

**Summary of
Wisconsin Towns Association Survey
on Intergovernmental Cooperation**

In June of 2001, the Wisconsin Towns Association conducted a simple survey of its membership requesting examples of intergovernmental cooperative relations to give the State-Local Government-Private Sector Working Group* an idea of the extent and variety of local efforts. See Appendix A to review the survey. After eight weeks, the association received 352 responses that indicated the following general areas of cooperative relations:

Service	No. of Responses
Fire Protection	268
Ambulance	187
Law Enforcement	114
Water	13
Sewer	18
Road Maintenance	168
Road Construction	31
Road Other	2
Library	56
Parks and Recreation	39
Solid Waste Management	69
Recycling	99
Hazardous Waste	4
Emergency Government	11
Dispatch Service	10
Land Use Planning	51
Land Use Zoning	19
Purchasing/Bidding	15
Other	79
TOTAL	1,253

While examples clustered around certain services, such as fire protection and law enforcement, many other examples were cited. Please note that these numbers might have been more rounded out had the survey specifically requested a complete listing of cooperative efforts undertaken by a local government. Some respondents described one shared service in detail, others provided a full listing of cooperative efforts in more summary fashion. Even then, some activities that are so commonly shared would escape notice and mention, such as dispatch services.

This paper will generally summarize these cooperative efforts. Please note that I did not follow up to specifically interview local governments for more detail and clarification. I assume responsibility for any misleading statements or errors because of this.

*This group helps advise the Wisconsin Land Council on policies, rules and legislation related to land use planning grants and various areas of land use. A subcommittee of this group, along with new members with intergovernmental experience, helped develop the *Intergovernmental Cooperative Guidebook* for comprehensive land use planning. A copy of this guide will be available later in the spring of 2002 at www.doa.state.wi.us/olis/

Fire Protection

Municipalities are mandated under state law to provide fire protection to their citizens in one of four ways: (1) through a department of their own, (2) forming a joint fire department with another municipality(s), (3) through contracting for the service with another municipality, or (4) contracting with a private fire company. The vast majority of responses were from towns and villages that formed a joint fire department with surrounding municipalities, frequently citing the reason as being able to provide a higher level of service at a cost lower than if they had established their own department. Many towns simply contracted for the service from a neighboring municipality, not able to assume the cost of equipment, personnel, training, inspections and public education given their population and tax base. Several towns belonged to more than one fire district and board, or simply contracted services from more than one municipality to cover their town with an adequate response time.

Fire protection is not a single service. Some municipalities specifically mentioned contracting out for fire inspections and the training of their volunteer personnel with a neighboring city or village with full-time employees. Four municipalities mentioned hazardous waste training and response as part of a coordinated effort with the county. With law enforcement and emergency medical services, fire departments also make up an intricate part of emergency government response.

Many respondents indicated that they had mutual aid agreements with neighboring fire districts and/or municipalities, not only to take care of problems at their borders, but to share needed and costly equipment and personnel when specific situations dictated it. Mutual aid agreements are also with the Department of Natural Resources and neighboring Indian tribes.

Ambulance Service

Municipalities are mandated under state law to provide emergency medical service to their citizens or to contract for the service. The most common response to providing this service was through several municipalities directly providing the service together or contracting with a private provider. Two counties provided this service to municipalities through service contracts. Sometimes, the ambulance service is a part of the fire department and firefighters have cross training as paramedics. Hospitals were cited as a private service provider by a few municipalities.

Law Enforcement

A good number of respondents indicated that they were provided general law enforcement service through the county sheriff's office. Other respondents cited specific contracts for a level of service (i.e., one deputy assigned to the community), for a specific service (enforcement of ordinances), or for a specific event (increased presence at a festival or fair). A few municipalities mentioned that partial payment of the contract with the sheriff's office was made by providing office space for a deputy. A village and two towns in one county cooperatively run a municipal court and support an officer to enforce their ordinances.

Several municipalities mentioned establishing joint law enforcement departments, or where a municipality had its own department, contracted out to provide this service in some form to neighboring municipalities. Mutual aid agreements for border areas and for backup were also cited.

