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Partnerships

Advocacy has historically played a major role in Association affairs. Establishing solid working relationships with groups that share interests and goals has been a key to the Association's success. From the very earliest years, MACo "reached out" to various organizations to find common ground for achieving its goals.

National Association of Counties

MACo has had a long-standing relationship with the National Association of Counties (NACo), founded in 1935 to provide county officials with "a strong voice in the nation's capital." The organization boasts a membership of over 2,000 counties, and represents over 80 per cent of the country's population "in the White House and the halls of Congress."

MACo's affiliation with its national counterpart began as early as 1951 when Paul Kuhns of Carroll County and future SACCOM Treasurer/ Secretary Kathryn Lawlor attended the National Association of County Officials Conference in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, as mentioned in Chapter 2. In 1960, 30 Marylanders attended the NACo Annual Conference in Miami Beach, Florida.

Maryland's involvement with the organization heightened when NACo held its Annual Conference in Baltimore in 1968, and again in 1982, when U.S. President Ronald Reagan addressed the attendees. MACo membership and staff played a large role in the organization of the 1982 event, most notably Executive Director Tee O'Connor. According to former Governor Schaefer, then Mayor of Baltimore, "Baltimore City went all out," setting up transportation around the city for the visitors, organizing tours of the area, and giving roses to all of the women who attended the conference. At that time, there was no hotel in Baltimore big enough to hold all of the conference guests, so attendees were housed everywhere from Hunt Valley to Howard County.

The 1982 NACo Conference allowed Baltimoreans to show off their City. Governor Schaefer proudly reminisced that the visiting county officials "liked Baltimore; up until then, people heard that Baltimore was a terrible place... By [1982] the City had turned around, and was in good shape." Even President Reagan took a tour of the City. The Inner Harbor had not yet been fully developed into the attraction that it is today, but provided a nonetheless perfect venue for the enormous fair that the City put on that weekend. John O'Rourke remembered that "we had to chase them home—they didn't want to leave... People still talk about it."

Montgomery County Council member Esther Gelman, MACo's first female president, remembers that the 1982 NACo Conference came to Baltimore because the previously selected location facility in Seattle was not ready. "Mayor Schaefer called me in and said 'get it.' He said to his staff, 'whatever she wants, she gets.'" Gelman said MACo hosted a reception for the NACo Board, featuring "crab, more crab, and crab on top of crab." A crew was sent to Kansas City that

year to prepare the food. “The chefs had never heard such raving, and they put crab on their menu after that.”

Of being named the first MACo female president, Gelman remembers, “I wanted to be the first of a long line of women in that position. I didn’t want to be a token.” That same year, Gelman had multiple challenges as she was not only MACo President but also served as the Montgomery County Council chairman that year. Future female presidents of MACo would include Anne Arundel County Council member Maureen Lamb in 1988, Carroll County Commissioner Julia Gouge in 1994, Baltimore City Council member Rochelle “Rikki” Spector in 1995, then Harford County Council member and in 2002 Delegate Joanne Parrott in 1998. In 2003, the second Montgomery County Council woman becomes president of MACo. Council member Marilyn J. Praisner, an active member of MACo, and a former President of the Maryland Association of Boards of Education (MABE) will take office as MACo’s 52nd President during the January 2003 Winter Conference.

The NACo conference came to Baltimore again in 1997 at the newly expanded City Convention Center. Events featured a night at Camden Yards, complete with local entertainment, Boog’s Barb-B-Q, and of course, Chesapeake Bay steamed blue crabs. Folk singer Gordon Lightfoot provided the Inaugural Gala musical entertainment at the Pier Six Pavilion. During this conference, former Howard County Council Chairman, NACo Past President, and MACo Past President, C. Vernon Gray was successful in his campaign for NACo 2nd Vice-President, which is discussed in more detail later in this chapter. The conference drew nearly 5,000 people from throughout the country and is still judged as one of the best NACo conferences ever.

