

What Helps Voluntary Regional Initiatives Get Started?

At the fall school on November 29, we will talk about why efforts to create *voluntary regional projects or initiatives* in Iowa succeed or fail. In anticipation of this workshop on regionalism, we'd like you to evaluate from your own experiences or knowledge, the important factors in intergovernmental cooperation.

In this brief survey, we'd like you to think about how regional efforts begin – and what causes them to go from idea to active negotiation to implementation. Listed below are a number of factors that may help governments form regional partnerships (e.g., agreements to share service provision, joint economic development efforts, etc.) – or may prevent them from doing this. Thinking about your own experiences, how important do you think these factors are at the beginning of these regional efforts?

Factors that help with regional cooperation (on the scale below each statement, indicate the degree to which you think these factors could help a successful voluntary regional project or initiative get underway in your county)

There is widespread public belief that the current situation needs to be changed.

On a scale of 1 to 5: **3.6**

There is a sense of urgency about this initiative among community leaders (“now is the time”).

On a scale of 1 to 5: **3.6**

External forces (federal government, state government, etc.) are exerting pressure or offering rewards for cooperation.

On a scale of 1 to 5: **3.4**

There is a group of elected officials and/or top appointed officials championing this effort.

On a scale of 1 to 5: **3.7**

The potential benefits and positive outcomes of this regional initiative are clearly articulated at the outset (2 + 2 = 5).

On a scale of 1 to 5: **4.0**

There are other factors that, in my experience, are critically important to launching a successful regional effort. They include:

- The problem / issue is beyond local solutions (i.e., it's a regional issue)
- Ballot initiative
- Change Code of Iowa to make it regional-friendly
- A legitimate explanation that “bigger will be better” (most people see new buildings and equipment needed to make this work will only cost more in the long run.)
- People are concerned about losing “local control.”
- Some counties are already sharing department heads. Working very nicely in rural areas.
- Community support.
- Clear benefits to all parties.
- Foresight on concerns in advance.
- Communication before beginning.
- Time and active leadership.
- Must get general public involved with initiation of effort.
- Make sure the local taxpayers know how this will affect their daily lives. Most want local services and don't mind paying for them. They don't want to drive very far.
- Protecting the “little guy” or smallest player in the region.
- Not having all the jobs and benefits go to the biggest player.

- Not being able to do it alone.
- Cost prohibitive as single entity.
- Willing parties.

- Public needs to buy in across the county lines.
- Communication from people involved.
- Public-Private partnerships.

- All efforts at regionalization should be handled at the local level.
- Appanoose county has some 40 28E agreements with other governmental agencies.

- Buy-in by local officials.
- State funding for proposed / mandated changes.

- Must be something public wants and will save money without hindering delivery of services.

- Autonomy of entities to be potentially merged.
- Trust must be present.
- Knowledge of the process and benefits of regionalism.

- If the need for combined services is apparent, co-operation usually occurs. The need could be saving money and/or better services.

- Being able to demonstrate the need.
- Protecting local control and authority over local matters.
- Being able to obtain a “buy-in” from all affected groups.

- Recognize the need and benefits.
- Organize the players – i.e., local, county, state and federal leaders.
- Convince the public for their support.

- Communication.
- Research.
- Leadership.

- Open dialog where officials can speak freely through understanding of all problems and goals to help it succeed.

- The problem is recognizable and will actually be solved by regionalizing.

- Cooperation between city and county government.
- Cooperation between counties.
- Not protecting turf.

- Increasing public service expectation.
- Increasing cost of “doing business.”

- Increased frustrations in local government to be empowering bodies rather than “baby sitters.”
- What does one region lose?
- What does another region gain?
- There has to be a need, not a mandate.
- The cooperative agreements may not be permanent.
- Both sides don’t necessarily have to benefit.
- I think there is more cooperation between cities and counties, and between counties and counties than most people realize. “We” need to do better PR in this matter.
- Respect for all parties involved.
- No elitism.
- Cost savings for all participants.
- Sharing experience.
- Spreading costs over several entities.
- Time restraints.
- Complete understanding of project.
- Risks, odds of being successful.
- Developing a level of trust and understanding between agencies.
- Clear and honest communication between public and private interests and stakeholders.
- Ongoing dialog among the players.
- Someone or a group to take leadership.
- Clearly defined regional issues.
- Good communication among all parties.
- Frequent, on-going planning sessions.
- A person in charge who has a strong vision.
- Equal buy-in among members.
- Flexibility – open-minded support.
- Historical commercial trade areas should be considered.
- Sociological and diverse populations.
- Overcoming the perception of losing your identity.
- Individual leadership: some elected officials need to speak up and take a leadership role.
- A well-articulated cost-benefit rationale.
- Ownership / identity / control are issues that need to be understood.
- Need to enable goal achievement.
- Easy common communication (electronic?).

