Improving Partnerships Between the Region’s Local Governments and the Federal Government

Intergovernmental Collaboration in The National Capital Region

Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments
Institute for Regional Excellence
Regional Executive Development Program – Cohort 7
August 2009

Intergovernmental Collaboration Team

Scott Berger – Loudoun County, Virginia
Ryan Davis – Falls Church, Virginia
David Lake – Montgomery County, Maryland
Katherine Murray – Fairfax County, Virginia
Jerilyn Polson – Fairfax County, Virginia

MWCOG Advisors

Lee Ruck
Nicole Hange
Contents

Executive Summary ................................................................. 2

Problem / Opportunity Definition ........................................ 4

Research and Analysis ............................................................ 6
  DataGathering......................................................................... 6
  Stakeholders........................................................................... 7
  Member Jurisdictions.............................................................. 8
  Alternatives............................................................................ 8
  Criteria.................................................................................... 10
  Alternatives/Criteria Matrix.................................................. 11
  Initial Recommendations..................................................... 11

Recommendations ................................................................. 14

Conclusion .............................................................................. 17

Appendix: Interview Questions .............................................. 20

Bibliography ............................................................................ 22
Executive Summary

Much of the area served by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG or COG) is covered by an area that is referred to as the National Capital Region (NCR). The NCR is unique in many ways; it is an urban/suburban area consisting of approximately six million people that is composed of portions of two states and the District of Columbia. It is the nation’s capital, and as such the Federal Government owns more properties, employs more people and contracts for more goods and services in this region than in any other region in the United States.

The federal presence in the NCR translates into the Federal Government being the economic driver in the region since it is the region’s largest employer and largest procurement market. Not only is the NCR dependent on the Federal Government, but also the Federal Government is dependent on the NCR and the local governments that comprise the MWCOG. The Federal Government is dependent on the local governments and their associated communities for its workforce, housing, transportation network, educational opportunities and related support systems. Accordingly, it is astonishing that there is no formal partnership between the Federal Government and the NCR local governments to coordinate planning, resource allocation, or even communication on issues that impact both of these entities.

Our project mission was to research opportunities to develop and promote a federal – local government partnership. We expanded this partnership to include state governments as well since the federal relationship with the states is well established, as is the local governments. To initiate this effort we needed to define ‘partnership’ since this may have different meanings to different people. For our purposes, we defined partnership to be opportunities to communicate, coordinate and collaborate on issues of mutual importance. It was felt by the project team that if a partnership could be established that it would improve the quality of life in the NCR for the benefit of all the citizens of the NCR, benefiting the Federal Government, state governments and the local governments.

The authority, resources, and capability to make such a partnership a reality already exist in the National Capital Region. What are needed are effective forums to promote dialogue, collaboration and decision-making among the multiple layers of government, policy making and resource allocation.

Our research found that there are three promising methods that could be developed to promote this partnership. They include:

1. Development of a Web 2.0 site (interactive networking internet site) associated with the MWCOG web page. Promote its use on the MWCOG website and through a regular MWCOG newsletter on NCR topics of interest.
2. Strengthen the MWCOG Intergovernmental Liaisons’ Committee. Promote an agenda on regional issues and cooperation in lobbying Congress, state legislators and local governments to achieve identified NCR benefits.

3. Encourage the formation of an NCR Congressional Caucus. This could be on the agenda for a luncheon or reception hosted by MWCOG to promote this concept and identify a sponsoring Congress member.

The circumstance for defining and implementing these forums for collaboration has never been more important than it is at this time. The political, social and technological opportunities that would promote such collaboration have never been aligned as they are now. The recent changes in the Federal political landscape combined with the economic crisis have opened the doors to collaborative problem solving between all levels of government, in ways that we have not seen previously. This opportunity has occurred at a time when computer-based networking is creating new forums for communication.

