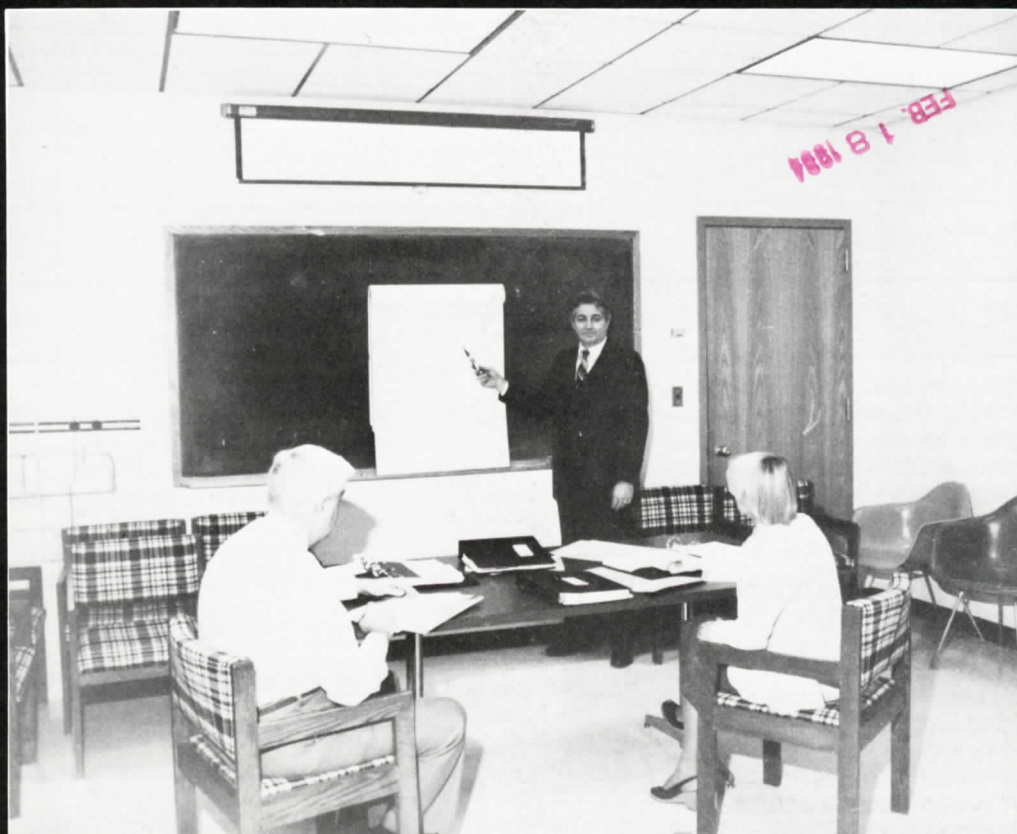


# Virginia & Town & City

Volume 19  
Number 2  
February 1984



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## THE ASSESSMENT CENTER

Opportunities Beyond Hiring and Promotion



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# Virginia Town & City

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## 5 People

## 6 The Assessment Center: Opportunities Beyond Hiring and Promotion

"Whereas the primary goal of an assessment center is the determination of who will be hired or promoted, other noteworthy intrinsic benefits exist within the process itself."

## 8 The Financial Plight of Education

"In effect, the state's share of SOQ funding for each year has been determined by the amount of available funds rather than by the level of actual educational costs."

## 11 Achievement Awards

## 12 Professional Directory

## 15 Commentary: Quality of Work Life

"Organizations using QWL programs are experiencing increased productivity, high quality and reduced costs."

## On the Cover:

Newport News Police Chief Darrel Stephens leads the assessors' discussion on candidates' scores for performance and behavior in a recent Newport News assessment center. Photo by Stephen Laurent, Newport News Police Department.

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# People

## Scott Receives Award

Fairfax County Supervisor **James M. Scott** has received the 1983 Elizabeth and David Scull Metropolitan Public Service Award from the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments. The award is presented annually to a local elected official for demonstrated contributions to the well-being of the area.

Scott, recently re-elected to a fourth term, has been an active leader in regional government and was honored for his "leadership, effectiveness and vision while building a better Metropolitan Washington for all citizens."

## Fairfax Appoints Mayor

**George T. Snyder Jr.** has been unanimously appointed mayor of the city of Fairfax. He fills the unexpired term of John W. Russell who was elected to the Virginia Senate in November.