- Basis for local satisfaction.
- Essential time elements of enacting and satisfying goals.

- Bringing all parties to the table for discussion. Exclusion causes fear and doubt.
- Good documentation of the meetings that were held.
- An in-depth financial analysis.

- Grassroots initiative and control, not mandated.
- Positive outlook.

- Against regionalization.

- Timing – staff retiring, resigning.
- Similar philosophies.
- Limited resources – financial, personnel.
- Must show a regional benefit.

- Keeping all the people involved informed on what is going on and ask for their input.

- Keeping folks informed along the “forming.”
- Distribute tangible examples.
- Pick a “leader” from each enterprise.

- Shared experience, trust and goals.
- Historical cooperation.
- Success in past projects.

- Equal representation – i.e., large vs. small counties.
- Travel time and expense for meetings.

- Being able to pay for the level of expertise in personnel needed.
- Clearly defining the benefits of the regional effort.
- Gaining complete buy-in of the regional effort.

- Willingness of elected officials to take on the task.
- Governmental cooperation and forego turf issues.

- Funding to go with state wishes.
- Community education (cost savings) – not losing something.

- The problem / issue is beyond local solutions (i.e., it’s a regional issue).

- Involvement of those who will be affected most.
- Great deal of publicity about need for project, potential benefit and outcomes.
- Making sure people understand exactly how it will affect them and their families (not broad terms of effect on community).

- Launch must take place with the right people in position to get things rolling (positive enthusiasts).
- Measurable, attainable goals should dominate the early agenda of the effort.

- Enlightened perception of the issues.
- Transparency and exposure of competing interests.
- Awareness of competing agencies. Open-mindedness.
- Objectivity in examining technology-based and sociologically-based aspects of decision-making.

- Successful history of joint efforts.
- Advisory boards representative of members through and continuation of involvement.
- Has to be designed from ground up by those directly affected by and responsible for implementation.

- Cooperation must start at the easy and obvious end with very little threat to either side.
- The worker bees must be sold on the concept or it will be almost impossible to implement.
- Start small and let it build.

- Organization would be very important – the members that you are seeking assistance from are already very busy in their many jobs that they perform / wear many different hats / may be difficult to work in other job duties.

- Citizen leadership – elected officials are risk-averse, and need others to introduce new ideas.

- Communication necessary between members of group.
- Willingness to allow impact for win-win solutions.

- Reassurance that elected officials wouldn't lose their jobs or be combined with another office.

Factors that hinder regional cooperation (on the scale below each statement, indicate the degree to which you think these factors could hinder a successful voluntary regional project or initiative getting underway in your county)

From the outset, important people in the region oppose this effort.

On a scale of 1 to 5: **4.0**

Leaders in one or more of the governments fear their community or county might be taken advantage of (“we’ll end up paying more than others”).

On a scale of 1 to 5: **4.2**

Some leaders fear their local governments will lose control in a regional project or initiative.

On a scale of 1 to 5: **4.4**

There is rivalry or dislike among the communities or counties that these governments represent.

On a scale of 1 to 5: **3.8**

Leaders worry that the process of negotiating a regional agreement will take too long or be too complicated.

On a scale of 1 to 5: **3.0**

There are other factors that, in my experience, are major obstacles to launching a successful regional effort. They include:

- Fear of change.
- The cost – where does the money come from?

- To “team” attitude.
- “Always done it this way” mindset.
- Change only makes a new baby happy.

- “Control” issues.
- Smaller counties feel unrepresented.

- Not providing information regarding proposals.
- The location of a regional office.

- Trust among leaders and entities.
- Intergovernmental cooperation is hard work (doing it the old way is easier).
- Voters continue to send a message that intergovernmental cooperation (joint services) are important. That’s where individual leadership is important.

- Relationships don’t exist to help the effort.

