



NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION[®]

1600 K Street, N.W., Suite 400
Washington, DC 20006

Phone:(202) 347-3190 Fax:(202)821-4728
www.napawash.org

Center for Intergovernmental Partnerships September 2021



The Need for Intergovernmental Partnerships

In the 21st Century, no significant public problem fits entirely within one government agency or even one level of government, and our federal system presupposes that all levels of government have an important role in the democratic process. Effective problem solving usually requires federal, state, and local governments to work successfully together, often with the private and nonprofit sectors. Fragmented and fractious inter-governmental arrangements—characterized by slow bureaucratic processes, conflicting rules, competing objectives, organizational stovepipes, and overlapping programs—are significant impediments to meeting public needs.

The United States has not prioritized establishing capabilities to develop and implement effective policies and programs across levels of government and sectors of society. To address this gap, the National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy or NAPA), with the generous financial support of the National Association of Counties (NACo) and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), and a close working relationship with the Government Finance Officers Association (GFOA), the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), the Council of State Governments (CSG) and the National League of Cities (NLC) is establishing a Center for Intergovernmental Partnerships to facilitate collaboration across levels of government. The Center will serve as a forum for dialogue and problem-solving on intergovernmental issues, including fiscal, grants management, program design, regulatory, and related matters, across local, state, territorial, tribal, and federal levels of government. The Center would be a resource for both the Executive Branch and Congress to assess program design and implementation.

The Academy as a leader in Intergovernmental Issues

The Center will build upon current Academy efforts being led by our Fellows, including:

- the Academy's thought leadership on [Grand Challenges](#), including protecting electoral integrity and enhancing voter participation, fostering social equity, developing new public governance and engagement mechanisms, and other shared objectives of the governments at all levels.
- the [Agile Government Center](#) (joint with the [IBM Center for the Business of Government](#)), which has produced Agile Government Principles and thought leadership funded by the Samuel Freeman Charitable Trust and [Project Management Institute](#);
- the [Federalism.US](#) website, which is a growing platform for intergovernmental data;

- Forums such as the [Grants Management Symposium](#) and the [Intergovernmental Forum on Outcome-Based Innovation](#) that seek to improve intergovernmental collaboration and promote evidence-based approaches;
- the Academy's [Standing Panel on the Intergovernmental Systems](#);
- the Academy's expertise in intergovernmental issues demonstrated through recent studies of issues that include [clean water regulations and community affordability of municipal water systems](#); [funding provided to state and local governments through the CARES Act](#); [data availability on public-private partnerships for transportation projects](#); [Army Corps of Engineers project partnership agreement process](#); and [strategic planning for public health resources to address sexually transmitted diseases](#).

The Center's Initial Focus

Some of the immediate issues facing the U.S. federal system come from the extraordinary challenge to wisely use the unprecedented funding that Congress has appropriated in the CARES Act, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), and the base budgets of federal agencies. The Academy's recent [study of CARES Act funding for NACo](#) validated the need for a better coordinated national response for a program of this complexity and urgency. This will certainly be true as additional funds for national recovery, jobs, education, and infrastructure are provided through future bills.

The Center's first, quick turnaround effort will examine coordination between the federal government and its state, local, territorial, and tribal partners in implementing the CARES Act and ARPA. Questions include:

- How effectively were funds distributed?
- How were the funds used?
- How was accountability established?
- What was the impact?

The Center will use the results of this research to further its efforts of identifying leading practices for intergovernmental organizational arrangements and establishing on-the-ground coordination between levels of government. Congress, the Executive Branch, and organizations representing all levels of government and grantees will be consulted to develop recommendations for a coordinated intergovernmental response. Through coalitions that can become permanent platforms for problem-solving, we will look at ways to improve outcomes for people and places that have been left behind.

Beyond its work exclusively related to relief funding, the Center will work with philanthropies, think tanks, and associations serving government officials to establish other research priorities and disseminate findings. This collaboration will include convenings that bring together association leaders to discuss areas of shared concern and interest. Working through our partners, we will also provide a forum for government officials to discuss system practices and design system improvements.

Issues for the Future

The Center will continue to look for opportunities to improve intergovernmental collaboration in the implementation of domestic policy in areas such as:

- Regional and interregional infrastructure projects;

- Disaster relief funding, to provide appropriate flexibility and accountability when federal policymakers need to act quickly;
- Connecting individuals to meaningful work;
- Building resilient communities.

The Time is Now

NAPA's [Center for Intergovernmental Partnerships](#) sees the need to develop strategic capacity that supports internal and external collaboration between all levels of government, private stakeholders, and nonprofit sector partners. The Academy, with its long history of intergovernmental research and convenings and with the expertise of its 950 Fellows, is perfectly positioned to help ensure the effective, efficient implementation of these ambitious funding programs and to make a lasting impact on the future of intergovernmental policy making and procedures.