Previously chair of the city's school board, Snyder has been a Fairfax resi-



—Snyder—

dent since 1977 and is widely known as a civic activist and community leader. He is employed by the Greyhound Corp. in Washington, DC, as assistant to the vice president of government affairs.

## Fire Service News

**R. Lawrence Oliver** of Dayton has died after three years of poor health. Oliver was a member of the State Fire Chiefs Association of Virginia and was known throughout the state at all fire departments. A native of Harrisonburg, he was a volunteer fireman for three years and a professional fireman for 10 years. He was a qualified fire instructor, fire inspector, professional fire fighter, fire chief and first aid instructor and had organized fire departments and served as a consultant. He retired from his position as a state fire training supervisor in 1979.

**James W. Kerr**, a member of the State Fire Chiefs Association of Virginia, a volunteer fire fighter with the Dunn Loring Volunteer Fire Department and a commissioner for the Fairfax County Fire and Rescue Services, recently received two honors. A nuclear physicist and director of research for the Federal Emergency Management Agency, Kerr received a grant to do an analysis of an incipient volcano in Long Valley, CA, and has been named a research associate of the California Academy of Sciences.



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# The Assessment Center

## Opportunities Beyond Hiring and Promotion

**By Darrel Stephens  
and Linda Smith**

A management technique for hiring and/or promoting employees that is becoming more prevalent is the assessment center. In contrast to a standard one-hour individual or panel interview, an assessment center allows job candidates to be evaluated more intensively in a variety of settings. Emphasis is on candidate responses to simulations of relevant job tasks, and evaluations are based upon key dimensions that have been identified as important behaviors in the prospective job (i.e. planning and organization, judgement,

creativity). The desired outcome is that the candidate selected will be the best suited to the position.

Whereas the primary goal of an assessment center is the determination of who will be hired or promoted, other noteworthy intrinsic benefits exist within the process itself. These benefits significantly counter the chief criticisms of assessment centers which claim the process is too time consuming and too costly. Intrinsic benefits are evident with respect to the candidates, the assessors, the department involved and

the participating localities.

The most obvious intrinsic benefit from an in-house standpoint is the learning experience of the candidates going through the process. Candidates through both written and oral exercises have an opportunity to look at themselves and their peers and to learn about the department and the work required of the position being sought.

This learning process does not simply take place during the experience of undergoing the exercises. At the conclusion of the assessment considerable feedback is provided the candidate. This feedback is largely based upon final written reports submitted by the assessors which identify strengths and weaknesses of the candidates. Further, candidates may review exercise materials in an individual review session with the assessment center administrator. Whether the candidate ranks well or poorly, he should feel he had a fair opportunity to project himself. The added advantage of the feedback system is that it provides clear guidelines to assist the candidate in future career development as well as in current job performance.

Another obvious opportunity is the built-in formal training assessors receive. An assessment center extending over a five-day period allows for one and one-half days of training.

Assessors are selected in a variety of

### WHAT IS AN ASSESSMENT CENTER?

An assessment center is an approach to personnel selection which emphasizes direct observation of behaviors as a means for determining an individual's potential for success in a particular job. It differs from other selection techniques in that it consists of a series of "work sample" exercises which are designed to simulate on-the-job situations shown to be critical to success or failure for the position being considered. The following activities summarize those functions coordinated by the assessment center administrator.

#### The Assessment Center Process

- Phase I – Job Analysis, Dimension Selection, Exercise Preparation
- Phase II – Assessor Selection and Training
- Phase III – Recording Observations
- Phase IV – Scoring
- Phase V – Assessor Discussion
- Phase VI – Preparation of Final Written Report
- Phase VII – Candidate Feedback

Whether the process is part of a larger scoring process which may also include a written test or is used as a stand-alone process, the assessment center provides a unique challenge in hiring or promoting applicants for vacant positions.



ways. One technique is to use a combination of persons both within and outside the area of expertise and within and without the locality conducting the assessment center. In a recent Newport News police assessment center for police lieutenants, officers from Hampton, Suffolk, Portsmouth, Chesapeake and Virginia Beach joined officers from the Newport News force to serve as assessors. Additionally, other assessors were drawn from Newport News' departments of personnel, budget and evaluation, and parks and recreation. The ratio of assessors to candidates was 12 to 21.

