

Updated January 5, 2026

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 28

**9:30–11:00 a.m. Recreational Opportunity
NCCCMA Tobacco Road Classic Basketball
Tournament** (*Registration required*)

Location: Hanes Hosiery Community
Center, 501 Reynolds Blvd., Winston-
Salem, NC 27101

Bring your athletic shoes and hit the hardwood with your fellow managers in friendly competition in the NCCCMA Tobacco Road Classic! Meet at the Hanes Hosiery Community Center by 9:15 a.m., which is a short drive from the Convention Center for this fun wellness and networking opportunity. Pre-registration is free, but required to ensure you receive communications about the details of the game and assist in organizing teams

**9:30–11:00 a.m. Public Arts Guided Trolley
Tour** (*Registration required, limited to 14
people*)

Come and explore Winston-Salem's public arts **by trolley**. Winston-Salem is a city painted with creativity, and nowhere is it more vibrant than the city's Downtown Arts District. This is where the "City of Arts & Innovation" truly shines. A few blocks in size, the Arts District offers a world of culture and color around every corner. Here you'll find stunning murals, thought-provoking sculptures, and one-of-a-kind

installations that transform our streets into an open-air gallery.

9:00 a.m. Registration Table Opens
(Salem Foyer, near escalator)

**11:00–12:30 p.m. Orientation for New
Members and New Managers** (Salem 1AB)

Registration Required. Lunch provided.

New managers and new association members are encouraged to attend this orientation session to learn more about the Association and other available resources and to meet members of the Executive Committee and NCCCMA/ICMA Senior Advisors.

**1:00–3:00 p.m. Opening General Session
Leading Through the Whistle: Mental
Resilience for Those Who Serve Others**
(Salem 2-3)

Public leaders often shoulder invisible weight, political pressure, community expectations, and the emotional toll of leading through uncertainty. Drawing parallels between the mental demands of professional sports and public service, former NFL player, mental health advocate, MPA grad, and Public Service leader **Doug Middleton** explores how resilience, vulnerability, and purpose-driven leadership can help managers stay grounded while serving their communities.

*In football, players are taught to give their all **until** the whistle blows, no matter the pain, pressure, or chaos on the field. Doug uses this same principle to inspire public leaders to stay present, empathetic, and intentional until their own “whistle”, the end of the play, the meeting, or the crisis...sounds.*

In a season where scrutiny is high and job security is fragile; this talk reminds leaders that caring for themselves and those they lead isn't a luxury — it's a necessity. Attendees will walk away with practical tools for protecting their mental health, modeling empathy, and creating a culture of well-being within their organizations.

Keynote Speaker: Doug Middleton, NFL Veteran Safety, Owner, Dream Yoga and Wellness LLC

3:00–3:15 p.m. BREAK (Foyer)

3:15–4:45 p.m. CONCURRENT SESSIONS

SESSION 1: Smart Growth, Smarter Government: Aligning Structure with Community Needs (Winston 1AB)

This session explores practical strategies for aligning governance models, staffing, and services with rapid population and economic growth. Through real-world examples and interactive exercises, participants will learn how to anticipate structural needs, leverage data-driven decision-making, and engage elected officials and residents in the process. Join us to discover how your organization can evolve to support the visible growth in your community.

Moderator: Alison Alexander, Assistant Executive Director, Western Piedmont COG

Panelists: Jonathan Blanton, City Manager, City of Mount Holly

Michael Peoples, City Manager, City of Gastonia

Matthew Rhoten, County Manager, Gaston County

SESSION 2: ChatGPT Comes to City Hall: What Every NC Manager Should Know About Generative AI (Winston 3AB)

Generative AI isn't just a tech buzzword—it's already reshaping how local governments work, communicate, and serve their communities. But with new opportunities come new risks, responsibilities, and big policy questions.

Join Kristi Nickodem, Assistant Professor of Public Law and Government at the UNC School of Government, for a grounded and practical look at what generative AI *really* is—and what it means for ethics, transparency, and public accountability in your organization. Then, hear from Chris Butts, Chief Information Officer for the Town of Chapel Hill, who will pull back the curtain on his community's early experiments with AI, lessons learned, and how they've developed one of North Carolina's first municipal AI policies.

