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Regional Economic Governance Series (five articles in a weekly series)

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Governing Regional Economies

From the National League of Cities
Dear Municipal Official:

Leaders of the nation's cities are increasingly involved in collaborations aimed at ensuring the competitiveness of their regional economy for the benefit of the area's residents. This pamphlet contains articles that appeared early in 1999 in a Nations Cities Weekly series on these efforts at "regional economic governance."

These articles build on NLC's long-standing focus on regional economies and inter-local collaboration.

- NLC publications, including the 1996 survey of 476 cities, American Cities in the Global Economy, have highlighted the local challenges and opportunities presented by the international economy.

- In 1996 and again in 1998, NLC conducted successful national conferences on "Achieving World Class Local Economies."

- The 1993 Futures Report, Global Dollars, Local Sense, presented the case for city officials to develop more fully their cities' roles in the global context.

- The path-breaking report, "All in it Together", documented that the economic fates and fortunes of cities and suburbs are tied together in their "local economic regions."

This series of articles was prepared for NLC by staff of the Urban Center at Cleveland State University's Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs: Daila Shimek is a Research Associate; Kevin O'Brien is Director of State and Intergovernmental Initiatives; and Susan Petrone is Editor. Bill Barnes, Director of NLC's Center for Research and Program Development, managed the whole effort.

Donald J. Borut
Executive Director
National League of Cities
Economy League, which provides much of the research and development work that provides information and support to the Conference in determining its agenda. The Conference's agenda is focused on five major areas:

- **Education and Workforce Development**: Improving the systems and methods that develop human potential
- **Public Governance**: Making local government more productive and fiscally sound
- **Regional Development**: Improving the physical infrastructure and development of the region
- **Civic Organization**: Making the civic sector more productive through reorganization and leadership
- **Working Together**: Promoting action on the “Working Together to Compete Globally” recommendations.

As the region has grown and developed, the Allegheny Conference has worked to respond to changing economic development needs. One response was the creation, in 1972, of an offshoot organization—Penn's Southwest Association (PSA). This regional nonprofit economic development organization serves nine counties in southwestern Pennsylvania and the City of Pittsburgh. Its mission is to improve the economic vitality of the Southwestern Pennsylvania region by encouraging selected businesses to locate or expand their facilities in the region; informing people of the positive aspects of the region’s quality of life; and stimulating among the region’s citizens an increased awareness of and commitment to the region. PSA leads the region’s efforts in marketing the area to outside investors and attracting new business. Retention and expansion activities are addressed by other organizations.

Penn's Southwest Association is also one of the six organizations that, in 1996, formed the Pittsburgh Regional Alliance (PRA), a public/private umbrella organization created to “marry the efforts and goals of its six component organizations.” The other component organizations involved in PRA include the Greater Pittsburgh Chamber of Commerce, the Pittsburgh High Technology Council, the Regional Industrial Development Corporation, the Southwestern Pennsylvania Industrial Resource Center, and the World Trade Center. The Allegheny Conference was also instrumental in the creation of the Alliance and continues to provide assistance and support in the form of policy.

The Alliance allows for an amalgamation of the region’s six economic development players and their efforts, yet was designed so each organization maintains its autonomy. The PRA was formed to facilitate and direct the coordination of and collaboration on economic development projects among its member economic development agencies.

The PRA serves a population of over 2.6 million people in a 13-county area. The PRA’s board consists of two elected officials from outlying Beaver and Armstrong counties and two (the chair plus another board member) from each of the participating agencies.

To encourage economic and community development organizations to locate in a single, centralized site, Alcoa donated its former headquarters in downtown Pittsburgh to a regional nonprofit corporation and is providing space in this thirty-one-story building to various organizations at below market rates. The Allegheny Conference relocated there in 1997, followed by the PRA and its partnering agencies in 1998.

