

Municipal Court Administration



The University of South Carolina's Institute for Public Service and Policy Research's **Organizational Performance Management Project** is an outgrowth of the South Carolina Municipal and County Benchmarking Projects. The primary focus of the project is to provide training, technical assistance, research and publications designed to foster the application of results-based management in government organizations. One of the services of the project is the *Local Government Service Delivery Forums*. The goal of these forums is to provide an opportunity for local government managers to share best practices and innovative techniques for service delivery issues and challenges.

During the project's first year, service delivery forums were held to address municipal court administration and codes enforcement issues. The purpose of this document is to share best practices identified during the municipal court forums. If your jurisdiction was not represented at the forums and your organization has found an innovative solution to these issues, please contact Anna Berger or Bill Tomes to include your program information. Contact information is located at the end of this bulletin.

Specialized Courts

One of the major factors that affects case flow management is a court's backlog. One of the methods for addressing this issue is specialized courts or dockets. Listed are summaries of several specialized courts in South Carolina.

Livability Courts

Livability courts are an innovative way to handle citizen concerns and quality of life issues. The Court's emphasis is in quality of life issues such as non-compliance with the municipal codes dealing with unfit dwellings, fire code violations, abandoned vehicles, and business license violations. In addition, noise, animal control, and parking violations may also be heard.

In this separate court environment, additional time can be spent identifying and resolving the issues between residents and city officials. Previously, such cases were heard at the same time as DUI's, speeding cases,

assaults, shopliftings, etc. Giving special consideration to issues that impact neighborhoods has a positive effect on the overall quality of life.

City of Charleston

The City initiated this type of court in South Carolina in 2002. In addition to the issues listed above, Charleston's court also handles parks and recreation issues and tourism violations. For additional information, contact Sylvia Skeeter, Court Administrator, at (843) 724-7467 or at SKEET-ERS@ci.charleston.sc.us

Livability Courts

City of Lancaster

The City's livability court was modeled after Charleston's court and heard its first case in 2003. Lancaster's court also hears fraudulent check cases. To learn more, contact Helen Sowell, Judge/Court Administrator, at (803) 285-5453 or at hpsowell@lancastercitysc.com

City of North Charleston

The City has a Night Court that handles many quality of life issues. The judge can also schedule special courts to hear cases brought forth by the City's Neighborhood Enhancement Teams, which responds to community safety

issues in a particular neighborhood. To learn more about North Charleston's court, contact Ray Anderson, Special Assistant to the Mayor, (843) 740-2512 or at randerson@northcharleston.org

City of Greer

The City's livability court is held on the first and third Wednesdays of the month and hears codes, zoning, and animal control cases. Contact Ponja Beck, Court Administrator, at (864) 848-5374 or at pbeck@cityofgreer.org for additional information.

Other Specialized Courts

City of Charleston

The City has a Collections Court to collect delinquent fines and fees, which has been a persistent problem for all courts. The Collections Court idea was conceived in 1991 and initially focused on the collection of past due traffic citations. Delinquent fines and fees amounted to \$5,000,000 in 1991. After a temporary trial of the program, the City was granted approval to move the program from a temporary trial status to a full-time program. The Collections Program has since expanded to include a full-time Collections Investigator and Police Department personnel who are responsible for collection efforts. The program collects approximately 50% of yearly delinquencies. In 2005, approximately \$448,000 was collected through collection efforts. The program has been a success in the area of revenue collections enhancements.

To learn more about Charleston's court, please contact Sylvia Skeeter, Court Administrator, at (843) 724-7467 or at SKEETERS@ci.charleston.sc.us

City of Greenwood

Like many other South Carolina communities, Greenwood's Hispanic population is quickly growing. In 2003,

the City was faced with the difficulty of providing proper translation during court cases involving Hispanics. The City hired a Translation Specialist and scheduled all court cases requiring translation for Tuesday evenings. This has resulted in a much easier process for police officers and court staff. In addition, the City is better suited to protect the rights of the person charged.

For additional information, contact Charlie Barrineau, Assistant City Manager, City of Greenwood, at (864) 942-8412 or at charlie.barrineau@cityofgreenwoodsc.com

Court Security

Court security has become a more prevalent issue in recent years. Oftentimes there is a false sense of security with officers present in the courtroom. However, officers typically are only present for traffic cases and are not present for other cases, which may require additional security.

City of Florence

One measure that cities are using to enhance court security is screening of courtroom visitors before entering the courtroom. The City of Florence screens people as they enter the city-county complex. Although personnel and equipment for screening are expensive, Florence feels it

is necessary to keep courtrooms secure. The City uses Class III officers to perform building security, courtroom security, and transportation of prisoners. This has reduced the cost associated with courtroom security.

For additional information, contact David Williams, City Manager, City of Florence, at (843) 665-3113 or at dwilliams@cityofflorence.com

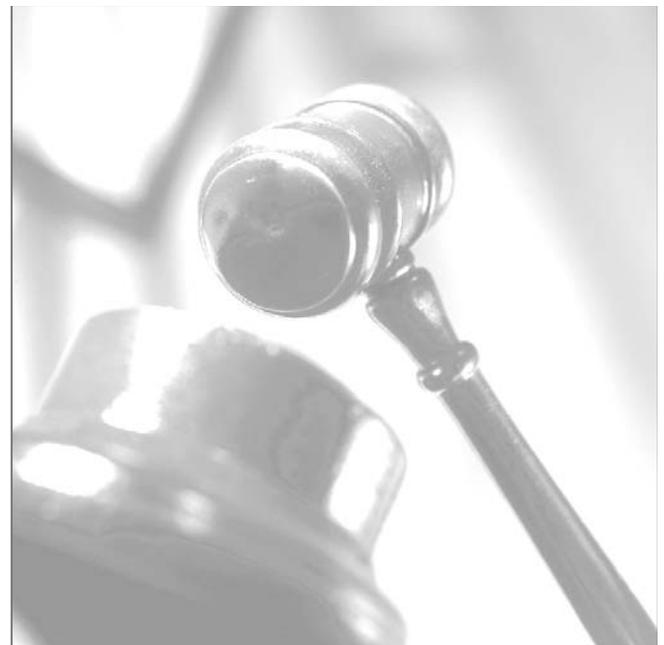
Citizen Education on State Assessments

The South Carolina State Legislature has increased the imposed assessments on fines over the past few years. This has created a challenge in municipal courts in collecting the higher fine amounts and has increased citizen complaints.

City of Lancaster

The City of Lancaster provides citizens with a written explanation of the state-imposed assessments, of how the fines are determined, and suggests that citizens contact their state legislators. This information is printed on post

cards and handed to everyone who receives a ticket. If you would like to learn more, please contact Helen Sowell, Judge/Court Administrator, at (803) 285-5453 or at hpsowell@lancastercitysc.com





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The Institute for Public Service and Policy Research is an interdisciplinary research and public service unit of the University of South Carolina. Its principle purpose is to address current and emerging issues relating to matters of public policy, governance, and leadership through research, educational activities, publications, and direct assistance programs. The goal of the Institute is to improve the quality of social, political, environmental, and economic life, with a primary focus on South Carolina.

To Learn More

To obtain a copy of the summaries from the forums, please visit: <http://www.ipspr.sc.edu/grs/forums.asp> For additional information on the Organizational Performance Management Project or the Local Government Service Delivery Forums, please contact:

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