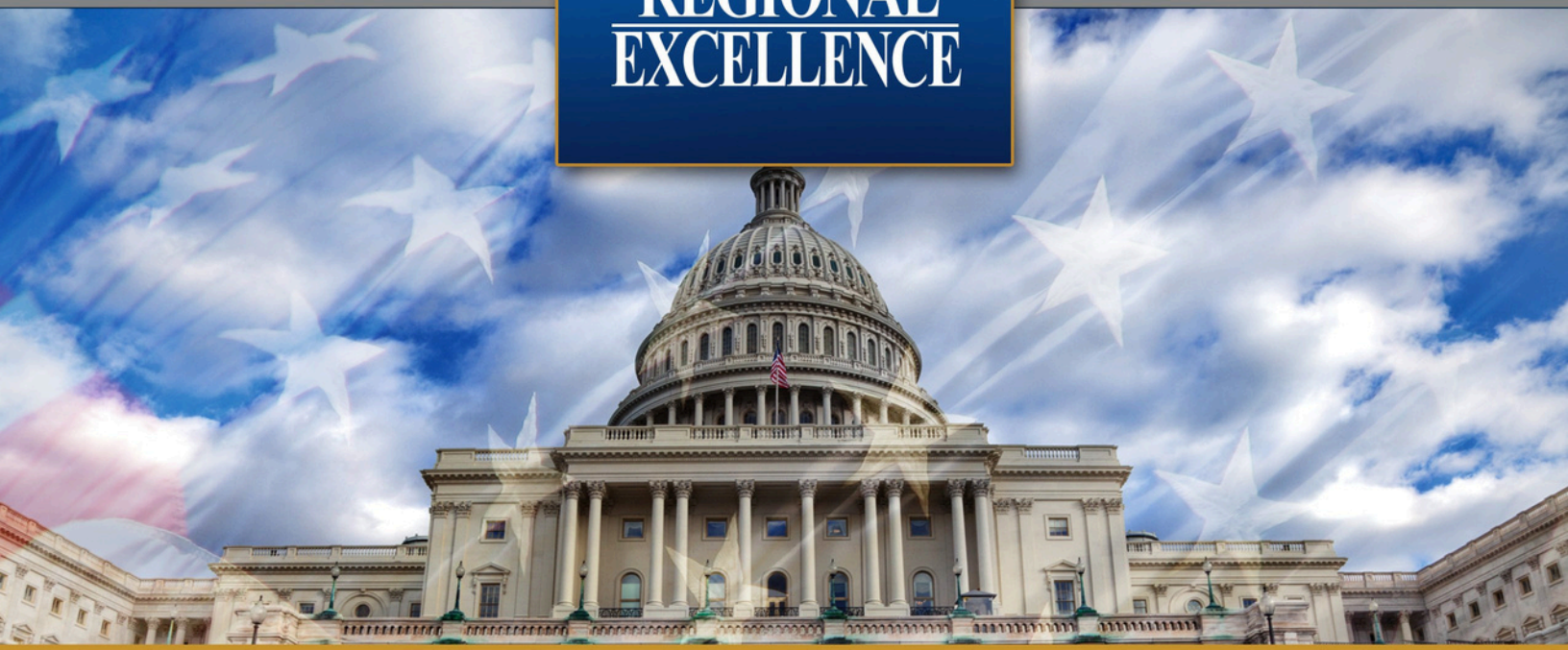


**COG**  
**INSTITUTE**  
*for*  
**REGIONAL**  
**EXCELLENCE**



Metropolitan Washington  
**Council of Governments**

**CPM**

CERTIFIED PUBLIC MANAGER  
P R O G R A M<sup>®</sup>



**THE GEORGE  
WASHINGTON  
UNIVERSITY**  
WASHINGTON, DC

# **IRE RECRUITMENT**

## **2026 | Cohort XXIII**

APPLICATION DEADLINE

~~-July 15, 2026-~~

## The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments invites you to explore an exciting, regional executive development program.

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) is pleased to invite you to learn more about the Institute for Regional Excellence (IRE). Now in its twenty-third year, we are recruiting for the Regional Executive Development Program (REDP) that begins in the fall of 2026.

If you are in a mid-senior level management position from one of COG's member jurisdictions or affiliates and your primary function or major responsibilities involve a regional focus, this program is for you. COG invites supervisory or managerial personnel at the professional level such as managers, division chiefs, department heads and directors to participate in this 12-month program. It will make a difference in your career and for the region.

