



PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH COUNCIL OF ALABAMA

AN INVESTMENT IN BETTER GOVERNMENT

Knowledge will forever govern ignorance, and a people who mean to be their own governors must arm themselves with the power which knowledge gives. – James Madison

The History of PARCA.

In 1987 a group of Alabama civic leaders decided to invest in the future of our state by creating an independent organization to research and report objectively on issues important to improving the government of cities, counties, public schools, and the state. Early in 1988 they formed the Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama (PARCA) to carry out this purpose.

Samford University agreed to host PARCA, which was organized as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit educational corporation with its own board of directors and editorial independence in its work. Former Governor Albert Brewer became the first Executive Director of PARCA, and Jim Williams, who had worked for 17 years in similar governmental research agencies in Texas and Michigan, was hired as Research Director.

From this beginning, PARCA has grown to a staff of four professionals who work full-time providing information that will help to improve state and local government in Alabama. Our location on the campus of Samford University enhances staff productivity and minimizes expense requirements. The University provides human-resource support and office space, as well as access to law and government documents libraries; a computer network connected to the internet; purchasing, printing, and mailing services; and other amenities. Samford also is a financial contributor to PARCA. For its part, PARCA reimburses Samford for actual operating expenses incurred on its behalf.

Our Research Products.

PARCA's primary products are research reports and consulting services. *PARCA Reports* are published as research work is completed, and the *PARCA Quarterly* is published four times a year to provide updates on research in progress. PARCA maintains a web site at <http://parca.samford.edu> and regularly posts data and other information there. About 62% of PARCA's research work is underwritten by contributions, 35% comes from consulting services, and the remaining 3% is derived from interest earnings. PARCA provides consulting services to state and local governmental units seeking to make improvements, and the results are published and made available to the general public.

To promote public understanding of the issues facing our state, PARCA hosts an annual meeting that regularly draws over 350 civic and governmental leaders from around the state. This year's program focused on ethics-related issues, while last year's concentrated on the state's *SMART Governing* initiative. The Governor and other public officials are regular participants. We seek to engage young people in public affairs through our PARCA Roundtable, which includes quarterly discussions and semi-annual symposia on topics of interest. The most recent symposium focused on economic development.

A Good Government Think Tank.

PARCA is a *good government* think tank, not a policy think tank devoted to a particular point of view. We believe that government ought to operate in a businesslike manner and provide taxpayers with the best possible return on their investment of tax dollars. We believe that taxes ought to be balanced, fair, and adequate to the task. We believe that the constitution ought to be a blueprint for a functional and efficient system of government. We believe that our tax dollars ought to be spent in ways that provide the best possible services for the people of Alabama, now and for the long-term, and that a representative system of government is the best method of making such policy choices. We believe that objective research considering all reasonable options is the best way to apply these general principles in given circumstances. Our fundamental goal is to improve state and local government in Alabama for the benefit of all its people.

Recognized for Quality and Results.

Our staff has won eight national awards given by the Governmental Research Association for research quality. In recent years we have received awards for an administrative study of the Huntsville City School System, for developing an automated performance-based budget methodology for the Sheriff's Office in Shelby County, and for long-term work to create a state budget built on planning and results.

Our research is quoted often by the media and has achieved improvements as PARCA's founders envisioned. To cite two examples: PARCA's research laid the foundation for Alabama's "SMART Governing" initiative, and with private and public support PARCA now serves as the lead consultant in its development. With PARCA support, purchasing consortia have been created and developed among local governments in the Huntsville-Decatur, Birmingham, Anniston, and Mobile areas; and another is in the process of forming. These consortia improve procurement practices and save taxpayer dollars.

The Importance of Contributor Support.

PARCA has two major sources of operating revenue – tax-deductible contributions and consulting income. Contributions, which represent 62% of revenues, are critical for the success of our mission. They enable PARCA to have a research agenda of its own choosing, allowing the staff to focus on the highest priorities for improving Alabama government. For example, PARCA studied and wrote about the necessity of improving the state budget process for seventeen years before officials seized the opportunity to adopt our recommendations. When they were ready to act, PARCA was there with the capacity to guide them through the implementation of reforms and remains committed to the initiative.

PARCA has a large number of committed and loyal supporters who understand the organization's value and continue to contribute toward its research efforts year after year. We have

no fund-raising staff and spend minimal time in seeking additional funds, in large part because of the low turnover in contributors. We try very hard to earn the loyal and continuing support of our contributors by producing results and maintaining extremely low operating costs. This is accomplished in two primary ways. First, our association with Samford University enables PARCA to operate more economically than comparable agencies in other states. Second, the staff of four professionals operates without full-time administrative support and energetically seeks opportunities to earn revenue in projects that are consistent with our mission to improve state and local government.

The Opportunity Provided by Consulting Work.

PARCA's research today is widely considered to be factual, objective, and relevant to the real issues facing Alabama government. PARCA is seen as a proponent of good government, as an agency that faces the real issues squarely – and, crucially, as the ally of all public officials who seek to improve the way government works. Thus, PARCA is seen as an agency that not only points to the issues that should be addressed: it also *participates* with officials in actually bringing about such improvements. The growth in consulting work, which now represents about 35% of revenues, is a key indicator of the success of PARCA's strategy, because it measures our involvement in projects aimed at producing real improvements on the issues discussed in PARCA's basic research reports. These consulting opportunities, insofar as they are driven by a sound basic research agenda, represent the fulfillment of PARCA's mission to bring about the improvement of state and local government in Alabama.

A Contribution to PARCA is an Investment in the Future of Alabama.

We believe that PARCA's mission to promote the improvement of state and local government is a significant way to make Alabama a better place in which to live, work, and do business. A contribution to PARCA is therefore an investment in the future of our state. To take full advantage of opportunities to improve local and state government in Alabama, PARCA seeks additional contributions from public-spirited individuals and organizations and would welcome your financial support.

PARCA is a qualified 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, and contributions are tax-deductible on that basis. Contributors receive PARCA publications and invitations to PARCA meetings. To become a contributor, simply fill out the form on the next page and return it to:

Public Affairs Research Council of Alabama
Attention: Jim Williams
219 Brooks Hall
P.O. Box 292300
Samford University
Birmingham, Alabama 35229-7017

PLEASE ENROLL AS A CONTRIBUTOR TO THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS
RESEARCH COUNCIL OF ALABAMA THE FOLLOWING

____ ORGANIZATION

____ INDIVIDUAL

(Name of Organization Responsible for the Contribution, if applicable)

(Name of Individual Responsible for the Contribution)

(Mailing Address 1)

(Mailing Address 2)

(City, State, Zip Code)

PARCA requests that organizations consider a contribution of \$1,000 to further its work of improving state and local government in Alabama. We recognize that organizational size and financial capacity vary, and we would be pleased to accept your contribution at the level you consider appropriate. Because of the cost involved in maintaining contributor accounts, we have set a minimum contribution level of \$250 for organizations and \$100 for individuals.

AMOUNT ENCLOSED AS A CONTRIBUTION TOWARD THE WORK
OF THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS RESEARCH COUNCIL OF ALABAMA:

\$ _____