

## Administrative Assistance Needs of Arkansas Local Government

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This is a summary of an Arkansas State University sponsored survey conducted in the Summer of 1983 whereby a sample of the state's county and city executives were asked about their administrative training and technical assistance needs and, generally, about the role of the universities in providing such services. Forty-nine percent (128) of the mailed questionnaires were returned. The respondents consist of 45 county and 83 city officials.

Arkansas State University sponsored the study on the basis of strong evidence suggesting that academic programs in public administration are much improved through their systematic interaction with government practitioners (see bibliography). Consequently, the specific purpose of the study was to discover possible mutually productive links between ASU's program in public administration and the state's local government.

The present research note reports on those aspects of the study which may be of interest to the overall Arkansas political science/public administration community.

### Administrative Training and Technical Assistance Needs of Arkansas Local Government

Administrative training and technical assistance is most needed by local government in the following four areas: grant-in-aid procurement and administration, financial management, police administration, and computerized information systems (See Tables 1 and 2).

Additional but more secondary priority needs are economic development, local tax and revenue administration, administrative law, and personnel administration. A prior need particular to county government is training and assistance in jail administration. Cities have also expressed priority needs which are particular to them. Second class cities need assistance and training in records management and in public health and safety programs. First class cities consider risk and insurance management as well as purchasing and contracts administration as priority matters for staff training and technical assistance.

The responding local government officials most prefer training programs which consist of short, intensive workshops offered at places and during times convenient to their employees. They also show an overwhelming preference for training staff consisting of a mix of academic and practitioner instructors.

## Respondents' Perceptions About University-Local Government Cooperation

Fifty-nine percent (59%) of the 128 responding city and county executives expect university sponsored administrative training and technical assistance to be "of distinct value" to them. Thirty-five percent (35%) said that such university programs would be "somewhat valuable" and six percent (6%) indicated that such university services would be "not very valuable".

The respondents strongly feel that the major public universities of Arkansas have an obligation to assist local government administration. When asked whether they considered that it is the responsibility of the major universities to provide training and assistance "at no cost to local government" 75% of the responding city and county executives said "Yes". When the alternative was phrased as university assistance "at reasonable cost to local government," the affirmative response was even more pronounced. Eighty-six (86%) of the respondents said "Yes".

In contrast to such expectations, there is some evidence to indicate that the state's universities have not been very active in helping local government in the past. When asked whether they have ever been concretely informed by the three major state universities about whom they could contact to seek university assistance, most of the respondents said that they have not been so informed. Eighty-two percent (82%) of the respondents said that they have not been informed by Arkansas State University; 75% claimed that they were not so informed by University of Arkansas-Fayetteville; and 82% indicated that University of Arkansas-Little Rock had not provided them information about whom that they may contact at the university to find out about possible assistance.

### Implications

Arkansas local governments' need for administrative training and technical assistance is clear. Moreover, its officials express a distinct expectation that the state's universities should provide all reasonable assistance. Furthermore, the respondents consider university based administrative training and technical assistance as a potentially valuable resource. Such findings set a promising stage for Arkansas university-Arkansas local government cooperation and for an opportunity to improve public administration in the state. However, there are some salient implications in this study which must be taken into account by universities before they embark upon an administrative training/technical assistance effort:

- 1) University cooperation with Arkansas local government must be more formalized and systematic.

There is ample evidence to suggest that mere willingness for a university and local government to cooperate is not sufficient to assure such cooperation. The main problem seems to be, according to Apfel and

Wothley (1979), a lack of adequate understanding by academics and governmental officials of the environments and procedures of the other. Practitioners find it difficult to comprehend the segmented structure of the university. Their problems usually transgress disciplinary boundaries. Henry (1976), in his survey of southern officials, cites the organization of the university itself as the greatest hindrance to closer ties. Henry reported, for example, that 95% of officials surveyed made some previous use of university personnel. Yet, he also reported that over 75% of the same officials did not know whom to contact in the universities for assistance. A similar problem was identified by Bowman (1978) and in the present study.

Such findings suggest that willingness and desire by university public administration faculty to engage in mutual activity and dialogue with practitioners must be coupled with a formalized coordinative effort and with formalized publicity. For example, Daniels, Darcy and Swain (1982), in studying seventy-eight established public administration outreach programs, found that technical assistance, workshops, and in-house training activities were generally directed or coordinated by the academic institution.<sup>1</sup>

2) The administrative training programs provided by the university to local government should be characterized by format and content directly responsive to the particular needs of local government officials. Such training should not be equated with continuing education nor be constrained by standard academic curricula of practice.

