



ACCG Civic Affairs Foundation Receives Funding from State Farm

The ACCG Civic Affairs Foundation recently received a grant from State Farm. Grant funding will be used to expand the Georgia Civic Awareness Program for Students (GCAPS) to two new counties.

Application Deadline: Friday, August 4, 2017

Georgia Civic Awareness Program for Students (GCAPS)

The Georgia Civic Awareness Program for Students (GCAPS) was developed by ACCG staff and county officials to address the need for increased civic involvement and awareness among our state's youth.

Georgia, like every state, has a need to establish in its youth an interest in civics and a desire to serve in the public sector. GCAPS provides a pathway for counties to address this need at the local level so that our state will produce a more informed and involved citizenry.

The objective of GCAPS is simple: to educate young citizens about the importance of being actively conscious of their local government and the opportunities available in the public sector.

The primary messages that GCAPS participants should take away from the program include:

- Understanding that county government provides diverse programs and services
- Understanding how county government works so that they can take an active role in their community's future
- Knowing the importance of being actively engaged in local government by voting, attending public meetings, monitoring government activities through the media and other informational networks and by volunteering
- Knowing that by getting involved in county government, every individual can make a difference in the community

GCAPS provides civic education by exposing high school students to the role that local government plays and by introducing them to the leaders who make local governments work. Youth are offered the opportunity to gain knowledge about their local governments through hands-on learning activities and experience the decision making process firsthand.

Not only do youth become engaged in their communities and become better informed citizens, they also learn valuable leadership skills and have the opportunity to create and implement civic awareness projects.

GCAPS Program Details

Each of Georgia's 159 counties is unique, which is why ACCG has created a flexible program that can be easily modified to accommodate the demographic, geographic, socioeconomic and financial diversity of the county offering a GCAPS program.

GCAPS starts by identifying a youth development professional to serve as the Program Manager. This individual accepts "ownership" of the program and is responsible for all components necessary for its success, including the recruitment of reliable and dedicated volunteers to serve on an Advisory Committee. The Program Manager works to meet all the needs of the delegation and to make GCAPS a successful initiative in the county.

Volunteer adult advisors aid the Project Manager by organizing the program and in guiding and selecting the delegates. The Advisory Committee is composed of members of the community who have a shared interest in youth development, education and civic involvement. These individuals aid students with procedures and projects and help the GCAPS Program Manager run the program.

The program's target audience is high school students. Interested high school students who either live in the county or go to school in the county are asked to submit an application that includes essay questions. Homeschooled students are also encouraged to participate.

Once the GCAPS participants are chosen, the students spend a year in the program receiving pertinent leadership training and learning firsthand about their local government. Throughout the course of the program year, an emphasis is placed on three training components. The first component is a lesson on the GCAPS mission, history of the program and its goals. The next component of the program is a combination of leadership training and teambuilding.

The final component to which the students are exposed is civic education. This is the component on which students spend the most time and is most critical to accomplishing the goals of GCAPS. The delegates meet on a monthly basis and participate in hands-on activities that expose them to different aspects of government. Sample activities include: attending a board of commissioners meeting, shadowing county officials, touring county facilities, holding a mock board of commissioners meeting, hosting a county department head forum and visiting the State Capitol.

In addition to training and learning activities, student delegates have the opportunity to create and implement civic awareness projects throughout the year for their fellow peers. Past successful projects include a countywide recycling campaign where GCAPS participants lead an effort to reduce the amount of electronic waste in their particular county. GCAPS students educated their peers on the elements of electronic recycling and gathered used cell phones and computers that would have otherwise been thrown away. After completing a year in the program, GCAPS participants are recognized in an informal "graduation" ceremony.

To date, five counties have active GCAPS – Dougherty County, Effingham County, Grady County, Oconee County and Macon-Bibb County. Youth ranging in age from 15 to 18 have engaged in government related activities in each of the counties. Post-program evaluations show that 100% of the students agreed that their experience was rewarding and that they had a clear understanding of the role local and state government play.

Grant Funding Available to Expand GCAPS

Two new GCAPS sites will be chosen through a competitive application process. Selection criteria will include: identification of a youth development professional to serve as the GCAPS program manager; demonstrated strong interest in GCAPS program implementation; accessibility to resources to allow the program to continue beyond the grant funding period.

The two new GCAPS programs would receive \$2,500 each. This amount should be considered startup funds. As the program becomes established, it should become self-sustaining through local support.

Grant funding will be distributed at the beginning of the planning process in an effort to acknowledge and guarantee selected counties' implementation of the GCAPS program.

Once a county has been selected to host a new GCAPS program, ACCG will provide technical assistance to make sure the program gets off to a successful start. ACCG can offer onsite trainings and visits with the program manager and other necessary individuals.

ACCG Civic Affairs Foundation

The Association County Commissioners of Georgia (ACCG) is a nonprofit instrumentality of Georgia's county governments. Formed in 1914, today ACCG serves as the consensus building, legislative action and training organization for all 159 county governments in the state.

ACCG actively pursues opportunities to develop educational initiatives for Georgia citizens to help enhance their understanding of the roles, responsibilities and purpose of government at a local level. To broaden these opportunities and ignite greater civic engagement in this state, ACCG has created a foundation.

The ACCG Civic Affairs Foundation was created in 2007 and has been recognized by the Internal Revenue Service as a 501 (c) (3) tax exempt organization. The ACCG Civic Affairs Foundation is organized to support initiatives in the areas of civic education, leadership training, historic preservation and community improvement. The Georgia Civic Awareness Program for Students (GCAPS) is a program financially supported through the ACCG Civic Affairs Foundation.

CONTACTS

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APPLICATION

**Interested in Bringing the
Georgia Civic Awareness Program for Students (GCAPS)
to Your County?**

The following components are needed for a successful GCAPS program:

- Strong support from the local Board of Commissioners
- Strong relationship with the local school system (public and private)
- Ability to designate a youth development professional to serve as the program manager
- Desire to promote civic awareness to youth

If the criteria above describe the setting in your county, we ask that you briefly answer the following questions.

1. Why are you interested in promoting civic awareness amongst the youth in your county?

2. In what ways do you believe your county would be a good candidate to host a GCAPS program?

3. The grant funding should be considered startup funds. In light of this, how would you plan to sustain the GCAPS program beyond the funding period?

By signing below you are signifying that you have notified either the County Chairman or the County Administrator/Manager of your interest in receiving grant funding to implement GCAPS in your county.

Application Submitted by:

NAME (Printed)

TITLE / COUNTY

Signature

Application should be returned to ACCG:

ATTN: Kathleen Bowen
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kbowen@accg.org

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