A Survey of Educational Program Needs for the Florida Association of Counties County Commissioner Training Program

Rodney L. Clouser

INTRODUCTION

Florida Cooperative Extension has partnered with the Florida Association of Counties (FAC) and the Florida Counties Foundation (FCF) since 1998 in surveying Florida County Commissioners and County Administrators approximately every two years. The survey collects information regarding attendance at FAC-FCF sponsored events, willingness to pay for educational programs, worth of events and programs attended by commissioners and administrators, desired locations for educational activities and, most importantly, the type and amount of training needed by commissioners on various topics that would assist them as an elected policy maker.

The results of the 2005-06 survey are presented as an executive summary that follows. In addition, for the first time the executive summary, survey questionnaire and PowerPoint presentation of results are being made available via a link for those who would like to view or print the entire document.
A Survey of Educational Program Needs for the
Florida Association of Counties County Commissioner Training Program

Rodney L. Clouser1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2006 County Commissioner and County Administrator Educational Survey

1. The survey response rate was large. A total of 250 surveys or 56.3 percent of all surveys were returned. The usable survey response rate was 55.4 percent (246 total surveys).

2. Almost three of every four commissioners (73 percent) who responded to the survey had been in office eight years or less.

3. Eighty-five percent of commissioners and administrators responding to the survey were from counties with a population less than 500,000.

4. Ninety-four commissioners or 48 percent of commissioner respondents to the survey are CCC (Certified County Commissioners) graduates.

5. Seventy-six percent of CCC graduates (some have not graduated yet) indicated they were interested in some type of postgraduate CCC curriculum and 71 percent of them would prefer a policy-based postgraduate curriculum.

6. Only thirty-eight percent of respondents support use of nationally or professionally recognized speakers if it would double the registration price of CCC events.

7. Survey respondents are open to use of technology in securing a maximum of six hours of credit towards certification: 75 percent would be likely to use web-based classes, 67 percent would be likely to participate in streaming video classes, 30 percent would be likely to participate in real time distance education classes and 40 percent would be likely to participate by use of taped (DVD, VCR) classes. There was little support (17 percent) for phone conference classes coupled with computer graphics.

8. More than six in ten respondents support authorization of computer-based classes for CCC credit.

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9. The overall top-voted training topics in the policy and procedure area were growth management, land use planning and zoning, alternative revenues, economic development, strategic planning and community visioning and natural resources issues related to water and land use. The top training topics in the people and personal area were strategic thinking and planning, leadership skills, developing a policy framework, conflict resolution and listening skills.

10. When asked to rank only the three top training topics the most requested topics in the policy and procedure area were growth management, budget and financial management, alternative revenues, land use planning and zoning and strategic planning and community visioning. The most requested training topics in the people and personal area were leadership skills, strategic thinking and planning, developing a policy framework, constituent services and conflict resolution skills.

11. Preference for workshop locations in rank order is Orlando, Tallahassee, Tampa, Gainesville, West Palm Beach and Jacksonville.

SUMMARY

Participation and returns of surveys by county commissioners and county administrators are at high levels. Prior to University of Florida Cooperative Extension becoming involved with the survey in 1998 the typical response rate was about 15 percent. In 1998, the survey response rate increased to 32 percent and, in 2002, the response rate was over 56 percent. Survey respondents indicated support for receiving some educational training through use of technology rather than at a location specific site.

From an educational standpoint, the most important education needs of those serving as county commissioners or administrators are:

- **Policy and procedure topic areas**: growth management, land use planning and zoning, alternative revenues, economic development, strategic planning and community visioning and natural resources issues related to water and land use.

