

POLICY BRIEFING: Municipal and County Government Service(s) Collaboration

Research and Report Findings in Support of City-County Partnership(s)

Cities, counties, and suburbs can leverage, or collaborate with, each other to tackle major issues:

- The best local *climate change plans* reflect regional commuting patterns and industry activities.
- The most effective *economic strategies* connect neighborhoods to regional opportunities, including pockets of high- and low-opportunity areas across the city–suburban landscape. Coordinated economic development can “grow the pie”, limiting competition over business-attraction.
- Successful approaches to *affordable housing* are regional, as growing demand is unlikely met by new construction within city limits alone. A single jurisdiction providing affordable housing, can concentrate and segregate lower-income families.
- By presenting a *unified voice to state governments*, local jurisdictions may be able to expand opportunities and prevent cities’ priorities from being dismissed. Given stark rural-urban political divides, cities may see their legislative efforts stymied without support from suburban peers.
- Finally, regional collaboration can increase *efficiencies*, with service-sharing or procurement arrangements that improve services and lower costs¹.

A 2013 study by the IBM Center for The Business of Government², found that the most common motivators for *service sharing between cities and counties* are:

- *Budget savings*: Partnering can create economies of scale. Some counties find that sharing services reduces administrative overhead. Resident taxpayers can benefit through the elimination of duplicative services (for which they can effectively “pay twice”).
- *New revenue streams*: Counties or cities with extra capacity find that selling a service to another government results in a revenue stream that can offset costs and prevent service reductions.

Effective service sharing or cooperative arrangements between county and city can also³:

- *Stimulate innovation* - Shared service discussions force county and city leaders to consider inefficiencies in current delivery methods and identify better methods.
- *Increase levels or quality of service* – Residents can benefit from less confusing and more streamlined access to services. Counties rarely report saving money on shared service delivery, but they report satisfaction with partnerships that provide residents with better services.
- *Improve decision-making & working arrangements* - Investing in the process of careful analysis and negotiation may result in better decisions about service delivery and necessitate regular dialogue.
- *Build complementary strengths & skills* – By assessing complementary strengths and delineating roles, county and city can build complementary expertise and capacities.

¹ [A modern case for regional collaboration | Brookings](#) 2018

² A County Manager’s Guide to Shared Services in Local Government, IBM center for the business of Government, 2013
[Additional Service Sharing Resources.pdf \(naco.org\)](#)

³ *ibid*

Identification of Potential Challenges to City-County Partnership(s)

While sharing services between cities and counties can have many benefits, there are also potential downsides⁴ to consider:

- Suitability of Services for Sharing: Not all services may be suitable for a shared service venture.
- Viability of Shared Service: There may be challenges in getting departments or authorities to buy into the shared service.
- [Implementation Costs: The costs of implementing a shared service may not always be viable1.](#)
- Legal Authority: There may be questions about whether the authority has the powers to enter into the arrangement.
- Inter-organizational Cooperation: There could be difficulties if the authorities or departments involved are not able to work well together.
- [Job Security Concerns: Shared services can be perceived as a threat by municipal employees who are concerned about loss of responsibilities or even the loss of jobs2.](#)
- Governance Challenges: Ineffective governance models have been identified as one of the main barriers to successful shared services.

These potential downsides need to be carefully considered and addressed when planning for shared services between cities and counties.

Overview of Current Collaborations Involving Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis

1. Heading Home Hennepin Executive Committee⁵ (Continuum of Care partnership to end homelessness)

- Members: City and County
- Elected officials that serve the Hennepin County CoC's geographic area, including the Mayor of the City of Minneapolis, two members of the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners and two Council Members of the City of Minneapolis; Government officials that serve the Hennepin County CoC's geographic area; Local community leaders from the Hennepin County CoC's geographic area, including leaders of in the faith, business, and philanthropic communities; At least two homeless or formerly homeless individuals; Up to two members of the CoC Operations Board
- The Continuum of Care supports coordination of the countywide effort to prevent and end homelessness. This effort addresses homelessness at all levels. Continuum of Care committees include elected officials, housing and service providers, advocates, people who've experienced homelessness, and cross-sector partners.
- [City of Minneapolis and Hennepin County MOU](#)
- [Governance Structure and Composition of Boards](#)

2. Hennepin County Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP)⁶

- Members: Hennepin County, Minneapolis, Bloomington, Richfield, Edina
- Hennepin County CHIP was founded in 2012 on the idea that solutions to complex health issues can be found when partners from across the community work as one. The local health departments within

⁴ Shared Services in Local Government [LGMG SharedServices 2009.indd \(nj.gov\)](#)

⁵ <https://www.hennepin.us/your-government/projects-initiatives/heading-home-hennepin>

⁶ [chip-partnership-one-pager-march-2023.pdf \(hennepin.us\)](#)

Hennepin County convene and provide staff for CHIP*. Our partners come from the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, and include health care, housing, education, and many others. We target community health issues together for greater impact.

