

Wisconsin Counties Association
2025 ANNUAL *GAME DAY*
CONFERENCE

8:00 – 9:00 AM

**County Leadership Development: Trends,
Challenges and Opportunities**

Wisconsin Counties Association Conference

County Leadership Development

SEPTEMBER 2025



Community Development Institute
DIVISION OF EXTENSION
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

Presenters



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Background and Context



Extension aims to build not just individual leaders, but **county-wide capacity**.

- Leadership development as a tool for organizational capacity-building.
- Focus on aligning leadership programs with **local needs**.
- Supporting counties in becoming more adaptive, resilient and responsive.

Background and Context



- Decades of partnership between county government and Extension.
- Programs include:
 - **Local Government Education** (e.g., County Officials Workshops, Certified Public Managers Program)
 - **Organizational and Leadership Development** (e.g. Local Government Leadership Academy, county-based leadership programs)
- County educators and state specialists regularly support departments with tailored trainings (e.g. Real Colors workshops).

Background and Context



- County leadership is also built through:
 - Wisconsin Counties Association (e.g. annual conference)
 - Professional associations.
 - Private sector consultants.
 - In house efforts.
- Extension aims to complement these offerings.

Background and Context



- Surge in inquiries over the past 6 months.
- Counties asking:
 - “What are other counties doing?”
 - “What leadership development options are available?”
- Extension responded by launching the **County Survey on Leadership Development Training**.

County survey on leadership development training



- Conducted by the **Community Development Institute** of the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of Extension in partnership with the **Wisconsin Counties Association** (WCA).
- Goal: better understand current leadership training structures, content, and delivery methods to inform statewide leadership development programming and help counties enhance their professional development offerings.

County survey on leadership development training



- Counties encouraged to distribute survey to HR Directors, County Board Chairs, County Administrators, or “anyone within your County organization that helps guide and direct leadership development.”
- 199 responses from 64 (out of 72) counties;
125 from 50 counties completed at least majority of survey.