Walk away with insights you can take back to your organization—whether you're cautiously curious, ready to innovate, or just trying to keep up with what's next in public service technology.

Speakers: Chris Butts, Chief Information Officer, Town of Chapel Hill

Kristi Nickodem, Assistant Professor of Public Law and Government, UNC School of Government

SESSION 3: Critical Conversations: Keeping Communities Informed During Disasters (Salem 1AB)

Providing timely and accurate information can often mean the difference between life and death during natural disasters. Understanding the complexities and challenges related to effectively communicating to your community, elected

officials, media, and employees during these times is essential and requires equal parts skill, tact, and creativity. This panel discussion will cover experiences learned from Hurricanes Florence and Helene from a cross-section of local government leaders who were on the front lines in shaping the messaging surrounding these two historic weather events.

Panelists: Tim Buckland, Intergovernmental Affairs Manager, New Hanover County

Jonathan Kanipe, Town Manager, Town of Biltmore Forest

Avril Pender, County Manager, Buncombe County

Steve Still, Emergency Management Director, New Hanover County

4:45–6:00 p.m. Networking Reception
(Foyer)

4:45–6:00 p.m. Deputy & Assistant Manager Reception (Winston 2)

Join your peers for an exclusive networking event for Deputy and Assistant Managers. This reception is your chance to **connect, share experiences, and build relationships** with colleagues who understand the unique challenges and opportunities of your role. In addition to networking, we want to hear from you! Your feedback is invaluable in shaping how NCCCMA can better support you with resources, professional development, and tools tailored to your needs. Come prepared to share your ideas and help us strengthen the Association's commitment to help you serve in your role.

THURSDAY, JANUARY 29

7:00 a.m. Registration Table Opens
(Salem Foyer, near escalator)

7:30–8:30 a.m. Continental Breakfast
(Foyer)

7:30–8:30 a.m. ALUMNI BREAKFASTS

Appalachian State University (Gaines 2)

East Carolina University (Conference 2)

NC Central University (Ardmore 4)

NC State University (Winston 3C)

UNC Chapel Hill (Gaines 1)

UNC Greensboro (Ardmore 2)

UNC Charlotte (Salem 1C)

UNC Wilmington (Conference 1)

Western Carolina University (Off-site)

8:45–10:15 a.m. CONCURRENT SESSIONS

**SESSION I: Taking Back the Narrative:
Rebuilding Trust Through Storytelling**
(Winston 1AB)

When the public narrative gets ahead of the facts, leadership must step up and reclaim the story. This session helps local government leaders sharpen their storytelling voice, using clarity, transparency, and purpose to connect with residents even in times of crisis. A panel of experienced practitioners will share strategies and lessons learned from the field because if you don't claim your community's story, someone else will.

Moderator: Matt McKirahan, Town Manager, Town of Mills River

Panelists: Abbey Ball, Communications Director, Town of Indian Trail

Liz Cooper, Public Communications Director, Union County

Adam Gaub, Communications Director, Gaston County

Allison Justus, Communications Director, City of Hendersonville

SESSION 2: Water and Wastewater Regionalism (Salem 1AB)

With a growing population and the demand for water and wastewater resources, communities must collaborate to ensure sustainable access to water and wastewater infrastructure. Regionalization of water and wastewater infrastructure, although challenging, can benefit multijurisdictional partners willing to collaborate in creating sustainable, reliable, and affordable water and wastewater utilities.

Moderator: Jim Seymour, Assistant Manager, Town of Fuquay-Varina

Panelists: Victor D'Amato, Supervisor, Viable Utilities Program, NC Department of Environmental Quality

Scott Chase, Assistant Manager, Holly Springs

Vic Czar, Assistant Manager, City of Sanford

SESSION 3: It's Not You, It's... Well, Maybe It Is You (Winston 3AB)

Ever wonder what your department heads are really thinking—but not saying? This candid, lighthearted session flips the script and gives department heads the mic. From communication quirks to leadership blind spots (yes, we all have them), you'll hear what they wish their managers knew to help teams thrive. Expect candid insights, a few laughs, and practical takeaways to strengthen collaboration, trust, and team performance.

