



Preconference Workshop

Tuesday, September 22, 2026

New Manager Boot Camp (separate registration required – lunch included)

9:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Breakfast begins at 8:30 AM

Whether you're early in your local government career, a first-time manager, or an assistant preparing for the next step, this interactive workshop provides a practical foundation for success. Participants will explore the essential responsibilities of today's local government manager, including effective communication, adaptive leadership, public values, disruptive trends facing local governments, organizational culture, and navigating the complex relationship between elected officials and professional administration.

Led by faculty from the University of Georgia's Carl Vinson Institute of Government and supported by experienced GCCMA managers serving as small-group facilitators, this interactive program combines expert instruction with real-world discussion, practical advice, and peer learning. Attendees will leave with practical tools, leadership insights, and a stronger understanding of the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in local government management.

Presenters:

Hardin Watkins, Public Service Faculty, Carl Vinson Institute of Government, UGA

Suzette Arnold, Public Service Faculty, Carl Vinson Institute of Government, UGA

*Joined by Seasoned GCCMA Managers Assigned to each Small Discussion Group

ICMA Competency: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 13, 14

Sponsored by: Carter & Sloope, Inc. and Trane

Dinner on Your Own



2026 Fall Conference

Wednesday, September 23, 2026

7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. Breakfast

7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m. Orientation and Breakfast for First-time Attendees and New Members

First-time attendees and new members are encouraged to attend orientation to become familiar with the organization and be introduced to the GCCMA leadership.

Sponsored by: Spectrum

8:30 a.m. – 8:45 a.m. Welcome and Opening Remarks

Adam Mestres, GCCMA President; County Manager, Morgan County

Nicole Love Hendrickson, Chairwoman, Gwinnett County Commission

Steve Kohn, Vice President of Construction at Concord Hospitality Enterprises, The Westin Atlanta Gwinnett

8:45 a.m. – 10:15 a.m. Opening General Session - The Lesson in Loss

Success is often defined by victories, but lasting leadership is forged through setbacks. Drawing from his nine-season NFL career with the Baltimore Ravens and Atlanta Falcons, former Pro Bowl fullback Ovie Mughelli shares powerful lessons on resilience, adaptability, and perseverance. Through stories of overcoming draft-day disappointment, recovering from difficult losses, and performing under intense pressure, Ovie demonstrates how challenges can become opportunities for growth. Attendees will gain practical leadership insights on maintaining focus, building resilient teams, and turning adversity into a catalyst for personal and organizational success.

Presenter: Ovie Mughelli, Founder and CEO, The Ovie Mughelli Foundation, Former All Pro Fullback, Atlanta Falcons & Baltimore Ravens

Moderator: Kathryn Downs, Assistant County Manager, Bryan County

ICMA Competency: 3, 4, 5, 6, 13, 14

Sponsored by: HdL Companies, Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia (MEAG), and Rep'd

10:15 a.m. –10:30 a.m. Break

10:30 a.m. – 11:45 a.m. Concurrent Sessions

Concurrent Session #1: Beyond the Keynote: A Deeper Conversation with Ovie Mughelli

Continue the conversation with Ovie Mughelli in this more personal and interactive follow-up to **The Lesson in Loss**. He will expand upon the experiences and leadership lessons introduced during the opening general session.

With more time for storytelling, reflection, and audience questions, this session provides an opportunity to explore how Mughelli's lessons from professional football, philanthropy, and life beyond the field can be applied to leadership in local government. Attendees are encouraged to bring their questions and take part in an honest conversation about responding to setbacks, supporting teams under pressure, and turning difficult experiences into opportunities for growth.