This report explores how the silos of existing government structures, at all levels, could be mitigated to promote collaboration between the federal, state and local governments to improve the quality of life in the National Capital Region and support the Federal Government’s effort to do the nation’s business.
Problem / Opportunity Definition

The Federal Government has a significant presence and influence on innumerable issues and actions in the National Capital Region, including recent issues such as federal facilities location, Metro dedicated funding, rail to Dulles, homeland security, and restoration of the Chesapeake Bay, among many others. Policies built on a true federal-regional partnership will benefit the federal interest in the National Capital Region, respect local and state responsibilities, leverage scarce resources, improve communication and coordination, and help achieve the founders vision of a world class capital on the banks of the Potomac River.

Comity, collaboration and compromise have not always fared well in the National Capital Region. Forums in which leaders from all sections gather to discuss issues of common interest and seek shared solutions are less frequently found. While many metropolitan regions have similar challenges, the presence of the Federal Government and its profound influence in shaping governance and setting the tone for public policy, makes the National Capital Region truly unique and heightens the importance of the collaborative effort. Yet, the Federal Government's relationship with the National Capital Region has an uneven history. Past attempts by Presidential administrations to appoint an advocate, liaison or spokesperson on National Capital Region matters have yielded mixed outcomes.

Opportunities for improved communication and collaboration include:

- **Workforce development and sustainability.** Over the next ten years, roughly 35% of the federal workforce will be of retirement age. To maintain continuity of operations, a coordinated and collaborative effort with the states and localities which house these jobs is essential. Key questions in this effort include: What would such a relationship entail and are there additional stakeholders who should be involved? Do the requirements of federal employment suggest specialized education which might be provided by the universities and community colleges of the Region? Can expanded use of federal internships or co-op programs with area high schools and higher education serve some of this need?

- **Workforce logistics:** The Federal Government is the single largest employer in the region with over ten percent of the total regional workforce. With congestion increasing, alternative working environments and scenarios are becoming more attractive with telework, shift work, and regional employment centers topping the list of functional possibilities. Would any one, or a combination, have a significant impact on congestion reduction. If so, what would need to be done, collaboratively, to maximize the benefits of employing such tactics? Would the private sector follow the federal lead in such efforts?
• **Homeland Security:** Since the terrorist attacks on 9-11, the Department of Defense has increased its security requirements on the buildings in which its employees are working by requiring a minimum standoff distance and controlled perimeter. At the same time, many of the jurisdictions in this region have subscribed to the notion of smart growth and reducing the footprint of development by promoting mixed-use development. How, if possible, could greater coordination between DoD and the region’s local governments rectify these two opposing standards.

The Federal footprint is undeniable in the National Capital Region. There are 271 federal departments and agencies and over 340,000 employees. In 2006 alone, the Federal Government spent $53.6 billion dollars in procurement in the region. The GSA leases 53,780,281 square feet of office space in the region, the equivalent to 934 football fields. The total rent for these spaces is $1.6 billion dollars (Cooley, 2007).

A 2007 report from the National Center for Smart Growth Research and Education chronicled the impact of the Federal Government. “There has been some quantification of the benefit the Federal Government’s presence can bring to a community. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has estimated that the average visitor to a federal office spends $18.58 while visiting the agency. That same study estimated that federal workers spend and average of $5,041 annually on retail goods and services in the community in which they work. The value of the presence of the federal workforce is magnified in metropolitan Washington where Federal Government workers comprise 12.4 percent of the workforce as a whole, and the Federal Government serves as a very significant anchor and driver of the local economy.” (Cooley, 2007) Applying the average dollars spent annually on retail goods and service to the number of federal workers in our region brings the total spent by federal workers to $1,713,940,000 dollars.

The number of federal employees is only part of the employment picture. The Federal Government contracts out a significant amount of its work. Accordingly, federal contractors can be added to the impact of the Federal Government on the National Capital Region.

