

## INTRODUCTION

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC), through its' Educational and Professional Support Committee, is requesting universities and colleges that have a Masters in Regional and City Planning (MRCP) and Masters of Public Administration (MPA) program to consider integrating an undergraduate and graduate level course on regional councils and the crucial role they play with local governments, state and federal organizations, and others.

Regional councils have been in existence for approximately 50 years and serve local governments and work with state and federal agencies and others. Today, there are over 500 regional councils that serve urban, non-metropolitan, and rural regions throughout the United States. Regional councils have become a key player in matters of governance that deals with a wide variety of issues that affect their respective regions. Regional councils are owned and operated by the cities and counties that they serve and engage, through their board representation, additional support from the private sector, environmental interests, minority representatives, and others.

The committee, with the support of NARC and others, will contact key universities that offer these regional planning degrees and existing professional organizations in order to garner support for this initiative. We intend to partner with organizations such as the American Planning Association (APA), International City Managers Association (ICMA), National League of Cities (NLC), National Association of Counties (NACO), and others as deemed appropriate.

MRCP and MPA programs offer such topics as budgeting, human resources, etc., which are all important to practitioners in the public sector; however, few if any, offer courses about regional councils. By developing this curriculum and providing other support regarding regionalism, this will assist universities and colleges in educating their students on regional councils and their importance and maybe even entice them to a career with a regional council.

The following talking points are to be used in making presentations to the various universities and others in asking for their support in allowing us to assist them in integrating a course on regional councils into their existing curriculum.

## Regional Council Talking Points

- Regional councils have been serving local governments for more than 45 years and are an integral part of the governance process.
- Regional councils are owned and operated by their local governments. Regional councils offer local governments and the private sector the opportunity to work at the “grass roots” level and create a bottoms-up process as opposed to a “top down” directive from state and federal agencies.
- Regional councils provide a forum for elected officials, private sector representatives, and others to develop a consensus about various issues that are important to the region. It is more effective when local governments and private sector representatives can hammer out their issues regionally rather than having the state or federal government dictate how to handle the situation.
- There is strength in numbers with local elected officials and others acting together on a regional basis and such a coalition can have substantially more power and influence with state and federal legislators and state and federal agencies.
- As growth throughout the country continues to accelerate, there are many issues that must be dealt with on a regional basis. Those issues would include, but not be limited to: air quality; water - ground and surface; transportation – roads, rails, airports and the movement of citizens; geographic information systems; disaster mitigation planning; business retention and development; revolving loan funds; land use planning; defense conversion; economic development; tourism; services for the elderly; services for work force issues; and, public safety.
- Regional councils can react very quickly to local and regional issues that are identified by local governments, the private sector, and others, contingent upon funding availability. This assists local governments by not having to deal with a bureaucratic structure that does not always respond quickly enough to meet local needs.
- Regional councils have a rich history of accomplishments and there are many examples of what regional councils have done to address issues on a regional basis. Regional councils work in a cost-effective way, and in many cases, provide an innovative approach to different issues that will save local governments substantial funding. Examples include GIS computer mapping, development, and operation of a regional solid waste landfill, public safety training, transportation of human resource clients, as well as private and public sector employees.
- Regional councils can be a valuable asset to state agencies by acting as their extension at the local and regional level on issues such as transportation, aging services, computer mapping, historic preservation, etc.

- Regional councils, under the direction of local governments, representatives from the private sector, environmental groups, and state and federal officials, develop policies in a cooperative manner among the local governments and private sector as well.
- By offering a graduate level or undergraduate level course and appropriate curriculum that provides instruction on regional councils detailing the how, what, when, and where, professionals and others who need to know about regional councils can be educated about the important role such organizations play in their region. Many people know what cities and counties do; however, far too few people know about regional councils and their mission.
- By offering an regional council curriculum, it is conceivable that more students will enter the workforce with a far better understanding of what a regional council does, how a regional council fits into the governance structure, a regional council's importance, and hopefully, the students will be interested in working for a regional council as there is a shortage of planners entering the profession.
- Regional councils are called by different names throughout the United States, e.g., Regional Development Center (RDC); Regional Planning Commission (RPC); Council of Government (COG); Planning and Development District (PDD); Area Development District (ADD), etc.