- **People and personal topic areas**: strategic thinking and planning, leadership skills, developing a policy framework, conflict resolution and listening skills.
1. How long have you been a county commissioner?
   - □ 2 years or less
   - □ 2 to 8 years
   - □ 9 to 12 years
   - □ More than 12 years

2. What is the population of your county:
   - □ 75,000 or less
   - □ 75,001 to 499,000
   - □ Over 500,000

3. How often do you attend FAC events each year?
   - □ Often
   - □ Occasionally
   - □ Rarely
   - □ Never

4. Have you attended any County Commissioners Certification (CCC) courses in the past? □ Yes □ No

5. If so, rate their value to you in your job: (check one)
   - □ Always useful
   - □ Never useful
   - □ Sometimes useful
   - □ No opinion

6. Of the following locations for CCC workshops, which would you prefer most? (check one)
   - □ Orlando/Orange County
   - □ Tallahassee/ Leon County
   - □ Gainesville/ Alachua County
   - □ Tampa/ Hillsborough County
   - □ Jacksonville/ Duval County
   - □ West Palm Beach/ Palm Beach County

7. Are you a CCC graduate: □ Yes □ No

8. If yes, would you be interested in continuing in an “post graduate” curriculum? □ Yes □ No

9. If yes, would you prefer that the “post graduate” curriculum be: (check one)
   - □ A skills building program which addresses topics such as leadership development, conflict resolution, communications skills, or other practical skills useful to commissioners; OR,
   - □ A policy issues approach addressing such topics as growth management, public finance, budgeting, environmental issues, or other policy issues?
10. Would you be interested in including site visits to other counties as part of the “post graduate” program?

☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure

11. Would you support utilizing nationally recognized or professional speakers in the CCC programs even if the registration fees doubled from $125 to $250?  ☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ Not sure

12. What is the best method for sending you information about education events or other FAC programs?

☐ Email  ☐ US Mail  ☐ Fax

13. In recent years, new technology has become available to do CCC training in different formats. If a maximum of 6 hours CCC training could be secured by using technology, how likely would you be to participate using the following technology?

a. Web based computer technology (written material with short tests):
   ☐ Very Likely  ☐ Likely  ☐ Somewhat Likely  ☐ Unlikely  ☐ Not at all

b. Streaming video computer technology (like watching a TV show on your computer):
   ☐ Very Likely  ☐ Likely  ☐ Somewhat Likely  ☐ Unlikely  ☐ Not at all

c. Live real time training from a distant site (a teacher at a distant site broadcasting live):
   ☐ Very Likely  ☐ Likely  ☐ Somewhat Likely  ☐ Unlikely  ☐ Not at all

d. Taped (DVD, VCR) training at a specific site in your county:
   ☐ Very Likely  ☐ Likely  ☐ Somewhat Likely  ☐ Unlikely  ☐ Not at all

e. Phone conference coupled with computer based graphics:
   ☐ Very Likely  ☐ Likely  ☐ Somewhat Likely  ☐ Unlikely  ☐ Not at all

14. Would you support authorizing CCC credit for taking the computer based classes?

☐ Yes  ☐ No  ☐ No preference

15. Would you prefer a commissioners’ education program that provided computer based courses?

☐ Yes  ☐ No

Comments on any of the previous items: ___________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
16. What amount of training do commissioners need on the following Policy and Procedure topics to do their job better? (*circle a number for each topic*)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Amount of training needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Alternative revenues (i.e. MSTU’s, impact fees, special assessments)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Intergovernmental issues: annexation, CRA, urban service areas, etc.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Public finance (bonding)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Budgeting and financial management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Charter Government and Home Rule</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Legislative Process</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Legal Aspects – Major legal and case law considerations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. County government form &amp; function</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. County government services (across the board)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j. Technology – E-government</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Economic development</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. Natural resources: water/land use</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Personnel policies/Labor law/employee relations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n. Ethics, Government in the Sunshine/Sunshine law</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o. Strategic planning and community visioning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. Growth management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q. Health &amp; human services</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>r. Homeland Security</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>s. Public safety (including but not limited to terrorists’ threats)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>t. Land use, planning and zoning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>u. Other:</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>v. Other:</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17. Of the topics listed in question 16, which are the most important to helping Commissioners do a better job? (*please identify by alphabetical character the top 3 training needs*)