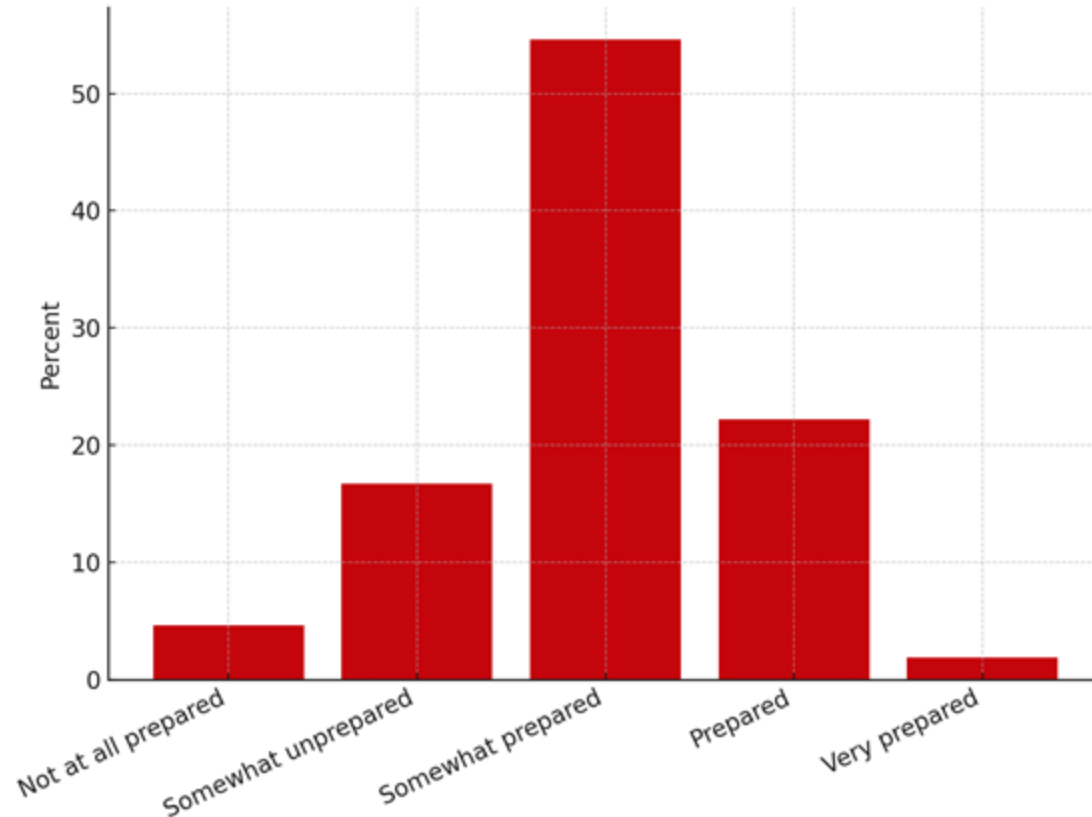
Definitions



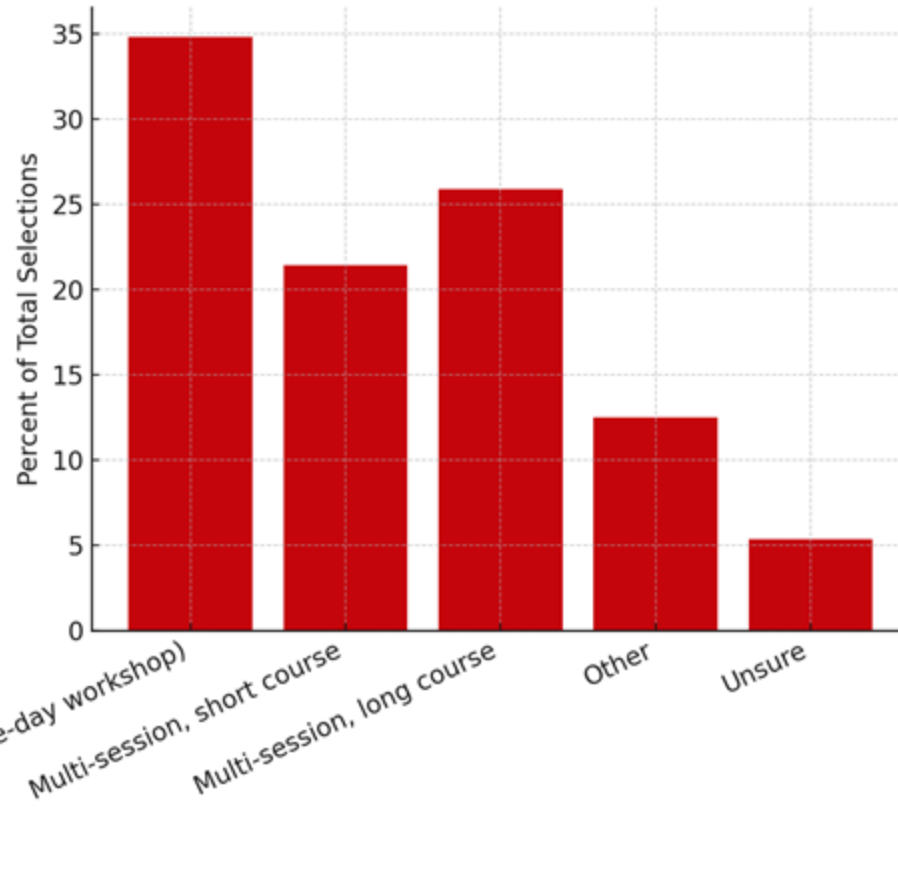
- ▶ **Leadership** refers to aligning people to an organization's mission and inspiring and motivating them to achieve a long-term vision.
- ▶ **Management** refers to organizing and controlling day-to-day operations to achieve short-term goals.