During each NACo Annual Conference, Maryland holds a caucus and invites candidates for NACo office to address the local delegation regarding the candidates’ commitment to serve, and objectives if elected. Typically, 25 to 35 Maryland local elected and appointed officials attend NACo’s Annual Conferences held each July.

MACo has been a 100 per cent member of NACo since the 1970s, which affords Maryland additional representation on the NACo Board of Directors. MACo and NACo staffs often share research and legislative information on state and national issues.

In the mid-1970s, NACo entered a difficult period in its history as the Association found itself in a serious financial crisis. Counties and state associations across the country rallied to help the organization survive this difficult period. MACo was a principal player in the effort to help the national organization. Gray remembers that, “Other states gave [NACo] money, but no one gave as much as Maryland did.” Later, when NACo approached the Association about repaying the loan, the MACo Board of Directors agreed to make the loan a contribution.

For the past several years, NACo has sent staff members from its Membership Development Division to attend and assist staff at the MACo Summer Conference, an arrangement that has been beneficial for both groups.

Maryland counties have always been some of the most active NACo members and its elected officials have held numerous positions in the organization. Most notably, Maryland is home to three NACo Presidents.

Gladys Spellman of Prince George's County: NACo President 1972

Maryland has the proud distinction of being the home of NACo's first female President who was also the first Marylander to become President. Prince George's County Council member Gladys Spellman, who served on the county council from 1962 to 1974, was elected as NACo President in 1972. MACo held a dinner and cocktail reception in her honor during the NACo Annual Conference that year in Washington, DC.

Spellman was later elected to Congress and served four terms from 1974 to 1981. She was so popular and effective that she was elected to her fourth term in Congress even as she "lay in critical condition" following a stroke and health complications during the 1980 campaign. Her seat was finally declared empty in 1981.

Future NACo President Francis "Frank" Francois fondly recalled that Spellman coined the phrase that "county governments are large enough to cope, and small enough to care." She died in 1988 after a lengthy illness.

Frank Francois - NACo President 1979

Another Prince George's County Council member, patent attorney, and MACo activist, Francis B. Francois was well suited to pursue NACo office in 1976. He began that quest at the NACo Annual Conference in Salt Lake City, Utah in 1976, where he was easily elected as NACo 4th Vice President. After moving up the ranks from fourth to third, and from second to first vice president in subsequent years, Francois was inaugurated as President during the NACo 1979 Annual Conference in Kansas City, Missouri.

He remembers that his campaign spent "nearly nothing, we didn't have a big entourage. I knew a lot of people. I'd visited 39 states." During that time, the concept of the "mid-Atlantic" states was formed and Francois said it was "our turn to have a NACo President, it was something to make me different from the other guys."

Francois remembers that Maryland hosted a "Maryland Night" complete with steamed crabs at the Hyatt Hotel in Kansas City for that 1979 conference. He said Maryland chefs planned the crab feast and traveled to Kansas City to cook the crabs. "The Hyatt chef had never seen them, he didn't know what to do."

In his inauguration speech, Francois declared, "From this day forward, let us never speak of county government as being anything less than the most meaningful and effective form of local government in America, for that is precisely what we are." He concluded that message with a tip to his Irish ancestry, offering an old Irish blessing to the NACo audience.

Today Francois is a transportation consultant, having spent 18 1/2 years as Executive Director of the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials following his 18 years of local government service in Prince George's County.

John O'Rourke: Candidate for NACo Office

John O'Rourke, a Baltimore County Council member, said he was encouraged to run for NACo office in the early 1980s by Howard County Executive Hugh Nichols, who considered running himself, but ultimately did not. During the 1983 NACo Annual Conference, Baltimore City Mayor William Donald Schaefer nominated O'Rourke to 4th Vice President during the election portion of the program. O'Rourke respectfully declined the nomination, but acknowledged that "it gave us exposure...we reminded them to watch for us, we were coming back."

