



NARC

Building Regional Communities

National Association of Regional Councils



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REGIONAL ROLE IN FEDERALISM

Regions' role in the federal system.



The first regional organization was formed in 1947. Since then, regional organizations across the nation have provided critical support for the nation's system of federalism by serving as coordinators and conveners of states, counties, municipalities, and others so jurisdictional boundaries do not interfere with the equitable provision of services, planning of projects, and distribution of funds. Regional organizations have accomplished a great deal at the local level with minimal federal support. Congress could better utilize regional organizations to help on a variety of issues.

- **Regions represent the best of federalism** – Various levels of government, each with different responsibilities, intersect and interact at the regional level. With federal and state support, regions amplify the effect of local and state approaches to address the needs of residents.
- **Regions provide the federal government with an effective and efficient way to communicate policy** – As conveners and coordinators, regions reach local elected officials and a broad network of leaders, educators, human services providers, and community-based organizations.
- **Regions allocate federal funds and administer federal programs** – Councils of governments (COG), a network of business metropolitan planning organizations (MPO), economic development districts (EDD), and area agencies on aging (AAA) have demonstrated the ability to efficiently disburse funds and direct federal funds.
- **Regions develop and implement solutions** – Regions address challenges that cross jurisdictional boundaries, and in so doing reflect the goals and objectives of their federal, state, and local partners.

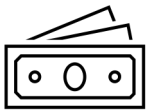


Regions should play a larger role.



Each regional organization is unique and serves its communities in varied ways. Some were established to address federally-mandated activities, including MPOs and EDDs. Others are based on federal programs but reflect state designations, including AAAs and WDBs. While still others are responsible for land use planning, assisting member cities and counties with financial services, broadband, environmental health, and law enforcement training, and more. This diversity is not an accident and demonstrates the ability of regions to direct a wide variety of federal funding at the local level, including funding for transportation agriculture, housing, homeland security, and more.

To better support regions, Congress should:



Direct additional funding to regions: This includes increasing the eligibility of regions to receive direct funding within existing programs and exploring new areas where regions could play an important role.



Increase spending flexibility: Building interagency and cross-agency waiver authority for all funding at the regional level **would allow** funds from different agencies and programs to be combined to better achieve local and federal goals.



Explore how to better utilize regional planning organizations: Regional councils (an umbrella term that includes councils of governments, regional planning organizations, planning commissions, etc.) often house federally-established entities (MPOs, EDDs, etc.), but are not themselves established in federal law. Despite this lack of federal designation, regional councils can provide direct assistance across many important federal policy priorities. Congress should explore what it would take to increase the authority and funding for regional councils in areas beyond those that are currently funded.