If you are seeking an opportunity to enhance your knowledge and leadership capacity built around the challenges facing the Washington metropolitan region, this program brings a unique opportunity for you!

### Here are some benefits awaiting prospective candidates:

- Certified Public Manager® designation at the successful completion of the 12 month executive development program;
- Expanded network of government professionals around the region;
- Enhanced regional perspective and skills to deal with regional issues;
- Improved capacities for leading and managing complex organizations and issues;
- Broadened skill sets necessary for success at senior levels of government; and
- Unparalleled opportunity to stay in touch with regional best practices.

*The Institute for Regional Excellence exists to build a cadre of regional talents with a common set of skills, and a common set of knowledge and understanding built around regional challenges.*

*Its goal is to be a learning forum for new ideas and uncommon ways of creatively addressing regional issues facing the Washington region.*



## ABOUT COG



The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) is an independent, nonprofit association that brings area leaders together to address major regional issues in the District of Columbia, suburban Maryland, and Northern Virginia. COG's membership is comprised of 300 elected officials from 24 local governments, the Maryland and Virginia state legislatures, and U.S. Congress.

Since 1957, COG has helped tackle the region's biggest challenges, such as revitalizing the Potomac River, ensuring the Metro system was fully built, and strengthening emergency preparedness after 9/11.

COG is supported by financial contributions from its participating local governments, federal and state grants and contracts, and donations from foundations and the private sector. The Board of Directors is COG's governing body and is responsible for its overall policies. In addition, a wide network of city and county managers, police and fire chiefs, housing and planning directors, environmental experts, public health officials, transportation planners, and more coordinate through COG's committees.

## COG'S VISION

Region Forward is our vision. It's a commitment by COG and its member governments, who together seek to create a more accessible, sustainable, prosperous, and livable National Capital Region.

## COG'S MISSION

COG's mission is to make Region Forward happen by being a discussion forum, expert resource, issue advocate, and catalyst for action.



March 18, 2026

Dear Prospective Candidate:

The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (COG) helps prepare and develop future leaders through a variety of learning opportunities that build stronger connections among local government professionals in the region. One of our signature programs is the Institute for Regional Excellence, also known as IRE-REDP, a yearlong program that we are pleased to coordinate in partnership with The George Washington University.



As an institution fully accredited by the National Certified Public Managers® Consortium, we offer training to help students reach top management positions. In doing so, the program ensures that metropolitan Washington will have a team of leaders with the knowledge, skills, and collaborative spirit to address our region's biggest challenges and plan for a better future.

I encourage you to take a look at the testimonials in this brochure from some of IRE-REDP's graduates to learn first-hand what our program is all about. Hopefully, someday soon you will add your own testimonial to let more prospective students know about the benefits of becoming a Certified Public Manager® and part of our network of leaders.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Clark Mercer'.

Clark Mercer  
COG Executive Director

## ABOUT THE IRE-REDP PROGRAM



A yearlong effort from various stakeholders in the region culminated in creating The COG Institute for Regional Excellence. These included partnerships between with The George Washington University's Center for Excellence in Public Leadership, Chief Administrative Officers (CAOs) and Personnel Directors from member jurisdictions, and the COG Board of Directors. COG developed a strategic plan focusing on leadership training as an important element of regional

development. Thus, COG and George Washington University staff worked together to sponsor a yearlong Regional Executive Development Program credentialing participants as Certified Public Managers® upon their successful completion of this program. The COG Board of Directors unanimously approved this program on July 12, 2000. The first cohort completed the program in August 2002.

The IRE-REDP program assists local government managers in the Washington metropolitan area in dealing with the challenges of providing services and meeting the needs of residents in a growing metropolitan area. It is targeted at mid- to senior-level managers in Washington metropolitan area local governments. It aims to develop leadership, enhance management skills, increase exposure to innovation in local government, and develop an understanding of regional issues and approaches. Upon successful completion of the program, graduates receive a certificate of completion from George Washington University and are designated as Certified Public Managers® .

