

Budget Unit Brief

FY 2017



Iowa Councils of Governments

The Councils of Governments are established in Iowa Code chapter [28H](#).

Purpose and History

The Iowa Councils of Governments (COG or COGs) were established by Governor Harold Hughes with [Executive Order Number 11](#) on February 19, 1968. This action was a result of a study entitled “A Regional Delineation for the State of Iowa” prepared by the Office of Planning and Programming (OPP) in December 1967. This report is available from the Legislative Services Agency (LSA) upon request.

The purpose of the study was to create multicounty regions to facilitate the coordination of planning, programming, and administration of state services. The study illustrated that while many state agencies used “areas” or “regions”, no two were delineated in the same way, producing an uncoordinated pattern of overlapping services. Some voluntary associations began to emerge as an attempt by local people to join together to study, analyze, plan, and act on issues that affected their area. Four major criteria were used to determine the shape, size, and number of the regions within the state. These include the identification of a focal point or central city, convenience of the citizen consumer, efficiency of field workers, and an adequate economic base. The methodology used in the report resulted in the designation of 16 multicounty areas and 16 area cities to be used for the coordination of state services and federal programs.

The COGs were codified by the General Assembly in 1990, slightly modified from the original proposal.¹ This Act set the number of COGs at 16, and in 2007, the number was increased to 17.² The Iowa Association of Regional Councils (IARC) is the statewide association of regional councils that frequently serves as the central contracting and administrative association for management services for the COGs.

Organization

The priorities and programs of each COG are established and governed by a policy board made up of local elected officials and citizens. To carry out these activities, the COGs work with public, private, and nonprofit sector partners to leverage resources and seek solutions to complex issues. The staff of the COGs generally includes an executive director, policy or program directors, professional planners, and other support staff.

Services Provided

Each COG provides specific programs and services tailored to the unique needs of its region and communities. The types and amount of services offered by each COG can vary by the region and can evolve as the needs of their member communities' change. According to Iowa Code section [28H.3](#), COGs are required to perform services that include:

- Planning services and technical assistance.
- Coordinating delivery of community development programs and services with local, state, and federal programs and activities.
- Preparing a regional community development plan that must be updated annually. The plan must include:
 - Inventory and needs assessment of regional infrastructure
 - Labor supply
 - Cultural and fine arts resources
 - Housing
 - Primary health care services
 - Natural resources, conservation, and recreational facilities
 - Region-wide development opportunities

More Information

Iowa Association of Regional Councils: <http://www.iarcog.com/>

Iowa General Assembly: <https://www.legis.iowa.gov>

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¹ 1990 Iowa Acts chapter 1157, SF 2366 ([Councils of Governments Act](#))

² 2007 Iowa Acts chapter 76, SF 444 ([Councils of Governments – Additional Area Act](#))

Service Contracts with State Agencies

Multiple state agencies have utilized the COGs to help with the coordination and delivery of services. Some examples of this include:

- The [Department of Public Health](#) used COGs to help implement the Iowans Fit for Life Program. The COGs led the communities through an asset mapping process to examine nutritional and physical activity assets available, and developed a plan to increase access to healthy foods and physical activity. Initially, only select COGs were utilized in the rollout of the pilot program; five COGs participated in implementation in FY 2012; and 10 participated in the Program in FY 2013.
- The [Department of Natural Resources](#) uses COGs as part of the [Iowa Waste Exchange Program](#), the [Resource Enhancement and Protection \(REAP\) Program](#), and one COG coordinates the Indian Creek Watershed Management Authority. Some COGs also participate in the solid waste planning and education in their region.
- The [Department of Human Services](#) utilizes one COG as the Decategorization Coordinator in their region.
- The [Iowa Homeland Security and Emergency Management Division](#) previously utilized COGs to provide grant administration services for regional awards under the [Homeland Security Grant Program](#), the [Hazard Mitigation Grant Program](#), and [FEMA Public Assistance Grant Program](#). (FEMA = Federal Emergency Management Agency)
- The [Department of Transportation](#) works closely with [regional and metropolitan planning organizations](#) in the areas of surface transportation planning and public transit. Regions defined for these purposes are similar but not identical to the regions defined for COGs. In some but not all cases, the regional planning entities are supported by COG staff.
- The [Iowa Economic Development Authority](#) does not directly use COGs, but does make Community Development Block Grant awards to cities and counties. These entities often hire COGs to administer federal grants.
- The [Iowa Finance Authority](#) has utilized COGs to conduct Low-Income Housing Tax Credit project inspections, the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program, and the State Housing Trust Fund Local Housing Trust Fund programs.

The COGs have also been utilized to assist with disaster recovery efforts, including the Jumpstart Housing Assistance Program and the Iowans Helping Iowans Housing Assistance Program.

Funding

The COGs receive funding from a number of sources, including membership dues, federal and state programs, grants, administrative service fees, and grant writing services. The dues structure varies by region and is set by the policy board of the individual COG. The COGs have received funding from the General Assembly through a number of appropriations and allocations.

- In fiscal years 1995 to 2007, the COGs were funded through an appropriation from the loan repayments of the Rural Community 2000 (RC 2000) Fund. Statewide funding for all COGs typically totaled \$150,000.
- In FY 2008, the appropriation to the COGs was \$40,412 from the repayments to the RC 2000 Fund.
- In FY 2009, the General Assembly appropriated \$160,000 out of the Grow Iowa Values Fund interest, in addition to \$20,000 in loan repayments received by the RC 2000 Program.
- In FY 2010, the General Assembly appropriated \$144,000 from the Federal Economic Stimulus and Jobs Holding Account interest.
- In 2010, the General Assembly created a standing allocation of \$175,000 from the Economic Development Fund (formerly the Grow Iowa Values Fund) interest for fiscal years 2011 through 2013.³ The Economic Development Fund was repealed at the end of FY 2012; however, the Iowa Economic Development Authority was allowed to carry forward this funding to spend in FY 2013.⁴
- Beginning with FY 2014, the General Assembly began providing funding with a \$175,000 General Fund appropriation in the Economic Development Act. The General Fund appropriation was increased to \$200,000 beginning with FY 2015.

The money appropriated by the General Assembly is used to leverage federal and local dollars for various programs. The state dollars are typically, however, not exclusively, utilized for matching dollars for the federal [Economic Development Support for Planning Organizations Program](#) administered by the [U.S. Economic Development Administration](#). Additionally, for some of the services provided to state agencies outlined above, COGs receive administrative fees for the work done.

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³ 2010 Iowa Acts chapter 1184, SF 2389 ([FY 2011 Infrastructure Appropriations Act](#))

⁴ 2012 Iowa Acts chapter 1136, HF 2337 ([FY 2013 Economic Development Appropriations Act](#))