



Town of Maggie Valley

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Maggie Valley Welcomes Lead for North Carolina Fellow as Statewide Program Launches Its Eighth Cohort

This July, the eighth cohort of Lead for North Carolina Fellows arrived at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill to begin their journey into public sector careers. After completing an intensive summer training program, Cohort Eight Fellows will begin a year of paid, full-time service in city halls, county offices, and community organizations across the state in August.

[Lead for North Carolina](#) (Lead for NC) is a program of the UNC School of Government — the largest university-based local government training, advisory, and research organization in the United States. The program recruits, trains, and places promising recent college graduates in paid local government fellowships to strengthen public institutions, support local communities, and cultivate a new generation of public service leaders.

Meeting the moment for North Carolina's communities

North Carolina's cities and counties are navigating some of the most demanding challenges in a generation — from workforce shortages and a wave of retirements in local government to disaster recovery, housing pressures, and growing service demands in rural communities. Lead for NC was built on a simple premise: talented young people are uniquely positioned to help.

"Local governments are where the work of democracy actually gets done — clean water, safe streets, thriving downtowns — and they need talent now more than ever," said Dylan Russell, Executive Director of Lead for North Carolina. "What our Fellows bring is real: fresh skills, new energy, and a genuine commitment to community. Eight years in, we've seen over and over that when you connect a capable young person to a community that needs them, both are transformed."

Growing demand across the state

"The first year, we had to work hard to convince local governments that a recent college graduate could be a value-add for their jurisdiction. We identified sixteen local government partners who agreed to co-pilot the program with the School and our philanthropic partners," said Russell. "This year, more than 100 host sites applied to host a Fellow — one of our largest application cycles to date."

This year's applicant pool also included a record number of repeat host sites — local governments returning to the program year after year to maintain a well-established relationship with the School and a steady pipeline of young talent.

A track record of impact

Since 2019, Lead for NC has placed over 200 Fellows in public service positions spanning communities in every corner of North Carolina, with a focus on rural and underserved areas. The program's impact endures well beyond the fellowship

year: more than three out of four alumni who are not pursuing graduate degrees have continued careers in public service — in town halls, county offices, state and federal agencies, and mission-driven organizations. Dozens more have gone on to graduate programs in public policy, public administration, and planning, building a lasting pipeline of public service leadership for the state.

“To see the number of young people who did not have local government careers on their radar be convinced of the transformative work you can do in this field — and pursue it after the program — has been inspiring,” said Russell.

About Maggie Valley’s Fellow

Claire Scott Stevens a graduate of UNC Chapel Hill from Washington, NC, has been placed with The Town of Maggie Valley for the 2026–27 fellowship year, where she will work on the Strategic Plan.

We are excited about this opportunity to partner with Claire and UNC. This program has provided the capacity we need to move our strategic plan forward. Sam Cullen, Town Manager of The Town of Maggie Valley.

Key Funders

Lead for NC is made possible by funders who have helped shape and sustain the program throughout its eight years. Each participating host site receives a significant subsidy to offset the cost of hosting a Lead for NC Fellow thanks to our federal and philanthropic partners.

One such funder is the [SECU Foundation](#), which has offered support both financially and as an advisor in the development of the program’s model. “The SECU Foundation — from their board members, foundation staff, corporation staff, and community advisory boards — has been so supportive and influential to the program’s success. It is no overstatement to say this program would not exist without their continuous support,” said Russell.

Support from [AmeriCorps](#) provides federal service benefits for Fellows and strengthens recruitment and support throughout the fellowship year.

The support of the [Anonymous Trust](#) has allowed the program to prioritize working in rural and underserved communities in eastern North Carolina.

The renewed support of the [Golden LEAF Foundation](#) has enabled the program to continue serving rural communities throughout North Carolina.

The [Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation](#) has also provided invaluable support through every year of the program.

About the UNC School of Government

The UNC School of Government serves North Carolina’s public officials through teaching, advising, and research, and is the largest university-based local government training, advisory, and research organization in the United States. Learn more at lfnc.sog.unc.edu.

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The flowchart on the screen illustrates the organizational structure of the County of San Diego. At the top is the **Board of Supervisors**, which oversees several key offices: **Staff & Worker Supervisors**, **County Manager**, **County Attorney**, **Chief No Budget**, **Deputy Accountant & Tax Controller**, and **Appointed Boards**. The **County Manager** is shown to supervise **County departments, divisions, and most agencies**. A dashed box indicates **FUNDING IS NOT SUPERVISION**, listing various boards and commissions. A purple box on the right details **STATE + SHARED CONNECTIONS**, including entities like the Community College Board and the State Board of Education. A footer note mentions **PAGE 302-0004** and its availability in various formats.

Rebecca Badgett, JD and Dylan Russell, PhD - Co-Faculty Leads of Lead for NC and Faculty at the UNC School of Government



Dylan Russell, PhD instructing incoming Lead for NC Fellows at the UNC School of Government