

General Policies & Priorities

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) advocates for regional cooperation as the most effective way to address a variety of community planning and development opportunities and issues.

Regional councils function by convening elected officials and leaders from member communities to develop solutions to challenges extending beyond individual jurisdictions. They plan transportation, environmental, and community development projects. And they deliver projects and programs by providing technical assistance and serving in roles such as Area Agencies on Aging, Economic Development Districts, 911 operators, and more.

REGIONAL APPROACHES

Regional councils have the unique ability to efficiently coordinate and plan across jurisdictional boundaries. These organizations, which function in diverse political, economic, geographic, and demographic areas, bring a wide range of stakeholders to the table in order to better serve their communities. Regional councils have the capacity to formulate community plans in a holistic manner that connects transportation, housing, health, environmental and public safety concerns, and economic and community development. These plans help communities provide more effective services, prioritize projects, and increase the efficiency of the distribution of federal, state, and local funds.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal government should:

- Ensure that regional councils and MPOs have input in federal decisions regarding their communities and the structure of their organizations.
- Support locally driven planning initiatives.
- Support holistic approaches to planning which connect transportation, housing, health, environmental concerns, and economic and community development.
- Provide flexibility in federal funding to allow regional councils to distribute resources based on their plans and assessments of community needs.
- Empower regions to meet the challenges and opportunities created by technology and data.
- Invest in public private partnerships which leverage the resources of regional councils, local governments, and other community entities.
- Fund federal data, research and technology projects, particularly as they relate to the needs of local governments and their regional councils.
- Provide incentives for regional councils to drive innovation, harness technology, and develop new strategies to improve program efficiency and effectiveness.

COORDINATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

Regional councils work to develop solutions for issues that cross jurisdictional boundaries, including those of municipal, county, tribal, and state governments. In order to benefit from the potential efficiencies and increased effectiveness of these solutions, coordination is required at all levels of government from the federal to local level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal government should:

- Increase coordination at, and between, all levels of government.
- Strengthen partnerships between the federal government and local governments and regional councils.
- Engage directly with local elected officials, who best understand the local needs, opportunities, and obligations of their communities.
- Promote coordination between federal agencies, particularly focusing on increasing efficiency and equity in the distribution of federal resources.
- Expedite project delivery and eliminate or consolidate duplicative or redundant processes that can negatively impact project delivery schedules.

PREEMPTION / UNFUNDED MANDATES

NARC encourages federal participation and expert assistance in regional and local policy making, where appropriate. However, NARC opposes any federal attempts to impose unfunded mandates or preempt state and local policies, processes and decisions. Federal preemption of local authority should not be initiated unless there is an overriding national issue and the fiscal impact on local government of such action has been evaluated closely.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal government should:

- Oppose measures that create mandates on local governments and/or regional planning organizations without federal funding.
- Provide necessary resources to cover all costs associated with complying with federal mandates and provide flexibility to local governments when complying to federal mandates.
- Avoid imposing unachievable objectives that foster new or expanded opportunities for litigation against local governments.
- Oppose any legislative or regulatory initiatives that preempt local authority, including those that would interfere with municipal revenue authority.

HEALTH

Regional councils have taken on a variety of projects to help improve the health outcomes of their residents, including addressing traffic congestion, improving air quality, educating residents on where they can access healthy local foods, and working with local farmers to reduce fertilizer runoff for better water quality. Providing regional councils with the support and flexibility they need to address the unique public health concerns of their regions will lead to better health outcomes for residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal government should:

- Approach and address national health issues in a comprehensive way, recognizing that public health is linked to transportation, community development, environmental considerations and more.
- Increase the funding available to regional councils to support national health initiatives.
- Increase federal assistance to local governments for community health planning and services.
- Fund research to scientifically evaluate the causes related to the systemic differences in health status, mortality rates, and distribution of illnesses and disease throughout communities and regions.

EQUITY

Many regional councils approach long-term planning projects and programmatic activities using equity as a primary consideration to ensure that community development, infrastructure, and economic opportunities serve those most in need. Regional councils should be supported in their efforts to work with stakeholders to increase awareness of inequity in their communities and develop collaborative action steps to provide adequate resources and access to opportunities for all residents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The federal government should:

- Provide assistance to local and regional governments to implement policies and programming in a non-discriminatory manner.
- Endorse federal legislation that provides technical assistance and funding to local governments and regional councils to conduct research on issues of regional inequity within their communities.
- Provide tools and resources that help communities understand equity issues and break down remaining barriers to opportunity for all residents.
- Promote projects and programs aimed at addressing the digital equity gap, providing equal access and opportunity to digital tools, resources and services to all.