In Milwaukee the following year, O'Rourke ran again, but when it became apparent that he did not have the votes, he withdrew his candidacy. Maryland opted instead to support a Florida candidate, with the understanding that Florida would support Maryland and O'Rourke the following year, but O'Rourke said "they went back on that." The following year, Florida supported the New York candidate, who won the election. It was a disappointment to the Maryland delegation and O'Rourke said that he had to "hold back [Executive Director] Tee O'Connor. I thought she was going to punch out the Florida guy."

Despite the disappointment, O'Rourke, who now resides, ironically, in St. Augustine, Florida, continued his involvement with NACo. O'Rourke regularly attends both the national and MACo conferences, as the 1983 MACo Past President and in his capacity as a consultant to Synagro Technologies.

C. Vernon Gray: 1999 President of NACo

MACo's first African American President, C. Vernon Gray, a Howard County Council member, first campaigned for NACo 4th Vice President at the organization's Annual Conference in Houston, Texas in 1996. That year, despite strong support from elected officials throughout the country, he lost the race by a mere 50 votes to Delaware's Dick Cecil.

The following fall, Cecil lost his local election and was therefore no longer eligible to serve as a NACo officer. Gray and other supporters sought legal opinions to determine if the NACo Board of Directors could simply appoint Gray to fill Cecil's position as 4th Vice President, but it became clear that indeed, he would again have to run for office. Before that next election, because of that incident, NACo changed its bylaws, eliminating the 3rd and 4th Vice President offices, enabling Gray to run for the office of 2nd Vice President.

Undaunted, Gray campaigned again in 1997 for the office of NACo's 2nd Vice President during the NACo Annual Conference in Baltimore. Prince George's County Executive Wayne Curry hosted a reception for Gray during the conference. That summer, he won against Gerry Hyland of Virginia, whose campaign outspent Gray by more than double. It was a rare and significant victory in that smaller jurisdictions, such as Howard County, typically do not have the funding or resources to run for national office that larger jurisdictions do. Gray campaigned on that note, which apparently struck a cord with the smaller jurisdiction NACo members.

Gray was inaugurated on July 20, 1999 during the NACo Annual Conference in St. Louis, Missouri, surrounded by more than a hundred Marylanders who traveled to the conference to celebrate the achievement with him. A gala dinner for Marylanders was held at the historic 9th

Street Abbey Restaurant in St. Louis, with Gray leading the group in song with “Maryland, My Maryland,” although certain “politically incorrect” stanzas of the Civil War era song were omitted.

Gray acknowledges that his election to the NACo office would not have been possible without MACo. The “key to being elected is the full support of the State Association,” said Gray. Chairman of the Political Studies Department at Morgan State University, after having served five terms on the Howard County Council, Gray was ineligible to run again for his Howard County Council seat in 2002 due to term limits. Gray ran for State Senate in the 2002 general election, but was narrowly defeated.

The Maryland Municipal League

Before 1973, the relationship between the Maryland Municipal League and MACo was strained at best, with little communication between the groups. Annexation, tax authority, and other money issues divided the groups. Over time, Association leaders from both camps recognized the benefits of fostering a better relationship, despite the inherent differences that separated them.

In 1968, MACo President and Washington County Commissioner Evan Crossley declared that one of his "aims as President was to develop better understanding between the counties and other units of government, and that few would be as important as the county-municipal relationship." In accordance with this aim, MACo wrote a letter to MML President John A. Derr concerning the creation of a task force of county and municipal officials to discuss "water and sewer extension, county plans for sewer services, annexation, and sharing of revenues." Mayor Derr concurred and county and municipal officials would be chosen to participate in and co-chair the group.

Representatives from both MACo and MML met on September 18, 1968 to discuss possible legislation on public employee labor organizations, and MML suggested that MACo use their labor consultant. MACo decided not to use MML's consultant, but did agree to actively pursue the idea of a public employee labor organization.

