

NATIONAL ACADEMY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION
INTERGOVERNMENTAL SYSTEMS STANDING PANEL

**White Paper: Intergovernmental Best Practices for
Societal Problem-Solving and Opportunity Advancement**

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Introduction

The Standing Panel on Intergovernmental Systems considers challenges and issues related to the US federal system and intergovernmental relations. Many of the problems and opportunities that fall to government fall to more than one level of government. The National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) has identified multiple big, complex, and important grand challenges that need government attention. Progress on these Grand Challenges and the many other challenges government takes on usually requires effective action by multiple players at all levels of government as well as by private for- and nonprofit organizations.

These multiple players sometimes work effectively together but sometimes do not. Intergovernmental efforts can sometimes be contentious but can also be highly constructive collaborations. Over the years, the Academy's Center for Intergovernmental Partnerships, Standing Panel (SP) on the Intergovernmental System (IS-SP) working on its own and with other SPs, topic-focused working groups of the IS-SP, and individual Fellows' efforts have begun to shine a light on characteristics distinguishing more from less effective intergovernmental and multi-sector delivery partnerships. In the coming years, the Academy urges the federal government to direct more attention and effort to work with state, county, local, regional, tribal, and territorial governments to forge more effective intergovernmental approaches to address the critical challenges of our time. The Academy is ready to work with the next Administration and with state, county, local, Tribal, and territorial governments to:

- Highlight intergovernmental dimensions of critical challenges facing government implementation efforts;
- Examine intergovernmental efforts that work and those that don't to understand why; and
- Spread knowledge about what is likely to work well under what circumstances and what is likely to work less well.

This document shares examples of how Academy Fellows have approached challenges requiring effective intergovernmental partnerships and delves into critical intergovernmental questions. As part of these inquiries, the Academy searches for what works, what doesn't, and why. From these specific inquiries—homelessness, broadband access, free and fair elections, and adaptation in the

face of climate change—the Academy seeks to understand better what works for these specific challenges and, more generally, for other challenges the government takes on. It also aims to enlist more in this effort to build knowledge to improve practice. The goal is to make examples of better intergovernmental practices less the exception and more the norm.

Good Government Is Important

When the government works well, few notice. When it works less well, it tends to garner attention and attack, making it hard for the government to work well when we need it to.

Consider, for example, the number of news articles written about declining student scores in places where schools closed during the pandemic but the paucity of articles about the rebound after schools reopened. Both the decline and recovery strongly suggest the value of schools and teachers.

We need the government and need it to work well.

Whether we are talking about federal, state, local, regional, Tribal, or territorial government or special purpose authorities dealing with topics such as drinking water and public housing, we need good government that works effectively alone, with other levels of government, or with other partners.

Good Government Requires Good Intergovernmental Practices

Most policy areas require multiple governments and government offices to work together successfully to improve outcomes cost-effectively.

The need to work well across jurisdictional and organizational boundaries applies in wholly federal areas, such as national security and defense, wholly local areas, such as public safety.¹

¹ Malcolm Sparrow, in his book *Handcuffed: What Holds Policing Back, and the Keys to Reform*, quotes Moore and Poethig describing the importance of managing across government agencies at the local level, in an area as specialized as policing, “If we conceive of the police as nothing more than ‘the first step in the criminal justice system,’ then we might easily miss the contributions that they make ‘outside the box’ of crime control, law enforcement, and arresting people. On the other hand, if we can see the police as an agency of municipal government that shares with other agencies the broad responsibility for strengthening the quality of urban life, then we are in a better position to notice that the police contribute much more to those goals than is captured by the simple idea of reducing crime. We also noticed that the police have capabilities that go far beyond their ability to make arrests and that these capabilities are valuable to the enterprise of city. In short, the police are more valuable assets when viewed from the vantage point of trying to strengthen urban life than they are when viewed from the narrow perspective of reducing crime through making arrests.)”

Horizontal and vertical intergovernmental (or multi-government) collaborations are common.

State and local officials network horizontally to learn from peers in other locations and collaborate with them to discover, learn, and solve specific problems. Federal and state governments help states and local governments with funding, often for redistributive and cross-boundary purposes. They also sometimes provide funding or in-kind services to help governments doing similar things learn from each other, tackle shared and similar needs, collaborate to find ways to realize more cost-effective delivery and purchasing, develop and share tools, and more. Involvement by federal and some state governments helps spread risk to prevent and respond to low-frequency, high-consequence events too onerous for a local government to handle on its own. Intergovernmental arrangements are useful for deterring cross-jurisdictional negative consequences. They sometimes also stimulate cross-jurisdiction positive gains. Federal and state governments often try to discourage current generations from imposing unreasonable costs on future generations while investing to realize significant positive future returns within and across communities and generations.

Intergovernmental efforts can be tense, sometimes by design.