3. Municipal Building Commission Board⁷

- Members: Hennepin County Commissioners, Minneapolis Mayor, Minneapolis Councilmember
- The Municipal Building Commission board has managed the Minneapolis City Hall & Hennepin County Courthouse since 1904. The Board is comprised of two Hennepin County Commissioners, the Mayor of Minneapolis, and one City Councilmember. [June 12, 2023 Meeting Materials](#)

Prior Efforts to Merge of Hennepin County & City of Minneapolis Services

In 2008, Hennepin County “took over” the city library system from the City of Minneapolis. Early indications suggest the merger saved some administrative costs and prevented the closing of several city libraries⁸.

In 2005, Hennepin County invited the city of Minneapolis to combine the 911 emergency call system, an invitation the city rejected.

According to Former Minneapolis Budget Director Patrick Born ideas raised and/or discussed include:

- Merging city and county departments with similar scopes of work
- Sharing Minneapolis’ 311 citizens’ question/complaint system with Hennepin County or suburbs
- Sharing City and County back-office operations, such as technology, insurance, purchasing, accounting, payroll, record keeping, revenue collection; maintenance of vehicle fleets, buildings, and other property⁹.

Additional Examples of Hennepin County - Municipal Collaboration Efforts (w/o City of Minneapolis)

1. Hennepin County Consortium¹⁰

- Members: Hennepin County, Bloomington, Eden Prairie, Plymouth
- The annual action plan involves the coordination of a broad range of projects and activities across multiple cities and other government agencies. The plan describes the roles of the county and cities in collaboratively managing CDBG, HOME, and ESG funding. It also outlines how the county and cities partner with residents, housing providers, health and social services providers, developers, and others to implement community input in the goals and objectives.

2. Hennepin Joint Community Police Partnership¹¹

- Members: Hennepin County, Bloomington, Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Crystal, Edina, Hopkins, New Hope, Richfield, and Robbinsdale.
- The Joint Community Police Partnership (JCPP) is a collaborative effort between Hennepin County's Safe Communities department and nine cities.

⁷ [Municipal Building Commission :: Building Management](#)

⁸ [Is bigger cheaper? Cities and counties contemplate merging or sharing | MinnPost](#)

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ [2023-action-plan-final.pdf \(hennepin.us\)](#)

¹¹ [Joint Community Police Partnership | Hennepin County](#)

- Our mission is to enhance communication and understanding between law enforcement and multicultural residents of these cities. We accomplish this by building trust and understanding between the police and community members — including immigrants, people of color, Indigenous people, and faith communities — which ultimately improves the safety and livability of our communities.
- Current partner cities are Bloomington, Brooklyn Center, Brooklyn Park, Crystal, Edina, Hopkins, New Hope, Richfield, and Robbinsdale.

3. Efficient Buildings Collaborative¹²

- Members: Hennepin County, Bloomington, Edina, Saint Paul, St. Louis Park, Rochester
- The Efficient Buildings Collaborative brings together the county, cities, and buildings owners to do energy benchmarking.

Energy benchmarking is the process of monitoring and reporting the energy use of a building. It allows comparison of buildings’ energy use to similar buildings or buildings’ past performance.

Cities can get help from Hennepin County adopting an energy benchmarking ordinance. They can also get help developing and implementing the program.

Building owners can get help from the county on how to benchmark their building.

Additional Examples of City – County Collaborations Outside of Hennepin County

St. Paul and Ramsey County – City and county merged their respective public health depts. as well as back-end purchasing, building maintenance, printing, police dispatch and the 911 emergency call system. The city parks department and school system also cooperate and share buildings for afterschool activities¹³.

Charlotte, N.C. and Mecklenburg County - Clearly defined responsibilities for services through specific contracts between the city and county that specify expiration dates and termination criteria. For example, Charlotte handles solid waste disposal, while Mecklenburg County is responsible for building inspection. Charlotte’s city officers patrol and investigate crimes throughout the County, while county sheriff’s deputies serve all warrants and operate jails.¹⁴

Police and fire departments offer perhaps the greatest potential for savings but are hardest to merge as they tend to be emotionally attached to local communities. Union contracts, pension funds and department traditions add more barriers¹⁵.

