

# celebrating alabama's counties

Sponsored by the Association of County Commissions of Alabama



## What is National County Government Month?

National County Government Week was created in 1991 to raise public awareness and better understanding about the roles and responsibilities of our nation's counties.



Due to the tremendous nationwide success of this one week, the National Association of Counties decided to expand the week to a full month beginning in 2010 to give local governments ample time and opportunity to schedule activities that would accomplish the overall goal of educating citizens through public outreach. Beginning this year, the month of **April** will be celebrated as **National County Government Month**.

The activities held during April and sponsored by local county governments, should be designed to help local citizens understand how their counties and elected officials can respond to their needs. In many ways, this special month is often an introduction for county residents to their local government, officials and services.

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## How will participating in National County Government Month help YOU and the citizens of your county?

By participating in National County Government Month in April, you and your fellow county leaders will be helping to elevate the public identity of local government in your community.

Most local residents don't see their government as doing good deeds for its residents. Instead, many residents only see government as the entity that raises taxes, refusing to fix a road, or imposing regulations on them (such as mandatory trash collection in the county) that they may not immediately understand. For these residents, local government is viewed in a negative light, but there are many ways for you to turn the tide.

National County Government Month is the perfect opportunity for local officials and county employees to take the time to show your residents and local media the good deeds that local government does every day.

Inside this packet are several easy-to-do projects to help your county get involved with National County Government Month, as well as a sample press release to adapt for your local media representatives. *The enclosed sample Resolution can be the first step your county commission can take to declare April as County Government Month in YOUR county.*



## How can your county get involved?

The National Association of Counties has set the 2010 national theme as “Healthy Counties.” During the month of April, counties have the unique opportunity to show how they provide healthcare services to their residents through local health department programs, programs sponsored by local emergency management offices, etc. Some counties may also provide mental health and substance abuse treatment and offer coverage programs for the uninsured. **Do your residents know what you offer them?**

You can hold an “open house” to allow school children to tour government facilities; county officials can visit schools and guest lecture during Civics and Government classes; invite a representative from your local health department to do a presentation during a commission meeting on programs the Alabama Department of Public Health is currently promoting...all in the name of a healthy Alabama.

We at ACCA realize that not all of Alabama’s counties may sponsor programs specific to this year’s theme. This by no means should keep you on the sidelines during this special month. *Spotlight the outstanding programs that you do for the safety and welfare of your county residents!*

*National County Government Month will help raise public awareness and better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of your county.*

## What are some ideas for projects during National County Government Month?

- Enact a resolution during a county commission meeting declaring **April** as County Government Month in your county. This simple resolution will set the stage for other events during the month.
- The national theme this year is “Healthy Counties,” so show your citizens what county government is doing to fulfill that ideal. Reach out to local health groups and your department of health. Invite representatives to make a presentation at an open-to-the-public commission meeting. *The meeting should be well-publicized in the media in advance.*
- Speak to Civic or Government classes about the importance of local government and public service. **REMEMBER: THIS IS AN ELECTION YEAR! Bring the necessary information to register all of-age students to vote, and introduce them to the electoral process.**
- Speak to civic groups, such as Kiwanis®, Lions Club® and Rotary®, about what county government is doing for your citizens. The following topics are all newsworthy and great ideas for public discussion:
  - ✓ What are you doing to maintain safe county highways and bridges?
  - ✓ Does your county have programs for litter control?
  - ✓ Has your county renovated any local parks or facilities for public use?
  - ✓ Does your county have programs for elderly citizens or children?



## How can you get positive media coverage?

*When good government does good work, it should be recognized.* But sometimes, the media may need a little help getting involved. That means either a press release or a phone call to your local news outlet. Media relations is key.

Keep reporters informed about the events you have planned. Let them know this is a month of events taking place **nationwide** and that the majority of Alabama's counties are participating as well.

Make sure your events have news value, particularly that the programs you are featuring will affect your communities in a positive way, and your local media outlets will attend. Be prepared to discuss what your county is doing during National County Government Month.

If your local media representative is unable to attend, you should be prepared to cover the events yourself. Take your camera with you, digital is preferred, and take photos of dignitaries speaking with local residents. *You are the reporter now, so think like one.* Look for the best photographs from your event, the photos that are heartwarming and add depth to your story.

Next, write a short article about your event. Keep it simple: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How. Answer these questions in your release, and include quotes from your commissioners and citizens who attended your event. Finally, proofread for spelling and check the names and titles of officials. Send everything to your local media as soon as possible following the event with your contact information in case there are follow-up questions.

## Timeline for event preparations...

- Enact a resolution during a county commission meeting proclaiming April as County Government Month in your county. **INVITE MEDIA TO A MEETING, READ AND SIGN RESOLUTION IN MARCH.**
- Choose which program(s) you would like to highlight during County Government Month. **SELECT PROGRAM(S) BY MARCH 1.**
- Contact Kiwanis®, Lions Club® and Rotary® leaders about speaking during their meetings in April. **CONTACT CLUBS BY MARCH 8.**
- Once your program(s) are chosen, you should choose how you would like to spotlight it during County Government Month. Do you need a committee to organize events? Do you want to hold a press conference? Are you hosting an Open House of government facilities? Do you need handouts? **MAKE DECISIONS AND ANSWER QUESTIONS BY MARCH 8.**
- Contact local schools, particularly junior high and high schools, about guest lecturing to students in Civics and Government classes. **CONTACT SCHOOLS BY MARCH 15.**
- Inform media about County Government Month and your county's activities. Issue a press release with a calendar of activities for April. **ISSUE PRESS RELEASE NO LATER THAN MARCH 29.**



