

NC LEAD: leading effective agency development

NC LEAD is a customized leadership development program specifically tailored to meet the current and future leadership development needs of our state agencies' top leaders. NC LEAD is offered by the Office of State Personnel (OSP) in partnership with the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) for state government agency heads and their senior management team members.

CCL is a top-ranked, global provider of executive education that develops better leaders through its exclusive focus on leadership education and research. A trusted partner of dynamic leaders and organizations worldwide, CCL blends cutting-edge research with innovative training, coaching, assessments and publishing to create a highly personal experience with lasting impact. Founded in 1970 as a nonprofit educational institution in Greensboro, NC, CCL develops creative leaders who are capable of thinking and acting beyond boundaries to achieve more than imagined. The *Financial Times* regularly ranks CCL among the Top 10 providers of executive education in the world.

NC LEAD is based on competencies identified by CCL experts through interviews, focus groups and surveys conducted with NC state government leaders. Program content is delivered through cutting-edge leadership development sessions designed and facilitated by CCL faculty. In addition, each NC LEAD participant receives customized 360-degree feedback, access to a personal executive coach and online follow-up assessments.



NC LEAD participants deeply engrossed in a leadership exercise.

WHY the program was needed

North Carolina's state agencies – like business, non-profit and educational entities everywhere – are experiencing a time of rapid change and increasing complexity. As the challenges faced by each agency become more complex, the challenges may need to be addressed by new forms of intra-agency or inter-agency cooperation.

In addition, there is the “baby boom effect” of many high-quality employees with many years of service (and knowledge), often occupying upper-level positions, who will be retiring in the next few years. There are not yet enough experienced and qualified people ready to move into these leadership positions. These issues are exacerbated by political considerations, such as the election or appointment of new agency leadership every few years.

To better enable state government leaders to successfully address these daunting challenges, NC LEAD was created to:

- Enhance executives' awareness of their leadership skills and how their behavior affects others.
- Build leadership capacity in executives, as well as senior and high potential agency leaders.
- Strengthen critical NC state government leadership competencies.
- Prepare leaders to recognize the need for change and to develop strategies to effectively lead and respond to change.
- Provide opportunities for networking and knowledge sharing across divisions within an agency and across agencies. A better understanding of each agency's activities and expertise can create a more collaborative culture and address the constant pressure to increase government efficiency.
- Introduce strategies that executives may apply to lead and engage others, including their internal and external constituents, as well as the NC General Assembly.
- Ensure smooth transitions for staff arriving and leaving state government by increasing shared knowledge and developing the leadership skills of the senior staff who do not change with each election cycle.

HOW the program was developed

The process began with several wide-ranging conversations involving the leadership of NC OSP and CCL program designers, faculty and staff. These meetings created a common knowledge base of what the major issues might be, what leadership development opportunities were currently available, and what CCL expertise could be brought to bear on the issues. These meetings also identified current agency leaders and senior agency staff members who could provide valuable input into the program's design.

CCL and NC OSP then created an electronic survey that went to about 85 people at senior levels in various agencies. CCL also conducted focus groups with agency heads and senior staff. In this “discovery” process, the intent was to gain insight regarding:

- What it takes to be a successful leader in the Governor’s Cabinet or Council of State.
- What it will take to be successful 3-5 years into the future.
- What current executives needed to learn when they were first named to their current senior positions.
- What someone new coming into these roles needs to learn.

Based on the information gleaned from the surveys and focus groups, CCL researchers identified the competencies on which NC LEAD was then designed. The following critical competencies emerged consistently in the discovery process and were uniformly rated very important:

- Demonstrating ethics and integrity
- Setting vision and strategy
- Solving problems and making decisions
- Managing change

In addition, the following supporting competencies surfaced on a consistent basis in the survey and focus groups, but with less emphasis than the critical competencies:

- Managing effective teams and work groups
- Developing others
- Exhibiting leadership stature
- Building and maintaining relationships
- Managing politics and influencing others
- Understanding and navigating the organization
- Managing yourself
- Managing the work



John Sayres, a Senior Enterprise Associate at CCL, discusses alternative influence techniques with NC LEAD participants.