MACo President Crossley also met with Governor Spiro Agnew that Fall to discuss state-county relationships, particularly regarding legislation. In November, the Board would again contact the Governor, sending a resolution of congratulations to him upon his election as Vice-President of the United States.

In MACo's early years, the two organizations were housed in the same building at the University of Maryland College Park, although research did not reveal interaction between the two groups.

By 1969, MML had purchased a building on Maryland Avenue in Annapolis and MML Executive Director Peter Harkins approached MACo to determine interest in sharing the office space and some personnel. The decision would have to be made by October 1970, but, as discussed in earlier chapters, the Association turned down the offer. It would not be economically feasible, as the shared resources would actually increase expenditures. However, MACo Executive Director Joe Murnane did concede that if arrangements could be made at a future date, it could "prove beneficial to both organizations." An "effort should be made to keep open opportunities for cooperation between the Association and the League."

Despite Murnane's declaration of cooperation between the two groups, Jon Burrell, former MML Executive Director, and now Executive Director of the Local Government Insurance Trust, remembers that during the Legislative Session he would often run into Murnane, who disliked the League and its officers. Burrell remembered, "Murnane would kill our legislation, sometimes before I left the room."

Murnane's successor, Wally Hutton, also disliked the League, according to Burrell, "cutting off communications with MML to ground zero." At that time, relations were strained, as MML and MACo were at odds on many issues. Hutton reluctantly met with Baltimore Mayor William Donald Schaefer, Burrell, and MACo Assistant Executive Director Tee O'Connor at the Baltimore City office in Annapolis to seek common ground on some issues. According to Burrell, Hutton was brought "kicking and screaming" into the meeting, but could not stand in the way of progress as Mayor Schaefer insisted upon the meeting. When Tee O'Connor was hired as Hutton's replacement, communications between the two groups vastly improved and the League and MACo began working towards common goals.

In the 1980s, Burrell and O'Connor began work on a venture that would cement the relationship between MACo and the League, and provide local governments with a much-needed service – the creation of the Local Government Insurance Trust.

Local Government Insurance Trust

Local governments struggled during the "hard cycle" of the late 1980s, when insurance was expensive and difficult to obtain because insurance companies viewed local government losses as undesirable or unpredictable risks. During that time, "a majority of Maryland towns, cities and counties suffered from the high cost of insurance premiums and loss of insurance coverage," said Burrell.

Burrell said that local government leaders thought a liability pool should be considered, as other states were considering it or had it in place. But, there was concern there was not enough volume. The state of Maryland, recognizing the problem, suggested WAIF or IWIF (Injured Workers' Insurance Fund), but "the timing wasn't good – there was a savings and loan crisis then," said Burrell.

According to Burrell, then Governor Harry Hughes told the League that, "if you take the lead, we will follow." "I went to Raquel [Sanudo] and said, 'Let's do this together,'" recalled Burrell. MACo Executive Director Sanudo and Burrell then planned the legislative and insurance components of the plan.

Lieutenant Governor Joe Curran chaired a task force that recommended the Local Government Tort Claims Act (LGTCA), enabling legislation for local government insurance pooling. The State contributed a \$50,000 matching grant and MML and MACo each met the monetary challenge to establish the Local Government Insurance Trust (LGIT).

The foundation for LGIT was MACo's successful attempt to secure passage of legislation creating caps on the liability of local governments, the Local Governments Tort Claims Act. Anne Arundel County Deputy County Attorney David Bliden led the effort on behalf of MACo and was

recognized for his success at the 1987 Winter Conference. This recognition provided Bliden with the visibility in MACo that certainly contributed to his later selection as Executive Director.

The Trust was launched at the MML Summer Conference July 1987 and the next month during the MACo Summer Conference. John Donoho, then Risk Manager for the Baltimore City mayor, was the Trust's first Executive Director, and operated the Trust from his own offices with his staff for the first six to eight months. A third party administrator ran the Trust from Alexandria for three years after that; in 1989, the Trust hired its first staff.