*Greater Chicago*¹⁶ - The city and surrounding seven counties came together to launch a single regional economic development agency to advance a common agenda, working with businesses, universities, and nonprofit actors. Working at the neighborhood level with an eye to regional needs, the city built on existing local workforce development programs by founding [i.c. stars](#), which has trained hundreds of disadvantaged young people in the city for jobs in industries that matter to the regional economy¹⁷.

¹² [Efficient Buildings Collaborative | Hennepin County](#)

¹³ [Is bigger cheaper? Cities and counties contemplate merging or sharing | MinnPost](#)

¹⁴ <https://www.badgerinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Hein12.1.pdf>

¹⁵ Cooperation among the 15 largest communities in metropolitan Milwaukee Sammis B. White, “Intergovernmental Cooperation: Has its Time Come for Metropolitan Milwaukee?” Spring 2002, Vol.15, Number 1, Center for Urban Initiatives and Research, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

¹⁶ [Advancing regional solutions to address America’s housing affordability crisis | Brookings](#) 2017

¹⁷ [A modern case for regional collaboration | Brookings](#) 2018

Also in Chicago, city and suburban governments are collaborating to expand the supply of affordable housing, including in growing, job-rich parts of the region. A [Regional Housing Solutions tool](#) helps stakeholders understand housing submarkets, identify shared challenges, and potential interventions.

*Greater Milwaukee*¹⁸ - City government created an economic revitalization strategy centered around attracting and expanding the priority industry sectors identified by the region's 7-county economic development agency. The city set aside land in target neighborhoods for companies in these industries and worked with community leaders to create job-training programs for neighborhood residents. Milwaukee's Grow Here campaign aimed to provide 200,000 career-based learning experiences to students in the 7-county region¹⁹.

St Louis City and St Louis County - Study found that operations could be improved at lower cost through cooperation in health, economic development, and human services. City and county held joint talks on economic development, health, and construction code enforcement – to explore joint services.

Albuquerque and Bernalillo County - City Council proposed partnering with the county to build more affordable housing through a joint Albuquerque-Bernalillo County housing authority. The Middle Rio Grande Housing Collaborative would combine City and County efforts to create more housing²⁰.

¹⁸ Cooperation among the 15 largest communities in metropolitan Milwaukee Sammis B. White, "Intergovernmental Cooperation: Has its Time Come for Metropolitan Milwaukee?" Spring 2002, Vol.15, Number 1, Center for Urban Initiatives and Research, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

¹⁹ Draws from Seattle and South King County's talent development initiative, [the Road Map Project](#) (for more see [The Road Map to post-secondary success in Greater Seattle | Brookings](#))

²⁰ <https://www.cabq.gov/family/news/city-and-county-to-launch-new-housing-collaborative>

Addendum A.

Initiating county-city shared services: Recommendations

A study by the IBM Center for The Business of Government²¹ offered recommendations for initiating county-city shared services:

County governments should enter into shared service agreements only after careful analysis and deliberation. It is important to explore the business case for sharing services and develop shared guiding principles.

Exploring a shared service project requires county and city governments to understand:

- How a service is financed
- How it is delivered and managed on a day-to-day basis
- How service delivery would change by contracting, merging, or redesigning the service

All participants need to understand their roles in the new service delivery model. Participants must also agree to standards of good service delivery. These conversations can be difficult but can be made easier if participating governments develop a foundation for cooperation. Such a foundation requires leadership; trust, reciprocity, and transparency; and clear goals and measurable results.

In county government, the IBM study found that most often the leader of a cooperative project is the county executive, county manager or administrator, or an elected county commissioner.

Leaders or champions may delegate responsibility to move a shared service initiative forward, but often the most visible administrative and political leaders must lend their endorsement to move shared service projects forward.

Employees working in the field, know how specific services are delivered and are instrumental in developing strategies and work rules to engage with other governments. If employees and labor groups are engaged early and understand the goals of a shared service project, they can become strong allies and advocates in moving projects through implementation

Recommendation One: Create a shared services assessment team that brings participants together to discuss in a transparent manner. The development of a multi-government team can put positive pressure on the participants to think creatively about shared service delivery. A team may include staff or elected leaders from all participating units of government. City and county leaders should outline goals and values to guide the negotiation process

Independent consultants and facilitators can help enable productive dialogue. By including representatives of all potential participating governments, conducting public deliberations, transparency can mitigate fears associated with changing local service delivery. Maintain communication with partners over time, resisting the

Common Shared Services in County Government

(IBM center for the business of government)

