



MONTANA
STATE UNIVERSITY

EXTENSION

Local Government Center

ANNUAL REPORT

Local Government Center
2025

Celebrating 40 Years of Local Leadership



A LOOK BACK AND AHEAD

A Message from the Local Government Center's Director
DAN CLARK

Cooler temperatures and snowcapped mountains once again mark the transition into a new season and a moment for pause and reflection. As we embrace this seasonal shift, we also celebrate a significant milestone: in December 2025, the Local Government Center proudly marked 40 years of serving Montana's local governments.

Founded in 1985 by Ken Weaver and Judy Mathre, the Center has spent four decades listening to and learning from city and county officials across the state. From handwritten letters and typewritten responses to digital platforms and real-time support, the tools have changed but the mission remains the same: strengthening local governments, Montana's backbone, through education, technical assistance, and research.

Over the past year, we've honored our history while embracing the future. We've expanded training programs, modernized our course delivery, and continued supporting those who step up and serve their communities. Whether it's a newly elected mayor or a seasoned commissioner, our goal is meeting them where they are with humility, clarity, and purpose.

As we look ahead to the next 40 years, we know the seasons will continue to change and technology will continue to evolve. However, the need for strong, informed local governance will remain constant. Here's to the enduring spirit of public service and a new season of growth and impact that will resonate for another year, or better yet, 40 years.

CONTENTS

Local Government Center

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Photo Credit: Jessica Nearing



Photo Credit: Jessica Nearing

Meet Our **TEAM**



DAN CLARK
DIRECTOR

Areas of focus include local government organization and structure, roles and responsibilities, open meetings, citizen participation laws, public engagement, effective meeting management, and the Montana Code of Ethics.



ASHLEY KENT
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR

Core priorities involve local government, good governance, open meetings, public participation, the democratic process, organizational and leadership development, strategic planning, communication, and conflict resolution.



LYDIA MAUNZ
ASSOCIATE SPECIALIST

Key focus areas encompass online education development, educational resource design, and publications writing, editing, and management, supporting local government professional development and certification programs.



CHRISTINE HODGES
MGLA PROGRAM LEAD

Primary areas include leadership development, team development, emotional intelligence for effective communication, and practical approaches to conflict resolution that foster collaboration, trust, and positive organizational culture.



SCHUYLER GERMANN
PROGRAM MANAGER

Essential domains of expertise include project management, event planning and production, strategic communications, office management, and leveraging data-driven insights for informed decision-making.



KATE WADE
PROGRAM COORDINATOR

Areas of focus include event coordination, marketing, program implementation, communications planning, and effective speaker and partner engagement to ensure successful collaboration and impactful outcomes.

Montana Local Government VOTER REVIEW

Supporting Montana's unique decennial process by providing training and resources so citizens can review their local government structure.



DIGITAL RESOURCES

- Online course for Study Commissioners
- Resource library with 70+ templates



IN-PERSON TRAINING

- Regional sessions for 120+ commissioners
- On-demand training for any jurisdiction upon request



PUBLIC EDUCATION

- Partnerships with local and state media
- Features on Montana PBS, Voices of Montana, Ag Live, and local outlets