Local governments in the National Capitol Region are in a unique position to establish collaborative relationships with the Federal Government and with one another for the mutual benefit of all. Local governments in the region have a forum for such partnership in The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOG). This forum provides a conduit for information and resource sharing which has the potential to yield great success stories. The state governments of Virginia and Maryland, and the District of Columbia government all participate in this organization; the Federal Government is generally not represented. Advocacy tends to be focused on each jurisdiction, minimizing the influence which might instead be combined and harnessed.
Improved collaboration with the Federal Government would enhance the success of federal and local endeavors alike. Instead of reacting to one another’s actions and missing opportunities, government leaders could be planning together to improve success rates, reduce costs, mitigate unintended consequences, and accelerate results. Opportunities would be created for information sharing, resource sharing and advocacy for the region.

The existence of the Metro rail system is a success story which illustrates the potential for regional cooperation to accomplish mutual goals. Leaders like Gilbert Hahn who had the courage to advocate for the region rather than simply for their individual localities were truly visionary in establishing the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority during an era of parochialism. Contrast that approach with the 2009 Stimulus Bill, in which localities had to submit shovel-ready project to their states, from whence the funds would be disbursed. Those dollars could be much more effective if they could be disbursed to regional centers for business and labor, like the New York Tri-State Area, the Los Angeles Area and the National Capitol Region. Regional collaboration presents the opportunity to maximize these dollars for the greater good, and where better to model such a regional approach than in the nation’s capitol?

MWCOG has regional goals, plans and expectations. This organization has proven itself to be superb at bringing localities together to develop such plans and reports. Implementation has apparently been a greater challenge. The alternatives under consideration for this project will inspire and facilitate regional advocacy as well as resource and information sharing, so the best plans can become reality.

Research and Analysis

Data Gathering

We researched background information, such as the Regional Transportation Plan on the MWCOG web site, journal articles and the web sites of regional organizations such as the National Association of Counties, the National Association of Regional Councils, and the Brookings Institution, etc., as well as other examples of past regional cooperation.

Most government stakeholders were being pulled in the direction of budget cutting and stimulus funding during our project development period, making it difficult to interview them about their perspectives and preferences on this issue. However, we were able to speak to representatives of major stakeholder groups (federal elected official, Congressional staff, local government intergovernmental liaisons, etc.) to interview them on their perspectives on a federal-local government partnership. As a result of our interview process we were able to better understand their perspectives on support for a federal-local government partnership, their reaction to our initial suggestions and and the potential existence of other alternatives that we had not considered.
The project group also studied networking web sites (web 2.0) that model the forum we envision for the NCR Web. Govloop is a good example, particularly because it has a professional focus on government policy and a few discussions in progress already about using technology to improve collaboration between government organizations.

Stakeholders

A key element in addressing an issue/opportunity such as this is the importance of understanding the key stakeholders. The project team interviewed a cross section of stakeholders, in order to understand the current situation, past efforts, and the potential for strengthening partnerships in the region. We have proposed alternatives which allow the stakeholders to advocate for their own jurisdiction as well as the region. We believe these alternatives demonstrate to localities that there is a clear benefit to focusing on regional priorities. Key stakeholder groups included. Federal Government leaders in Congress, elected to represent constituents in MWCOG jurisdictions

- Federal executive agencies working on issues of high interest to the region, such as DOE, EPA and Homeland Security
- State government leaders, executives and agency managers
- Local government elected officials, executives and agency managers
- Citizens, business and property owners in the NCR
Member Jurisdictions

District of Columbia:

Maryland:

Virginia:

Alternatives

The project team considered a wide range of alternative actions to improve collaboration in the National Capital Region. The alternatives include actions both in the direct control of the MWCOG member jurisdictions and those the members can merely influence. These alternatives were the result of consultation with our sponsor and initial interviews with key members of MWCOG.

1. Form a Congressional NCR Caucus: A caucus is an informal group of members sharing an interest in the same policy issues. Caucuses exist in the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate. MWCOG and congressional sources have informed us that a caucus for the National Capitol Region used to exist, but we have been unable to locate any evidence or information about such a group thus far in our research. A member of the chamber would have to initiate establishment of a caucus. We focused on the House because of their district representation, as opposed to the Senate in which members represent their respective states as a whole.