In cooperation with the six economic development organizations (EDOs), there are six full-time staff who implement the board-approved strategic plan. Activities include workforce development, school-to-work, marketing, government relations, and others. Recently, the PRA worked with the Pittsburgh High Technology Council to create the Computer Services Coalition to lobby for elimination of the computer services sales and use tax that was enacted by the Pennsylvania Legislature in 1991. It is also working with the Greater Pittsburgh Convention and Visitors Bureau to develop a regional marketing campaign. The PRA will take the lead in implementing the coordinated marketing and promotional strategy and business retention program necessary for the
success of investment strategies. Part of the PRA's agenda includes attracting companies in Europe and Japan. Several leaders from Pittsburgh have already joined the mayor in delegations to Germany and Japan.

For additional information, contact Rick Stafford, Director, Executive Director, Allegheny Conference on Community Development at 412-281-1890; Kevin Docherty, Director, Marketing and Research, Penn's Southwest at 412-392-1020 or via the Internet home page at http://www.pennsouthwest.org; and Tim Parks, President, Pittsburgh Regional Alliance at 412-392-4555.

Seattle’s Trade Alliance: Going Beyond Regional Boundaries

Seattle’s location at the northeastern tip of the Pacific is a prime spot for international business and trade. In order to capitalize on the region’s geographic advantages, the Trade Development Alliance of Greater Seattle was created in 1991. Its primary goals are to promote the Greater Seattle area in domestic and international markets; raise awareness of the area’s exports, marine and aviation facilities; and to encourage tourism and investment in the region.

The Trade Development Alliance is a collaboration of the Port of Seattle, Metropolitan King County Government, Snohomish County Government, City of Seattle, City of Everett, Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce and union leadership, all of which represent a population of approximately three million people. Representatives from the seven partners make up a twenty-member executive board that oversees six full-time staff members. The Trade Alliance also has a sixty-member Advisory Committee and a membership of over 190 companies. Because the Trade Alliance’s aim is to supplement, not supplant, other organizations, all business members who wish to join the Trade Alliance must be a member of a chamber of commerce. Funding primarily comes from partnership support and is supplemented by membership fees.

The Trade Alliance is credited with beginning to tie together a patchwork of fragmented local international economic development initiatives with a region-wide effort that strives for a consensus between business, government and labor. The “Foundation for the Future” study facilitated by the Trade Alliance, for example, has been used by three counties—King, Snohomish and Pierce—to
develop their own economic development action plans that dovetail with a regional vision.

A prime focus of this nonprofit organization has been hosting out- and inbound international trade missions. Outbound missions have gone to South America, China, Southeast Asia, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom, among other destinations. Inbound missions are typically meetings with inbound delegations opportunities for Northwest companies in target markets. In addition, the Trade Alliance, with other organizations, sponsors and co-sponsors conferences and seminars for the business community.

Other major initiatives have included development of marketing material that is available in eleven languages. The Trade Alliance also supports its marketing initiatives through research. This includes a 1992 target market report prepared for the Trade Alliance that analyzed opportunities for future international trade growth.

Further, the Trade Alliance assisted in the “Foundation of the Future” assessment of the region’s economy. Other major areas of activity have been the creation of a computer database that matches inbound delegations with appropriate local business and the development of the Greater Seattle Trade and Business Center on the Internet.

The Trade Alliance’s office is also home to the International Press Center (IPC), one of five press centers organized by the U.S. Information Agency (USIA). The IPC offers research and staff assistance to visiting foreign journalists. The Trade Alliance’s relationship with the USIA helps to give the city and the region greater exposure in international markets.

The Trade Alliance continues to exist because of the success of the inbound missions, collateral materials developed and the outbound and study missions. The Trade Alliance is located at the Greater Seattle Chamber of Commerce. This affords greater acceptance of the public-private partnership by the business community because the Trade Alliance functions in a business, rather than governmental, environment. Although the Trade Alliance’s chair traditionally comes from the private sector, the public sector is represented on the twenty-member Executive Board that represents all funding partners. Although the ultimate policy setting and decision-making authority rests with the Executive Board, the Advisory Board reviews and makes recommendations on marketing themes, locations for outbound missions and most Trade Alliance business. According to Bill Stafford, the Trade Alliance’s executive director, “the board recognizes that international promotion comes before politics and business and government communities need to cooperate to maintain Seattle’s and the region’s ability to compete globally.”