Presenter: Ovie Mughelli, Founder and CEO, The Ovie Mughelli Foundation, Former All Pro Fullback, Atlanta Falcons & Baltimore Ravens

Moderator: Kathryn Downs, Assistant County Manager, Bryan County

ICMA Competency: 4, 6, 13, 14

Concurrent Session #2: Discover Winning Strategies: Insights from GCCMA Community Award Winners

What does award-winning local government innovation look like in practice? Hear directly from recipients of GCCMA's most recent Community Awards as they share the vision, partnerships, and leadership behind their successful initiatives. Panelists will discuss how their communities identified opportunities, overcame challenges, engaged stakeholders, and achieved measurable results. Attendees will leave with practical ideas and proven strategies that can be adapted to strengthen programs and services in their own communities.

Presenters:

Guy Singletary, GCCMA District Director; County Administrator, Emanuel County

Sharyn Dickerson, City Manager, Watkinsville

Chuck Warbington, City Manager, Lawrenceville

Moderator:

Scott Johnson, County Manager, Columbia County

ICMA Competency: 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14

Concurrent Session #3: The GCCMA Legal Services Program – Protecting Your Career, Strengthening Your Position.

An employment agreement deserves expert eyes. Learn about GCCMA's new Legal Services Program that provides up to five hours of free annual attorney time through Wilson, Morton & Downs, LLC for agreement review, drafting, negotiation, and severance guidance. Session highlights include introduction of the draft model employment agreement built specifically for Georgia city and county managers and administrators, giving members a strong, profession specific starting point for their next agreement negotiation.

Presenter: Shelly Momo, Wilson, Morton, and Downs

Moderator: Shawn Boatright, GCCMA Secretary-Treasurer

ICMA Competency:

11:45 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Networking Lunch with Exhibitors

Sponsored by: Croft & Associates, Davenport & Company, LLC, and SiteLogiQ

11:45 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. Board of Directors Meeting and Lunch

1:00 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. The Local Government How-To Lab: Practical Solutions

Get practical, boots-on-the-ground guidance on four timely challenges facing local government leaders. Four topic sessions will be offered concurrently and repeated during three rounds. Choose three of the four topics and rotate to a new room after each round.

How It Works:

Each topic will remain in the same room and will be presented three times. Attend your first-choice topic during Round 1, rotate to another topic for Round 2, and complete a third topic during Round 3. By the end of the session, you will participate in three of the four available topics.

Choose Three Topics

A. Conducting a Salary Study | Sam Trager, Public Service Faculty, Carl Vinson Institute of Government, UGA

B. Rebranding Your Community | Kaitlin Messich, Public Service Faculty, Carl Vinson Institute of Government, UGA

C. FEMA/GEMA Documentation and Recordkeeping | Ashley Tye, Lowndes County and Jonathan Jones, GEMA

D. Writing Better AI Prompts | Ethan Christmas, Public Service Faculty, Carl Vinson Institute of Government, UGA

Rotation Schedule

1:00–1:25 p.m. — Round 1

1:25–1:30 p.m. — Rotate

1:30–1:55 p.m. — Round 2

1:55–2:00 p.m. — Rotate

2:00–2:25 p.m. — Round 3

2:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. Break with Exhibitors

Sponsored by: Berkley Group, LLC, Bureau Veritas, Developmental Associates, LLC, Hoar Construction, Raymond Global, Inc., and Stifel

3:00 p.m. – 4:15 p.m. General Session: Property Tax Legislation - Impacts and Implementation

Georgia's legislative landscape continues to evolve, bringing significant implications for cities, counties, and local government leaders. This session will provide an update on recent property tax legislation, implementation requirements, and the potential impacts on local governments.

