
Citizens' academies are an excellent way to educate residents, build positive relationships and increase communication between city government officials and citizens, as well as inspire future municipal leaders.

Statistics show that 30 percent of Floridians are natives, while 70 percent moved here from somewhere else. This can greatly affect a Floridian's understanding of city government in the Sunshine State.

For most people, their civics lessons were given in middle and/or high school. Upon moving here, there aren't always opportunities for new residents, especially adults who are out of school, to quickly learn how their governments function and about the many services cities offer.

Through citizens' academies, Floridians can learn about their city, how cities improve the quality of their daily life and their city's commitment to its citizens. This is an excellent public outreach program and way to encourage future city leaders.

There are many successful citizens' academies held throughout Florida. Beginning on page 4, we've included a brief review of just a few Florida programs – Cape Coral, Delray Beach, Gainesville, Lakeland and Lauderdale Lakes – along with Web addresses so you can get more information.

While most of these programs are for adults, see page 7 for information about the City of Weston's program, which is for high school students.

Also, beginning on page 9, we've reprinted the City of Kissimmee School of Government "Planning Guide," which provides a variety of material that you can use as you develop your program.

We appreciate the assistance of each of these cities for providing information about their programs. We hope you find this material helpful in developing a Citizens' Academy in your city.

For information about civic education projects developed by the Florida League of Cities, visit www.flcities.com/membership/civic_education.asp or call Beth Mulrennan at (850) 222-9684.