Details: contact the Seattle TDA at (206) 389-7301.
Atlanta Region Nurtures Strong Business Climate

Over the past five years, Atlanta has been heralded as a city that nurtures a strong business climate. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, metro Atlanta is one of the top job-producing economies in the United States and the city consistently places in the top five of Fortune magazine's annual "best business cities" survey.

The metro Atlanta area, covering 6,150 square miles, has two regional organizations that have contributed to the region's success nationally and globally. Representing government and private-sector entities, these organizations are able to address issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries and allow for cooperation and coordination among these jurisdictions.

One of these organizations, the Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC), was the first publicly supported, multi-county planning agency in the country. Founded in 1947 as the Metropolitan Planning Commission (MPC), the organization now serves as the regional planning and intergovernmental coordination agency for the sixty-four city, ten county Atlanta region. The ARC is funded through a number of local, state and federal government sources. Its board consists of each region's county commissioner chair, mayors, city council members, private business representatives and citizens, and one non-voting member appointed by the board of the Georgia Department of Community Affairs.

The Atlanta Regional Commission is dedicated to unifying the region's collective resources to prepare the metropolitan area for a prosperous future. It does so through professional planning initiatives, the provision of objective information and the involvement of the community in
collaborative partnerships that encourage healthy economic growth compatible with the environment, improve the region's quality of life and provide opportunities for leadership development.

The Commission serves as the regional center for data gathering, interpretation and information. It coordinates the development and implementation of regional plans in its focus areas, including all functional planning in the areas of aging, community services, economic development, environmental planning, governmental services, job training, land use and public facilities, transportation planning and data gathering and interpretation.

One of its most significant accomplishments of the ARC has been Vision 2020. To develop this long range vision, the ARC brought together the entire regional community through twenty-three public forums, a survey published in three languages in four newspapers and a statistically valid survey. Using these forums, the ARC was able to develop a common vision with ten focus areas. The stakeholder groups of 100 or more have been established for each focus area to develop action steps to implement the initiatives. The initiatives that have been developed as an outgrowth of Vision 2020 are being implemented by the ARC and other organizations. For example, "Blueprints for Successful Communities" initiatives has been spearheaded by the Georgia Conservancy that has partnered with the Urban Land Institute and the Greater Atlanta Homebuilders Association to create greater awareness of better development and land use practices.

To complement its public sector efforts, the ARC supported the development of a regional business entity, the Regional Business Coalition. The Regional Business Coalition (RBC) was formed in the spring of 1997 by chamber of commerce leaders in Atlanta to serve as the business community's unified voice on natural resource and infrastructure issues critical to the region's continued prosperity. The ARC and RBC work cooperatively to address regional concerns. They have co-sponsored initiatives centered around building leadership skills, understanding regional issues and addressing regional problemsolving. These initiatives have included the Regional Leadership Institute and the Annual LINK program, where approximately 60 regional leaders visit other cities to look at ways they have dealt with similar challenges and problems. In addition, some of the business leaders in the RBC are also on the ARC board.

The idea for the coalition grew out of the Metro Business Forum, a loosely structured discussion group of seven metro chambers. The Metro Business Forum served for more than a decade as a forum for discussion and eventually led to the development of a staffed regional organization. Now the RBC is a regional problem-solving consortium of eleven chambers of commerce in the Atlanta region. A non-partisan, not-for-profit association, the RBC focuses on common issues that are unconstrained by jurisdictional boundaries: air quality, transportation, water quality, and solid waste management.

The RBC's current chairman, Ray Weeks, states "The RBC is committed to a new kind of collaborative problem-solving that looks to the long-term good of the region. Chamber leaders have told us they are concerned about issues like air quality, and I believe we are perceived as a strong link between state government and the business community." Rather than duplicating the work on broader policy and economic development issues already addressed by other state and regional organizations, the RBC focuses on specific infrastructure and natural resource issues. Air quality is the number one issue on the RBC's agenda for 1999 according to Weeks.
Austin-San Antonio Region Unites On Growth Strategies

In 1984, a group of public and private sector leaders created the Greater Austin-San Antonio Corridor Council. The creation of the Council reinforced the region’s determination to work cooperatively to manage growth while preserving the region’s natural beauty and quality of life.