In the United States, as argued in Federalist Paper 51,² disagreements between the federal and state governments are part of a system of checks and balances designed by the framers of the Constitution to contain the unchecked power of special interests and unreasonable dominance of the majority over the minority while also deterring corruption and creating healthy venues for democratic debate about government's goals and strategies. States, too, can have substantive disagreements with their localities, as evident in the variety of state home rule laws.

Intergovernmental efforts can be collaborative, cooperative, and friendly.

One way governments work together is when one government, usually the larger and more centralized one, such as the federal government, offers grant funding for which other governments and nonprofits can apply. This system allows the funding government to find and support "goal allies" that share its objectives. Governments can use different tools to find and support goal allies. For example, they may discover, build, and share knowledge, facilitated by wise data collection, analyses, and well-designed trials via evidence libraries

² “...In the compound republic of America, the power surrendered by the people is first divided between two distinct governments, and then the portion allotted to each subdivided among distinct and separate departments. Hence a double security arises to the rights of the people. The different governments will control each other, at the same time that each will be controlled by itself. Second. It is of great importance in a republic not only to guard the society against the oppression of its rulers, but to guard one part of the society against the injustice of the other part. Different interests necessarily exist in different classes of citizens. If a majority be united by a common interest, the rights of the minority will be insecure.... There are but two methods of providing against this evil... The second method will be exemplified in the federal republic of the United States. Whilst all authority in it will be derived from and dependent on the society, the society itself will be broken into so many parts, interests, and classes of citizens, that the rights of individuals, or of the minority, will be in little danger from interested combinations of the majority....” (Federalist Paper No. 51 - <https://guides.loc.gov/federalist-papers/text-51-60>)

and knowledge snippets transmitted to those who opt into listservs. They provide training informed by evidence and experience. They also convene and provide in-person and online platforms to facilitate cross-government, cross-sector learning, and collaboration.

Even cooperative intergovernmental arrangements can get strained, complicated, or frustrating.

Policy implementation is easier said than done, especially involving multiple government jurisdictions or implementing offices. To assure the honest, responsible, productive, and cost-effective use of grant funds, grant-giving entities very reasonably establish criteria and conditions defining who can apply, how to apply, how award decisions get made, and how post-award processes operate. Some of these processes are easier to understand and do than others. Some federal and state organizations build evidence libraries and listservs to help government partners learn from each other and the findings of well-designed trials. Some communicate that knowledge in ways that are easier for their delivery partners to use, understand, and apply than others. Others are less successful at that. Political objectives can also complicate otherwise cooperative intergovernmental efforts, especially but not only during election season.

Effective intergovernmental arrangements are essential to good government.

It is essential to learn what makes some intergovernmental systems work well that are worth continuing and trying to replicate in other places and what makes some work less well, necessitating attention and adjustment. Recognizing this and the scarcity of attention to this issue, the National Academy of Public Administration (the Academy) established the Center for Intergovernmental Partnerships (CIP) in 2021. The CIP, the Academy's Standing Panel on Intergovernmental Systems, and individual Fellows continually work to identify, encourage, and support increased use of better intergovernmental practices and identify and discourage less good ones. CIP, the Academy, and the Academy Fellows work to:

- Build an understanding of the importance of effective governmental arrangements, recognizing that most people's eyes glaze over when they hear the word "intergovernmental" and that some use the word "federalism" with a political perspective.
- Build an understanding of practices that distinguish more from less effective intergovernmental arrangements and how what works well can vary by situation.
- Increase the adoption of better practices and reduce the use of less good ones to improve outcomes, operational quality, and public understanding of and trust in government.

The CIP, the Intergovernmental Systems Standing Panel working on its own and with other Standing Panels, and individual Fellows produce case studies, find and share recorded presentations of those using better practices, convene people and organizations to identify better and worse practices, suggest steps for improvement, and pilot projects to test new ways to operate that deliver better results than current practice. They also work to find better ways to share those lessons to support the increased adoption of better practices and reduce the use of less good ones.

Intergovernmental tension is inevitable.

City, county, and state government officials' perspectives differ from those working in a federal agency, and their political leaders' views also vary. At the same time, functional intergovernmental arrangements are invaluable. They improve outcomes, operational quality, ease of government, and public understanding of and trust in government. Moreover, intergovernmental practices and tools that work well in one policy area can often be applied successfully in other policy areas.

The Academy encourages the next President, White House, and agency officials to give increased attention to mechanisms that strengthen intergovernmental partnerships.

Agency officials include Deputy Secretaries and their equivalents, career and appointed program and regional office leaders and staff, agency and cross-agency outcome-focused goal leaders and teams, those working in the federal government's many CXO offices, and those working in other functional offices supporting federal mission-focused outcome-improving efforts. The cost of failing to give sufficient attention to effective intergovernmental arrangements is high. The return on searching for and increasing adoption of better intergovernmental practices is even higher. Continually evolving technology for communicating and managing data across places, jurisdictions, offices, and time increases potential performance gains. The challenge is to search for better and worse past practices and then to share and discuss that knowledge in ways that help government implementers make better decisions while also initiating well-designed trials to discover increasingly effective intergovernmental practices continually.