Perceived preparedness of department heads for leadership

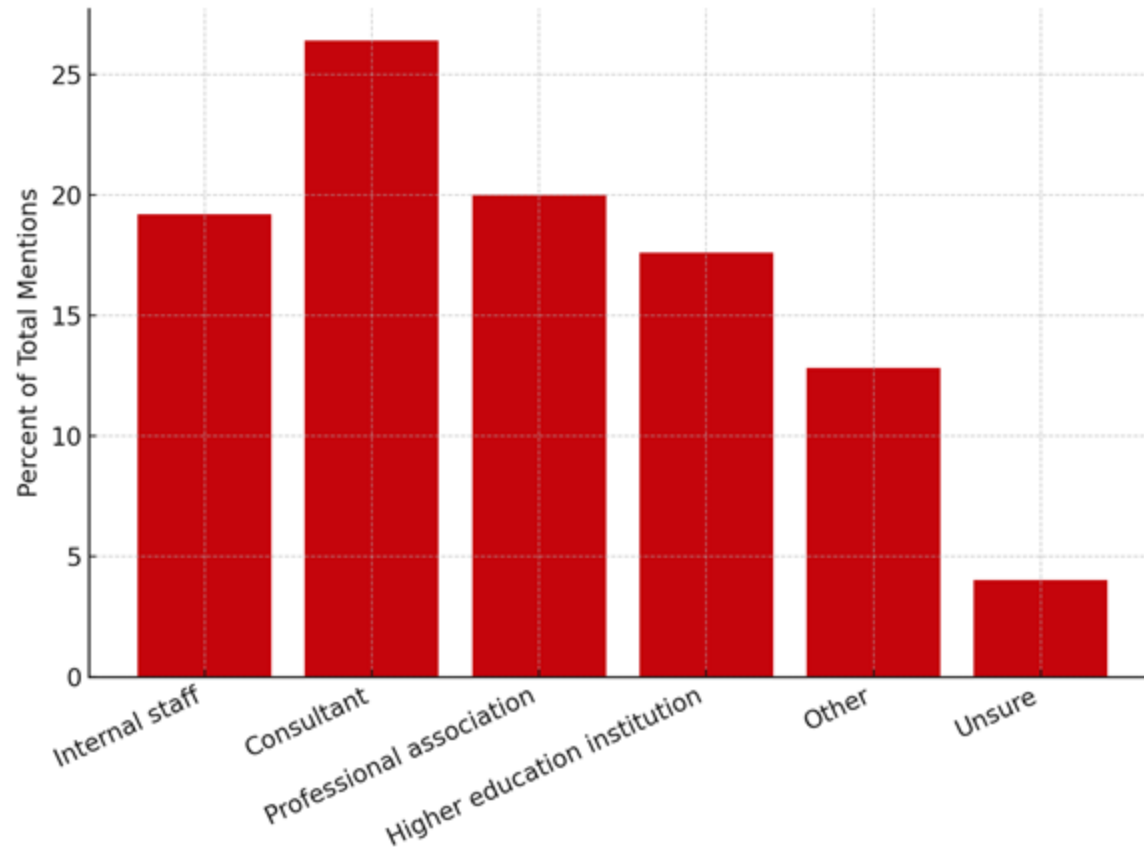


What counties are currently offering...



"Other" responses included conferences, mentorship programs, "lunch and learns."

Who provides current offerings...