Its history stems from a forum of regional public and private sector leaders in 1982 that explored economic development issues such as improving the ability of the Central/South Texas region’s to compete, particularly with areas like Houston and Dallas. Through this forum, it became clear that the region needed a unified, well-thought-out approach for the future. Area leaders recognized that common economic, social, and environmental goals unite the region and that the region’s success hinged on pooling its resources to address regional challenges and improve its development potential by defining a development zone that offers the best of the region to business.

In order to develop a unified approach for the region’s future, leaders needed to identify an institution that would define the regional issues and opportunities as well as coordinate efforts to address them. Because the region’s chambers were city-focused, they were unsuitable candidates for meeting the region’s needs in this area. The region’s management planning organization focused on infrastructure and was restricted in its ability to work beyond those issues.

The Corridor Council provides a mechanism to build cooperation and provides neutral ground to facilitate the region in achieving its goals. Although the Council has no formal authority, its strength is derived from the degree of consensus it creates around the issues it addresses.

Atlanta Regional Governance

- Atlanta MSA: 20 counties
- Population: 3.4 million
- Atlanta Regional Commission: Public sector, citizen and private sector board; Est. 1971
- Regional Business Coalition: Board representing 11 chambers in Atlanta region; Est. 1997

RBC’s Policy Board is composed of two representatives, generally corporate CEOs and presidents, from each member chamber. The financial contribution of each chamber is proportioned according to chamber membership (i.e. number of member businesses). Member chambers are the RBC’s customers.
According to David Robison, the Corridor Council’s president, the Council’s success lies in the ability of members and staff to “rally the troops to create partnerships, build public consensus and remove obstacles.” While each jurisdiction in the region may not agree on all issues, the Council identifies issues of mutual interest and establishes coalitions to tackle them. This includes a recently-assembled economic development team of area organizations that work together on recruitment and retention of businesses and a regional marketing effort.

The Austin-San Antonio Corridor stretches 100 miles from South San Antonio to Georgetown (north of Austin) and is the busiest inter-metro Interstate in Texas. Austin, the capital of the state of Texas, is known for its concentration of high technology computer and software companies including, Dell Computer, IBM, Motorola, AMD and Samsung. San Antonio is world-renowned for medical and biotechnical research and manufacturing facilities and was selected by the United States, Mexico and Canada as the headquarters for the NAFTA-sparked North American Development Bank.

One of the Council’s primary concerns has been regional transportation problems. The Council’s goal in this area is to develop a long-range plan that will allow for the region’s growth while taking into account people, institutions, and the environment.

The dominant transportation problem in the corridor is congestion on Interstate 35 between Austin and San Antonio. This highway is not only the primary commuter roadway between the two cities, it is also a key artery for truck traffic, primarily due to increased exports from Mexico as a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Traffic volume on I-35 is expanding four times faster than the region’s population growth, which is considerable, given that the Austin-San Antonio region is among the five fastest-growing regions in the country.

The Corridor Council proposed two solutions to relieving congestion on I-35: the construction of a commuter rail and the construction of an alternative highway. The Council held public meetings and debates on the merits of both alternatives. As a result of developing a consensus, a commuter rail district was created between Austin and San Antonio.

The Council is governed by a board of directors comprised of private and public sector members. Exact composition of the board is not predetermined. Once the agenda has been established, members are selected based on their ability to contribute toward achieving the goals set by the Council. Public representatives include county commissioners, county judges and mayors. The chambers of commerce, universities, corporations, economic development groups and foundations provide representation of the private sector.

The Board serves as the policy-makers for the Council. The five full-time employees staff departments that include administration and membership, infrastructure, and economic development. Although the Council does not take a lobbying role in the community, it provides input to the congressional delegation on key issues and assists member communities.