The Academy welcomes the opportunity to support the next Administration and the federal government in this important effort.

Learning from Experience Improves Future Intergovernmental Practice

Examples of the Academy's current and recent intergovernmental work are described briefly below in three categories—lessons from experience, recommendations for and models of better practice, and pilots. Several recent Academy efforts have examined intergovernmental efforts. Some focus on policy areas, including emergency management, COVID-19, and homelessness. Some focus on processes, such as public benefits delivery and grants management. Some look for and share better intergovernmental practices, such as support to local governments provided by a state university and existing intergovernmental networks. Where available, links to more information are provided. The last section of this document raises specific questions to invite others to join efforts to find answers (and ask new questions) to improve intergovernmental practice.

Emergency and Disaster Management

Several recent Academy-linked efforts address lessons from emergency and disaster management. In a [short piece](#) reflecting on emergency management, Academy Fellow and former federal, state, and local emergency management leader Don Bathurst suggests several good government and intergovernmental practice principles:

- ✓ **Plans must be on everyone's mind, not the shelf.**
- ✓ Planning is not enough. **Practice, practice, practice** is critical. Practice does not make perfect, but it does make things a whole lot better.
- ✓ **Models support decisions**; they do not make decisions.
- ✓ Hold all accountable for data honesty and improvement, not punishment.
- ✓ Everyone must **understand the supply chain and their role in it**. Logistics wins the war.

Academy Fellow and former head of the National Weather Service (NWS) Louis Uccellini describes in a co-authored article how NWS complemented its existing strategic objective of providing state and local government and others operating at the local level with **earlier accurate forecasts and warnings** for weather (a goal on which great progress has been made) with an additional objective: impact-based decision support. NWS tries to help city, county, and state governments and other local delivery partners understand how to use weather forecasts and other information to plan, prepare for, practice, and respond more effectively to extreme and other weather events. Federal agencies in different policy areas can similarly be influential in providing more useful **predictive analyses and decision-support services**.

Working with several other Fellows, Academy Fellow and University of Georgia Professor Katherine Willoughby produced a case study reflecting on multiple emergency and disaster management events and intergovernmental issues in this area. "[L]ocal governments are on the ground level, closest to the people and communities affected. They can respond more quickly in the aftermath of a disaster but also can put in place prevention mechanisms before disaster... States and regional organizations can coordinate recovery efforts that span local borders while the federal government can coordinate efforts that span state borders." This study identifies several intergovernmental practices likely to work well in other policy areas, not just emergency and disaster management.

- ✓ **Clarify roles, expectations, and legal responsibilities for all.**
- ✓ **Communicate evolving roles, responsibilities, and expectations clearly.**
- ✓ **Recognize** climate change is a **risk factor**, **watch and study** the weather and environment, and **make research transparent**.
- ✓ **Understand and communicate** that the **impacts** of disaster mean a **future** forever changed.

- ✓ **Emphasize the importance of insurance** by individuals and "**rainy day funds**" at all levels of government.
- ✓ **Develop and engage a consistent reporting structure.**³
- ✓ **Establish** an emergency management **data portal.**⁴

COVID-19 and Pandemic Preparedness

The Academy prepared several publications reflecting on intergovernmental lessons of the nation's experience dealing with COVID-19, offering insights and recommendations. A report by a Working Group of Fellows, many of whom had worked in multiple levels of government, suggested specific actions to improve collaboration, risk identification, mitigation, working with the private sector, and more to help all partners in the intergovernmental system better deal with future pandemics. These papers also offer insights with potential applicability to other operations and policy areas.

- ✓ **Find and understand the problems needing attention.** The working group offered several recommendations about problem identification.
- ✓ **Find effective treatments.** The working group also offered recommendations to improve future practices related to non-pharmaceutical interventions for infection risk reduction.
- ✓ **Successfully increase adoption of better practices.** In addition, the working group offered recommendations to improve future vaccine distribution.
- ✓ **Focus on building public trust through engagement and transparency.**

The working group also encouraged several specific additional changes likely to be relevant to other policy areas:

- ✓ **Maintain waiver authority.** Congress should maintain authorization for the Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) 1135 waiver authority to facilitate CMS's immediate response to emergent conditions. Although not discussed in the COVID report, future analyses of past waiver authority use might improve future intergovernmental practice.