LGIT was founded as a non-profit association authorized by state law, and is wholly owned and managed by its local government members. The Trust's main purpose is to provide joint self-insurance programs or "pools" for towns, cities and counties in the State of Maryland. Rather than pay premiums to buy insurance from an insurance company, local governments contribute those premiums into a jointly owned fund. The money in that fund is used to pay for the members' claims, losses, and expenses. Former MACo Executive Director Raquel Sanudo explained the pooling in layman's terms: "you have a bad time and I have a good time, so we're going to share my bad times with your good times."

Burrell and Sanudo are largely credited for establishing the Trust and continue to be actively involved in its operation – Burrell as Executive Director and Sanudo as the Chairman of the Board of Trustees. The governing Trustees are composed of elected and appointed county and municipal officials who have experience in local government operations and are members of the Trust. The MACo and MML Executive Directors are ex-officio members of LGIT.

By 2003, LGIT has 187 members, including 19 counties, and a \$52 million budget. Its Columbia offices are home to 38 staff members.

Institute for Governmental Service

The Institute for Governmental Service (IGS), an arm of the University of Maryland Center for Applied Policy Studies in College Park, evolved from the Municipal Technical Advisory Service (MTAS) that was established in the late 1950s to provide "low cost consulting and technical assistance to municipalities in Maryland." In the 1970s, MACo requested that MTAS be expanded to serve the counties as well as the municipalities; this request was granted and the name was changed to Maryland Technical Advisory Service. MTAS was later renamed the Institute for Governmental Service in 1981. The IGS Advisory Board includes local and State elected officials and the Executive Directors from MML and MACo.

In recent years IGS and MACo have collaborated on several projects important to the Association's members, such as the study of police disciplinary procedures (1999), legislative session research (several sessions), and the facilitation of a MACo staff retreat (1998).

For many years, MACo surveyed and published an annual Salary Survey of county elected and appointed positions, a labor-intensive task, made more so by the lack of spreadsheet and quality database software. In 1997, IGS, who had also been publishing a salary survey, worked with MACo and MML to develop one Salary Survey for the three groups. The consolidated survey contained both county and municipal government salary data and to this day is published every two years.

In 1995, MACo petitioned IGS for on-site research support during the Legislative Session to assist MACo legislative staff with bill and issue research and surveys. MACo Board minutes of June 1995 reflect concerns about the Institute's refusal to accommodate MACo's request. The Board of Directors was dismayed, since they viewed IGS as the logical source for help, but other assistance was secured later that year.

Former IGS Executive Director Barbara Hawk explained the reason the Institute declined to take on the project in a letter to Bliden on June 7, 1995: a "review of [the] work load revealed that this would not be a task that [IGS] could accomplish for the 1996 session. Hawk based the decision upon "current and pending IGS projects and the probable demands of working with MACo and possibly MML to conduct bill analysis in addition to our ongoing commitment to the House Commerce and Governmental Matters Committee."

In October 1996, the Board accepted an IGS proposal by which the Institute would "provide Session support beginning with the 1997 Session" and "produce a local government salary survey biannually as a joint effort with MACo."

By October 1999, in a letter to Hawk, Bliden recognized the Institute for services to MACo. He cited a research project on national police discipline practices, the personnel survey, and strategic planning facilitation as helpful components. Further, he urged "greater IGS staff support for the Academy program and an appreciation for the importance of maintaining Session support at a stable cost."

Perhaps most notable is the Institute's interest and continued support for the establishment of the Academy for Excellence in Local Governance. The IGS offices have hosted the administrative function of the Academy since its inception in 1998, and hired the first part-time Academy Coordinator, former Carroll County commissioner, attorney, and law professor Jeff Griffith.

Academy for Excellence in Local Governance

As early as the 1960's, the Association recognized a need for continuing education for county elected and appointed officials. Late 1966, the Maryland County Commissioners Association discussed the feasibility of establishing a Training School for County Officials. The Board then approved a two-day meeting and training session for county officials on January 11-12 1967 at the Holiday Inn in Baltimore. The organization sporadically offered other trainings for Newly Elected Officials through the years, but it was not until 1996 that such a program began its founding as the Academy for Excellence in Local Governance.