The Corridor Council represents a nine-county area of 5,320 square miles. Depending on the project, the Council has “borrowed” staff from universities and task forces. Funding comes from both the private and public sector (approximately 50/50). Remaining revenue sources include contracts with public and private institutions and subscriptions to Council publications.
From Airports to the Workforce:

The North Texas Commission

Take a region with only a handful of corporate headquarters, a major airport under construction and a lack of national or international identity, and you'd pretty much sum up the situation in the north of Texas in 1971, when the North Texas Commission (NTC) was formed. At that time, a group of regional civic leaders convened and agreed that the only way the region would ever take its place in the national and international marketplace would be through a regional marketing organization for the entire North Texas area.

The commission's primary goal at that time was to market and develop the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport. This on-going goal has been pursued by securing air routes, undertaking a nationwide advertising scheme, establishing international offices and conducting promotional tours to major markets.

In addition to cultivating the growth and development of the airport, the NTC set a more general goal of developing strategies, forums and partnerships to address critical problems requiring a regional response. The also set out to provide services and opportunities to further the economic prosperity of NTC members in the twelve-county area known as the Metroplex. (The Metroplex name was actually copyrighted by the NTC in 1972 as a means of establishing the collective identity of the allied communities in North Texas.)

The NTC's commitment to the development of the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport has succeeded in making the airport the second-busiest in the world. Much
of this success stems not only from NTC’s efforts to establish international air routes, but also its work to raise the stature of the airport. The NTC has secured a US Customs District Office and established the airport as an official Fish and Wildlife Port of Entry and as the regional center for the U.S. Department of Justice, Immigration and Naturalization.

Dan S. Petty, NTC president said, “Historically, we have viewed the problems and solutions landscape from a local, state or federal perspective. Now, we find that landscape to have evolved into a neighborhood, regional and global configuration. The North Texas Commission is preparing to help the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex be a key regional player in the 21st Century... Regional cooperation leads to regional prosperity.”

To further the prosperity of the region, the NTC has also marketed the Metroplex by promoting its important industries and assets, such as the aviation, logistics and the information/communications industry. The centerpiece of the NTC’s marketing effort is a 16-page color brochure which celebrates the region’s high-technology assets. For example, the Metroplex is one of the fastest-growing high-tech centers in the U.S., employing over 230,000 technology-related personnel. Beyond the high-tech industries, the NTC has made an effort to attract new corporations to the area, playing a role in the relocation of the Dallas/Fort Worth area of the headquarters of American Airlines, Exxon, The Associates and J.C. Penney and major operations of foreign financial institutions.

Today the NTC is a consortium of approximately 400 businesses, cities, counties, chambers of commerce, economic development entities and higher education institutions in the North Texas region. These groups are represented on the NTC’s executive committee and board of directors. Eighty percent of funding comes from member dues, with twenty percent provided by public dues, community colleges and universities.

The NTC’s ten full-time staff members focus on four types of services: marketing, legislative advocacy, research and economic development/quality of life. Legislative advocacy efforts have focused on issues that transcend local jurisdictional lines, such as developing the region’s transportation system. The commission has used an integrated approach to economic development, whereby its research has assessed the future prospects of the region’s existing industries and developed marketing targeted to build upon sectors with the strongest long-term prospects.

In addition to the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport and regional marketing efforts, the commission’s major programs of work include regional cooperation, surface transportation, environmental programs, Dallas/Fort Worth Regional Film Commission, Mentor-Entrepreneur Program and North Central Texas Interlink Incorporated. The NTC is also launching a new initiative to address possible shortages of skilled labor as the technology sector continues to grow. This new initiative, the North Texas Science and Technology Coalition, will promote policies, programs and quality initiatives, of which workforce is a priority, to ensure the growth of science and technology business in North Texas.

Details: Contact Dan S. Petty, President, at 972-621-0400, e-mail at ntc@ntc-dfw.org or visit the Commission’s web site at http://www.ntc-dfw.org.

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North Texas Commission

Area represented: 12 counties
Population: 4.6 million
Board: 60 members representing higher education, public and private sectors
Established: 1971
PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR COOPERATION IN RICHMOND

Throughout the 1980's and early 1990's, the Greater Richmond area felt economically competitive with other regions in the surrounding area. Business was thriving and the region even had a publicly funded, regional economic development program, the Metropolitan Economic Development Council (founded in 1978), to look out for the business community's interests. But when the region lost several corporate projects to North Carolina, the business community decided that more needed to be done to attract new companies and industries to the area. The private sector proposed changing the Metropolitan Economic Development Council to one in which the public and private sector would play an equal role. As a result, the Greater Richmond Partnership was formed, with a five-year commitment from its funding partners.