Presenters:

Larry Hanson, CEO and Executive Director, Georgia Municipal Association
Alicia Vaughn, County Consulting Services Associate, Association County Commissioners of Georgia

Moderator: Sammy Rich, GCCMA Vice President; City Manager, Rome

ICMA Competency: 1, 2, 5, 6, 9, 14

4:15 p.m. – 4:45 p.m. GCCMA Business Meeting

Adam Mestres, GCCMA President; County Manager, Morgan County

4:45 p.m. Awards Ceremony**5:00 p.m. - 6:30 p.m. Opening Reception with Exhibitors**

Sponsored by: Explore Gwinnett and Westin Atlanta Gwinnett

GMC, InterDev, Parrish Construction, and Readyly

Dinner on your own

Thursday, September 24, 2026**7:45 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. Women in Government Breakfast: It Takes a Tribe: Lessons from a Lifetime**

Karen Daly made history as Greenville, Texas's first-ever woman city manager and went on to lead in Sugar Land, Longview, and Arlington Texas across nearly 40 years — earning both the ICMA and TCMA Distinguished Service Awards along the way. Today, as director of the Texas Women's Leadership Institute, she's built one of the strongest leadership pipelines in the state, with dozens of alumnae now serving as city managers, assistant city managers, and department

heads. Join us for a candid conversation on what it takes to break barriers, lead through change, and build the tribe that lifts the next generation of women in local government.

Presenter: Karen Daly, Director, Texas Women's Leadership Institute

Moderator: Chelsea Jackson, Deputy City Manager, Douglasville and ICMA Southern Region Vice-President

ICMA Competency:

Sponsored by: 4PM, MSI Benefits, RaLin Construction, and Schneider Electric

8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m. Breakfast with Exhibitors

Sponsored by: AshBritt, Inc., Clark Patterson Lee, Pond & Company, Thomas & Hutton Engineering Co., and Turnipseed Engineers, Inc.

9:00 a.m. – 9:15 a.m. Welcome and Opening Remarks

Adam Mestres, GCCMA President; County Manager, Morgan County
Lisa Anders, Chief Operating Officer, Explore Gwinnett

9:15 a.m. – 10:30 a.m. General Session: Turning the Tails on Terror in our Uncertain & Scary World

Every leader will face moments of uncertainty, crisis, and unexpected change. In this inspiring keynote, Michael Hingson shares his extraordinary story of escaping the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, with the assistance of his guide dog, Roselle, while revealing the leadership principles that enabled him to remain calm, make sound decisions, and persevere under unimaginable circumstances. Through powerful storytelling and practical lessons, attendees will discover how trust, resilience, teamwork, adaptability, and managing fear can strengthen their leadership and prepare them to navigate both personal and professional challenges with confidence.

Hingson is an internationally recognized speaker, author, and survivor of the terrorist attacks. Blind since birth, he has dedicated his career to helping leaders and organizations understand that fear can be managed, adversity can become an opportunity, and true leadership emerges when we choose courage over panic.

Presenter: Michael Hingson, International Speaker, Author, 9/11 World Trade Center Survivor

Moderator: Adam Mestres, GCCMA President; County Manager, Morgan County

Sponsored by: HdL Companies, Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia (MEAG), and Rep'd

ICMA Competency: 4, 5, 6, 11, 13, 14

10:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m. **Break with Exhibitors**

Sponsored by: Berkley Group, LLC, Bureau Veritas, Developmental Associates, LLC, Hoar Construction, Raymond Global, Inc., and Stifel

11:00 a.m. - 12:15 p.m. **Concurrent Sessions**

Concurrent Session #7: Timely Legal Issues Facing Georgia Local Governments

This session will examine two distinct but timely legal issues affecting Georgia local governments. The first portion will explore litigation involving fire fees, impact fees, and other local government charges, including class-action claims, the experiences of communities facing these challenges, and potential legislative developments that could affect future cases.

The second portion will focus on *City of Milton v. Chang* and the Georgia Supreme Court's 2026 decision addressing municipal liability for conditions within public rights-of-way. Panelists will provide an overview of the background and status of the case, the questions it raised for Georgia cities, and its place within the broader legal landscape confronting local governments. Together, these discussions will provide city and county managers with a factual overview of both subjects and a better understanding of the issues they may need to discuss with their attorneys, insurers, and governing officials.

Presenters: Aaron Kappler, County Attorney, Bryan County & Managing Shareholder, Thompson, O'Brien, Kappler & Nasuti, P.C.
Jeffrey Rusbridge, City Attorney, Canton & Principal, Dyer, Rusbridge, Argo, P.C.

