local option sales tax (LOST) distributions. Nearly all of Georgia’s counties and qualified cities were required to come to a 10-year agreement with respect to allocating revenues generated by the 1 percent sales tax. Knowing that the stakes were high, the Institute developed a team of trained mediators, attorneys, and local government specialists to serve as impartial facilitators during the negotiations. The team worked in 13 communities throughout the state to mediate meetings between cities and counties so that they could create a LOST distribution plan that took into consideration population, levels of service delivery, and other relevant issues.
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**Building an Innovative State**

When economic and social challenges require a fresh take on how governments operate, the Institute is there to provide support and help develop innovative ideas and technologies. Whether producing new geographic information systems (GIS) applications or exploring responses to the changing public service landscape, the Institute works with governments to find inventive, practical solutions when the status quo needs an update.

When state lawmakers met at UGA for the 28th Biennial Institute for Georgia Legislators in December, they had the opportunity to pause for several days before the start of the busy legislative session to contemplate new ways of optimizing the state’s assets while addressing its challenges. The Institute coordinated the event in partnership with the General Assembly and helped compile an agenda that delved into such critical statewide issues as economic development and job creation, education, transportation, juvenile justice reform, and natural resources. Panel discussions allowed the legislators to gain a deeper understanding of the issues and explore novel approaches for state government. The event culminated in an address by Governor Nathan Deal, who outlined his policy priorities for the coming year, especially those related to transportation, education, and health care.

The Institute’s Office of Information Technology Outreach Services (ITOS) produced a groundbreaking new GIS tool that helped Augusta–Richmond County and other local governments locate undocumented property improvements worth hundreds of thousands of dollars in uncollected tax revenue. In addition to improving tax collections, the program also increases accuracy and equity of the tax assessment process. ITOS’s Jimmy Nolan and other GIS specialists used existing digitized property assessment records to create a map with outlines of buildings and structures already found in the county’s database. They then overlaid the map onto recent aerial photography to identify structures in the photography that were not accounted for—and therefore not being assessed for taxation—in their records. ITOS has reviewed approximately 25 percent of parcels in Augusta–Richmond and already discovered $20 million in previously unassessed property, worth approximately $200,000 in yearly tax collections going forward. ITOS has begun to provide assistance to other local governments using this process as well.

With retirement benefits becoming a major consideration for local governments around the country, the Institute's Paula Sanford produced a study with assistance from a researcher from the Center of State and Local Government Excellence about the current and future status of defined contribution (DC) retirement plans in the public sector. In DC plans, as opposed to more traditional defined benefit (DB) plans, employers provide employees with a retirement contribution while they are working without further obligation from the government. As governments scale back their DB plans and employees become more dependent on DC plans to supplement their other retirement income, concerns arise about how to design DC plans that recognize the difficulties of saving and investing for retirement. The report explores ways governments can improve plans, thus making them more productive for employees and better able to meet retirees’ income needs.