HOW the program works

The program consists of two inter-related tracks: one for agency heads and a second for deputies and other senior staff members from the agencies. While the agency heads and their deputies/senior staffs obviously deal with many of the same issues in leading the agencies, CCL and NC OSP felt that separate tracks made sense for several reasons. These reasons included the mobility of the agency heads (due to elections and changes of administration) and the desire to focus, in the senior staff track, on developing leadership skills that would prepare participants for even higher levels of service in the future.

PARTICIPANTS

For the inaugural sessions in early 2008, the NC OSP solicited participation from across state government. The program was publicized throughout the state agencies, and program participants were self-nominated. There were 11 participants in the agency heads track and 19 in the deputies track.

PROGRAM elements

Prior to attending the first program, each participant completed several internet-based assessments, including a customized 360-degree assessment developed by NC OSP and CCL based on CCL's *360 By Design*. The idea of 360-degree feedback is to collect information from a number of people who work closely with a participant about how the participant performs in real-world situations, as a superior, peer or employee. The term "360" reflects the fact that this information is gathered from all around the manager – from supervisor, coworkers, employees, customers, and others outside the organization that the manager may work with. This information is presented to the manager (thus the term "feedback") in a completely confidential, one-on-one session with a CCL feedback facilitator.

The actual sessions were a combination of assessment feedback, experiential activities, group discussion, reflection time and developmental planning. Sessions 1 and 2 were held at CCL's main campus in Greensboro, and Session 3 was held in Raleigh. The contents of each session for the agency head and deputy tracks are outlined in the following table:

| Session | Agency heads | Deputies and senior staff |
|--|---|---|
| <p>Session 1</p> <p>(The two groups, agency heads and deputies and senior staff, attend separate sessions covering the same content.)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Changing nature of leadership in NC state government ● Creating a leadership vision and strategy ● Strengthening problem-solving and decision-making skills ● Leading change ● Promoting team and agency collaboration ● Coaching for success ● Influencing in a political environment ● Feedback from 360 surveys and other assessments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Changing nature of leadership in NC state government ● Creating a leadership vision and strategy ● Strengthening problem-solving and decision-making skills ● Leading change ● Promoting team and agency collaboration ● Coaching for success ● Influencing in a political environment ● Feedback from 360 surveys and other assessments |
| <p>Session 2</p> <p>(This session is attended by deputies and senior staff.)</p> | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Building skills to work across organizational boundaries to tackle complex challenges ● Visualizing challenges ● Conducting stakeholder analyses ● Creating solution matrices ● Storyboarding implementation |
| <p>Session 3</p> <p>(All participants attend the morning session together; deputies and senior staff stay for the afternoon session.)</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deputies and senior staff present their learning products ● Exploring methods to attract and retain key talent in NC state government | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Deputies and senior staff present their learning products ● Exploring methods to attract and retain key talent in NC state government ● Influencing Skills Self-Assessment ● Influencing Tactics ● Bringing What You've Learned To State Government ● Planning Your Development for the Next Six Months |

By the end of the program participants created individual development plans. They shared these plans with their superiors or peers, as appropriate, in order to create a supportive environment for the individual changes that they wish to make. Participants may also choose to continue to work with the CCL executive coach that they met during their one-on-one assessment feedback sessions.



Participants in first NC LEAD program, 2008.

DETERMINING *IF* the program works

Several measures are used to determine the success of NC LEAD. Because it is a critical component of growth as a leader, we look for evidence of increased self-awareness. This usually occurs and is evidenced through the participants' self-reporting, the perception of their executive coaches and program facilitators, and by what they choose to focus on in their development plans.

During the program, each day's schedule ends with the participants completing a confidential evaluation of the day's activities. The evaluation includes specific questions on what each person found most helpful and least helpful on the given day, along with open-ended questions for whatever input the participant wishes to provide.

More substantially, three to six months after the final program session, a follow-up 360-degree assessment will be administered. This assessment makes use of CCL's *Reflections*[®], a "then and now" assessment in which raters are asked to assess the participant's leadership behaviors before the leadership program ("then") and now. *Reflections*[®] is structured to focus on specific leadership behaviors that were the subject of the development program.

CCL's Design and Evaluation Center, in cooperation with NC OSP, will produce a written evaluation report that relates the program's final outcomes to the goals and objectives that were agreed to at the beginning of the program design process. Through

analyses of the participants' own evaluations, the *Reflections*[®] data, and interviews with various program stakeholders, the impact of the program will be determined. Any opportunities for improvement that surface during this process will be applied to future editions of NC LEAD.