Moderator: Billy Peppers, City Manager, Canton

ICMA Competency: 6, 8, 12, 14

Concurrent Session #8: Electrical Grids, Data Centers – What Is the Impact, and How Can Cities and Counties Prepare?

Join Janice Allen Jackson, host of the *Local Matters Podcast*, for a timely discussion on one of the most significant emerging issues facing Georgia communities: the rapid growth of data centers and their impact on local infrastructure, resources, and community vitality.

Building on a recent *Local Matters* podcast discussion, this session will focus on the facts local government leaders need to understand as they evaluate data center development. Panelists will explore infrastructure and utility demands, land use considerations, and the policy tools communities can use to prepare, including ordinances, zoning regulations, development standards, resolutions, and utility capacity analysis.

The session will also examine how local governments can establish a sound factual foundation before weighing the potential benefits, challenges, and economic impacts of individual projects. With that information in hand, communities can make informed decisions that reflect their values, strategic priorities, growth plans, and long-term goals.

Presenters:

Amy Sharma, Executive Director, Science for Good
TBD - Atlanta Regional Commission

Moderator: Janice Allen Jackson, Host, *Local Matters Podcast* and Retired Local Government Manager

ICMA Competency: 6, 7, 8, 10, 12

12:15 p.m. – 1:15 p.m. Networking Lunch with Exhibitors

Sponsored by: Croft & Associates, Davenport & Company, LLC, and SiteLogiQ

12:15 p.m. – 1:15 p.m. Assistant/Deputy Lunch

Sponsored by: Crews & Associates, Inc., and Southern Disaster Recovery

1:15 p.m. – 2:30 p.m. Feeling the Heat: Fiery Questions for GCCMA Leaders

Inspired by the popular spicy-wing interview format, this entertaining and interactive session puts GCCMA leaders in the hot seat—literally. As members of the GCCMA Board answer audience-submitted questions, they'll sample increasingly spicy chicken wings (or a comparable spicy alternative), adding an element of fun to an engaging and authentic conversation.

Questions collected from attendees in advance will cover topics such as leadership, career development, ethics, board service, organizational culture, emerging challenges, and the future of local government management. As the heat rises, so does the candor - creating opportunities for honest reflections, memorable stories, and practical leadership insights. Whether you're looking for professional advice, curious about board perspectives, or simply ready for a few laughs, this unique session promises an engaging blend of inspiration, humor, and meaningful conversation.

Panelists:

Adam Mestres, GCCMA President; County Manager, Morgan County
Teresa de Castro, GCCMA District Director; Assistant Manager, Decatur

TBD

Moderator: Freddy Morgan, GCCMA District Director; Assistant Manager, Cartersville

ICMA Competency: 2, 4, 5, 6, 14

1:15 p.m. – 4:30 p.m. Mobile Workshops

(Tours meet promptly at 1:15 p.m. and begin at 1:20 p.m.)

Tour 1: Insiders Walking Tour of the Gas South District

Go behind the scenes of the Gas South District and explore the operations, coordination, and planning required to manage Gwinnett County's premier entertainment and convention

destinations. This guided walking tour will take participants through the arena, convention center, theater, arts center, and parking facilities while highlighting how these interconnected venues support economic growth through major events, community programming, and visitor experiences.

District leaders will share practical insights into event operations, facility management, public safety, customer service, parking and transportation, and the partnerships necessary to keep a complex, multi-venue campus running smoothly. Participants will gain a greater understanding of the opportunities and challenges involved in operating large-scale public assembly and destination facilities.