Initial assessor training involves teaching assessors about the assessment center process itself. Of importance is what to look for in evaluating candidates. Assessors actually go through the three different exercises which constitute the assessment process: an in-basket exercise, an oral presentation and a group discussion.

The assessor group discussion exercise uses the same three problems and the same time format candidates later encounter. Assessors also attempt to address the priorities and strategies in handling a forty-five item in-basket exercise during the first evening of training. These exercises require the same thought processes required of the candidates. Post exercise discussions educate assessors in not only what to look for but in the variety of approaches one might encounter in resolving the simulated problems. Likewise, the same briefing and discussion occur pertaining to the background material provided for the oral presentation.

A corollary to the formal training of the assessors comes in the interchange between the various assessors as ideas are exchanged. Assessors learn not just about the process and how to evaluate the dimensions of the candidates, but also a considerable amount about themselves and their peers in terms of organizational and managerial philosophies. In a very real sense, the assessment center provides a professional development opportunity for the assessors.

The process of the assessment center also provides opportunities in group dynamics and communication. Assessors are grouped into teams of three. Each team evaluates five candidates through each exercise. Evaluations are made one on one, in twos, and with all three assessors present for the group discussion. The evaluative process is so intense during the day, assessors need to complete some of the work each evening prior to sharing findings with other team members. The team's collaborative evaluation requires two consecutive days and team members discuss each candidate on two oc-



*A group of candidates begin their in-basket exercises while Chief Stephens (bottom right) counsels a candidate on his assessment results. Photos by Stephen Laurent, Newport News Police Department.*

casions.

At the end of the second day, the desired outcome is for the team to have reached a consensus on each dimension for each of the five candidates reviewed. Ideally, the team then identifies the strengths and weaknesses that provide the foundation for the final report.

The major expense of the process is the assessors' lost time from their own work. However the concentrated professional work both in the group at large and in individual teams is invaluable. Assessors selected from the hiring department itself learn more about their own organization. Employees outside the hiring department gain the opportunity to know the hiring department personnel and organization better as well as the opportunity to interact with persons in several other departments. With further input from the personnel of other jurisdictions, the opportunity for widespread input and lively dialogue is abundant. The cross-pollination of ideas and information from this intricate group enables assessors to apply a fresh outlook to their own work setting. An assessment center provides the framework for thought processes that usually cannot occur with the persistent press of standard work.

The interaction between the as-

sessors throughout the week coalesces the group. The shared experience and concentration on work issues creates a camaraderie. This same shared experience fosters pride in the locality at hand and municipal government work in general. At the week's end there is a distinct sense of accomplishment among all participants.

Upon the completion of the assessment center, both candidates and assessors have partaken of a professionally enriching experience. The experience provides constructive criticism for candidates and revealing insights for assessors. Upon return to their respective work settings, each participant, candidate and assessor alike can use the body of knowledge gained during the assessment center and know that the selection process itself assures a high quality of administrative personnel in the department using the process.

#### About the Authors

*Darrel Stephens is chief of police in Newport News. He has been involved as an assessor or assessment administrator since 1977 in approximately 10 assessment centers. Linda Smith is a budget analyst for Newport News and recently served as an assessor in that city's police lieutenant assessment center.*



# The Financial Plight of Education

By Ellen S. Posivach

With the 1984 session of the Virginia General Assembly underway, the Virginia School Boards Association, the Virginia Association of School Administrators, the Virginia Education Association and the Virginia Association of Counties have joined the Virginia Municipal League in support of the league's top 1984 legislative priority—full state funding of the actual Standards of Quality costs (SOQ) for education.

SOQ funding is a complex issue to comprehend, compounded by the complexity of finance and budgeting trends in the state. In order to understand the current financial plight of education, one must have a working knowledge of both the SOQ funding formula and historical factors which have led to the current budget situation in the commonwealth.

## Funding SOQs

The Standards of Quality originated in 1971 following adoption of the revised state constitution. Article VIII, Sections I and II require that public schools of high quality be maintained, provide for the determination of Standards of Quality and delineate state and local responsibilities in meeting the cost of the prescribed standards.

The state Department of Education prescribes the Standards of Quality and calculates an estimated cost of their funding. These estimates are presented to the governor and the General Assembly where the final funding decision ultimately rests. From a local government perspective there are two major concerns with the process: the premises used in calculating the cost and the level of funding provided by the General Assembly.