2. NCR Collaboration Web Site: Sponsored and administered by MWCOG, this web 2.0 vision would facilitate as much or as little collaboration as participants desire. This portal would announce initiatives, propose ideas, report on regional studies, and encourage dialog on specific issues of interest.

3. NCR Newsletter: This would be a published vehicle to communicate across government bodies about issues of common interest. MWCOG
would produce and distribute the newsletter to member governments as well as Federal Government representatives. The project group would contribute issues and articles to the first of these newsletters. A variation on this alternative is to make this an electronic newsletter published on the COG web site, or on the new site suggested by alternative #2 above. Congressional members would be alerted to each new issue via email with an embedded link to the newsletter.

4. **Host a Luncheon**: MWCOG proposes to host a luncheon for Congressional members who represent COG member jurisdictions. This event would present an opportunity to bring members up to date on issues of common interest to everyone in the region. The occasion could be utilized to solicit member suggestions for issues and initiatives for future collaboration. A variation on this would be to host an event on Capitol Hill (Breakfast, Brunch, Lunch) to announce one or more of the proposed alternatives. For example, we might demonstrate the new web site or distribute the first newsletter at this event.

5. **Ride on Existing Organizations**: In addition to MWCOG, The National Association of Counties (NACo) and at least one congressional Committee (House Committee on Government Reform and Oversight) includes collaboration between government entities in its organizational goals. NACo has a stated 2008-09 goal to “bring back the partnership” for the NCR. It may be more efficient for MWCOG to offer assistance to one of these organizations, rather than initiate a new forum.

6. **Issue-based Approach**: Encourage collaborative groups to assemble around a specific issue of common interest. For example, cleaning up the Chesapeake Bay is an issue of common interest across the region, and one that requires cooperative efforts at all level of government to succeed. We might identify a handful of these high interest issues, and facilitate establishment of multiple forums for NCR collaboration around each issue.

7. **Do Nothing**: This was included in our alternatives analysis to determine if this alternative provided any discernable benefits over other options that we considered.
Criteria

The criteria for evaluating alternatives were partially established through discussions with our sponsors, interviews with members of MWCOG and best practices research. The criteria were also informed by the definition of the opportunity and the history of the key stakeholders. A matrix was created to assist in the evaluation of the alternatives based on the criteria found to be most important to the stakeholders of this report.

1. **Sustainable**: The outcome must be sustainable over the long term, so that as issues arise and priorities change, regional collaboration will help bring about regional solutions. A successful alternative would also be sustainable through changes in leadership.

2. **Forum for Regional Issues**: The outcome must provide a safe common ground for information sharing, dialog and planning.

3. **Creates Resource Sharing Opportunities**: The outcome must enable jurisdictions to investigate and attempt the sharing of resources, in the form of expertise and experience, human resources or funding. We are aware that this criteria hints at the complexities of intergovernmental contracts and creation of regional authorities. Such formal legal agreements are beyond the scope of this project, but a successful alternative would yield an outcome that opens the doors to such agreements where such action is mutually desired.

4. **Serves Constituencies**: Elected officials and government employees are public servants first and foremost. Any regional collaboration would have to show a demonstrable benefit to the constituents of our stakeholders.

5. **Political Viability**: Political realities are more concentrated in the NCR than anywhere else in the nation. The recommended alternative(s) must be practical, but also at least politically neutral, if not politically beneficial to our stakeholders.

6. **Local Participation**: Local jurisdictions must be likely to participate in the recommended action.

7. **State Participation**: Maryland, Virginia and DC must be likely to participate in the recommended action.