JUNE 2024 - NOVEMBER 2026

12

COUNTIES ELECTED TO PARTICIPATE

44

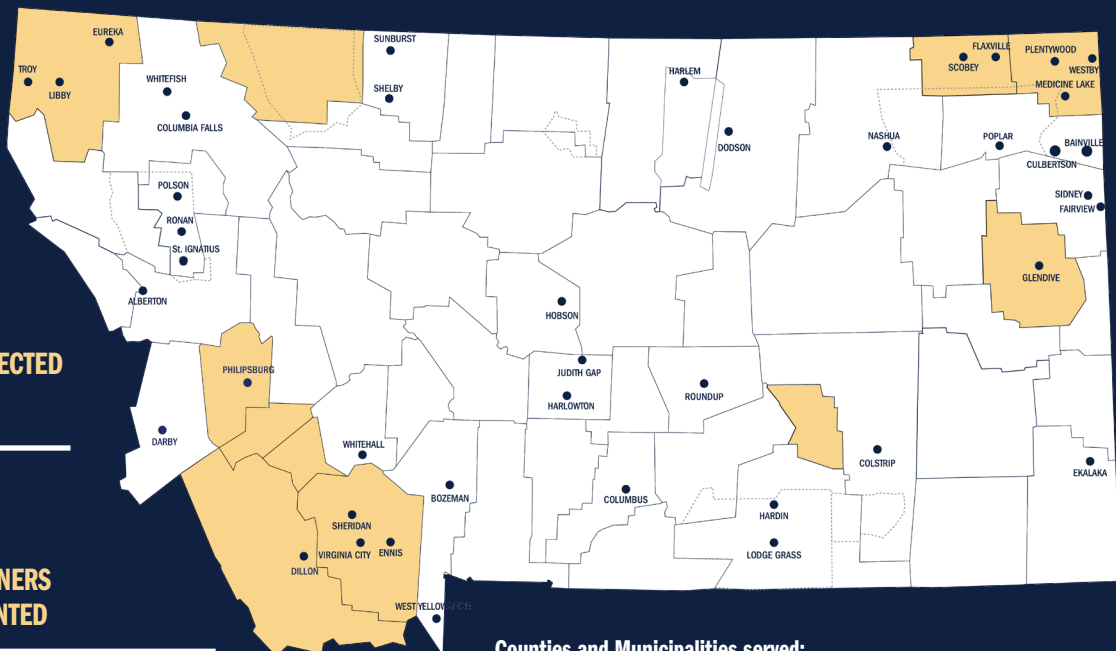
MUNICIPALITIES ELECTED TO PARTICIPATE

167

STUDY COMMISSIONERS ELECTED OR APPOINTED

\$1.4M

LEVIED/BUDGETED BY JURISDICTIONS TO FUND LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVIEW



Counties and Municipalities served:

○ Municipalities

■ Counties participating in 2024-2026 Local Government Review

OUR LEGACY

Celebrating 40 Years of
Education, Service, and
Partnership

1990 Established the Local Government Policy Council and Local Government Policy Center to advance statewide policy dialogue.

1993 Montana Legislature formally defined the Center's mission in statute (MCA 20-25-237):
"Strengthen the capacities of Montana's local governmental units to deliver essential services efficiently and provide training, technical assistance, and research to local officials."

1994-1996 The Center provided ongoing support for the 3rd decennial Local Government Review, and published the first edition of the "Montana's Local Government Review - Study Commissioner Handbook."



2004-2006 The Center provided ongoing support for the 4th decennial Local Government Review.

2007 Produced the County Salary and Benefits survey and report.

2008 Dan Clark selected to serve as Director, and the position was restructured to prioritize outreach across Montana.

2009 Established training curriculum for municipal, county, and special district boards.

2010 Established Municipal Summits in partnership with Montana Municipal Interlocal Authority to offer training for Newly Elected Municipal Officials.

2022 Established the statewide Montana Grown Leadership Academy for local government staff and department heads.

2024-2026 The Center provided ongoing support for the 6th decennial Local Government Review.

2025 40th Anniversary Celebration of the Local Government Center's service to Montana communities.

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85

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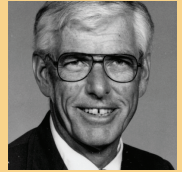
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1985 Established at Montana State University under the leadership of Ken Weaver, PhD, and Judy Mathre.



1984-1986 The Center provided ongoing support for the 2nd decennial Local Government Review.

1986 Began hosting the annual Municipal Elected Officials Training in conjunction with Municipal Institute for Clerks, Treasurers, and Finance Officers.

1988 Launched the Local Government Academy within MSU's Division of Extended Studies. Began the Montana Municipal Capacities Project, conducting 90 in-depth interviews with small-town officials (1988-1989).

1989 Established the Local Government Profiles. Published annually and highlights budget information and governmental characteristics of municipalities and counties.

1989 Official authorization by the Montana Board of Regents (Item 62-204-R0389, June 21, 1989). Delivered 1,100 student days of formal workshop instruction to strengthen local governance.

