



OVERVIEW

Since 2023, the Hill Country Alliance has convened the Hill Country Leadership Institute - a ten-month program for elected officials and key staff from across the Texas Hill Country, with a focus on local planning and natural resource management challenges and solutions. From January to October each year, the cohort meets twice monthly for a total of ten in-person sessions and nine virtual sessions on themes ranging from water infrastructure funding to transportation and development codes, to engaging the Texas Legislature. To date, a total of 59 leaders have participated in the program.

BY THE NUMBERS

- 9 County Commissioners
- 4 County Judges
- 1 Emergency Services District Commissioner
- 13 City Councilmembers
- 7 Mayors
- 8 Groundwater Conservation District leaders
- 17 city managers, planners, county engineers and key staff

These leaders represent 9 county commissioner courts, 15 cities, 5 groundwater conservation districts, and together serve 1 incredible Hill Country worth protecting.

"Every session brought new ideas and a better perspective and understanding to take back to the Real County Commissioner's Court as we pursue local policies to preserve water quality and quantity. I count the Leadership Institute as one of the greatest opportunities I've had to learn on behalf of my county since taking office."

-Judge Bella Rubio, Real County

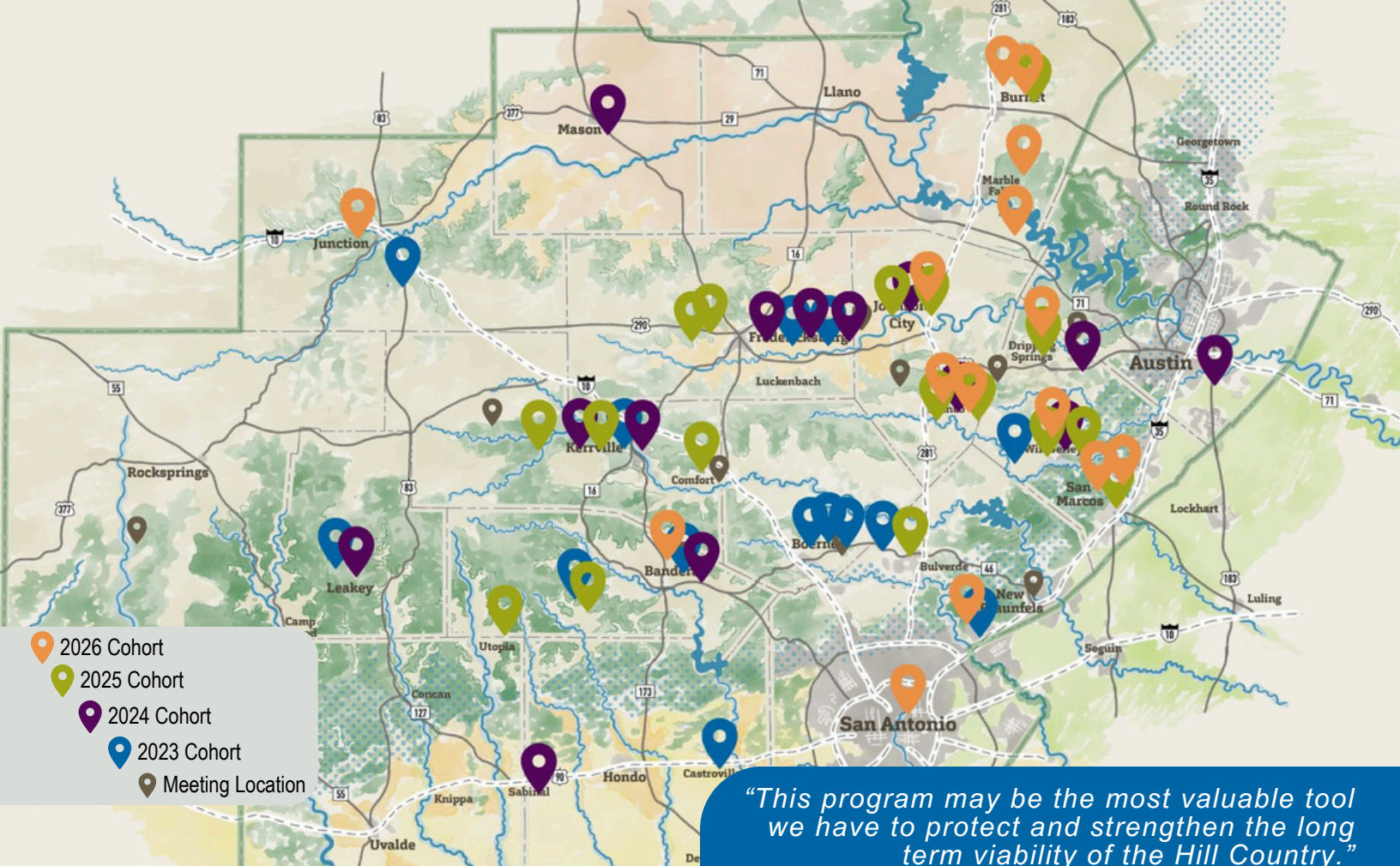
PROGRAMMING

KEY TOPICS

- City and county planning tools
- Statewide and local water planning
- Innovative approaches to water management
- Land conservation, park creation, and funding
- Night sky preservation
- Local economic development
- Transportation planning and funding
- The land / water connection, land stewardship
- Funding tools (grants, loan programs, etc.)
- Disaster planning and response

PRESENTERS & PARTNERS

- Cibolo Center for Conservation
- Environmental Defense Fund
- Native American Seed
- National Wildlife Federation
- Simplicity Design
- The Campsite at Shield Ranch
- The Meadows Center for Water & the Environment
- Texas Association of Counties
- Texas Municipal League
- Texas Parks and Wildlife Department
- Texas Water Development Board
- Texas Water Foundation
- Texas Water Trade



"This program may be the most valuable tool we have to protect and strengthen the long term viability of the Hill Country."

- Mayor Robert Rayburn, City of Mason

DIRECT OUTCOMES

- Real County adopted new subdivision regulations thanks to the leadership of Institute alumni Judge Rubio (2023) and Commissioner Gray (2024).
- The cities of Fredericksburg, Blanco, Boerne, and Wimberley adopted One Water resolutions, directing staff to consider water conservation-focused strategies when developing or permitting public and private facilities, inspired by Leadership Institute sessions in Wimberley.
- The City of Sabinal received a \$1 million grant from the Texas Department of Agriculture for a major downtown revitalization project thanks largely to alum Judge Cindy Casburn (2024) and recurring Institute presenters Monte Anderson and Matt Lewis.
- Gillespie County revised its Floodplain Development Regulations to better manage impervious cover in new developments, thanks to County Engineer and HCLI alum Melissa Eckert (2025).
- Johnson City worked with HCA and US Water Alliance to apply to both State Revolving Funds for drinking and wastewater improvements to address leaky water infrastructure and needed wastewater treatment plant upgrades.
- In response to 2025 flooding, HCA convened several meetings for leaders to discuss early warning systems and riparian restoration.
- Hays County adopted a One Water resolution in 2025 and Institute alum County Judge Ruben Becerra (2024) committed to ensuring that all new county buildings, including the new Indigenous Cultures Institute, will be designed with One Water principles.
- The Hill Country has a stronger network of local and state leaders, aligned in a vision for the region. This network includes Institute participants and over a dozen more officials who have attended Leadership Institute sessions as guests.

PROGRAM GOALS



Connect local leaders to practical solutions for common challenges.



Strengthen the network of leaders aligned in their vision for our region.



Identify opportunities for stronger regional collaboration.