8. **Federal Participation**: Federal representatives must be likely to participate in the recommended action.
Alternatives/Criteria Matrix

The matrix below summarizes the results of our analysis. Each alternative course of action was evaluated on the basis of its potential impact on the criteria. The high (H), medium (M), and low (L) rankings represent the team’s estimation of the impact of the alternative (A1-A7) on the various criteria (C1-C8).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>C1</th>
<th>C2</th>
<th>C3</th>
<th>C4</th>
<th>C5</th>
<th>C6</th>
<th>C7</th>
<th>C8</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A1 Caucus</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A2 Web</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A3 News</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A4 Lunch</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5 Orgs</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6 Issues</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>H</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>H</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7 Nothing</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>L</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

KEY: H High   M Medium   L Low

Initial Findings

As a result of our data gathering and analysis, the project group began to focus on two complementary alternatives which combine the strengths of five of our seven alternatives and minimize their risks. These initial findings were subjected to additional analysis by the team which led to the three final recommendations identified later in the report. The two areas identified as initial priorities were:

1. **NCR Caucus**: MWCOG and ICMA both list this among their priorities this year, and the new Congress and Administration may present a timely opportunity. Only a member of Congress can initiate the establishment of a new caucus, and newer members are discouraged from taking such bold initiative. Based on our research we feel that MWCOG Staff are best positioned to assist with the presentation of this concept to the Congressional members and/or staff, perhaps making it a luncheon or other type of reception.
2. **NCR Web**: We believe the web 2.0 alternative takes the MWCOG suggestion of a Newsletter, and moves it into the 21st Century, so it can facilitate dialog and multilateral information sharing. This option also offers an opportunity for stakeholders to focus only on specific issues of interest at any given time. We recommend the MWCOG Staff would create the first “issue” together in an interactive format, and invite stakeholders to participate via an email link to the site. Given the relative newness of Web 2.0, we conducted significant research into the concept and its applicability and feasibility in supporting efforts to build government collaboration. Some of our findings are summarized below.

**Web 2.0 Research**

The definition of Web 2.0 is nebulous at best due to its very nature, but even as it evolves with new invention and use there are unifying features. Web 2.0 refers to an internet-based resource where the user is the primary source of content. That content can range from photos and images, to taste and emotion, to contact (business, social, and otherwise), and rating, reputation and feedback. The key resource for Web 2.0 is not technical, such as computer resources or webpage designers; rather it is the richness of the content provided by the users.

Web 2.0 examples abound on the internet and any list compiled will suffer obsolescence within hours but David Osimo categorizes Web 2.0 sites into four functional classifications in his report for JRC Scientific and Technical Reports: Content, Taste/Emotion, Contacts, Reputation/Feedback. Content sites concentrate on a user’s personal knowledge base (wikis or blogs) or other data such as images (Flickr, Picasa). This content then adds to the universe of knowledge found on that site. Taste or Emotional sites aggregate a user’s tastes in websites (del.ii.rious) or music (Last.fm). Users can then explore the musical or web preferences of other users. Web 2.0 applications take advantage of the computer’s ability to process large quantities of data while allowing humans to interact and share that data.

Governments and government agencies are discovering that Web 2.0 applications can enhance their interaction with their constituents, increase the efficacy of programs, and save resources. During his successful presidential campaign, President Obama found the ability to deliver his message directly to voters and the ability to collect email addresses by the millions were powerful advantages over his opponents. With these tools, he forever changed the way political campaigns are run. Such a powerful example has not gone unnoticed and Web 2.0 applications are appearing in greater number at all levels of government.

In 2007 the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) opened the review of patents to the public through a Web 2.0 program called Peer-to-Patent, or p2patent. The business community observed that patent examiners were
overwhelmed by the numbers of patent applications and this lead to the
deteriorated quality of the patents issued. The business community asserted that
poorer patents lead to ambiguity in patents which in turn lead to more lawsuits.
More lawsuits deteriorate the business environment. Peer-to-Patent is designed
to improve the quality of patents issued by giving the patent examiner better
information. That information comes from an “open peer review” where a
community of experts views and evaluates prospective patent applications, offers
professional evaluation, and provides research in favor of, or against the patent.
Peer-to-Patent fosters citizen engagement by allowing experts to have a voice in
the patent process, improves transparency in the patent application process,
broadens the base of expertise at the USPTO, saves time and money by placing
some of the burden of evaluation back on the business community, and
courages dialog among experts (NY Law School article).