- _____Most Important
- _____2nd Most Important
- _____3rd Most Important
18. What amount of training do Commissioners need on the following Personal skills to do their job better? *(circle a number for each topic)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal skills</th>
<th>Amount of training needed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Leadership skills</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Conflict resolution</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Constituent relations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Customer service</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Strategic thinking and planning</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f. Diversity training</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g. Stress management</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h. Time management; balance work and home life</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i. Listening skills</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Media/Presentation skills</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k. Negotiating skills</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l. Developing a Policy Framework (issues, alternatives, consequences)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Team Building</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n. Computer skills useful to commissioners</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o. Other:</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. Other:</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

19. Of the topics listed in question 18, which are the most important to helping Commissioners do a better job? *(please identify by alphabetical character the top 3 training needs)*

_____ Most Important  _____ 2nd Most Important  _____ 3rd Most Important

PLEASE RETURN SURVEY TO IFAS FOR RECEIPT NO LATER THAN JANUARY 6, 2006. USE THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE OR FAX TO THE FAC OFFICE AT (850) 488-7752.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ASSISTANCE.

LOOK FOR THE NEW 2006-08 CURRICULUM AND SCHEDULE NEXT SPRING
2006 County Commissioner Educational Survey

Rodney L. Clouser
Survey Response Rate

Overall Response Rate: 56.3%

199
80%

51
20%

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Useable Survey Response Rate

246 Total Surveys (55.4%) 98.4 % Of All Returned

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Years As County Commissioner

- 98 (50%) < 2 Yrs
- 44 (23%) 2-8 Yrs
- 32 (16%) 9-12 Yrs
- 1 (1%) > 12 Yrs
- 19 (10%) NA
Interested In Post Graduate Curriculum?

- Yes: 88 (76%)
- No: 28 (24%)

For current recommendations see [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu) or your local extension office.
Post Graduate Curriculum: Skills or Policy Based?

- Skills: 41 (29%)
- Policy: 99 (71%)

For current recommendations, see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Visit Other Sites As Part Of Post Graduate Curriculum?

- Yes: 37 (34%)
- No: 18 (16%)
- Not Sure: 3 (3%)
- NA: 52 (47%)

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Nationally Or Professional Speakers?

- Yes: 75 (38%)
- No: 50 (26%)
- Not Sure: 45 (23%)
- NA: 25 (13%)

For current recommendations, see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Best Method To Contact?

- Email: 133 (54%)
- Mail: 76 (31%)
- Fax: 14 (6%)
- NA: 23 (9%)

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Training Using Technology: Web Based

- Likely: 133 (54%)
- Some L: 22 (9%)
- Unlikely: 23 (9%)
- Not At All: 14 (6%)
- NA: 76 (31%)

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Training Using Technology: Streaming Video

- Likely > 110 (45%)
- Some L 54 (22%)
- Unlikely 46 (19%)
- Not At All 11 (4%)
- NA 25 (10%)

Archival copy: For current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Training Using Technology: Live Real Time

- Likely >: 74 (30%)
- Some L: 73 (30%)
-unlikely: 62 (25%)
- Not At All: 27 (11%)
- NA: 10 (4%)

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Training Using Technology: Taped (DVD, VCR)

- Likely >: 99 (40%)
- Some L: 64 (26%)
- Unlikely: 50 (20%)
- Not At All: 21 (9%)
- NA: 12 (5%)

Archival copy: for current recommendations see [http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu](http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu) or your local extension office.
Training Using Technology: Phone With Computer Graphics

- Likely > 42 (17%)
- Some L 62 (25%)
- Unlikely 94 (38%)
- Not At All 27 (11%)
- Not At All 21 (9%)

Archival copy: For current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Authorize CCC Credit For Computer Based Classes?

!!More Than 6 in 10 Say Yes!!

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Preference For CCC Program That Provides Computer Based Courses

Com
Admin

Yes No NA

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Top Six Policy and Procedure Programs
(indexed to highest vote total)

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Top Five People and Personal Programs
(indexed to highest vote total)

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Most Important Policy and Procedure Program By Request

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Most Requested Policy and Procedure Programs

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Most Important People and Personal Program By Request

[Bar chart showing the importance of different categories: Leadership, Strategic, Policy Frame, Constituent, Conflict.]

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Most Requested People and Personal Programs

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.
Most Preferred Location For CCC Workshops?

Archival copy: for current recommendations see http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu or your local extension office.