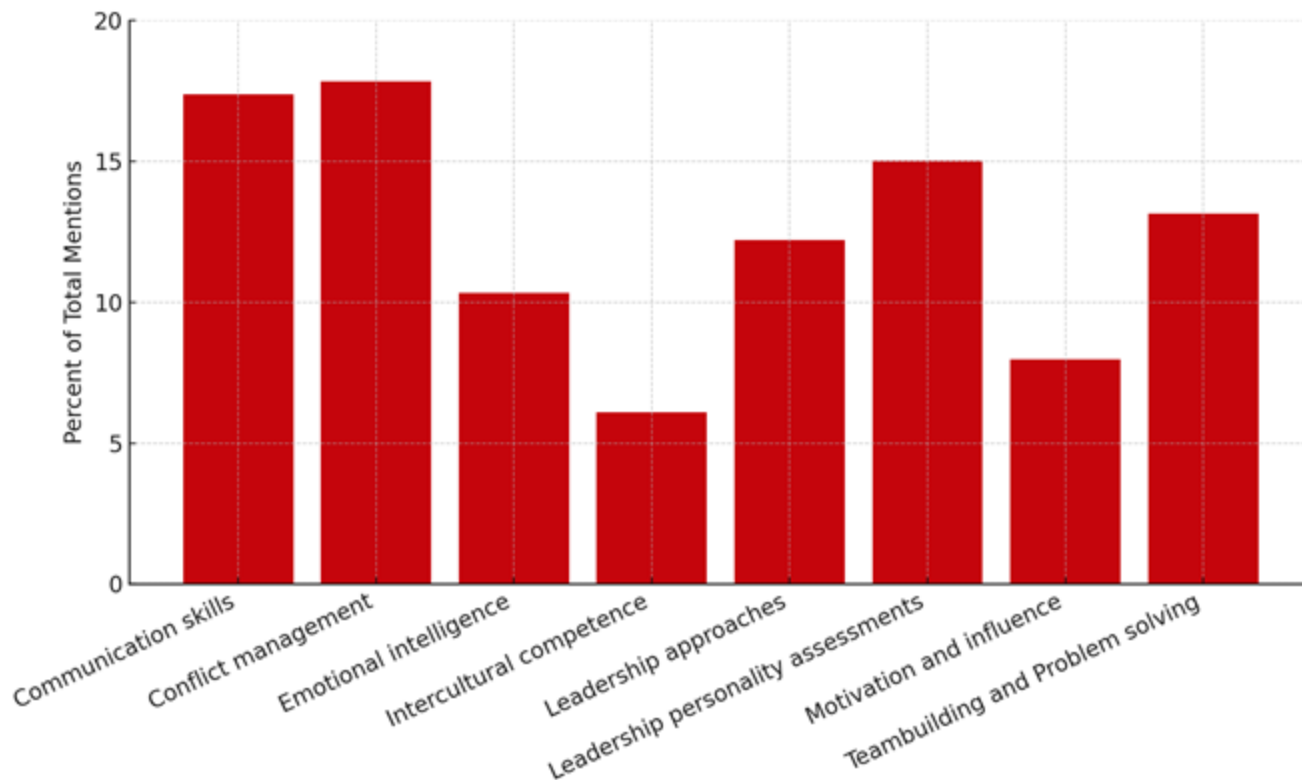


What leadership programs has your county participated in (last 3 years)?



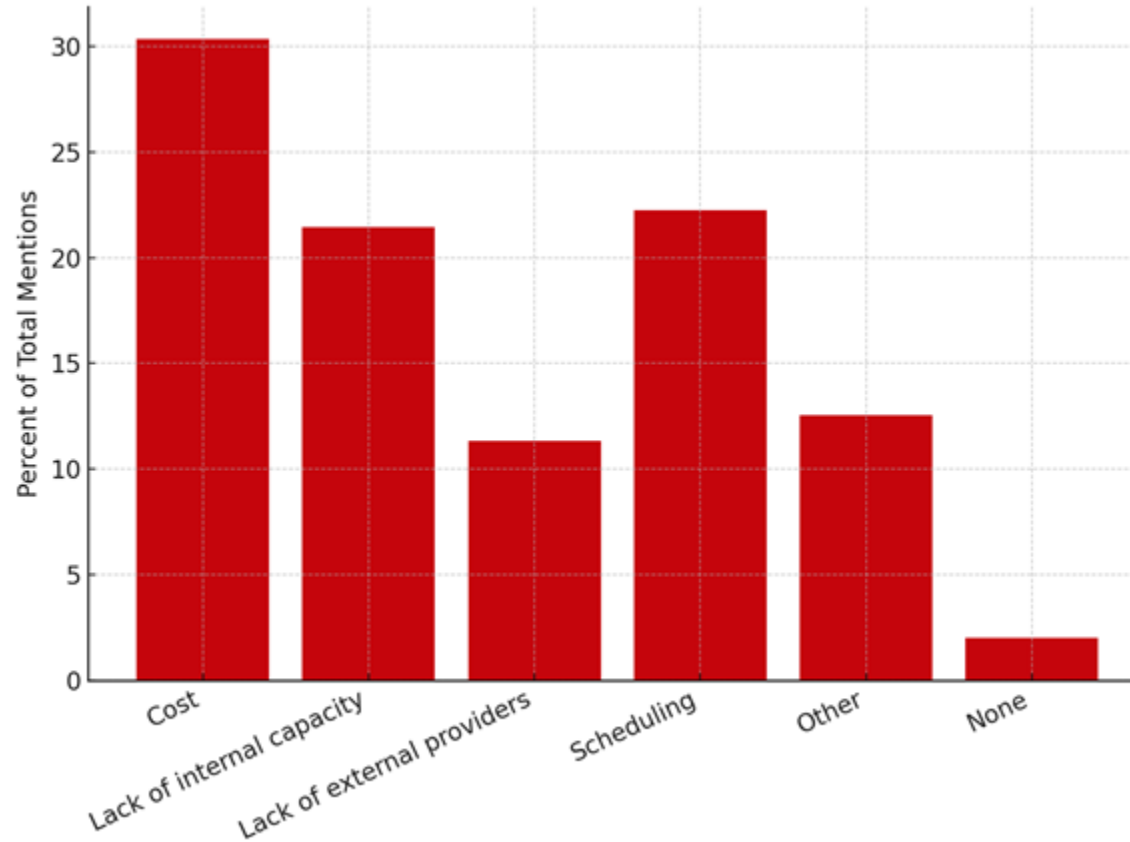
Program	Number of Mentions
UW Extension / UW-Madison / Local Government Education Programs	21
Leadership Development (general or unspecified)	15
National Association of Counties (NACo)	14
CPM / Certified Public Manager	11
Supervisory / Management Training	9
WCA / WCA Leadership Forum	7
Other (county-specific programs, universities, miscellaneous)	10