³ "There are fire and crime reporting structures, but emergency management does not have such a framework. Also, different federal agencies have different reporting requirements. ... An approach to determine critical information needed to make decisions, and mining current information to assess what data exists to meet that requirement must be developed.... set a structure that allows for the consistent collection and sifting of data for effective emergency and disaster management into the future. Also necessary in data capture and mining, is the need to develop a consistent hazard and risk structure that communities could apply to make specific adjustments to plans and activities for development, mitigation, emergency response, and recovery."

⁴ "Key to sorting out which activities most effectively and efficiently advance emergency management objectives is the collection, analysis, and sharing of data and analytics in ways that allow all levels of government and other stakeholders around the table to gauge progress, pinpoint problems, search for causal factors, adjust plans, and develop solutions."

- ✓ **Tap evolving communication capacity.** HHS should consider maintaining Medicare's expanded telehealth authority in perpetuity.
- ✓ **Strengthen the supply chain.** HHS should work with relevant health sector stakeholder organizations and others to ensure that the medical supply chain can provide Medicare-participating hospitals with a 90-day supply of their average usage rate of essential personal protective equipment (PPE) items to enhance the health system's readiness and resiliency to manage pandemics and other public health emergencies.⁵
- ✓ **Strengthen financing capacity.** HHS should seek ways for the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) to have a working capital fund (WCF) that reduces reliance on new federal appropriations to sustain it and be better prepared to respond to public health emergencies.
- ✓ **Integrate and strengthen online data collection, reporting, analyses, and sharing.** HHS should work with states and industry stakeholders to move to a fully online, integrated data reporting and database management system. HHS should capture the structure, technologies, and processes of the data systems developed to guide federal responses to COVID-19 in 2020, including roles of the US Federal Emergency Management Agency, Office of the Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response, CDC, and DoD.

COVID-19 and Intergovernmental Relief

Another Academy [study](#) looked at **innovative county uses of COVID-19 relief funds**. The federal government might more routinely support such documentation of better state and local practices. Reflecting on the deployment of the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF), the study offered specific recommendations to improve intergovernmental responses to future widespread emergencies:

- ✓ **Establish better national coordination to create a complex and urgently needed program quickly.** Intergovernmental collaboration involving experts at all levels of government would have allowed program design to better meet the needs of counties.
- ✓ **Stand up program offices quickly, staffed by people with needed skills.** Federal departments or agencies responsible for implementing a program such as CRF – in this instance, the Treasury Department -- need legislative funding to set up a program office with personnel with the skills and expertise required to design the

⁵ HHS should work with other agencies (e.g., General Services Administration (GSA), Department of Defense (DoD)), supply chain industry leaders, and standards-setting bodies (e.g., National Quality Forum, National Institute of Standards and Technology) to develop and broadly adopt a foundational set of technical blockchain standards. HHS should work with industry partners and government procurement organizations to promote and adopt blockchain standards for PPE manufacturers, distributors, and intermediaries. Academy Fellow and former federal legislative and domestic and military executive branch leader John Bartrum elaborates on actions needed to improve the intergovernmental, intersectoral supply chain in this [article](#).

- program, develop practical guidance, and anticipate and respond to questions and issues that will arise, especially during early days.
- ✓ **Distribute guidance quickly.** Comprehensive program operations guidance must be available when a program is initiated or soon thereafter.
 - ✓ **Consider longer-term payoffs, supported by program flexibility to pursue them.** State and local governments should be allowed to make expenditures with longer-term payoffs with greater flexibility in allowable uses of the funds.
 - ✓ **Expand allowed spending categories.** Program design should allow coverage of operational expenses and revenue replacement, not only coverage of new COVID-related costs.
 - ✓ **Anticipate the governance needed to support cities and counties with overlapping jurisdictional borders.** Future legislation should allow and fund large counties to provide selected services for city residents residing within their counties.
 - ✓ **Evaluate during and after program implementation.** Future federal relief legislation should require a formal evaluation of program impact during and after a program's end.

Homelessness

An Academy SP working group is currently working to understand the challenges communities face trying to reduce the costs of homelessness. The group's initial work focuses on (1) identifying efforts of various localities around the nation experiencing some success in addressing the problem of homelessness, (2) highlighting the intergovernmental dimensions of addressing this problem and efforts to combat it, and (3) developing and communicating practical ideas, frameworks for action, and advice to support the efforts of many people working to reduce the number of people experiencing homelessness. This study did not examine larger structural issues affecting homelessness, such as tight housing markets or worker pay not keeping up with rising rental and mortgage costs. Still, it also recognized the need for future attention to intergovernmental aspects of these issues.

The working group's draft findings suggest that the communities that seem to make good progress take on the following tasks:

- ✓ **Develop shared objectives and a coordinated strategy** to address the problem.
- ✓ **Build a network of organizations that plan and work together** toward shared goals and develop ways to coordinate and synchronize their contributions.
- ✓ **Design and deliver timely integrated services** appropriate to the needs of each person who is homeless or facing homelessness, which requires aligning federal and state programs for addressing homelessness with local initiatives and capacity so that

homeless individuals receive tailored services and support unique to their circumstances.