Counties were also the most frequently cited provider of animal control through humane societies, although this too was an area where municipalities would sometimes jointly provide this service.

Water and Sewer

When water and sewer lines were mentioned, it was often in regard to use by another municipality of existing lines or connector lines. Several municipalities mentioned use of another's wastewater treatment facility and joint efforts to plan and develop stormwater retention areas. One town spoke of using a village's water lines to provide the necessary pressure to fire hydrants, thereby delaying the need to build their own water tower.

Road Maintenance and Construction

For some towns, counties were a major provider of road maintenance (plowing, signage, brush cutting, etc.) and/or road construction projects. Other towns would use the county selectively for these services or for specific projects. Towns that relied exclusively on the county for road maintenance and construction conveyed that they had limited population and tax base to own their own equipment and support personnel. Counties were used frequently for cooperative purchasing of materials and equipment (salt, sand, culverts, etc.) and for bidding specifications. Perhaps the most commonly cited cooperative effort among municipalities was maintenance agreements between municipalities of border roads and the provision of assistance in emergencies. Municipalities also jointly bid out projects to realize savings. In addition, municipalities frequently share equipment, do in-kind trades of services, and provide storage space for the equipment of another municipality.

Library

Many towns cited their participation in the county library system. Several towns belonged to the county system and supported one or more municipal libraries. In a few responses, towns provided extra support for purchases of computers and other equipment in libraries.

Parks and Recreation

For those respondents that spoke to recreation, local governments cooperatively provided for summer recreation programs, little league, pools, parks, baseball diamonds and lighting, tennis courts, ice rinks, recreation centers and community centers. Typically, one local government was responsible for the program(s) and/or building(s) while participating municipalities provided an annual amount of support.

Recycling and Solid Waste Management

While many respondents used the county's recycling program, several municipalities established their own programs in conjunction with neighboring municipalities and cited efficiencies, access and reduced costs as motivations. Sometimes specific equipment was used or rented from the county or another municipality, such as chippers for organic waste that was then sold as compost or spread in farm fields. While landfills were rarely mentioned, responses seemed divided between use of county and private landfills. Solid waste collection was often a contracted service, either with another municipality or a private provider.

Land Use Planning and Zoning

Many towns listed land use planning as a cooperative effort with the county and/or neighboring municipalities. Several towns sited boundary agreements with their neighbors as well as shared service agreements. One town spoke to its agreement with neighboring cities on uncontested annexations and extraterritorial zoning. Several towns discussed being under county zoning and working jointly with the county on rezoning petitions, other special requests, and ordinance enforcement.

Other

There was a wide variety of cooperative efforts cited by towns, which do not neatly fall into the aforementioned categories. For example, there were joint municipal airports and metropolitan area transit systems. There was a unique example of an economic development effort between towns and tribes that focuses on providing needed services, such as health care. One response cited area towns jointly working with school districts in laying out fiber optic cable. A couple of towns indicated that they use their town halls as sites for meal programs and open them to county departments, state agencies and special districts for their meetings. Towns cited working with the county housing authority to meet local needs. Finally, several towns mentioned having management meetings with other municipalities to discuss emerging issues of concern on a regular basis.

Conclusion

A review of the town survey on intergovernmental cooperation indicates that there is a great deal of cooperation among local governments and that it takes many forms: informal and formal, monetary and in-kind payments, multiple use of staff, equipment and buildings, and so forth. There are a host of mutual aid agreements for protective services and road maintenance in evidence. Local governments cooperate on the provision of services, but also on activities such as land use planning and regular area management meetings that lend themselves to greater future cooperation. Cooperative efforts occur between neighboring and area municipalities and with the county, state agencies, Indian tribes, and school districts as well as other special districts.

It can be frustrating to try to neatly categorize intergovernmental cooperative efforts as they are uniquely expressed across the state and vary according to circumstances, relationships, resources, specific services, and desired levels of service. In one place there may be a very formal agreement to contract for service, in another situation there is a trading of services, staff, and equipment. There is a great deal of richness in this lack of uniformity that can and should be shared among local governments to encourage even more innovative cooperative efforts.