2001 Released the first edition of "Montana's Local Government Review."

2001-2008 Jane Jelinski served as Director.

2002 Released the first edition of "Governing Montana at the Grass Roots - Local Government Structure, Process and Politics."

2004 Founded Montana Mayors Academy, a program dedicated to helping newly and previously elected mayors navigate their function with effectiveness and efficiency.

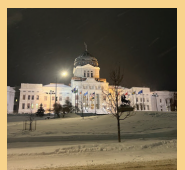
2010-2013 Published first edition of the "Montana Municipal Officials Handbook," "Montana Local Government Board Handbook," and "Montana Public Lands Guide."

2014 Established the Local Government Website Development Program.

2014-2016 The Center provided ongoing support for the 5th decennial Local Government Review.

2020 Facilitated dozens of online town hall sessions in response to emerging issues related to the pandemic response.

2021 Created and hosted online webinar education series to support municipal clerks and treasurers during the pandemic.





CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF SERVICE

The Story Behind MSU's Local Government Center

An Interview with Kenneth Weaver, PhD, and Judy Mathre

WRITTEN BY SCHUYLER GERMANN

Forty years ago, two visionary leaders transformed the way Montana communities govern. Today, the Montana State University Local Government Center (LGC) celebrates its 40th anniversary, a milestone rooted in service, resilience, and a shared belief that informed leadership strengthens democracy.

Kenneth Weaver's journey began far from city hall. A former head of MSU's ROTC program, Weaver transitioned from aerospace studies to political science in the 1980s. His military experience instilled a deep respect for service, a value that would define his next chapter.

"Service is at the intersection of everything we do," Weaver said. That conviction led him to ask a pivotal question in 1984, "Why isn't the [MSU] political science department involved in the voter review process?"

The answer became the Local Government Center, an initiative aligned with MSU's land-grant mission to strengthen communities through education. Weaver envisioned a resource that would equip local officials, not just to win elections, but to govern effectively.

At the same time, Judy Mathre was blazing her own trail. She served on Bozeman's first voter review Study Commission from 1974-1976, then two terms on the City Commission, and ultimately became the city's first female mayor. When the second Voter

Review cycle arose and there were no longer state funds for educational resources, Mathre saw the challenge firsthand, "How would they learn what they should do?" That question united her with Weaver in a partnership that would shape Montana governance for decades.

Over four decades, the LGC has trained thousands of officials and administrators, helping bridge the gap between being newly elected and leading effectively. The LGC mission remains unchanged, empowering communities through knowledge. "Most people are happy to have you come and answer questions," Mathre said. "It's about learning how to do the jobs better."

As the Center celebrates its 40th anniversary, its founders' advice endures, "Get educated. Learn how government works. Gain experience on advisory boards before you serve."

From a question in 1984 to a statewide institution today, the Local Government Center stands as a testament to resilience, collaboration, and the transformative power of service.

OUR SERVICES

COMMUNITY COLLABORATION & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Community Engagement
Strategic Planning
Candidate-Forum Moderation
Interlocal Agreements
Civic Dialogue
Conflict Mediation
Voter Review
Listening Sessions

TEAM DEVELOPMENT & LEADERSHIP PROGRAMS

Foundations - Montana Grown Leadership Academy
Deep Dives - Montana Grown Leadership Academy
Real Colors/Teams/Leadership
Leadership Challenge for Key Leaders
Leadership Challenge for Emerging Leaders
Creating Highly Effective Teams
Multi-Generation Workplace
Emotional Intelligence
Workplace Bullying
Employee Motivation
Employee Management
Conflict Management
Ethics/Nepotism

GOVERNANCE EXCELLENCE & PUBLIC MEETING BEST PRACTICES

Open Meetings Laws
The Public's Right to Participate
Closed Meetings Laws
Public Records
Public Ethics/Nepotism
Good Governance
Parliamentary Procedure
Creating By-Laws
Public Participation
Running Effective Meetings
Roles & Responsibilities
Board Training
Special Districts
County & Municipal Trainings
Voter Review/Forms of Government