- ✓ **Collect, use, and share data to inform planning, prioritization, and continuous improvement.** The intelligent application of person-centered data has helped ensure the integrated, timely delivery of services appropriate to each person's situation. Evidence-informed decisions in real-time help local actors adjust their plans and actions to address current problems and avert future ones. Person-centered data analyses have proven an invaluable complement to aggregated data supported by the federal government, such as annual point-in-time counts and activity data from the homelessness management information system.
- ✓ **Create and maintain governance and financing structures** that will support continued learning, action, and improvement.

Public Benefits Delivery

Today's public benefits programs provide critical assistance to many US residents. Public benefit or social safety net programs other than Social Security and the Department of Veterans Affairs [benefit nearly one hundred million people, over 10 percent of adults and 30 percent of children](#). Multiple governments, working together in various ways, implement these programs. The pandemic compelled the government to try different ways to provide these benefits. The adopted temporary rules and procedures suggest what a modernized public benefits system that better serves program participants, administrators, policy makers, and taxpayers could look like. This [Academy paper](#) proposed several fundamental principles toward that end:

- ✓ **Emphasize outcomes.** A holistic, integrated approach optimizes the client journey and outcomes rather than isolated improvements of individual touchpoints or process steps.
- ✓ **Integrate cross-program, focusing on the outcome and client.** System-level design brings uniformity to program language, definitions, procedures, and requirements.
- ✓ **Tap emerging technologies.** Emerging technologies enable program administration and service delivery coordination in ways not possible when programs were initially designed.

Better grants and data management

The Academy and the Academy Fellows have undertaken several projects to improve grants management. The Academy runs a periodic Grants Management Symposium, providing updates on developments in the grants world and offering a forum to discuss grant-related issues.

Academy Fellows have worked on several projects focused on ways the federal government can make it easier for federal grant recipients to use and combine federal funds for

integrated data systems and evaluation capacity. In 2023, Kathy Stack and Jonathan Womer released a paper explaining how pioneering state and local governments had financed robust integrated data systems by blending and braiding funds from multiple sources, which included recommendations for OMB actions that would encourage broader adoption of these approaches. Subsequently, the US Office of Management and Budget revised its Uniform Guidance. It issued reference guides explaining new provisions that clarify how grantees may use grant funds for evaluation and integrated data systems. In 2024, Fellows Kathy Stack, Robert Shea, and Jonathan Womer and the Academy Fellow Nominee Pari Sabety are working on an Academy project to develop a field guide on financing integrated data systems and evaluation services using direct costing, indirect costing, and cost allocation to combine funds from multiple sources. Related, the Academy co-sponsored a cost-allocation webinar. Results for America, co-founded by the Academy Fellows Michele Jolin and David Medina, identified top takeaways and initiated a webinar series about significant grant guidance changes.

Earlier, Academy work laid out principles for effective grants management to evolve federal grants management from overly focusing on oversight to also and primarily concentrating on generating insights to support continuous performance improvement:

- ✓ **Focus on people and places, clearly articulating program objectives and relentlessly focusing on solving problems**, pursuing opportunities, and increasing the return on taxpayer dollars in fair, understandable ways.
- ✓ **Learn from experience and share those lessons** in ways that help the front-line apply them.
- ✓ **Clearly lay out and explain strategies**, informed by the best available evidence.
- ✓ **Continually search for and discover new ways to accomplish better outcomes and higher returns on taxpayer dollars in fair, understandable, and courteous ways.**
- ✓ **Communicate goals, strategies, progress, and problems broadly and effectively** to strengthen accountability, support learning, enlist and engage ideas and assistance, and inform individual decision making.
- ✓ **Enlist and engage the front line, those affected by grants, and others** in delivery decision making.
- ✓ **Return data to data suppliers with value-added through analysis and visualization.**
- ✓ **Enable and encourage cross-program, cross-agency, and cross-government planning, reporting, learning, and implementation.**
- ✓ **Encourage innovation by embracing partnership and trust.**

Building on this earlier Academy work, the Academy Fellow and former federal, state, and local official Shelley Metzenbaum wrote a report and two companion white papers suggesting ways to [improve federal grant management, outcomes, and operational quality](#).

Models of Intergovernmental Practices

The Academy works to find and share examples of better practices and discern what makes them better, sometimes working with other organizations such as the Mid-Atlantic StatNet network and the Center for Government Excellence at Johns Hopkins University, as well as with other Standing Panels. These better practices include state universities supporting local governments to learn from each other, effective government performance management practices beneficial for all levels of government, and effective networking practices.