### The main objectives of the program are to:

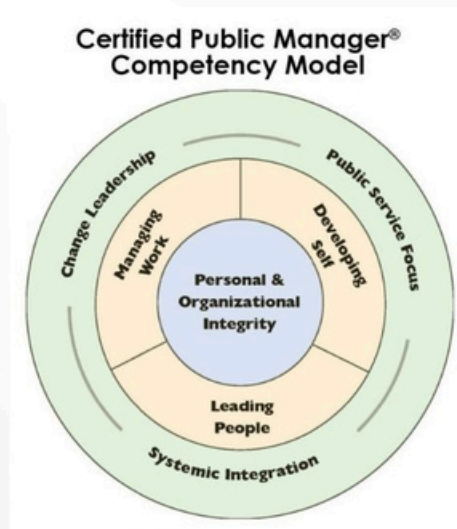
- Provide the theoretical and intellectual foundations of leadership and management in the public sector and expose participants to "state-of-the-art" practices in public administration;
- Examine – and help participants prepare for – the special challenges and responsibilities that come with leading large, complex public organizations;
- Increase understanding of metropolitan-wide issues as well as interdependencies among area local governments and develop a common language and set of concepts area managers can use when discussing issues; and
- Provide an opportunity to share problems, develop joint solutions, and establish networks among area jurisdiction managers.

### Program Overview

The COG Institute for Regional Excellence is pleased to offer the Regional Executive Development Program (REDP). The program is designed to meet the requirements for graduates to be designated Certified Public Managers® by the National Certified Public Manager® Consortium.

Those requirements are:

- A minimum of 300 hours, at least 240 of which must be instructor-led
- A project that enables participants to synthesize their learning and address a regional issue
- Training in the seven core leadership competencies



### Time Commitment

The cohort meets monthly beginning in October and finishing the following September. For each module we meet for 2.5 days: Thursday from 9am–5pm, Friday from 9am–5pm, and Saturday from 9am–noon. Currently, five of the twelve sessions are in-person and seven are virtual. The Saturday sessions are always virtual. The in-person sessions are typically held at the COG building in downtown Washington D.C. Participants are expected to attend all sessions.

### Monthly Format

Typically, each module begins with either a half-day or full day introduction of tools that will help groups move forward in their work on regional projects. The ensuing day or day and a half will offer engaging discussions, lectures, simulations, or field trips that advance participants' understanding of and competence in one or more of the CPM® competencies. Saturday mornings are split into two parts. First, participants engage in Peer Coaching Circles, then they discuss the monthly reading assignment.

### Project Management

During the first two modules the cohort will identify projects they are interested in pursuing. The projects must be regional in scope. During the November or December session participants will be assigned to a project team of 5–6 people from various jurisdictions. Every attempt is made to assign participants to projects that interest them. From December forward project teams will meet outside of class to work on their projects. The expected monthly time commitment outside of class for project work is on average 8 hours. During the final module in September each team will present their project to the broader cohort, the region's CAOs, and other guests.

### Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) Participation

One feature of the IRE-REDP program is the regular engagement of regional senior leadership. In most months, we will hear from one of the region's CAOs about their leadership journey, any advice they may have for participants, and issues that they are working on or concerned about in the region. Participants have an opportunity to develop relationships with these senior leaders, including their own, both for professional guidance and regional understanding. The CAOs are also the target audience for the projects that the cohort members complete.

### Peer Coaching Circles

The Peer Coaching Circle is a method by which a participant "case giver" presents a small group of 5–6 with a work challenge they are facing. Through a guided process, the other members of the group act as "coaches" and pose powerful questions to assist the case-giver in seeing the problem in new ways and beginning to develop possible paths forward. This process will be thoroughly explained and demonstrated early on before the formation of the peer circles, and subsequently each participant will have the chance to gain input into real world situations they are facing and the opportunity to practice their coaching skills.

### Readings

Approximately five books are required reading for the program and will be provided during the first module. Each month a small team of three or so will take the lead on developing a one-hour discussion of the reading and activities designed to help participants apply the insights from the book to their leadership and performance.

### Networking

Participants go through the program as a single cohort, attending sessions together. The cohort format creates group cohesiveness and maximizes the opportunity for managers from different area jurisdictions to network and learn from each other. In addition, during one of the modules the IRE-REDP meets with the DC CPM® Program to strengthen and expand their regional networks.