Two components are combined to produce the SOQ cost estimate presented by the Department of Education which is figured on a per pupil basis. The instructional component is based on 48 instructional staff per 1,000 pupils in average daily membership (ADM). The second component, a non-instructional

support component, represents funding for all costs not included in the instructional component.

## The Per Pupil Ratio

From a local government perspective, the major continuing problem with this formula is that the average number of instructional staff per 1,000 pupils is not 48, the figure used by the state, nor has it ever been as low as 48 since the formula was first implemented in fiscal year 1974-75.

In fiscal year 1974-75 the Board of Education requested funding for 50 instructional staff per 1,000 pupils, a figure representing the actual instructor/pupil ratio at the time; however, the General Assembly funded the formula at a reduced ratio of 48 instructors per 1,000 students. Since that time the disparity between the number of instructional staff funded by the assembly and the average number of instructional staff actually employed by localities has increased in each succeeding year. The most recent available data indicate an average of 63.8 instructional staff per 1,000 students with the upper end of the range reaching 87.3 instructors per 1,000 in Highland County.

In recent years the General Assembly has recognized its responsibility in the area of instructional funding and has added financial support for six instructors for vocational and special education positions. Federal funds supplement approximately four additional positions for a funding total of 58 instructional staff per 1,000 pupils, still 5.8 positions short of the state's 63.8 average student per pupil ratio.

As a result of this disparity between the number of positions funded and the actual number of instructors, localities are forced to pay for any instructor beyond the 58 funded by the state and federal government. In the "average" locality this amounts to 5.8 positions. In a highly staffed locality such as Highland County, this amounts to 29.3 positions (the difference between 87.3 and 58). Keep in mind that this is in addition to the local's share of the cost of education the locality is already paying as mandated by the General Assembly.

Based on Department of Education cost estimates, it would take approximately \$30 million in the 1984-86 biennium to increase the instructor/pupil ratio by one instructor. Calculating the difference between the statewide aver-

age employment of 63.8 professionals and the 58 positions supported through state and federal funding, it would require approximately an additional \$174 million in state monies to fund the additional 5.8 positions needed to correct this disparity in SOQ funding.

## The Cost Per Child

This creates a situation of deep concern to local government, but it pales in comparison to the situation created by the General Assembly's approach to funding the actual Standards of Quality formula. In effect, the state's share of SOQ funding for each year has been determined by the amount of available state funds rather than by the level of actual educational costs.

In Table 1 the established state per pupil appropriations are compared to the calculated cost of providing these standards for each year since the SOQ formula was implemented. During each of these years, each local government has had to make up the difference noted in column five for each student educated in the locality. This is in addition to paying for any instructional staff of more than 58, and in addition to paying the local's established fair share of the cost of education.

The Department of Education estimates it would require \$275.8 million in additional state funds to raise the governor's proposed SOQ funding targets of \$1,605 per pupil for 1984-85 and \$1,753 for 1985-86 to the actual estimated costs of \$1,879 and \$1,982 for these respective years. This is in addition to the estimated \$174 million needed to fund the actual average number of instructors already employed across the state. Plus, the new more stringent Standards of Quality recently mandated by Department of Education are expected to cost in excess of \$11 million. This brings the state's total share of the cost of education to more than \$460 million.\*

## Virginia's Budget

In its most fundamental form there are only two important issues in any budget: how the money is raised and how the money is spent.

Since income is directly related to spending in Virginia, where state prac-

\*These figures were accurate at the time this article was written, but as are all state budget estimates they are subject to change.

### About the Author

Ellen S. Posivach is currently director of research with the Virginia Municipal League. She has written articles which have appeared in nationwide publications ranging from "FBI Law Enforcement" to the "Bureaucrat," a public administration professional journal. She has also had articles in academic publications in Virginia.



tice requires a balanced budget, a review of the factors affecting revenue collections serves as a starting point for understanding state spending. Significant factors affecting revenue collections since 1970 include state and federal tax cuts, inflation, reductions in revenue collection projections resulting from economic recession and the state's tax effort.

During the past 14 years in Virginia, tax cuts have led tax increases. The result has been a \$175.9 million revenue loss to the state's general fund. Since 1970 state taxes have been cut by \$653.5 million, while only \$477.6 million has been generated through new or revised tax efforts. Of 14 tax cuts, averaging one per year over the 1970-83 period, half have had direct negative impact on local government and five have transpired since 1980, a period in which localities have faced significantly reduced federal funding and downturns in local revenue collections due to economic recession. The remaining seven state tax cut measures have had an indirect negative impact on local government by reducing the size of the overall budget "pie" from which the individual "pieces" are appropriated.