- The differences in how a county budget works as opposed to a city budget.
- As discussions are under way it is important to have equal representation for all entities.
- Some officials are appointed while others are elected.

- Regional efforts usually involve a full-time coordinator to keep everyone focused, etc. It gets too dispirited without someone coordinating.
- All efforts with coalitions, regionalization in other areas of business have had to hire coordinators.

- Fear of losing jobs.
- Fear of non-support or lesser community support.

- The control issues are typically with staff, not elected officials, but elected officials are reluctant to question staff.

- Monetary and political (power) self- interests.
- Arrogance and hubris. Political posturing.
- Interdepartmental parochialism (This tension within a governmental jurisdiction can present greater obstacles than between jurisdictions). Consideration of this local issue should probably be evaluated before regional issues are tackled.

- How will it benefit everyone?
- Who will pay what costs?
- Who must do what, clearly defined.

- Residents' driving distance for services.
- Age population – many people do not have access to computers to get services where they otherwise would have to travel.
- Code of Iowa.

- In rural areas the distance between offices and transportation for the elderly, who have no computers or knowledge running them for their business.

- Community attitudes / arrogance.
- Money concerns.
- Perception of unfairness.

- Not letting local people decide what's best for them.
- Being forced to make decisions that are contrary to what the local citizens would like to have happen in their communities.
- The idea that the state knows best and one size fits all.

- Distrust of other parties.
- No assurance of financial gain.
- Distance and travel eating up any savings.

- Open communication between all involved.
- No one wants to spend tax dollars in other counties.
- Keep the whole region involved with open discussions and dialogue.

- Money to support any new program or initiative.
- Top leaders / potential politics could be a big hindrance.
- Voluntary? Have to be money behind it to bring about interest.

- All the local governments that we have 28E with want only the best for their counties. All counties want as much local control and productive sharing as can be obtained within the parameters of knowing what can and can't be successfully shared.

- Lengthy process and county attorney involvement for 28E agreements.
- Funding sources.
- Community independence – local ownership of programs.

- Not completing accurate assessment.
- History of not addressing known problems.

- Local governments are usually very frugal and joining together sometimes doesn't save any money.

- What are the benefits to my area of entity.
- Do I have any control on my future.
- Local control still needs to be preserved.

- Un-cooperation.
- Narrow-mindedness.
- Lack of vision.

- Lack of communication.
- Lack of clear goals and objectives.
- Cost.

- Public perception that they will lose control and input by cooperating with a regional government effort.
- Small communities fear a loss of identity or input.

- Turf protection in your county or city.

- Some opposition to change.
- Elected officials have gotten away from a managed enabling body.

- Knowledge about what individual communities have to offer (their resources, finances, and otherwise).

- “Turf” and the loss of it.
- Document savings.
- Document / prove improvement of quality of service.

- Must make sure this isn’t just another layer of government trying to do what the counties are already doing well right now. DOT regional planning areas as an example.

- Personal “egos” interfere with glowing outcome. “Ask what you can do for the county – not what the county can do for you.”

- Elitism.

- Added costs.
- Unknown outcomes.
- Time involved.

- Political issues – elected officials more concerned about votes and public opinion than benefits to community.
- Lack of understanding of need for project and the potential benefits and outcomes, its effect on individuals and their families.

- Lack of information, understanding.
- Lack of communication.
- Lack of time, man power.

- Restrictive legislation.

- Fear of “Big brother.”
- Loss of local control.

- Legality of the regional entity (Iowa 28E code).
- Making local goals integrate into the region.
- Uniqueness of local situations.
- Ability for all local players to understand region.

- State and federal government mandating cuts while continuing to spend at their usual rate.
- Misleading information.
- False promises.

- Not cost-effective.
- Not efficient way to deliver local services.
- Comes through as an unfunded state mandate.

- Fear that their area may lose out.

- Work out way that all agencies will have a role in the project to reduce the fear of losing control or being taken advantage of.

- Picking too large or complex project to begin.
- Providing support when opposition develops.
- Communicating effectively.

- Larger is not always better.
- Regional does not always save money.
- Service is not better and not personalized.

- Different counties provide different levels of service.
- Combining counties may reduce our services.

- Equal share in the grant programs.

- Sustaining same level of service to public.
- Large regional areas are hard to coordinate.
- Too many decision makers to accomplish efforts.

- Community losing identity.
- Losing local control.