Since 1994, when the Partnership was established, over $6.5 billion has been invested in the Greater Richmond Area. This investment was achieved through the Greater Richmond community initiating efforts to redefine and transform itself into an area of high-tech and emerging technology. Early successes in this area include Motorola's commitment to locating its first East Coast semiconductor manufacturing complex in Greater Richmond. Further, WhiteOak Semiconductor, a joint venture of Siemens AG and Motorola, has completed a $1.5 billion DRAM manufacturing facility. These accomplishments, along with major investments by Hewlett Packard, Whitehall-Robins, K-Line, G.E. Financial Assurance Company and the Pittston Company, advance the efforts to diversify the region's economy.

According to Gregory H. Wingfield, the Partnership's president, "The success of the Greater Richmond Partnership
is based on the cooperation and equal support we receive from our public and private partners. In four and one-half short years, these two important sectors have demonstrated to the work, that if you agree on a common vision and provide the resources to carry it out, job opportunities and new capital investments will follow."

The Greater Richmond Partnership is currently approaching its fifth year. It is a public/private, nonprofit corporation serving the Richmond, Virginia metropolitan area. The Partnership is a multi-faceted, regional economic development organization made up of four local governments (the counties of Chesterfield, Hanover, Henrico, and the City of Richmond) and over 300 companies. These various components work cooperatively to "promote a healthy regional economy that will ensure prosperity for the region's citizens." The Partnership's mission concentrates on developing the metropolitan area as a world-class community for quality economic growth through aggressive and strategic marketing to new and expanding businesses. It has worked to develop regional cooperation and identify issues of regional importance. For instance, the Partnership has most recently focused on workforce preparation and development with local companies, universities, community colleges, and high schools. In addition, the president of the partnership has taken a government liaison role and works closely with elected officials to support the partnership's programming and service within the community.

The Greater Richmond Partnership follows three basic principles in working to achieve its mission: retention (stimulating a positive business climate to ensure that the region's existing companies grow and prosper); new business (attracting targeted businesses through a highly focused marketing strategy); and business information (promoting the region's competitive advantages through the use of comprehensive information sources).

The Partnership's $2.4 million budget is funded equally through private and public investments. The chamber raises the money for the private sector contribution. Unlike some organizations, whose fees are population-based, each governmental entity contributes equally. The budget includes all administrative overhead costs as well as funding for various program areas, such as regional, national, and international marketing and expanded transportation, including working with the Airport Commission to expand service and competition at Richmond's airport.

The eight-member board consists of four public sector (one from the City of Richmond and one from each county) representatives and four representatives from the area Chamber of Commerce, which represents approximately 2,000 companies in the area. Policy and programs established by the board are implemented by staff. The full-time staff of eleven provides such economic development services as customized economic and business analysis, labor and training consultation, a real estate site selection study, coordination of training programs, and public relations services. These services are provided to companies free of charge for the purposes of business attraction and expansion.

Since the Partnership's inception, its staff has been given very specific targets with regard to attracting select industries, the number of new jobs to create, and the number of foreign affiliated companies to attract. Currently completing its fourth year of operations, the Partnership has already exceeded its five-year goals.

The Partnership works with both domestic and foreign companies planning to relocate, establish new facilities, or expand existing facilities in the area. The Partnership structures and manages a network of state, regional, and local professionals to assist companies in their relocation/expansion efforts. By providing critical information to clients, the Partnership is able to facilitate a client's decision-making process, thereby expediting new facility relocations.
Regional Governance Capacity Is Key to Economic Performance

by Bill Barnes

“Regional cooperation leads to regional prosperity.”

Bottom line, that’s the theme of the series of articles on regional economic governance in major metropolitan areas that recently appeared in The Weekly. The quotation is from Dan S. Petty, President of the North Texas Commission (Dallas-Fort Worth), but it could have come from any of the key leaders in these regions or indeed in many other regions across the nation.

