

Walker County Leadership Initiative 2026-27

Serving All of Walker County

Leadership makes things happen!

The Huntsville Leadership Institute was established by the Huntsville-Walker County Chamber of Commerce to foster the development of community leaders from all segments of the Walker County area, specifically to:

- Promote leadership as a public responsibility
- Identify and develop new and emerging leader candidates for community service and improved business practices
- Encourage communication between current and future leaders
- Fill key community leadership positions with graduates
- Develop a large, active group of graduates

In 2026 the chamber rebranded to the Walker County Chamber, and HLI is rebranding as well to be more inclusive of the entire county. The program is now known as Walker County Leadership Initiative.

Our program focuses on the 3 following areas:

- Leadership
- Community Awareness
- Networking and Relationships

Leadership is always needed

Businesses...non-profit organizations...boards...churches...governments..., etc. The business of a leader is to turn weakness into strength, obstacles into steppingstones, and disaster into triumph.

Who may apply?

Anyone who has an interest in helping to develop our community to its greatest potential and enhancing the quality of life in Walker County is invited. There are no minimum educational requirements to apply. You do not have to be a member of the Chamber of Commerce, nor employed; however, you must live or work in Walker County.

What's to be gained?

The Walker County Leadership Initiative will inform you about your community and its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. In WCLI you'll find individual growth and fulfillment as you become prepared to meet the challenges and dynamic changes of the future, whether in your own life or the life of the community.

"HLI was a life changing experience for me. The visits around town afforded the opportunities for deeper understanding of our community and what it takes to make Huntsville-Walker County truly work. The program not only helped me in my own business, but also in growing my confidence that we, as a community, can reach towards new goals for our future!" -Lisa Branch, HLI Class #31

The Experience

- Begins with a two-day overnight resort retreat
- Includes ten regular monthly day-long (7:30 a.m.-5:00 p.m.) sessions including, but not limited to: Personality Styles, Communication Skills, Local Economy, Government, Natural Resources, Political Process, Criminal Justice, Law Enforcement, Local Education Systems, Leadership Skills, Community Demographics and History, ROPES Outdoor Adventure Course
- Engages the class in simulations, group exercises, discussions and presentations
- Provides an opportunity to visit places and meet people you might not otherwise
- Incorporates tours that may include: local industry, TDCJ, SHSU, etc.
- Gets the class involved "hands on" in a community project. *(some fundraising or extra cost may be required)*
- Introduces you to beneficial and rewarding relationships with others
- PLEASE NOTE that most sessions require a great deal of walking – if you have physical limitations, please contact the chamber for clarification

What else can I expect?

- Professional & personal development
- Expanded interest in community service
- Introductions to key leaders
- A new look at yourself
- Opportunities you never knew existed!

WCLI Faculty

The faculty of the program are decision makers, both front-line and behind the scenes. We utilize local and state elected officials, professionals and other key community leaders. Our instructors provide insight into the challenges facing future leaders and give a perspective of the challenges our community has already overcome and/or is facing today.

The quality of our leadership will determine the future of our community. We can each decide to be part of the problems...or part of the solutions.

Participants

The annual class will be no less than 15 people and no more than 25 selected as representatives of a broad cross-section of the community. Application does not guarantee selection. Since the initial class in 1982, more than 700 citizens have participated in the program. Graduates are from diverse backgrounds, possess unique skills and have a history of making things happen. You are invited to apply for WCLI, or to nominate someone you feel is a good candidate.

"Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other." -John F. Kennedy

Requirements

Attendance

Every participant in WCLI is expected to attend all sessions. The overnight retreat is mandatory and regular attendance at sessions is enforced. The program is designed so that each subject adds to a well-rounded foundation for any future leadership roles.

Tuition

The \$900.00 tuition covers the nine-month (September-May) program; the overnight retreat, all class sessions and materials, meals, field trips, the graduation ceremony, branded polo to wear at all sessions and all other incidentals.

Payment options are available; no money is due until the class is announced in late August. Tuition may be paid by an individual, organization or business; by check or credit card. Scholarship assistance may be available.

Class Project-

The class project is one way the current class can serve our community. In the process we hope it will provide each participant with a sense of satisfaction, teamwork and high impact networking. Personal leadership styles will arise as the project takes place. **Participation in the project is a graduation requirement.**

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"I believe the Huntsville Leadership Institute is one of the most valuable programs in our community. Whether you have lived in Huntsville for many years or only a short time, it's the way to become informed about all the aspects, opportunities, and all that makes Huntsville-Walker County great! I highly recommend HLI for anyone who wants to know all about our community and who wants to get involved."

-Mac Woodward, former Mayor of Huntsville, HLI Class #1

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Great experience! I accomplished my goals and learned at least one new thing about our community each day!"

-Frankie McCaffety, Lifetime resident, HLI Class #33

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"I have been very impressed with the broad range of people in the community that HLI touches as well as with the depth, attention to details, which HLI covers throughout the nine month course." - Dr. David Prier

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"HLI helped build our foundation of understanding and broadened our perspective, but it also took us down the path of self-discovery."

- Kirstie Legerski, HLI

Class #34

2017-2018 HLI Chair

2026-27 WCLI Committee

The Institute is governed by a Board of Directors
Liz Speer Chair
..... *Albertus Land & Cattle*
Rachel Parker Vice Chair
..... *Walker County EMS*
Tracy Chappell Past Chair
..... *City of Huntsville*
Kaye Boehning Board Liaison
..... *Tomorrow's Promise Montessori*
Courtney Luper VeraBank
Danika Hill Huntsville Fire Dept.
Chriss Kuykendall *Miracle Alley*
Casey Spencer *Lone Oak Services*
Jason Brandolini Chamber President
Shannon Higbie HLI Coordinator

2026-27 Schedule

Please review these dates and make sure they will not conflict with prior commitments. The attendance policy is defined on the last page of this application.

- July 20-Applications Due
- August 25 - Orientation; 5:15 p.m.- **Mandatory**
- September 14 & 15 Retreat Overnight – 2 FULL DAY/OVERNIGHT **Mandatory**
- October 20
- November 17
- December 15
- January 19
- February 16
- March 16
- April 20
- May 18
- Graduation – June 3

To request an application or for more information about WCLI call 936-295-8113, stop by the chamber at 1327 Hth Street or email chamber@huntsvillewalkerchamber.com with HLI in the subject line

Please review all requirements for the program included in the application.

"I think the HLI program is fabulous for networking; but, also very beneficial for developing leaders to run for public office or just get more involved with the community. It helps people find a good fit for their area of interest in serving the community." -Patsy Collins, HLI Class #35

Leadership is not only an honor...but a responsibility.