States supporting local government best-practice benchmarking

The University of North Carolina helps interested NC local governments compare constructively (not in ways likely to embarrass) to find ways to improve. Fellow and [Professor David Ammons describes](#) how he has worked with local governments to help them tap the performance-improvement capacity of benchmarking. [Professor Obed Pasha built on the work of Ammons](#) to help more local governments learn from each other. The state supports the costs of this work with funding for faculty and graduate students, supplemented by fees paid by participating local governments. State budgeting and appropriation decisions, including for state-funded colleges and universities, should consider the resources needed to support this sort of local government continuous-learning-and-improvement community.

Performance measurement and management

The federal government and most states require some form of performance management and budgeting. These efforts can be supported or complicated by how the federal government requires grant recipients to collect and report data. Some agencies make this reporting more of a compliance exercise rather than collecting, storing, and analyzing data in ways that make it more useful for finding better practices and informing priority-setting locally and nationally. Some agencies return data to grant reporters and other front-line workers with value added through use-specific analyses. To build an understanding of useful performance management approaches, the Academy Standing Panels on Intergovernmental Systems and Executive Organization and Management invited the City of Mesa, Arizona, to share its strong performance management practices, explaining how it collects and uses data to measure and manage performance. The analysis helps elected officials, the city manager, and those running programs decide where to focus and what to do, such as where to site a new fire station and how to help people experiencing homelessness. More work is needed to understand how the federal government and states can collaborate to fund, collect, and share data and analyses to make data more useful and less of a reporting burden.

Networks

The Academy [scanned and described existing intergovernmental partnerships](#) to identify common practices of more successful networks. These practices include:

- ✓ Accountability and transparency to members and stakeholders and appropriate oversight and performance measures used appropriately (e.g., as Bathurst suggested regarding accountability, "Hold all accountable for data honesty and improvement, not punishment.")
- ✓ Community members and stakeholders have access to and are meaningfully engaged in deliberations.
- ✓ Helping lower levels of government pursue their objectives.
- ✓ Resource-constrained governments participate on par with other partners and are as well represented as communities in high-capacity jurisdictions.
- ✓ Participants benefit in proportion to their contributions, calibrated as needed to achieve regional equity objectives.
- ✓ Sufficient autonomy is given to individual participants without compromising collaboration.

Opportunity-Advancing Pilots

Academy Fellows have initiated several pilots to advance the current state of intergovernmental practice, including:

Local Agency Contract Exchange (LACE). During the Pandemic, Fellows began working with San Diego County (COSD) and Los Angeles County (LACo) to establish a regional joint local agency purchasing agreement, initiating a paradigm shift described [here](#).

Enhanced Infrastructure Financing Districts (EIFDs). Fellows in California are testing new collaborative financing and governance approaches to address complex intergovernmental challenges such as climate change and affordable housing, which are discussed [here](#).

Areas for Future Attention, Learning, and Action

The federal government's relationship with states will always have tensions by design. At the same time, much federal work involving states, localities, tribes, and regional and territorial governments can be, has been, and should be collaborative and cooperative. The Academy and others have begun identifying and sharing lessons about better and less effective intergovernmental practices, both vertical and horizontal. In addition, the Academy Fellows are piloting new practices to find even more effective practices and identifying issues needing more attention. The Academy is also working to catalyze more

actions related to this essential aspect of good government, often convening others to brainstorm and plan what these actions should be and encouraging their implementation.

Attention to better intergovernmental efforts needs to continue not just by the Academy but by the federal government and others. Beyond that, the federal government and the Academy must find better (more effective, cost-effective, fair, equitable) ways to share knowledge about intergovernmental practice to make better practices more broadly understood and applied. Evolving technologies make this easier than ever. The federal government can and already has begun to tap those technologies to find and communicate better and worse practices in different areas. Future laws, funding, guidance, and incentives must align well to increase the adoption of better intergovernmental practices and terminate less good ones while continually informing priority-setting because people and financial resources are always limited.

The Academy encourages the President and federal agencies, programs, employees, grant recipients, and contractors to devote increased attention to searching for better and less good intergovernmental practices and then finding ways to share and apply that knowledge to law, funding, and implementation. The Academy stands ready to help in these efforts.

The Academy Standing Panel on the Intergovernmental System encourages the federal government to consider, learn, and take action in the following areas:

Moving beyond a compliance mindset to managing to improve outcomes, working across governments and organizational units.

Improving the state of the world, people, and other living things requires persistent, insistent attention to measuring and managing outcomes in and across places in the near and long term. It also requires attention to finding factors affecting outcomes and ways to influence them. This is easier said than done but is nonetheless essential. Some but not all federal programs have done this well in the past. The federal government must find affordable, practical, effective ways to do this in all programs involving multiple government partners. It must find increasingly effective ways to support those partners, even if it finds ways to improve federal operations and transparency.

How can, does, and should the federal government manage across programs and levels of government to improve outcomes, operational quality, and public understanding of and trust in government and those it funds? How can, does, and should it encourage other governments to collaborate to manage across jurisdictional boundaries to improve outcomes?