In order to provide a clearer picture of the impact that tax cuts, inflation and recession have had on the state budget, a comparison in terms of constant dollars is worthwhile.

According to Stuart W. Connock, assistant secretary for administration and finance, "During the past five years revenues have increased by over \$1 billion, about 30 percent in current dollars, but they have decreased by \$320 million in constant dollars. In other words, revenues have not kept pace with inflation."

By 1981-82 the "buying power" of

dollars used to fund the budget had been reduced to the point that 6.4 percent less in goods and services could be purchased than in 1969-1970.

While inflation and state tax cuts were taking a toll on the "buying power" of the state's general fund during the late 1970s and early '80s, the federally supported share of the state's non-general fund was being reduced as a result of federal deficit interest payments and individual income tax cuts. In fiscal year 1981-82 federal grants were almost \$200 million less than in 1980-81, according to Secretary Connock. For the most part, cuts to federal funds passed through the state to local government.

### The Toll on Education

The ravages of inflation, recession and budget cuts at the state and federal level have taken their toll on local government. Fourteen tax cut measures in 14 years, coupled with reduced buying power of state appropriated dollars and direct cuts in federal grants, have had a devastating effect on local governments in Virginia. No where have these reductions been more evident than in primary and secondary educational funding. In local governments, where education funding averages 50 percent of the local budget and is as much as 80 percent of the budget in some localities, a statistically insignificant decrease in state allocations can have a significant net impact on local education budgets.

Even though state funding for education has grown to 41.6 percent of the total state budget in 1982-84 from 36.7 percent in 1966-68, primary and secondary educational programs have not been the major beneficiaries of this growth. The effort to improve the quality of higher education has been at the

expense of primary and secondary education. In 1966-68 the Department of Education received 61.5 percent of all state education funds with higher education receiving 37.1 percent. In 1982-84 the Department of Education received only 48.1 percent with higher education receiving 50.4 percent of this. This 13.4 percent relative reduction in state support has had a devastating impact on local government budgets.

Decreased emphasis on primary and secondary education is evidenced further by the findings of the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission's 1983 local mandates and financial resources study. According to JLARC, the state's share of primary and secondary educational funding dropped to 43.6 percent in 1981-82 from 46.3 percent in 1977-78.

### The Burden on Localities

As the state's share of primary and secondary educational funding has decreased, the burden has more and more fallen on the localities. In 1977-78 the state passed on \$729.1 million in educational costs to localities, and in 1981-82 this sum exceeds \$1 billion. Local governments cannot continue to carry this increasing burden. Funding primary and secondary education is the largest slice of every municipal's budgetary pie and a major concern of local governments. In view of these facts, full funding of the Standards of Quality has been set by VML's members as the league's number one legislative goal for 1984.

The league has voted on a one percent statewide sales tax as the best means of generating the revenue to fund the SOQs. Why this as opposed to an increase in local taxes? The answer

*Continued on next page*

TABLE 1  
COMPARISON OF ESTABLISHED STANDARDS OF QUALITY PER PUPIL AMOUNT  
TO ACTUAL/ESTIMATED COST

Fiscal Years	Established	Calculated	Established As a Percent of Calculated	Dollar Difference
1974-75	\$ 687	\$ 833	82.5%	\$146
1975-76	730	887	82.3	157
1976-77	790	961	82.2	171
1977-78	825	1,029	80.2	204
1978-79	901	1,116	80.7	215
1979-80	960	1,231	78.0	271
1980-81	1,075	1,361	79.0	286
1981-82	1,185	1,519	78.0	334
1982-83	1,320	1,668**	79.1	348
1983-84	1,464*	1,773***	82.6	309
1984-85	1,605**	1,879***	85.4	274
1985-86	1,753**	1,982***	88.4	229

\* Per Chapter 622, Acts of Assembly (1983).

\*\* As recommended in the 1984-86 Financial Proposal.

\*\*\* The 1981-82 actual SOQ cost was increased by the following percentages:

1982-83 by 9.8 percent; 1983-84 by 6.3 percent; 1984-85 by 6 percent; and 1985-86 by 5.5 percent.