**BOOK A
TRAINING**



PROGRAMS & EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

Fiscal Year 2025 Activity at a Glance

MONTANA GROWN LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

17 TRAILHEADS HOSTED ACROSS THE STATE FOR SUPERVISORS

350+ PARTICIPANTS IN A VARIETY OF DEPARTMENTS AND FUNCTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

140 LEADERS PROVIDED COMPREHENSIVE FEEDBACK TO HELP ENVISION THE FUTURE OF THE PROGRAM

Montana's local governments face challenges in preparing new leaders. Although supervisors hold some of the most critical roles in an organization, they often receive the least support.

The Montana Grown Leadership Academy (MGLA) was created to equip current and emerging leaders with the professional development needed to succeed in supervisory roles.



MUNICIPAL INSTITUTE

40+ SESSIONS OFFERED PROVIDING CREDITS TOWARD STATE AND NATIONAL PROFESSIONAL ACCREDITATION

23 ELECTED OFFICIALS ATTENDED TRAINING IN CONJUNCTION WITH MUNICIPAL INSTITUTE

98 CLERKS, TREASURERS, AND FINANCE OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

76 JURISDICTIONS REPRESENTED WITH THOSE IN ATTENDANCE

Hosted in collaboration with the Montana Municipal Clerks, Treasurers, and Finance Officers from **May 4-8, 2025**, Institute brought together **practitioners** from across the state for an intensive week of learning and collaboration.

Topics ranged from Debt Financing and Ethics to Roles and Responsibilities of Municipal Government, the Institute offered participants both practical knowledge and meaningful connections.



CLERKS OF DISTRICT COURT SCHOOL

60+ CLERKS OF DISTRICT COURT AND DEPUTIES FROM COUNTIES ACROSS MONTANA

51 COUNTIES REPRESENTED THROUGH ATTENDEES

23 CREDIT HOURS AVAILABLE FOR STATE CERTIFICATION THROUGH THE EVENT'S TRAINING PROGRAM

The Local Government Center hosted the **Montana Association of Clerks of District Court School from October 6-8, 2025**, featuring **workshops, presentations, and interactive sessions** designed to enhance knowledge and strengthen the capacity of Montana's judicial administration.

Topics addressed procedural updates, best practices, and strategies for improving efficiency and service delivery within district courts.



CASE STUDY

OVERVIEW Local government employees in Montana often face limited access to professional development opportunities in leadership and management. This gap presents a significant challenge to build effective, resilient public service teams across the state.

RESULTS Between August and October 2025, the LGC hosted MGLA trainings in Kalispell, Helena, Great Falls, and Havre. To date, 32 local government employees and elected officials from 13 municipal and county governments have completed the programs. Training topics included: emotional intelligence / Real Colors, transitioning from individual contributor to supervisor, managing the whole person, communication skills for supervisors, conflict styles, delegation skills, setting clear expectations, imposter syndrome, and the purpose and funding of local government. The content was delivered through a combination of lectures and small group activities, ensuring an interactive and engaging learning experience.



CHALLENGES



LIMITED ACCESS TO TAILORED TRAINING A primary barrier is the lack of high-quality, affordable professional development programs specifically designed for the unique demands of public service roles.



GEOGRAPHIC BARRIERS Montana's vast and rural landscape often requires employees to travel long distances to attend training, which can be both time consuming and cost prohibitive.



BUDGET CONSTRAINTS Many local governments operate with tight budgets, making it difficult to allocate funds for comprehensive training initiatives.

SOLUTIONS AND PROBLEM SOLVING The MSU Extension Local Government Center conducted a two-phase survey between April and August 2025 to gather input from Montana's local governments. Municipal governments participated in April–May, followed by county governments in July–August. A total of 195 responses informed the future direction of the Montana Grown Leadership Academy (MGLA) and its offerings. In response to the feedback, MGLA redesigned its learning tracks to better support local government leaders. It now consists of two learning tracks: the Foundation Series, in-person courses focused on core leadership and management skills and Deep Dives, intensive sessions that explore complex topics in-depth. Through MGLA, participants gain practical tools to lead more effectively, with a curriculum emphasizing supervision, communication, and conflict resolution.