In order to achieve what NLC has termed “world class local economies” within which cities and towns can thrive, municipal leaders are increasingly involved in developing and carrying out economic policy in a regional framework that takes national and global forces into account and focuses on the needs and interests of residents and communities within the area.

The Weekly series shows that this has been happening for quite a while in some places. It’s not a speck on the horizon. It’s a change in the climate of local governance that is upon us and that is a challenge and often a headache to every local government, large or small.

The series of articles was prepared for NLC by staff of the Urban Center at Cleveland State University's Maxine Goodman Levin College of Urban Affairs; Daila Shimek is a research associate; Kevin O'Brien is Director of State and Intergovernmental Initiatives; and Susan Petrone is Editor.

What do these organizations do? They work on a wide variety of issues from transportation to workforce development to land use.
They do marketing for the area, provide studies and information to leaders and the public, coordinate child care provision, and carry out old-fashioned retention and recruitment activities.

Perhaps the simplest generalizations are that, at their best, they seek to nurture the local economic region and to offer ways that narrow interests can be addressed and compromised in the framework of broader shared interests.

Their core strategies are governance, not program delivery. Like the best politics everywhere, they “rally the troops to create partnerships, build public consensus and remove obstacles.” (David Robison, President, Austin-San Antonio Corridor Council.)

Who participates in the regional governance groups? In these cases, it’s mostly city and county officials and business leaders. Such “public/private” partnerships have great potential as well as limitations.

They can get things done. They may but do not necessarily include or reflect the perspectives and interests of all the stakeholders in the local economy. It is particularly a challenge and an opportunity for local elected officials to ensure that all citizens and communities have effective voices in the evolving civics and politics of the region.

How are they structured? There’s no simple answer to that question.

There are COGs and Chambers and informal gatherings and elaborate umbrella groups. They uniquely and idiosyncratically evolve from or in reaction to earlier efforts. Not one of them is a consolidated metropolitan government. A concern with structure—a focus that has derailed many inter-local and regional efforts over the years—does not seem to dominate these organizations. Instead, the tendency is to use various structures depending on the goals involved. Thus, the need for all stakeholders --- community groups, unions, non-profits, civic organizations, faith-based groups --- to develop flexible regional capacities becomes all the more important because there is no single place where their voices should be heard.

These “regional economic governance” organizations, then, are crucial parts of an increasingly evident process of building community at the regional level and in a regional context.

Each region needs a thick layer of regional civic efforts of all sorts in order to address challenges and to seize opportunities that cannot be done within a single jurisdiction.

Each region will develop its own distinct political culture out of its “thick civics.” Making good economic policy that nurtures the economic region for the benefit of all the region’s residents will have to be a central part of this new regional politics.
About the National League of Cities

The mission of the National League of Cities (NLC) is to strengthen and promote cities as centers of opportunity, leadership, and governance.

NLC was established in 1924 by and for reform-minded state municipal leagues. NLC now represents 49 leagues and more than 1,500 cities, towns and villages of all sizes directly and, through the membership of the state municipal leagues, more than 18,000 municipalities indirectly.

NLC serves as an advocate for its members in Washington in the legislative, administrative, and judicial processes which affect them; develops and pursues a national municipal policy that meets the present and future needs of the nation's cities and the people who live in them; provides training, technical assistance, and information to municipal officials to help them improve the quality of local government in our urban nation; and undertakes research and analysis on issues of importance to cities and towns.

Related Publications

- Regional Excellence: Governing Together To Compete Globally and Thrive Locally (411 pages)
- Local Economies: The US Common Market of Economic Regions (37 pages)
- Building Learning Communities: Workforce Development and the Future of Local Economies (32 pages)
- Achieving World Class Local Economies (36 pages)
- American Cities in The Global Economy (85 pages)
- Global Dollars, Local Sense: Cities and Towns in the International Economy (24 pages)

For ordering information on these or other NLC publications contact: NLC Publications Center at (301) 725-4299 or (888) 579-2939.

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