In the summer of 1996, Dr. Nan Booth of the University of Maryland Institute for Governmental Service (IGS) conducted an assessment of local government training needs with the encouragement and support of MACo and MML staff. It included interviews with 57 municipal officers, 30 county officials, and 22 leaders statewide. Ninety-six percent of those interviewed expressed a desire for additional training. The IGS Advisory Board reviewed the findings and formed a Committee with representatives from MACo, MML, LGIT, and IGS, to consider formulating a certificate program in Maryland. After studying other state programs and evaluating the training needs in Maryland, the Committee recommended the establishment of the Academy for

Excellence in Local Governance. The partner Boards of Directors accepted this recommendation after hearing Dr. Booth's presentation in December 1997 and the Academy was founded in 1998.

The Academy offered a two-year voluntary certificate program open to all local elected and appointed officials in Maryland to provide educational opportunities not available anywhere else. Both the county and municipal tracks required core and elective courses in specific topic areas. Six core courses and six elective courses were the initial requirements toward fulfilling the two-year certificate program.

The 2002 core requirements for county officials were changed to address other topics considered essential, including ethics, team building, county financial management, school board relations and the public information act. Now, four required electives are required from such issue areas as land-use planning, communications, legal issues, human resources, technology, and personal development. From the beginning, MACo has offered Academy core and elective sessions as an integral part of its conferences, rotating the core topic session schedule to assist local elected officials in completing requirements within the specified two-year time frame.

An Academy Training Committee, including staff and elected officials representing the partner organizations, provides oversight of the Academy. The Training Committee, including MACo, MML, IGS, and LGIT staff, municipal and county elected officials and Academy "advisors," seek regular input from the membership of both groups. Additionally, MACo established an Academy Liaison Committee to advise MACo Training Committee members regarding Academy curriculum and operations.

The Academy was initially funded with a \$25,000 grant from the University of Maryland and was supplemented by a \$50 registration fee per student. The core and elective sessions were held in conjunction with the MML and MACo conferences and LGIT trainings, and there was no further cost beyond conference registration fees. Administration, office space, and support staff were provided by IGS until it became necessary to hire a part-time Academy Coordinator. As previously mentioned, Jeff Griffith, a former Carroll County Commissioner and attorney, was hired at the Academy's outset and continues to serve in that position. IGS remains the administrative program manager for the Academy.

The Academy's first graduating class included both county and municipal officials. A graduation was held in the University Chapel at the University of Maryland College Park in June 2000, with a dessert reception following the ceremony at the University's Rossburg Inn. By September 2002, the Academy had 404 registered local government officials and graduated 94 at its November 17 ceremony in the University Chapel. The program has far exceeded the Training Committee's expectations.

Responding to the call for a second tier of continuing education, based on surveys by graduates of the Academy, a "Level II" certificate program exclusively for Academy graduates was proposed. At the June 2000 MACo Board meeting, Montgomery County Council member Marilyn Praisner presented the Academy's Level II Planning Committee recommendation for the structure of a Level II Academy.

The proposal provided that a certificate would be awarded for each topic, consisting of four sessions providing in-depth, interactive instruction in a group of not more than 20 students, held

over several months. The certificate program began with an "Employment Issues" series in Spring 2002 and more topics will be offered quarterly.

The Academy continues to respond to the needs of county and municipal elected and appointed officials. While the process has not been without some "growing pains," by 2002, the Academy was a well-respected program, with participation by the large majority of county elected officials.

If there is one premise that MACo was founded upon, it was the concept of unifying the efforts of unique individuals in order to build collective power and effect change. By taking that premise beyond just the counties and working with a variety of organizations, agencies, and individuals, the Association has built solid, professional relationships that will continue to be mutually beneficial throughout the years.