Topics covered in county leadership programs



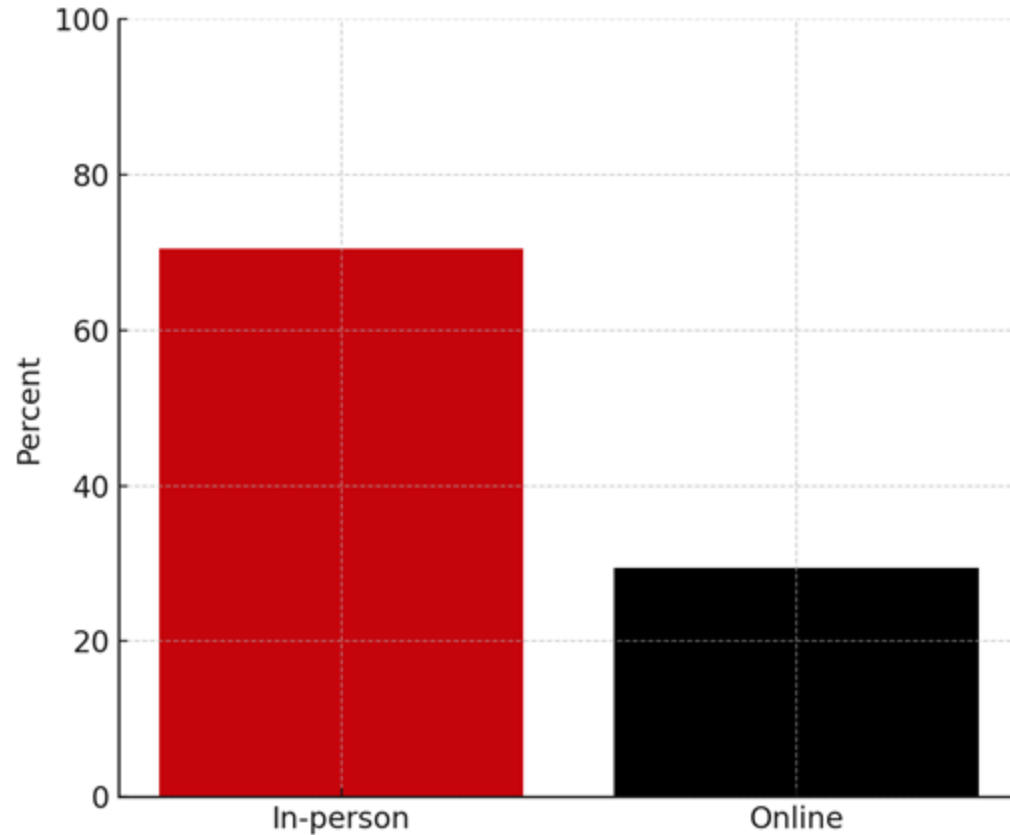


Barriers to offering leadership development

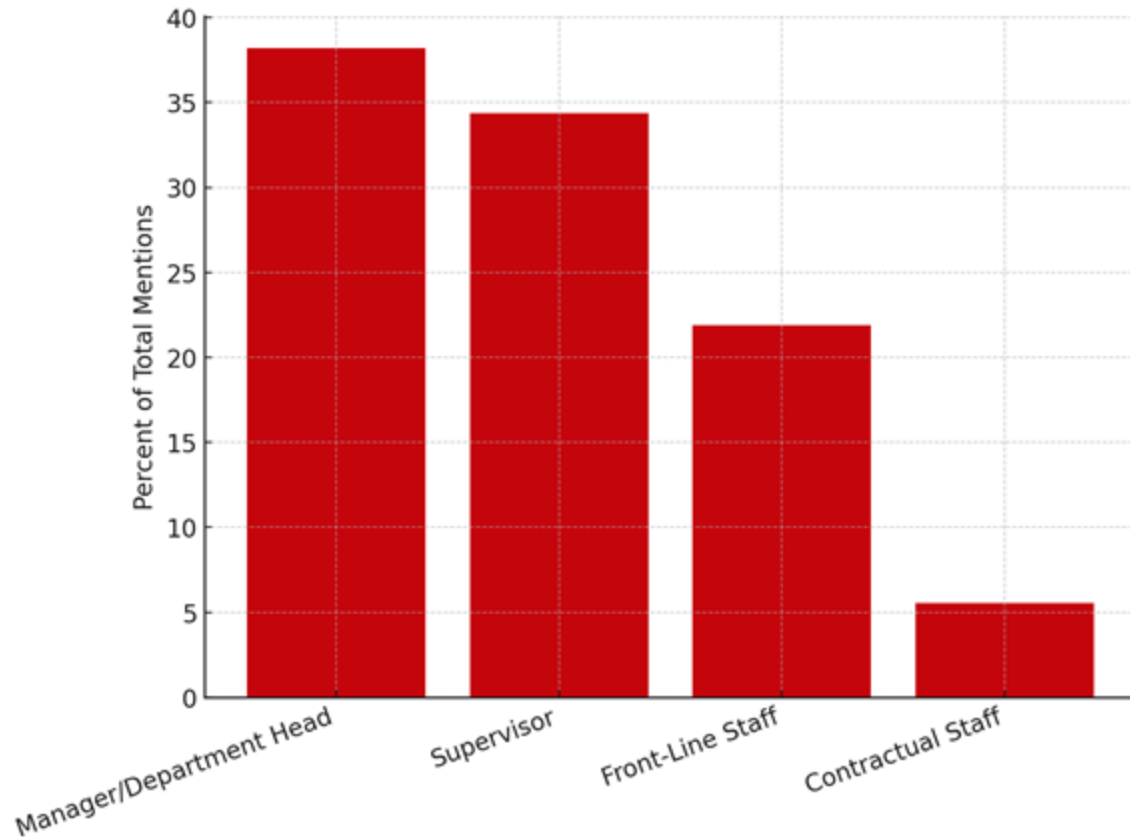


Most common reason offered in "Other" was lack of commitment, not making it a priority.

Preferred training modality



Recommended staff levels for training



1

Leadership training

2

**General government
training**

3

Management training

4

HR policy

5

Other training

Leadership development needs



- Communication
- Strategic thinking & vision
- Conflict management
- Team building & collaboration
- Change management
- Decision-making and problem-solving
- Emotional intelligence & self-awareness
- Succession planning and recruitment

Leadership development needs



- Communication
- **Strategic thinking & vision**
- Conflict management
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- **Change management**
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- **Succession planning and recruitment**

Key Takeaways



- **Strong Need Identified:** Counties recognize the importance of leadership development.
- **Limited Preparedness:** Many department heads are seen as only somewhat prepared for leadership roles.
- **Barriers to Access:** Cost, scheduling, and lack of internal capacity are top challenges.
- **Preferred Format:** In-person training is strongly favored.
- **Target Audiences:** Counties want training for managers, supervisors, and front-line staff.

Discussion Questions



- What are some of the **specific leadership challenges** that your county is facing?
- How would you **define success** in leadership development?