### ELIGIBILITY

All applicants must meet the following eligibility requirements and must be employed within a COG member jurisdiction and/or affiliate:

1. Middle to senior management, particularly positions involving regional focus or responsibilities as a primary function. (Examples: supervisory or managerial positions at the senior professional level, division chiefs, department heads and directors.)
2. Bachelor's degree or comparable work experience.
3. Full-time, regular staff, having completed any employment probationary period required by the respective jurisdiction. Non-contractual or regular term position.
4. Supervisory approval to attend the training.
5. Additional screening may be required by participating jurisdictions.

### DESIGNATION AND FEES

The 12-month Regional Executive Development Program (REDP) consists of 300 credit hours leading to a "Certified Public Manager®" designation upon successfully completing all classes and projects.

The fee is \$7,000 per participant, payable to the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments before classes begin. An invoice will be sent to the student's member jurisdiction for payment. COG employees shall refund COG IRE from his/her last paycheck upon authorization prior to departure, or other payment arrangements within six months of leaving COG as approved by the HR Director.

### STEP 1

## Application Materials

All applicants must submit a completed application, including a resume and a letter of recommendation, by the July 15, 2026 deadline. Electronic PDF applications are strongly encouraged. Candidates who have submitted a complete application by the July 15, 2026 deadline, meet all the requirements, and whose application has been deemed to meet acceptable standards will be reviewed by the IRE selection committee.

Acceptable standards include: a thorough application packet; a well-written, reasoned essay; and relative rank given to educational background, professional accomplishments, awards, and recognition. The letter of recommendation is considered as well and participation in the program must have jurisdictional/supervisory approval.

### STEP 2

## Interview

The screening process may be conducted by a panel of representatives of the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments and The George Washington University Center for Public Leadership. Other senior government officials from around the region may also be involved as needed.

Results of the screening process and possible follow-up will determine final selection for participation in the program. The screening process is designed to focus on skills and abilities such as: problem-solving, judgment, organizational planning, teamwork/teambuilding, reasoning, and leadership. It may also be used in case additional information is needed to further determine applicant's qualification for the program.

## CLASS SCHEDULE

### SCHEDULE AND FACILITY:

Classes are normally held once a month, Thursday through Saturday, as specified on the detailed schedule provided to participants at the beginning of the program. Currently, we will use a blended learning platform, with mostly online learning. The Cohort schedule is 9:00 a.m.– 5:00 p.m. on Thursdays - Fridays and 9:00 a.m.— 12:00 p.m. on Saturdays. This accommodates the 20 hour per module training requirement. *Module dates are subject to change and will be finalized prior to program orientation.*

	<b>Module</b>	<b>2026-2027 Schedule</b>
1	Building a Learning Community & Challenges in Metro Management	October 15-17, 2026
2	Introduction to Strategic Projects & Emotional Intelligence	November 12-14, 2026
3	Leading People	December 17-19, 2026
4	Building Teams	January 21-23, 2027
5	Tools for Communicating when Stakes are High	February 18-20, 2027
6	Leading Change	March 18-20, 2027
7	Building the CPM Network: Joint Session with DC CPM	April 8-10, 2027
8	Managing Up, Down, and Sideways	May 20-22, 2027
9	Strategic Human Resources Management	June 24-26, 2027
10	Looking to the Future and to the Past	July 15-17, 2027
11	Project Finalization and Financial Management	August 19-21, 2027
12	Leadership Values and Ethics	September 16-17, 2027

### CONTACT INFORMATION:

For more information about this program, you may contact:

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lhughes@mwkog.org  
www.mwkog.org/ire

Suzanne Ludlow, COHORT I, City of Takoma Park

“I was promoted in the City of Takoma Park.”

“I appreciated the high quality of the program which spurred me to really think about how I do my job. The IRE Program was valuable to me. I particularly liked getting to know talented people from other jurisdictions.”

Michael Love, COHORT II, Montgomery County

“I have been promoted in Montgomery County.”

“The COG IRE and REDP provided me with an opportunity to participate with a group of manager level peers from around the region in an intense learning environment. Working side by side with these other manager helped to create a long lasting bond and increased my awareness to the impacts of regional problems and how to solve them by bringing the right people to the table. This is truly an opportunity to learn three ways, once from an incredible group of subject matter experts who teach the modules, once from the vastly experienced and knowledgeable peers and finally once from the experience of working through and producing a valuable applied research project.”

Pam Doran, COHORT II, City of Falls Church

“I have been promoted in the City of Falls Church since completing the IRE Program.”