FEEDBACK The LGC received strong anecdotal feedback immediately following the trainings and continues to receive inquiries for future sessions. In post-program evaluations, participants praised the relevance and applicability of the content.

One HR supervisor noted:
"This was one of the most hands-on, applicable courses that I've taken for professional development."

The impact of MGLA extends beyond individual participants to the broader community. By investing in the professional development of staff, local governments enhance performance and build public trust. The practical, hands-on nature of the training enables immediate application, resulting in tangible improvements in workplace culture and effectiveness.

ACCESSIBLE & DIGITAL RESOURCES

From Associate Specialist

LYDIA MAUNZ, PH.D.



Our team at the Local Government Center has talked about educational equity quite a bit as we grapple with the challenges and barriers we face providing education and training that's affordable, equitable, and rurally accessible.

With the overwhelming demands on the time, energy, and resources of many of our constituents and the limits on our time, energy, and people power, combined with the necessity of working under a fee-for-service model, we're confronted by the challenges of the 'do-more-with-less' cycle internally and externally. The willingness and capacity of the people who perform feats to maintain the order and function of counties, cities, and towns across the state is frequently pushed to, or even past, the breaking point.

How can we more effectively help them? How do we balance the tremendous need with our limited capacity and finite resources to provide vital training and information in an equitable and accessible way?

We can serve communities virtually in ways that we simply cannot in person. We know; we've tried. In-person training can sometimes prove to be unsustainable and inefficient; it's also not equitable or accessible for many rural communities. It's neither equitable nor realistic to ask overburdened county and municipal employees to drive six or seven hours to attend an in-person training they may have limited funds to afford and limited time to accommodate. And, for as many of the put-the-fire-out trainings our team travels around the state to provide, there's always another way we can help, but never enough hours in the day.

We're certainly not reinventing the wheel, but by enhancing our existing online training content and developing new digital educational resources, we can more strategically align the growing external demand with our limited internal capacity. We can also increase the base level of training and information, a foundation that might help prevent some fires to begin with.

So, in addition to our existing online courses in Parliamentary Procedure and the Fundamentals of Montana Municipal Government, we've released a new online course designed to help Study Commissioners understand and execute the Voter Review process. We're also revising our Fundamentals course, creating a new board training course, and creating a digital resource library containing short videos, webinars, handouts, one-pagers, and other forms of easily accessible and digestible content.

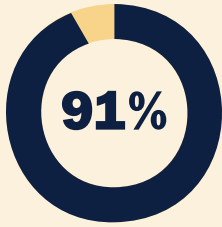
At the conclusion of our Fundamentals of Montana Municipal Government course, we ask participants to complete an evaluation. The feedback we receive reaffirms our belief that we're on the right track. As one participant said, "The online format and, therefore, the accessibility were crucial to being able to put the time and energy into [the course]. We need informed, educated people leading our municipalities; by making this course accessible it ensures that the people who need it will receive the information to prepare them for service. Thank you for offering this."

If you're interested in taking one of our courses, have suggestions for courses or training content that would be helpful in your community, or have ideas for collaboration, please let us know. We'd love to hear from you.

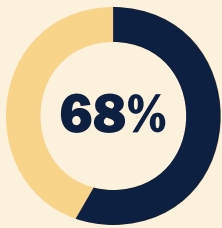
IMPACT by the NUMBERS

JULY 2024 - JUNE 2025

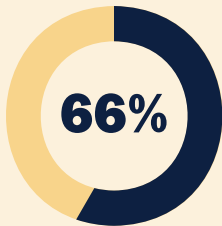
OVERVIEW



51/56
Counties Served
through local trainings



85/125
Municipalities engaged
services from the Local
Government Center or
participated in a hosted
training



1989/3000
Local government **leaders**
reached through programs
from the MSU Extension
Local Government Center

ONLINE RESOURCES



1000

Estimated **hours spent**
building online resources
for access in all of
Montana



3 **Online courses**
offered with Montana
specific curriculum:
Fundamentals of Government,
Parliamentary Procedure and
Study Commissioners Local
Government Review

