

CAO Executive Institute – Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

1. What is the CAO Executive Institute?

The CAO Executive Institute is a six-month, cohort-based leadership development program designed for senior county executives preparing to step into — or recently appointed to — the County Chief Executive Officer (CEO) or County Administrative Officer (CAO) role. It combines in-person residencies, virtual cohort sessions, and electives to support leadership growth, strategic awareness, and peer networking.

Who is this Institute designed for?

- County CEOs/CAOs with **five years or fewer** in their current role
- **Chief deputies, deputy, and assistant CEOs/CAOs**
- **Department heads** on an executive track
- Other county executives preparing for or exploring advancement to a county CAO/CEO role

2. What is the selection process and criteria for participation?

While the former *“So You Want to Be a CAO?”* program required a formal application and selection process, this year’s CAO Executive Institute has been streamlined to allow for direct enrollment.

However, all participants must have the support of their County CAO or CEO to ensure alignment with county leadership goals and succession planning.

You are welcome to initiate your own enrollment, but we kindly ask that you confirm your County Administrator’s support prior to registering. This ensures the program remains a coordinated investment in county executive development.

If you’re unsure whether your participation aligns with your county’s internal development plan, we encourage you to connect with your CAO/CEO prior to reaching out.

3. Can non-county employees, like city and special district leaders, apply?

While we welcome interest from local government organizations, enrollment priority is given to current county employees, specifically those in county executive roles or on a clear path toward CAO/CEO positions.

Local government applicants may request to be placed on a waitlist, and we will follow up in late October if space is available.

For questions about eligibility, contact: ryanuyanutawa@counties.org

4. What is the program schedule and format?

Instructional Hours: 50+ hours over six months

Components:

- Two In-Person Residencies
 - December 10–12, 2025 (Sacramento, CA)
 - April 16–17, 2026 (TBD)
- Four Virtual Cohort Sessions
 - January 21, February 18, March 18 & May 13, 2026
- Two Elective Courses
 - Choose from Institute offerings to tailor your experience, August 2025-June 2026

5. Can my agency pay by invoice rather than credit card?

Yes, we offer the option to **pay via invoice**. Please contact our team directly for assistance.

6. What's the philosophy behind the program design?

The CAO Executive Institute is grounded in the belief that **transformational leadership in local government requires more than technical expertise** — especially in today's rapidly evolving landscape and amid a wave of leadership transitions and retirements across California counties. Leadership demands political agility, strategic foresight, a mindset of innovation, and the ability to cultivate trusted relationships across the Board, departments, and the broader community.

The program is rooted in:

- Real-world insights from sitting CEOs/CAOs across California
- Peer learning and connection among county leaders
- Adaptive leadership frameworks that respond to disruption, complexity, and change
- A commitment to advancing inclusive, cross-county leadership pipelines

This year's curriculum builds off the formerly framed "So You Want to Be a CAO?" series, and has evolved to develop not just the skills, but the **strategic perspective and executive presence** needed to succeed in one of the most demanding and dynamic public service roles.

7. Who are the presenters and faculty?

The Institute features a mix of seasoned CEOs/CAOs, state and local governance experts, and executive leadership facilitators. Panelists and guest speakers are selected for their practical experience, authenticity, and ability to prepare leaders for what's ahead.

8. How do I register?

To register for the CAO Executive Institute, please contact **Salote Yanuyanutawa** directly. She will guide you through the registration process and ensure your information is accurately captured in our system.

 [syanyanutawa@counties.org](mailto:syanuyanutawa@counties.org)

 (916) 692-6969

Please note: Creating an account on the CSAC Learning Portal may still be required for program access once registration is confirmed.

9. Can I register multiple people at once?

Yes, agencies or counties can register multiple eligible participants at the same time.

To do so, simply contact **Salote Yanuyanutawa** with the names, titles, and email addresses of each participant you wish to enroll. She will process the registrations and provide you with any necessary follow-up information, including invoicing or account setup support.

 [syanyanutawa@counties.org](mailto:syanuyanutawa@counties.org)

 (916) 692-6969

10. How do the electives work?

Please visit csacinstitute.counties.org to select your elective courses which are part of your registration fee. You can use code '**CAO-PROGRAM-ELECTIVES**' to waive fees at checkout. This code is valid for 2 uses and applies to the CAO Executive Institute program only. For assistance with registering for your electives contact Salote Yanayanutawa.

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Additional Notes

- **FAQs are subject to updates.** We will continue to refine this document as additional questions arise. Please check back or contact us directly if you need clarification on anything not addressed here.
- **Priority enrollment closes on October 31, 2025.** After this date, remaining seats may be offered to individuals on the waitlist, including special district or non-county applicants.