In April 2006, U.S. intelligence agencies began collaborating on a Web 2.0
application called Intellipedia. This application is simple in that it allows tens of
thousands of members of different agencies, in different building, sometimes
separated by thousands of miles, to share data that may lead to useful
intelligence. The format of Intellipedia is unimportant: It is similar to the website,
Wikipedia. The value of Intellipedia is that it creates a virtual forum which greatly
enhances the intelligence community’s ability to maximize resources, share
ideas, and produce a more comprehensive intelligence product. Dr. D. Calvin
Andrus, of the CIA’s Office of Application Services claims that the compression of
the “intelligence – decision – implementation” cycle down to as little as fifteen
minutes, gives the United States an advantage over adversaries. Dr. Andrus
writes in The Wiki and the Blog that, “We must transform the Intelligence
Community into a community that dynamically reinvents itself by continuously
learning and adapting as the national security environment changes.” (Andrus,
2005). This application solves a problem endemic in governments around the
world: It breaks down the proverbial silo. It fills the collaboration vacuum created
when multiple federal agencies are created and then compelled to cooperate.

The impact of Web 2.0 on governments at every level can be significant.
Benefits range from providing a centralized source for opinions, such as is done
on patientopinion.org.uk, where stakeholders post opinions about healthcare
providers and facilities, to allowing the U.S. Intelligence community to share
critical data among disparate agencies. Web 2.0 applications have the potential
to save money as with Peer-to-Patent, increase participation in government as
with the Petition.gov.uk, where users participate in, and create petitions, and to
provide crucial data sharing opportunities as in the Intellipedia example. Experts
volunteer their time and create a virtual community to provide research useful to
the patent reviewer, thus saving the USPTO time and expense.

The primary step in developing and fostering collaboration between the local
governments in the National Capital Region and the Federal Government is to
develop and foster lines of communication between the groups. Given the
complexities of the Federal Government and the disparate nature of (not to
mention distances between) the COG constituent governments, a physical forum for communications may be impractical at best, but a virtual forum with an unerring memory for detail that is available at any time may not only be preferable, but may be the only opportunity for true collaboration. Web 2.0 applications are not new. They are not experimental. Their use is not uncommon in government. What is novel is how we employ this technology to achieve the goal of improving collaboration between the local governments of the National Capital Region and the Federal Government.

Final Recommendations

The culmination of our research and analysis was the recommendation of three specific courses of action which we believe will most effectively and efficiently promote a successful federal-local government partnership. These actions are:

1. Develop MWCOGNet

Our initial recommendation is to launch a Web 2.0 site that we have named “MWCOGNet”. In order to achieve collaboration and subsequently partnership, there must be a forum for communication. A Web 2.0 application is the ideal vehicle to achieve this. Simply stated, a Web 2.0 application is a site on the Internet that relies upon the users to generate content through formats such as discussion boards.

By leveraging this type of online asset, various components and levels of government can share information, ideas and solutions without the constraints of having to schedule meetings, travel to a meeting location or even knowing who to talk to on a given topic. The communication on any relevant topic occurs on-line from the convenience of your computer.

President Obama wielded his web presence effectively in last Fall’s election. It served as clarion to others in the political world that online participation is an effective way to communicate with your constituency, raise money, and serve as a conduit for grassroots movements. Some members of congress have embraced Web 2.0 with both hands. Claire McCaskill, of Missouri keeps her constituents up to date with a constant stream of Twitters and Nancy Pelosi of California maintains her own blog.

The MWCOGnet would serve as a sounding board for County and City Administration-level participants, along with COG participants and would be limited in membership. One major advantage of the MWCOGnet is cost. There are free methods of hosting a permanent, secure online discussion. Participation could be very high if “marketed” well. A major risk of this recommendation is that, if it is not well publicized and not well attended by decision-makers, it will not get the attention of the Federal Government. There
may be generational obstacles to this action, as well. Younger people feel more comfortable with Web 2.0 forums and older people may feel uncomfortable with it.

Based on our research we believe COG can easily initiate this site as an adjunct to its existing web site. COG would administer the site; restricting the participation on the site to government officials to ensure the content remains relevant to public policy issues.