Responses to the survey indicate that local government officials most prefer university administrative training when it is extended as short, intensive training programs. This means, for example, that traditional academic curricula and related practice will need substantial modification and that training will have to be offered at times and places convenient to the governmental practitioners. The university administrative training effort will not be successful if an attempt is made merely to transplant customary campus offerings to different settings. The participating faculty must be willing and able to adopt a different educational method and perspective.

3) The university's administrative training and technical assistance endeavor should utilize staff in addition to its faculty.

The problems of local government administration are at times narrow in scope and which seek an immediate practical solution. Training and assistance for coping with such matters can often be best provided by experienced governmental executives rather than academics. The university's training and assistance effort, therefore, should provide for the use of staff other than faculty, such as for the ad hoc, temporary engagement of practicing government officials and of retired governmental executives.

<sup>1</sup> It's noteworthy that, on the average, 68% of such out-reach services were self-supporting.

4) The university should seek, to the extent practicable, to combine its administrative training and assistance efforts with those of agencies already providing such services to Arkansas local government.

Some administrative training and technical assistance to Arkansas local government is provided by such professional associations such as the Arkansas Municipal League, the Arkansas Association of Counties and a number of state agencies, among which planning and Developmental Districts are conspicuous. The development of working, mutually beneficial relationships between such agencies and the university are important. Their experiences with local government administrative problems and accrued good will can greatly facilitate the university's training and assistance endeavors.

5) The university should seek, to the extent practicable, to combine its local government administrative training and assistance efforts with those of its sister universities in Arkansas.

Cooperation between the universities in the development of joint training sessions and technical assistance activities can result in a richer and more beneficial array of services to Arkansas local government.

Table 1. Priority of Administrative Training Needs of  
Arkansas Counties and Municipalities  
(All Respondents, N=128)\*

Priority Rank	Category of Administrative Training	Importance Value**
1	Grant-in-aid procurement and administration	4.0
2	Financial management	3.9
3	Police administration	3.8
4	Local tax and revenue administration	3.6
4	Economic development	3.6
4	Computer information systems	3.6
5	Administrative law	3.5
5	Personnel administration	3.5
6	Records management	3.4
7	Disaster preparedness and management	3.3
7	Productivity improvement strategies	3.3
7	Public health and safety	3.3
7	Public works management	3.3
7	Intergovernmental relations	3.3
7	Risk and insurance management	3.3
8	Fire protection administration	3.2
8	Community rehabilitation	3.2
8	Planning and land use	3.2
8	Jail administration	3.2
8	Purchasing and contract administration	3.2
9	Environmental protection	3.1
10	Occupational health and safety	3.0
10	Organizational behavior	3.0
10	Parks and recreation administration	3.0
11	Traffic engineering and safety	2.8
12	Administration of social services	2.7
12	Energy issues	2.7
13	Broadcast/print media relations	2.6
13	Telecommunications and local government	2.6
14	Historic site rehabilitation	2.5
14	Facilities design	2.5

\* 45 Counties; 51 first class cities; and 32 second class cities.

\*\*Respondents were asked to express their perceived degree of need, on a scale of 5 (most needed) to 1 (least needed), for a given category of administrative training. "Importance value" is the mean expression of need for a given category of training.

Table 2. Priority of Administrative Technical Assistance Needs of  
Arkansas Counties and Municipalities  
(All Respondents, N=128)\*

Priority Rank	Category of Technical Assistance	Importance Value**
1	Grant-in-aid procurement and administration	4.1
2	Computer information systems	3.9
	Financial management	3.9
3	Police administration	3.8
4	Administrative law	3.7
	Local tax and revenue administration	3.7
5	Economic development	3.6
	Productivity improvement strategies	3.6
	Public health and safety	3.6
6	Disaster preparedness and management	3.5
	Risk and insurance management	3.5
7	Purchasing and contracts administration	3.4
	Personnel administration	3.4
	Planning and land use	3.4
	Intergovernmental relations	3.4
	Jail administration	3.4
	Public works management	3.4
	Records management	3.4
	Administration of social services	3.4
8	Community rehabilitation	3.3
	Fire protection administration	3.3
9	Environmental protection	3.2
10	Organizational behavior	3.1
	Traffic engineering and safety	3.1
	Parks and recreation administration	3.1
11	Facilities design	3.0
	Telecommunications and local government	3.0
	Occupational health and safety	3.0
12	Print/broadcast media relations	2.9
	Energy issues	2.9
13	Historic site rehabilitation	2.7

\* 45 counties, 51 first class cities, and 32 second class cities.

\*\*Please see Table 1 for definition of "importance value".

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