Affordable Housing
Agriculture Support Services
Animal Control
Appraisal and Equalization
Building Inspections
Court Services
Economic Development
Emergency Communications and Dispatch
Facility Sharing Agreements
Fleet Maintenance
Geographic Information Systems (GIS)
Grant Writing
Human Resources
Information / Technology Services
Infrastructure Maintenance
Jails
Landfills
Lawn and Grounds Maintenance
Medical Examiner
Parks and Recreation Services
Planning and Zoning Administration
Police Services
Purchasing
Recycling
Restaurant Inspections
Senior Services
Social Services
Solid Waste Management
Tax Billing and Collection
Transportation
Wastewater Treatment
Water Treatment and Delivery
Website Design and Maintenance
Youth Services

²¹A County Manager's Guide to Shared Services in Local Government, IBM center for the business of Government, 2013
[Additional Service Sharing Resources.pdf \(naco.org\)](#) See Pages 14-17 and 24-30

urge to set relationships on autopilot.

Recommendation Two: Counties and cities should carefully identify their areas of strength in determining where they could provide service to others, while also assessing other governments' areas of strength. Shared service partnerships and interlocal agreements will erode if one of the parties feels that the costs and benefits of working together do not align.

An inventory and performance estimate for existing intergovernmental programs can help the public understand the value of investing time and effort in new methods of service delivery. Estimates can also provide policymakers with clear justification for exploring new shared service opportunities

City and county governments should set clear and attainable goals for shared service delivery efforts and interlocal agreements. Whether the goals relate to cost savings or service quality improvements, the participating governments should put a system in place in advance to collect the information necessary to determine if the project has been a success.

Recommendation Three: Consider pilot projects. Small successes through pilot projects can build relationships, trust, and a track record to expand cooperation in the future.

Existing forums like metropolitan planning organizations and councils of governments can be used as forums to start dialogue about interlocal agreements and shared service delivery. Communication established in these organizations, and trust developed through cooperation on existing projects, provide a helpful foundation for new initiatives.

In areas where dialogue and cooperation does not exist, developing small cooperative efforts can establish a base for more extensive shared services in the future.

Addendum B.

Identifying Areas for Greater Coordination²²

Based on guidance provided by New York State (to guide city-county collaborations), identifying areas for greater coordination may include some variation of the following tasks:

1. *Assess areas of commonalities, overlap and relative strengths and weaknesses -*

Determine functions or service areas that can benefit from restructuring based on cooperation. Look for things that more than one local unit might be doing; consider where there are overlapping or complementary expertise, resources, equipment etc. Identify areas in which the city or county may have extra service capacity or staff time. Assess the potential costs of duplication (for residents, budgets and staff) and potential benefits from increased communication, coordination and/or collaboration.

The following schematic may be helpful to gauge the existing level of county-city engagement and make forward looking recommendations:

Levels of inter-local engagement:

- Communication – networking, dialogue, and info sharing.
- Coordination – Sharing of resources, equipment, personnel, and joint efforts to achieve a shared goal.
- Collaboration – City and county merge a function or one jurisdiction manages a function for another.²³

2. *Conducting a feasibility analysis -* After determining possible service opportunities, a feasibility analysis should be conducted to determine whether proposals for cooperation “make sense” economically, operationally, and administratively.

Analysis should detail:

- Mutual goals and expectations of cost savings and/or improved level of service, along with criteria to measure the effectiveness of the cooperative or consolidated service.
- How service is now being provided by each participant, including the specific departments, divisions and units involved, persons responsible for various aspects of the service; facilities, equipment, vehicles, or other materials required.
- Level (or degree) of service provision currently provided by each participant and assessment of whether current level of service is adequate for present and anticipated needs (over 2-5 years).
- Estimated cost of cooperation for each participant to meet minimum service levels and projected service cost. Determine annual cost calculation for each participant.

3. *Making recommendations* based on analysis of how proposed cooperation would fulfill the stated goals.

Based on Advisory Board recommendations, city and county officials may decide to engage in negotiating a joint agreement and/or take steps to build support.²⁴

²² [Intermunicipal Cooperation and Consolidation - Exploring Opportunities for Savings and Improved Service Delivery \(state.ny.us\)](#)

²³ [City-County Consolidation and Its Alternatives: Reshaping the Local ... - J.B. Carr, Richard C. Feiock - Google Books](#)

²⁴ [Intermunicipal Cooperation and Consolidation - Exploring Opportunities for Savings and Improved Service Delivery \(state.ny.us\)](#) See pages 6 & 7