- What **solutions** do you see **to supporting** counties with **leadership development** needs?
 - Would a template of best practices for developing county leaders be useful? Something counties could use in house?
 - Is there a need to be better connected to existing leadership development opportunities?
 - What else?

Local Government Leadership Academy



- 9-month cohort program
- Focuses on **four core leadership skills**:
 - Relationship-building
 - Communication
 - Decision-making
 - Vision
- Designed for:
 - Elected officials ready for new leadership challenges
 - Department heads, managers, and aspiring leaders
- Supported by UW-Madison Extension, Wisconsin Counties Association, and Leadership Wisconsin Inc.

Certified Public Managers Program



- 300-hour, 18-month program for public sector managers.
- Builds **seven core competencies**:
 - Integrity, Managing Work, Leading People, Developing Self, Public Service Focus, Systemic Integration, Change Leadership
- Participants join a cohort learning community for peer support and shared growth.
- Recognized nationwide; graduates earn the CPM designation.

Community Leadership 2.0



- Advanced leadership skill development in areas such as collaborative decision making; issue analysis and assessment; advocacy and persuasion.
- Experts and practitioners from across the state provide valuable content, offer insights, and prompt deep thinking, planning and action.
- Intensive focus on a single issue of importance and impact.
- **Leadership Wisconsin**: <https://leadershipwi.org/>



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