Tour Host: Robyn Ali, Senior Vice President, Gas South District

Presenters:

Stan Brown, President and CEO, Gas South District, Gwinnett Convention & Visitors Bureau

Dan Markham, Vice President, Arena Management, Gas South District

Neal Humphreys, Director of Event Services, Gas South Arena

ICMA Competency: 2, 6, 7, 10, 13

Tour 2: Downtown Lawrenceville – A Decade of Transformation

Experience firsthand how the City of Lawrenceville has transformed its thriving downtown (DTL) over the past decade through strategic investments, innovative financing, and strong public-private partnerships. This tour highlights several catalytic projects, including the SouthLawn residential development, the historic Hooper-Renwick Themed Library, The Lawrence Hotel, and the Lawrenceville Arts Center. Participants will learn how Lawrenceville leveraged tools such as revenue bonds, tax abatements, Tax Allocation Districts (TADs), public-private partnerships, and collaborative City, County, and Downtown Development Authority (DDA) partnerships to drive redevelopment and create a vibrant, walkable destination.

Tour Host: Chuck Warbington, City Manager, Lawrenceville

ICMA Competency: 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13

Tour 3: Suwanee Town Center – Building a Destination Through Vision and Partnership

Join the City of Suwanee for a walking tour of the award-winning Suwanee Town Center and Town Center on Main. Explore how more than 20 years of community vision, strategic planning, targeted public investment, and public-private partnerships transformed the area into a connected mixed-use destination that attracts nearly one million visitors each year. Along the way, participants will learn about the planning process, financing strategies, implementation approach, challenges encountered, and key lessons learned. The tour offers practical insights that communities of all sizes can apply to their own downtown redevelopment efforts.

Tour Host: Marty Allen, City Manager, Suwanee

ICMA Competency: 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13

Skills-Based Quick Learning Session

2:45 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Quick Learning Session: How to Create Mission, Vision, Value Statements for Your Organization

Mission, vision, and values statements can provide an important foundation for an organization - but only when they are clear, meaningful, and connected to how the organization actually operates. This interactive session will help local government managers better understand the purpose of each and how they can be developed and used to guide organizational culture, priorities, and decision-making.

The session will begin with an overview of effective approaches for developing mission, vision, and values statements, followed by perspectives from a city and county that have recently completed similar organizational or strategic planning processes. Participants will hear what worked, what they learned, and how they engaged elected officials, employees, and other stakeholders.

The session will conclude with an active-learning exercise that gives participants an opportunity to practice developing mission, vision, and values statements and consider how the process could be applied within their own organizations.

Presenter: TaLisha Champagne, Human Resources Director, Fairburn

Moderator:

ICMA Competency: 6, 7, 13, 14

Dinner on Your Own

Friday, September 25, 2026

7:30 a.m. – 8:45 a.m.

Program Planning Committee Meeting and Breakfast

8:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.

Breakfast with Exhibitors

Sponsored by: AshBritt, Inc., Clark Patterson Lee, Pond & Company, Thomas & Hutton Engineering Co., and Turnipseed Engineers, Inc.

9:00 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.

Opening Remarks & Vendor Door Prizes

9:15 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.

General Session: Don't Wrestle With B.E.A.R.s

Today's local government leaders routinely face emotionally charged conversations - with residents, elected officials, and community stakeholders. Former hostage negotiator and "conflict strategist" Ryan Dunlap explores why some people aren't looking for resolution, how

heightened emotions change the way people think and respond, and what leaders can do to de-escalate conflict before it disrupts organizations and communities.

Drawing on decades of experience in crisis negotiation and organizational leadership, Dunlap introduces practical strategies for recognizing the "meaning behind the madness," responding effectively to emotionally elevated individuals, and leading difficult conversations with confidence and composure. Attendees will leave with tools to navigate community tensions and emotionally charged people while strengthening trust and maintaining focus on serving their communities.

Presenter: Ryan Dunlap, Conflict Strategist, Founder and Chief Conflict Officer, Conflictish; Conflict Strategist Former Hostage Negotiator

Moderator: Derrick Turner, Assistant City Manager, Tucker

ICMA Competency: 2, 4, 5, 6, 13, 14

10:30 a.m.

Closing Remarks & Adjournment