Problem-identification and problem-solving

Each state and locality is uniquely situated. At the same time, tribal, state, regional, county, city, and territorial governments and the communities they serve are often affected by similar and shared problems such as extreme weather events, a pandemic, supply chain problems, crime, drug abuse, sea level rise, and fires. How the federal government collects and analyzes data and shares those analyses can help state, local, tribal, and regional

partners identify and address issues needing attention. At the same time, grant recipients may consider mandated data collection and reporting more burdensome than helpful if the federal government fails to return collected data to data suppliers with value-added through analyses that help states and localities answer questions they need to answer. The federal government also prevents one community from imposing costs on other communities. In addition, it can encourage communities to come together to address problems that cross community boundaries.

The federal government often helps its government partners invest in testing and assessing to find solutions to similar, shared, or common problems. The federal government also often helps communities share and spread risks, especially for lower frequency and higher consequence events that simultaneously strike one or a few but not all communities. The federal government also helps with state and local government project financing for projects promising longer-term, intergenerational returns and for projects where lower-income communities lack the revenue base of higher-income communities to address their problems. In addition, the federal government sometimes takes actions that keep pressure on state and local governments to tackle issues needing attention, such as upgrading drinking water and wastewater pipes that may be politically unpopular to address because of high near-term cost, because direct service providers see different problems than their funding partners, or because as Federalist Paper 51 warns those holding local power do not want to compromise that power.

- **How does, can, and should the federal government identify significant problems affecting many places and help each place identify and prioritize local issues?**
- **How and when does, can, and should the federal government initiate actions to fix those problems?**

Searching for successful practices

Over the years, the federal government has undertaken numerous activities to search for and share more successful practices with communities to help them solve their problem. It has also helped build knowledge to help local communities pursue opportunities such as child and economic development.

In addition to providing funding to find, develop, and use evidence that helps local governments get ideas about what to do and ways to improve, the federal government has built online platforms and run listservs to share that evidence. Online evidence-sharing platforms include the Education Department's What Works Clearinghouse, the Labor Department's CLEAR.gov, and PubMed of the National Institutes of Health. Some evidence libraries are more helpful to practitioners than others for finding what worked well in the past and how that varied by situation and subsets. Other evidence libraries seem geared more to the needs of researchers than their implementation partners' needs. Moreover, much of the evidence in these libraries indicates average findings without more precisely reporting differential effects on different subsets of people and situations, providing more precise information that is more useful to practitioners and researchers trying to decide what to do and what to research next.

Many federal agencies convene conferences organized around outcomes, not programs, to share knowledge. Program offices may fund these outcome-focused conferences, such as the very popular annual meeting of the National Transportation Research Board. The National Weather Service recently started providing impact-decision support services to help communities learn how to use the forecasts and other analyzed data to help communities strengthen their storm preparedness and response. FEMA has co-located staff with some state agencies to facilitate learning and sharing. Some federal agencies train their state and local partners, while others build and support online collaboration spaces. Some of these partner-supporting practices work well, some better than others, and some do not work well at all. The challenge is learning from past practice and applying lessons learned to improve future practice.

- **How does, can, and should the federal government search for successful practices, including information about how situational differences affect success?**
- **How does and can it share that information successfully?**
- **How easy is it for key people in state, local, and other governments to know about, find, access, understand, and use that information?**
- **Does and should the federal government assess the effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, and equity of its searching, vetting, and sharing practices?**
- **Does it help federal agencies learn from each other and continually improve each federal agency's ability to support their government partners where relevant?**
- **How does and can the federal government encourage well-designed trials, both randomized control trials and other sorts of well-designed pilots, and how does and can it share trial findings not just about what worked but also about what did not?**
- **How can it encourage those in the field to try something that seems sensible but may fail?**
- **How does and can the federal government support continuous improvement with iterative testing, assessing, and adoption?**

Scale economies and cross-boundary synergies.

The federal government has long invested in actions that generate value for multiple places because of spillover effects, other kinds of positive externalities, economies of scale, and cross-boundary flows. The national highway system and the internet are two examples of cross-boundary synergies. Federal evidence libraries yield great scale economies when designed to make it easy for its government and nonprofit delivery partners to find and contribute to shared knowledge. Similarly, as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has done with its Click-It-Or-Ticket campaign, the federal government can test and assess campaigns that increase the adoption of practices proven to work well in different places and share those campaign materials in ways allowing adaptation where appropriate and continue to collect data to assess the effectiveness of rollout efforts.