*Having the media cover your events can help change how local government is perceived by your county residents.*



## A few tips about the media...

- **Remind your media representatives to attend your events.** Call your contacts one to two days prior to the event. It is entirely appropriate to call your local newspaper, television station and radio station a few days before an event to remind the assignments editor or reporter about an event you are coordinating. *However, don't go overboard with the reminders.*
- **Be prepared to answer questions during your event.** If possible, create handouts with information the reporter can use in a story about your event. The more background information you provide to the reporter, the easier it will be for the reporter to cover your event. *The reporter may even use your Resolution as background information.*

For example, if you are hosting the reopening of a public park that was once run down and the county reclaimed, cleaned, built a playground and picnic pavilion – all using donated funds – briefly explain in your flyer how the county received the money, how much money was received, and the process the county went through to complete the project.

- **It's very important to take a camera with you to your event.** There is always the possibility that members of your local media may not attend, even though a promise was made in advance. Last minute assignments often come up, and reporters must change their schedule at a moment's notice. If that's the case, then you **ARE** the reporter. Be prepared.

Take plenty of photos and submit your own story to your local newspaper. Local newspapers, especially weekly newspapers, are often short staffed. If you are willing to go the extra mile and tell the story yourself, chances are very good that your story about your event may appear in the next edition of your local newspaper.

- **Don't forget to let ACCA know your plans.** We want to know what you're doing to celebrate National County Government Month and County Government Month in YOUR county! **Please send us a copy of your Resolution and photos from your events so that we can publicize your good work in *County Commissioner* magazine.**
- **Need some help?** A sample press release and sample Resolution are included in this packet for your convenience. However, if you have any questions about planning your project or need help contacting your local media, please call **Lori M. Quiller, director of public relations, at (334) 263-7594** or by e-mail at [lquiller@acca-online.org](mailto:lquiller@acca-online.org).

Alabama has been blessed in previous years with great participation from most of our counties. **This year, our goal is 100 percent participation!** If you need help with your events, or have questions about National County Government Month, just ask!

*Remember: You are helping to tell the story for your county, and good government doing good work deserves good press!*



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s a m p l e r e s o l u t i o n

# National County Government Month

## April 2010

**WHEREAS**, Alabama's 67 counties provide a variety of essential public services to communities and take seriously their responsibility to protect and enhance the health, safety and welfare of our citizens in sensible and cost-effective ways; and

**WHEREAS**, many of Alabama's local government initiatives directly touch the lives of Alabama's citizens on a daily basis, but many residents do not realize the impact of many of local government programs; and

**WHEREAS**, the \_\_\_\_\_ County Commission has a duty to find and provide value-added services to all its local residents; and

**WHEREAS**, the \_\_\_\_\_ County Commission provides not only essential services to its residents, but also programs such as road-and-bridge programs for the safety of our motorists; litter control for the beautification of our county; economic development programs for the growth of our community; education and welfare programs for our elderly citizens; drug awareness and prevention programs for the health of our citizens; and parks and recreation programs for the enjoyment of our citizens; and

**WHEREAS**, National County Government Month has been celebrated since 1991 to raise public awareness and understanding about the roles and responsibilities of the nation's counties to meet the needs of the community; and

**BE IT RESOLVED**, that the \_\_\_\_\_ County Commission declare County Government Month in \_\_\_\_\_ County; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, that a copy of this resolution be spread upon the minutes of the \_\_\_\_\_, 2010, meeting of the \_\_\_\_\_ County Commission, and be immediately forwarded to the Association of County Commissions of Alabama,

**IN WITNESS WHEREOF**, the \_\_\_\_\_ County Commission has caused this Resolution to be executed in its name and on behalf by its Chairman on this the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2010.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman, \_\_\_\_\_ County Commission





s a m p l e p r e s s r e l e a s e

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**CONTACT:** \_\_\_\_\_ (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

## \_\_\_\_\_ County Celebrates National County Government Month

Each year, local governments across the nation celebrate National County Government Month as a way to raise public awareness and understanding of the roles and responsibilities of county government.

The \_\_\_\_\_ County Commission has several events planned the month of April to celebrate National County Government Month, focusing on the many public services that the county commission provides to its citizens.

“National County Government Month is the perfect opportunity for our citizens to get to know what county governments really do for our citizens,” said \_\_\_\_\_ County Commission Chairman \_\_\_\_\_.

“Unfortunately, many of our residents only think about the one aspect of county government that most often touches their life, but the county provides services and program that contribute to the quality of life in our community, safety of all our citizens and the economic growth of the county.”

The month will kick off during the regular county commission meeting on \_\_\_\_\_ when the county commissioners sign a resolution declaring County Government Month in \_\_\_\_\_ County. On \_\_\_\_\_, Chairman \_\_\_\_\_ will lead a tour of the recently renovated recycling center, and the commission will sponsor an Open House on \_\_\_\_\_ for citizens to visit the county courthouse, participate in a county commission meeting, and learn more about what county services are available to residents.

“Our county has so much to offer to our residents, and we want to show our residents that their leaders are here for them,” Chairman \_\_\_\_\_ said.

National County Government Month was created in 1991 by the National Association of Counties and is fully supported by the Association of County Commissions of Alabama. There are activities at the national, state and local levels during this month with more than 1,000 counties participating annually.

For more information about County Government Month and \_\_\_\_\_ County’s activities during the month of April 2010, please contact \_\_\_\_\_ at (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_.

**- END -**