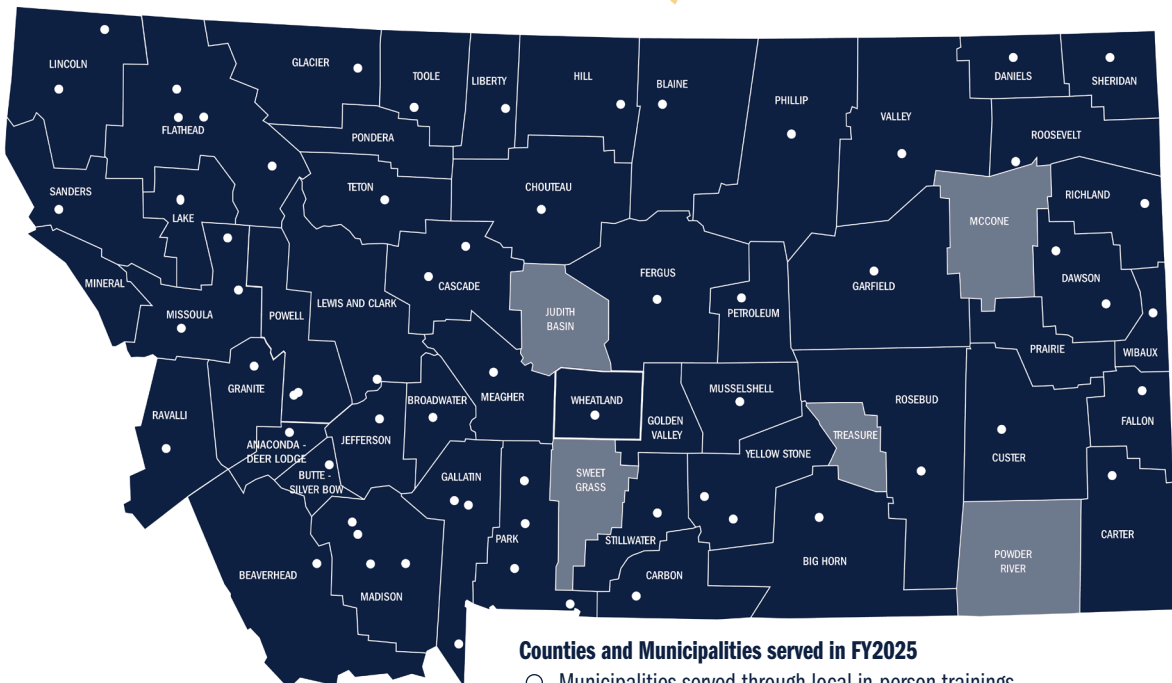
1000+

Hours spent providing high
quality technical **assistance**
to all levels of local
government administration
and leadership.

MISSION DRIVEN DELIVERY

115

Municipal clerks reached
through educational programs like
Municipal Institute or Fundamentals
of Montana Government



Counties and Municipalities served in FY2025

- Municipalities served through local in-person trainings
- Counties served through local in-person trainings
- Counties served through nearby trainings

SUPPORT OUR WORK

YOUR PARTNERSHIP HELPS LOCAL LEADERS THRIVE

Behind every number on these pages is a community made stronger, a public servant better equipped, and a local government more prepared to meet the challenges ahead. At the Local Government Center, we believe that thriving communities start with well-supported leaders, and this year's impact demonstrates what's possible when we invest in them together.

But the needs facing our cities, towns, and counties continue to grow. From navigating complex policy changes to strengthening civic engagement, local officials rely on trusted guidance, training, and resources more than ever before.

Your support ensures that every leader, no matter the size or budget of their community, has access to the expertise, tools, and learning opportunities they need to serve effectively.

By contributing to the Local Government Center, you help us:



Expand critical training and leadership development programs



Reach under-resourced communities that depend on our support



Equip local officials with the knowledge needed to solve today's challenges



Build stronger, more resilient communities across the state

When you invest in the Local Government Center, you invest in the people who keep our communities running. Together, we can continue building a future where every local government has the capacity and confidence to serve well.