- **How does and can the federal government search for opportunities to realize economies of scale that will not compromise local flexibility?**

- **How does and can the federal government increase the adoption of those activities?**

Data and analyses

Most federal agencies that fund government partners require them to measure and report outcomes, characteristics of those served or regulated, and, sometimes, activities. Some federal agencies collect data in ways that make it useful to the federal government and their partners. Others do it less well, sometimes collecting data in a format, frequency, and level of detail that complicates or even precludes efforts to analyze the data for useful insights. Other programs collect information more intelligently and then return data with value added through analyses that help the front-line answer questions they need to answer. Recent crises such as the COVID-19 and opioid epidemics spotlighted serious deficiencies in the way the federal government gathered and analyzed data from multiple jurisdictions. Johns Hopkins University, not the federal government, built the Covid data hub that most states, localities, the private sector, and the public used to manage the Covid crisis. Agencies such as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration have long worked with state governments to collect and analyze data and share analyses that all levels of government and the private sector have used to inform where to focus and to find ways to improve. The federal government needs to identify and apply lessons from agencies to understand how to collect, store, analyze, and share data to support federal, state, and local decisions about where to focus and what to do.

- **How does and can the federal government collect, store, and share data to make it more useful for informing priorities and for improving outcomes, program operational quality, and public understanding of and trust in government both nationally and locally?**
- **How does, can, and should the federal government analyze the data it collects and return value-adding analyses to those on the front line in ways they find easy to use?**
- **How does and can the federal government help others do analyses that generate actionable insights without compromising privacy, risking identity theft, or revealing confidential business information?**
- **How does and can the federal government learn across its programs how to make data more useful to state, local, tribal and other units of government so they can better serve the American people?**
- **How does and can the federal government coordinate across federal programs to make information the federal government collects or funds others to collect more useful for realizing better outcomes at lower administrative costs?**

Communication, conversation, and community

Few successful companies develop products without gathering information from current and prospective customers about their needs and preferences. Few successful companies fail to test and assess to find better ways to market their products once developed. Most successful companies also communicate effectively with their suppliers and delivery

partners to identify operational glitches that need fixing and invite ideas for better approaches. Similarly, the federal government must find effective, cost-effective, equitable ways to communicate with its delivery partners and those the government serves and regulates. It must brainstorm with its delivery partners to identify more successful practices, cost-saving tools, etc., and facilitate continuous learning and improvement communities. Moreover, even though the government lacks the kind of revenue feedback private companies get when people like their products enough to buy them, the federal government benefits when it gathers frequent feedback to assess whether it is focusing on the right places and doing and producing the right things and to inform agile adjustments to support its government front-line delivery partners.

Federal agencies such as the [Agricultural Extension Service](#) and the National Weather Service have long found effective ways to communicate successfully to support the continual improvement efforts of its governmental and private sector partners. Recent surges in federal funding for state and local governments have caused many federal agencies to give much greater attention to their intergovernmental communication efforts to help governments apply for and better use grant funds, as is evident with the [Department of Transportation's Navigator site](#) and the [Housing and Services Partnership Accelerator](#) of the Departments of Health and Human Services and Housing and Urban Development.

- **How does and can the federal government understand the needs of its government delivery partners?**
- **How does and can the federal government get feedback on the systems it uses to collect and provide information to its government delivery partners?**
- **How does and can the federal government run evidence-informed conversations with its delivery partners that enable the federal government, states, localities, and other delivery partners to make better decisions to realize better outcomes, operational quality, and understanding of and trust in government?**

Funding and financing

The federal government partners financially with states and localities in many ways, sharing federally collected revenues with state, local, and other governments. It provides funding through grants that come in many shapes and sizes, varying in the time allowed for spending and the conditions associated with funding. The federal government also provides financial support through credit enhancements, including direct loans, loan guarantees, standby lines of credit, and tax credits. The federal government plays various financial roles for a variety of reasons. These reasons include equity and redistribution, with the federal government funding those with fewer resources to spend on important needs. These reasons also include risk sharing across places and time, with the federal government using various tools to pool and spread the risk that locals and even states may be unable to assume independently. When the federal government assumes this sort of credit role, it often reduces the cost of borrowing for public and public/private projects with great local benefits.

- **How does, can, and should the federal government support its intergovernmental partnership efforts with funding, financing support, and finance risk-sharing mechanisms?**

Motivation and accountability

The federal government has long used a variety of mechanisms to motivate those it funds to use federal funds intelligently to find ways to improve, decide where to focus, plan better, and assure accountability. Some of these mechanisms have worked well. Others, such as rewards for meeting specific targets, have not. Sometimes, these mechanisms have backfired, encouraging measurement manipulation or causing those being measured to get discouraged and drop out of improvement efforts. A more systematic effort is needed to learn from experience and experiments how the federal can effectively motivate continuous improvement and wise priority setting.

- **How does, can, and should the federal government use goals, data, analyses, and findings of well-designed trials, as well as other evidence, to motivate continuous improvement for better outcomes, not just compliance?**
- **How does, can, and should the federal government refrain from using data and evidence in ways that frustrate and discourage its state, local, and other governmental partners rather than help, inform and excite them?**