Whether you're a seasoned manager or new to the role, this session will help you better understand the people who keep your departments running—and what they need from you to keep doing it well.

Panelists: Jonathan Feldman, Chief Information Officer, Wake County

Andrew Griffin, Facility Services Director, Henderson County

Richard Griggs, Parks & Recreation Director, City of Statesville

Kimberly Honeycutt, Finance Officer, Harnett County

Moderator: Alison Alexander, Assistant Executive Director, Western Piedmont Council of Governments

SESSION 4: Speed Networking for MPA Students & Emerging Local Government Managers (Winston 2)

10:15–10:30 a.m. BREAK

10:30 a.m.–Noon Business Meeting (Winston 1C)

10:15–Noon MPA Student Session

You've Got the Job... Now What? How to Thrive in Your First Local Government Role and Beyond (Piedmont 1)

This session will focus on the real skills new hires need to thrive in their new roles. This panel discussion will feature a Human Resources and Organizational Development professional specializing in emotional intelligence/career coaching, an early-career professional, and a seasoned manager who is known for mentoring successful managers. These panelists will dive into questions surrounding career development, interpersonal communication, political awareness, developing emotional intelligence, and professionalism under pressure. Not only will MPA students and early-career students gain applicable insight, mid-career and seasoned managers will learn ways to best support new hires and the aspiring managers in their orbits.

Moderator: Brian Barnett, Manager, Davie County

Panelists: Catherine Bennett, Consultant, Catherine Bennett Consulting

Nick Farmerie, Community Development Director/Assistant Manager, Ashe County

Greg Zephir, Manager, Town of Troy

Noon–1:30 p.m. PRESIDENT’S LUNCH
(Salem Ballroom 2-3)

1:30–1:45 p.m. BREAK (Foyer)

1:45–3:15 p.m. CONCURRENT SESSIONS

SESSION I: How to Make Local Government Cool (Winston 1AB)

Dealing with systems that have been in place for decades, how can local governments modernize to become more attractive to a contemporary workforce? How can local governments innovate their operations and policies to create a more engaging and attractive place to work?

Moderator: Jim Seymour, Assistant Manager, Town of Fuquay-Varina

Panelists: Tracy Miles, Strategic Members Services Foundation Director, NCACC

Dylan Russell, Faculty Lead, Lead for NC, UNC School of Government

Leia G. Stiegman, Senior Budget & Management Analyst, Guilford County

SESSION 2: Michael and Scottie: Building a Championship Team Through Strong Manager/Assistant Partnerships (Salem 1AB)

Just as the Chicago Bulls’ success was built on the dynamic partnership between Michael Jordan and Scottie Pippen, effective leadership in local government depends on a strong, collaborative relationship between the Manager and Assistant/Deputy Manager. This engaging panel will feature seasoned city and county leaders discussing how a high performing “#1 and #2” team can drive organizational excellence and get the best out of every team member. Learn practical approaches to

communication, trust-building, and role clarity that will help your leadership duo work in sync and lead your community to championship-level results.

Moderator: Noah Saldo, Manager, City of Southport

Panelists: Mary S. Furtado, Manager, Catawba County

Mark Matthews, Assistant Manager, Town of Fuquay-Varina

Adam G. Mitchell, Manager, Town of Fuquay-Varina

Paul Murray, Assistant Manager, Catawba County

SESSION 3: SPONSOR SESSIONS

1: Shared Vision Takes Flight: The Partnerships Behind the City of Hickory Aviation Museum (Winston 3AB)

When collaboration takes flight, incredible things happen. Hear how Hickory’s city leaders, Catawba Valley Community College, and the Hickory Aviation Museum turned a simple hangar project into a community-wide success story. Panelists will share how partnerships were built, goals were aligned, and challenges were overcome to deliver a facility that benefits education, tourism, and local workforce development. Attendees will leave with strategies for identifying creative partners and driving community impact through shared vision.