Join us in strengthening local leadership with financial support, including through grants, donations and private funding. Make a gift today to help ensure every community has the support it needs for the challenges ahead.

MAKE A DONATION TODAY



www.msuaf.org/LGC

Contact:

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LGC Program Manager

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40th ANNIVERSARY GALA

A NIGHT OF CELEBRATION FOR MONTANA'S LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

On December 11, 2025, over 200 people came from across the state to celebrate the Local Government Center's 40th Anniversary and the impact that local leadership continues to have on all communities.

We were honored to present the following awards to deserving Montana local government leaders.

LEADERSHIP & LEGACY SERVICE AWARDS

THE WEAVER AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED SERVICE | Alan Hulse, Retired CEO of Montana Municipal Interlocal Authority

THE JUDY MATHRE COMMITMENT TO COMMUNITY | Gail Leeper, Mayor of Drummond

LIFETIME LEADERSHIP IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT | Harold Blattie, Retired Executive Director of Montana Association of Counties

THE LAND-GRANT LEGACY | Kenneth Weaver, PhD, & Judy Mathre, Co-Founders of the MSU Local Government Center

PEER-NOMINATED AWARDS FOR EXCELLENCE

LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP AWARD | Jeff Sell, Wheatland County Commissioner

MONTANA LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHAMPION AWARD | Anne Hughes, COO Missoula County

STEWARD OF SERVICE AWARD | Dannai Clayborn, Clerk of the Commission, City of Helena

PUBLIC LEADERSHIP AWARD | Shane Fox, Blaine County Commissioner

JUSTICE IN ACTION AWARD | Paige Trautwein, Clerk of District Court, Ravalli County

CORNERSTONE AWARD | Lorraine Hellie, Deputy Treasurer, Phillips County

BRIDGE BUILDER AWARD | Tracy Cook, Lead Consulting and Learning Librarian, Montana State Library

SENTINEL OF CIVIC TRUST AWARD | Brent Brooks, Municipal & County Attorney for multiple jurisdictions



2026 EVENT CALENDAR

COUNTY

FEBRUARY 15 - 19

MACo Midwinter Conference
Billings, MT

MAY 11-14

60th Annual Clerks of District Court Convention
Dillon, MT

SEPTEMBER 27 - 30

MACo Annual Conference
Helena, MT

DECEMBER 8 - 10

MACo Elected Officials Training
Helena, MT

MUNICIPAL

REGIONAL MUNICIPAL OFFICIALS TRAININGS:

FEB 4 in Great Falls

FEB 10 in Butte

FEB 4 in Kalispell

FEB 18 in Bozeman

FEB 10 in Billings

FEB 18 in Sidney

MARCH 4 - 6

Executive Forum
Livingston, MT

MARCH 12

Municipal Budgeting 101
Helena, MT

MAY 3 - 7

Municipal Institute and Elected Officials Training
Livingston, MT

OCTOBER 7 - 9

MT League of Cities and Town's Annual Conference
Helena, MT

EVENTS HOSTED BY OUR PARTNERS AND AFFILIATE ASSOCIATIONS

MARCH 23-25

MT Rural Water
Billings, MT

MAY 18-20

Consortium of University Public Service Organizations Annual Conference
Anchorage, AK

JUNE 15-18

National Association of Community Development Professionals Annual Conference
Wichita, KS



ANNUAL REPORT

Local Government Center 2025



Local Government Center

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who has supported the Local Government Center over the past 40 years. Your commitment, whether through participation, partnership, or philanthropy, has made it possible for us to provide training, resources, and guidance to local leaders across Montana. Together, we strengthen communities, foster informed governance, and ensure that every city, town, and county has the tools to thrive. Your support is not just an investment in the Center, it's an investment in the future of Montana.



STAY CONNECTED



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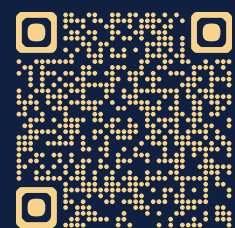


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