“Although the IRE was a great deal of work, it was also fun and gave me an opportunity to meet and gain the perspective of a diversity of expertise areas with professionals whom I might otherwise never had any contact.”

Claire Kiley, COHORT II, Fairfax County

“I have been promoted in Fairfax County.”

“The IRE Program has had a very positive impact on my work for Fairfax County. The training took me outside of my own experience and helped hone my skills as a manager. While the experience can be challenging in many way, it is more than worth it. Managers learn about the challenges facing colleagues in other jurisdictions and are able to bring new skills to their jobs. It is an extraordinary opportunity for any municipal manager.”

Clarissa Byrd, COHORT III, District of Columbia

“I have received two promotions since completing the IRE Program.”

“The IRE Program helped develop me as a better leader, a better person, and definitely sharpened my professional skills.”

Sermaine McLean, COHORT XVIII, City of Alexandria

“The COG IRE Program helped develop my leadership and manager skills while building a deeper understanding of issues not only impacting the City of Alexandria, but also of the entire DMV region.”

Jacqueline Woody, COHORT IX, Prince George’s County

“In general, I am more conscientious of leadership in the region. I felt that the IRE, gave me the tools to prepare me to be a better leader. The program was very insightful and I had excellent instructors and met wonderful colleagues.”

Dawnita Smith, COHORT XXI, Prince George’s County

“The Regional Executive Development Program stands out as one of the most historically impactful experiences of my career. It expanded my leadership toolkit, strengthened my confidence in addressing complex issues and having courageous conversations, and connected me with a network of regional colleagues that have become a resource when needed and, in many case, have turned into lifelong friends.”

Allison Mulligan, COHORT III, Fairfax County

“I received two promotions since my participation in the IRE Program.”

“The IRE Program gave me essential knowledge, skills, and networking opportunities that directly affected my ability to move to a higher level in Fairfax County. My first promotion was for a job that was supervised by another former IRE Cohort member who I had continued meeting to discuss work.”

Hadden C. Culp, COHORT III, Prince William County

“I received a promotion while in the IRE Training Program. This is little doubt in my mind that the information I learned was directly applicable to the interview questions and situations I encountered during my promotional process.”

“I have gained a broader working knowledge of the regional issues. Some of the tools I was exposed to during the training have been added to our organization and working well. I appreciate the opportunity to work with such a diverse group of professionals from the region, who share common challenges, yet from a wide variety of job applications. It was a very beneficial and rewarding experience.”

Chris Scales, COHORT IV, Fairfax County

“I was promoted for Fairfax County after completion of the IRE Program.”

“Due to the IRE Program, I look at solutions and issues from a broader prospective. In addition, I have made a lot of contacts with people from other jurisdictions.”

Traci Anderson, COHORT V, Montgomery County

“I received a promotion after completion of the IRE Program. I am proud to have participated in the IRE Program as it gave me an opportunity to evaluate my strengths and weaknesses, and make improvements in a supportive environment. Additionally, I met some of the best friends I ever had.”

Luther Reynolds, COHORT VI, Montgomery County

“The IRE Program has helped me to understand the importance, relevance, and specifics of my role in regionalism and working with my partners in public safety. The CPM certificate specific to this region is helping me in my efforts to support our agency as an executive staff member. As I move ahead in my career, it is a distinction that will help me be more effective as a leader.”

“The COG IRE is an outstanding program which assists students in broadening their understanding and application of effective leadership skills and abilities. The program is all about real-life and as it assists with honing skills in a variety of areas. The program is practical and had immediate and longer-term application in critical areas of knowledge that are required for executive leadership. I am pleased that I made the time and emotional investment in the program and highly recommend it for those interested in attending.”

Sarah Alvarez, COHORT XIX, Montgomery County

“Participating in the IRE Program gave me a valuable window into the challenges and responsibilities of departments I rarely interact with. Gaining that broader, systems-level view of regional issues across the DMV helped me understand how interconnected our work truly is and how leadership decisions ripple across agencies. The program also demystified what it means to be an effective leader and manager, and it strengthened my confidence in my own approach. Most of all, it reinforced the importance of continual learning and maintaining a growth mindset. I’m grateful for the experience and would highly recommend it to anyone looking to expand their perspective and evolve as a leader.”

Patricia Durham, COHORT XII, Arlington County

“Almost every month I brought back something from our training to the office.”



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