Moderator: Jana Gottlieb, Principal, McMillan Pazdan Smith

Panelists: Randy Burns, Senior Executive Director, Campus Centers at Catawba Valley Community College

Rodney Miller, Deputy Manager/CFO, City of Hickory

2: Finding the Money: Funding Approaches for Municipal Infrastructure (Winston 3AB)

Funding the design and construction of infrastructure improvements is a challenge for municipalities regardless of size and annual budget, with projects often postponed or shelved entirely due to lack of available funds. Discretionary and competitive grant opportunities offered by federal, state, and non-profit entities have become increasingly popular, providing the funds needed to complete critical improvements. There are steps that municipalities can take well in advance of funding announcements to compete successfully for these programs. Presenters from the City of High Point and Dewberry will discuss a recent effort to identify strategies for competing for these grants, including an evaluation of the City's current Capital Improvement Program, a review of current and anticipated funding sources, and identification of pre-application strategies to improve chances of project selection.

Speakers: Andrew Edmonds, Transportation Planning Administrator, City of High Point

Zachary Lang, Planner, Dewberry

Beth Smyre, PE, Senior Associate, Dewberry

Robby Stone, PE, Public Services Director, City of High Point

3:15–3:30 p.m. BREAK (Foyer)

3:30–5:00 p.m. CONCURRENT SESSIONS:

1. NCLM Update (Winston 3C)
2. NCACC Update (Salem 1C)
3. MPA Director Meeting (Winston 1C)

5:00–6:00 p.m. Networking Reception (Foyer)

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30

8:00 a.m. Registration Table Opens (Salem Foyer, near escalator)

8:00–9:00 a.m. Continental Breakfast (Foyer)

7:30–8:45 a.m. Public Executive Leadership Academy Networking Breakfast (Conference 1)

9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m. Professional Development Workshop: Leading Through Incivility: What Local Government Managers Can Do (Salem 3AB)
(Registration required, \$60)

This interactive workshop will equip local government management professionals with strategies for addressing incivility by community members. The session features four parts: the causes and consequences of incivility, civility policies, messaging and misinformation strategies, and coping tactics. Attendees will come away with resources of materials, including worksheets, examples, and PowerPoints for later use.

Speakers: Leisha DeHart-Davis, Professor of Public Administration & Government and Director of the Local Government Workplaces Initiative, UNC School of Government

Kristi Ehlers, Research Analyst, Local Government Workplaces Initiative, UNC School of Government

Clay Fleming, Assistant Director, Local Government Workplaces Initiative, UNC School of Government

9:00 a.m.–12:00 p.m.
MOBILE WORKSHOPS

**Winston-Salem Innovation Quarter and
The Grounds (Wake Forest Stadium District
Redevelopment Project)**

(Registration required)

Innovation Quarter has recently unveiled a refreshed master plan and new renderings for Phase II, a transformative 28-acre expansion that will elevate the district's role as a hub for life sciences, regenerative medicine, biomanufacturing and community engagement. Since the initial announcement of Phase II in 2021, the Innovation Quarter, created through a public-private partnership, has seen significant expansion and ecosystem development. Anchored by the Wake Forest School of Medicine and supported by Advocate Health, the district now contributes an estimated \$2 billion in annual economic impact, supports 4,000+ full-time employees and generates nearly \$60 million in state and local taxes.

The Grounds is a transformative 100-acre mixed use development in the Deacon Boulevard area (Wake Forest Allegacy Federal Credit Union Football stadium and Lawrence Joel Veterans Memorial Coliseum), surrounding some of North Carolina's most iconic event venues. Spearheaded by a visionary partnership of Carter, Front Street Capital, Wake Forest University, and the City of Winston-Salem, The Grounds will be a year-round gathering place blending vibrant and unique retail, food and beverage options, entertainment, office, activities, walking trails, and new styles of residential living all in one community hub.

**12:00–2:30 p.m. Program Committee
Meeting and Lunch (Winston 1AB)**

**12:00–2:30 p.m. Civic Education
Committee Meeting and Lunch (Winston
1C)**