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is twofold. One response addresses equity; the other addresses need.

On the principle of equity, the state should provide its fair share of the actual costs of education. This includes full funding of the actual SOQ costs based on the current ratio of instructional personnel per 1,000 pupils.

On the issue of need, the major finding of the JLARC local mandates and fiscal resources study is that local governments are fiscally stressed.

In concluding comments the study states, "No one approach will address all of the stresses affecting the ability of Virginia localities to meet their service responsibilities. And, the most effective approaches may well require the examination of additional revenues at the state level."

The study continues by reviewing additional sources of revenue that could be used to provide public services. First on this list is an additional sales tax.

### Trends in Taxation

Even though budget cuts, inflation and economic recession have had a severe negative impact on the budget of Virginia, and subsequently the budgets of its political subdivisions, Virginia continues to rank 39th in the nation in state and local tax effort, a position maintained since 1970.

In fiscal 1970, Virginia allocated \$102

from every \$1,000 of personal income to state and local government. In 1981, the most recent data available, Virginia collected \$100 per \$1,000, falling \$13 per capita short of the nationwide average.

A Virginia Education Association publication entitled, "Is Virginia A High Tax State?" ranks Virginia 36th nationwide in per capita state tax revenue for 1980-81.

"The 1981 Tax Capacity of the Fifty States," compiled by the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (ACIR), reviews major sources of tax revenue for each state and determines a tax capacity index and tax effort index for each area of taxation. If the tax effort index is lower than the tax capacity index then the tax can be termed "under-utilized" as a source of revenue.

According to ACIR, a series of Virginia taxes in which the tax effort index is significantly lower than the tax capacity index exists. These include: the general sales tax (with a tax capacity index of 101.9 and a tax effort index of 64.7); the tobacco sales tax (with a tax capacity index of 112.9 and a tax effort index of 30.7); and corporation licenses (with a tax capacity index of 84.1 and a tax effort index of 21.6). While there are certainly advantages to this position, those advantages must be weighed against the cost—in this case the quality education of our children.

Although it is sometimes unpopular, raising taxes is often a responsible action necessary to meet increasing program needs. During 1983, 12 states raised sales taxes, 13 increased income taxes, 23 boosted taxes on motor fuel and 16 hiked taxes on tobacco or liquor. Illinois' combined tax increase measures for 1983 should bring \$1.3 billion in new revenues. Ohio and New York respectively should see an additional \$770 million and \$742 million in new revenues resulting from legislative actions taken in 1983. In all, 35 states enacted tax increases during 1983 according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

### Summary

According to the figures, Virginia is fortunate to be in a posture which would allow a one percent statewide sales tax increase without significantly jeopardizing the state's attractive tax position. Also, the state already has in place the mechanism for funding education through the sales tax. In addition, the JLARC study recommends a search for additional revenues at the state level for funding education.

The JLARC study and the ACIR study serve in a complimentary fashion, one showing localities fiscally stressed and

*Continued on page 14*

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## **Eligibility**

All VML member localities are eligible to enter the competition; however, entries may not be shared by more than two localities.

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## **Categories**

Six categories of competition are available to two groups of competitors—towns, and cities and counties. The categories are: community development, effective government, environmental quality, human development, public safety, and transportation. Localities may submit only one entry in each category.

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## **Entries**

Entries must be typed double spaced and should not exceed eight pages. A cover page bearing the project's title, the category of the entry, the name of the locality and the signature of the chief elected official is required. Black and white photographs, line art, renderings or newspaper clippings may be included but should not be larger than letter size. Three copies of each entry must be submitted. All entries become the property of the Virginia Municipal League.

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## **Judging**

A screening committee will review all entries and a panel of three judges will select the winners. A key criteria in judging an entry will be the results achieved by the project. Although the entries themselves need not be elaborate, appearance, grammar and writing style will be considered.

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## **Deadline**

All entries must be postmarked no later than April 27, 1984.

For more information, call Christy Everson at (804) 649-8471.



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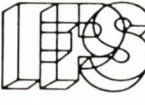
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## Education

Continued from page 10

the other showing Virginia's sales tax "under-utilized." In addition there can be no doubt as to the need for funding education. As mentioned earlier, an additional \$460 million is needed to pay for the new Standards of Quality, the teaching positions already in existence throughout the state and the actual cost of educating a child as opposed to the figure proposed in the governor's budget. A one percent increase in the state's sales tax would generate the funds needed to pay for quality education. Also, because the VML supports equal educational opportunities for every child in the commonwealth regardless of local financial heritage or political pressures, the league requests that these monies be fairly distributed to the localities on the basis of school-age population.

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## VML Holds Press Conference

Members of the press crowded the VML conference room Jan. 17 for a press conference held to promote the league's number one legislative goal for 1984—full funding of the educational Standards of Quality through a 1 percent statewide sales tax increase.

Lawrence A. Davies, mayor of Fredericksburg and first vice president of the league, acted as the league's spokesperson explaining how the state under funds education and the impossible burden placed on localities.

Davies was joined in his views by Harry King, president of the Virginia Association of Counties; Brenda Cloyd, president of the Virginia Education Association; Dawana Sheppard of the Virginia School Boards Association; and Frank E. Barham of the Virginia School Boards Association and the Virginia Association of School Administrators.



A member of the press interviews Mayor Davies.

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# Commentary

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## Quality of Work Life

By Russ Linden

"Managing During Times of Declining Resources" has appeared frequently in recent years as the title of books, journals, articles and seminars, all of which offer a variety of coping strategies. Increased creativity among staff, encouraging entrepreneurial efforts, finding the slack in the budgets and making cuts that seem fair to all are commonly mentioned strategies.

These approaches have merit, but each suffers from the same limitation: the onus is on the manager. To foster creativity, the manager must encourage and reward. To stimulate entrepreneurial behavior among department heads, the manager must suggest such behavior and remove the barriers to taking risks. To find slack and cut budgets, the manager again shoulders the burden.

In the past decade, a movement has been underway that advocates sharing many of these types of responsibilities with employees. It is called Quality of Work Life, QWL. The central theme of QWL is active participation by employees in decisions that affect them and the organization.

QWL takes many forms and has been advocated wholesale or in part by both public and private organizations. Irving Bluestone, former vice president of United Auto Workers and initiator of the first national QWL program, describes it this way: "Traditionally, management has called upon labor to cooperate in increasing productivity and improving the quality of the product . . . management should cooperate with the worker to find ways to enhance the dignity of labor and to tap the creative resources in each human being in developing a more satisfying work life. . . ."

Such words will sound unrealistic and utopian to some. After all, the point of a job is to get the work out; organizations do not exist to promote worker dignity. Clearly, the purpose of organizations is delivery of goods and services. The irony, as Bluestone points out, is that organizations using QWL programs are experiencing increased productivity, high quality and reduced costs.

Consider these examples:

- In Columbus, OH, lower-level employee and management representatives began in 1976 to hold committee meetings to explore shared

problems. With the help of consultants, each committee set its own agenda and proposed solutions to city officials. The results have included increased safety, fewer serious employee grievances, a new employee orientation program and a flex-time schedule.

- A different sort of QWL program worked in San Diego where a series of workshops helped employees clarify their roles and improve their communications and management skills. After these sessions, the city experienced increased productivity, improved morale and high citizen satisfaction with city services.
- Closer to home, city officials in Charlottesville have used a variety of approaches, each contributing to the employees' quality of work life. Quality circles were implemented in three departments in 1982. The gas department's circle made suggestions for changing their scheduling and inventory practices. The results are fewer bottlenecks and less overtime. The city began an employee assistance program, contracted with the local family services agency, to deal with personal problems affecting job performance. According to Assistant City Manager Gary B. O'Connell, these programs reflect an "overall concerned attitude" apparent throughout the organization from the city manager down. As he put it, "Our manager, Cole Hendrix, has a concern for the whole employee."

In these and other instances, QWL programs are producing improved supervisor-subordinate communications, lower turnover and increased appreciation for the ways in which the interests of supervisors and subordinates merge.

Several developments spurred this trend toward QWL in both public and private sector organizations. Employees are better educated now than they were a generation ago, and they demand certain rights that never occurred to their parents. They expect to have power and autonomy. In addition, employees are more conscious of options for career growth. Increasing numbers of women in the workforce also have

contributed to the desire for participation in decisions.

Quality of Work Life should not be viewed as a "quick fix" for employee relations problems, and it won't make a real difference for those localities facing large budget shortfalls. What it does offer is a resource—the skills, ideas, initiative and enthusiasm of employees who are close to the worksite. This resource cannot be expected to solve all a locality's problems, nor should the employees involved expect all their ideas will be adopted.

To maximize QWL's chances for success, some rules of thumb will help:

- Make the QWL program voluntary—start with departments that want it.
- Give the program top-level support.
- Make sure those involved are trained in whatever problem-solving or decision-making approach is used.
- Remember that QWL is not a substitute for existing grievance procedures—it is neither a productivity gimmick nor a substitute for good management.
- Give the program long-term support; do not create expectations for immediate success.

In our post industrial society, with a well-educated work force with increasing expectations for meaning and value in their work, QWL is a needed and proven approach. In a sense, it boils down to an attitude. If managers take the classical scientific management approach and insist on making all the decisions, QWL won't have a chance. On the other hand, for managers who see their employees as their most valuable resources, persons who are fully capable of making certain decisions and providing input on others, QWL can substantially improve the climate in the workplace. A QWL program may even yield useful ideas for managers struggling to manage during times of declining resources.

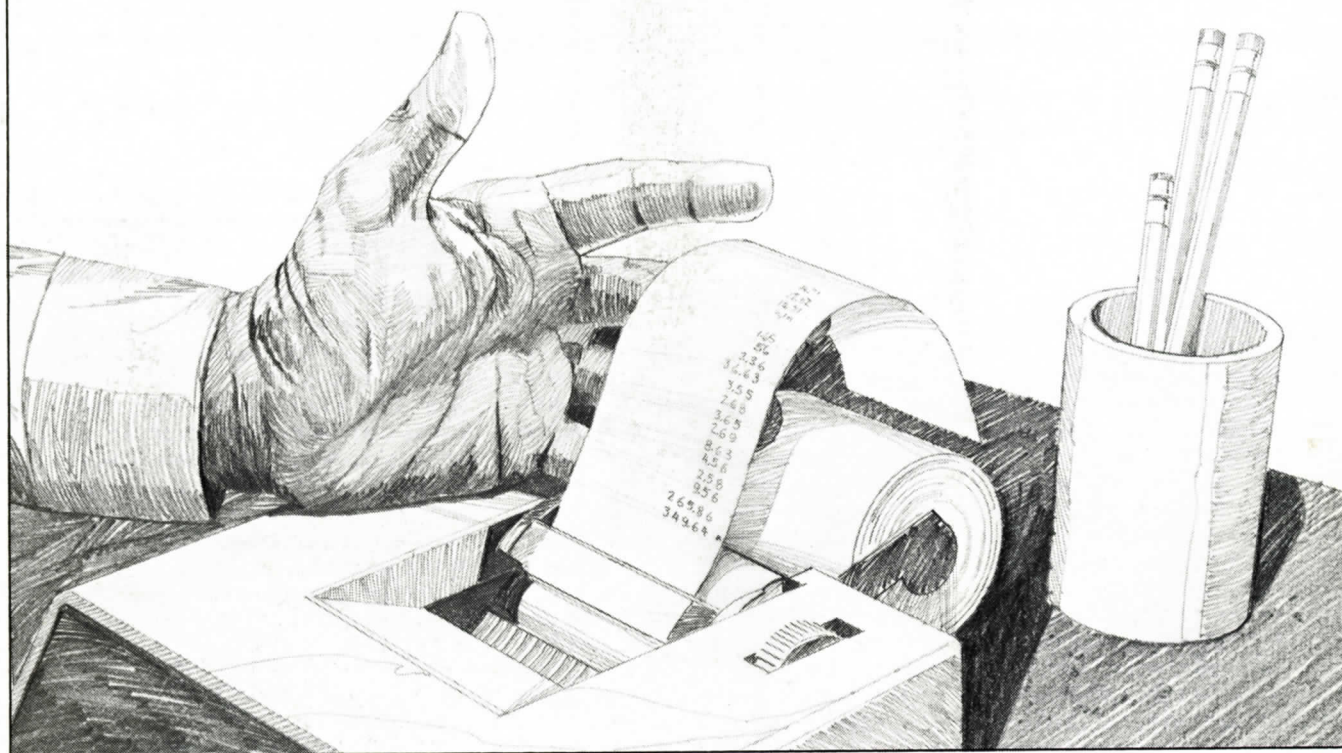
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#### About the Author

Russ Linden is associate for training and development at the University of Virginia's Institute of Government. His consulting and research interests have included implementation of QWL programs in public sector organizations.



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