In summary, the MWCOGNet site will:

- Provide discussion boards
- Be issue driven
- Provide for file sharing
- Provide an opportunity to store and retrieve best practices
- Enhance project management
- Be a vehicle to address other issues/solutions

2. Strengthen NCR Federal Liaisons

During the interviews with MWCOG members an additional alternative was raised by one of the stakeholders. This stakeholder’s experience in both Federal and local government provided a unique perspective into how the established operations of the local governments might further benefit them in collaboration with the Federal Government.

Many of the NCR jurisdictions have had success over the years lobbying their state legislators and locally elected members of Congress; the District also lobbies committees and subcommittees of Congress due to their unique relationship with Congress. However, while jurisdictions have experience lobbying for their own interests, there is little experience in joining with other jurisdictions to work together on regional issues.

Examples of local governments lobbying on their own include Prince George’s County lobbying the Maryland state legislature to secure the right to use speed cameras in their jurisdiction. Another example is when Fairfax County lobbied the Virginia state legislature to retain their powers of eminent domain. Both of these public policies have benefits for other jurisdictions in their respective states. Each of these counties may have benefited by including other jurisdictions in their lobbying efforts. Accordingly, there are opportunities for the NCR for regional cooperation in lobbying of the Federal Government. Presently, COG members have an Intergovernmental Liaison Committee that could be strengthened to effectively coordinate their efforts to
bring NCR issues to federal legislative and regulatory bodies. We are recommending COG initiate these actions to promote the effectiveness of the existing federal liaison committee at COG.

In summary, promotion the NCR Federal Liaisons will:

- Allocate time from the existing intergovernmental liaisons for regional issues
- Lobby with a single voice for regional issues
- Improve coordination of federal funds allocated to the region
- Rally federal support for regional goals

3. Promote the NCR Congressional Caucus

Our final recommendation is to encourage the development and support of a NCR Congressional Caucus. Congressional caucuses exist to support many special interests in Congress, bringing together members who support a common cause. Our research has shown that even though the federal presence in the NCR is unique in the nation, no Congressional caucus exists to promote the coordination of federal interests in the NCR. An NCR Caucus would allow COG member jurisdictions to raise and to respond to issues in a forum where the participants are empowered to influence federal policies and funding. The Caucus piece of our multi-tiered proposal focuses on Congress, a unique and powerful partner in the NCR.

The challenge to encouraging the formation of an NCR Caucus is that only members of Congress can create a Congressional caucus. COG staff has expressed an interest in hosting a luncheon for members for Congress from the NCR and we believe that this topic should be on their agenda. An NCR Caucus would be valuable in promoting collaboration with local jurisdictions on NCR issues.

Part of the problem with attaining cooperation between the Federal Government and COG is that there is no actual forum for discussing regional issues. COG may have working relationships with individual members of congress or with members of the federal bureaucracy, but addressing complex issues, such as military base relocation and closing, or coordination of emergency services requires participation of representatives from various jurisdictions and from various federal programs. A National Capitol Region Congressional (NCRC) Caucus would allow COG to raise issues in a forum where the audience not only can influence policy, but also holds the purse strings. The NCRC Caucus would allow members of Congress to concentrate on regional issues by virtue of having them all in the same room. There are expansive opportunities for information and resource sharing.
among members of Congress, but unless COG and the states have a seat at the table, this recommendation may not lead to the desired level of collaboration. The advantage of this recommendation is that, if successful, the participants have the resources necessary to change ideas into action. The disadvantage is that COG is not a member of Congress and may be excluded from the discussion. Additionally, some local members of congress are not enthusiastic about the concept, while others, who would support the Caucus, do not have the political clout to bring it forward.

In summary, Promotion of the NCR Congressional Caucus will:

- Provide a forum to raise and respond to issues where participants are empowered to act
- Provide opportunities to partner with organizations like the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) to address urban issues
- Focus attention on and prioritize regional (NCR) issues

**Conclusion**

The topic of this policy project was initially improving partnerships between the region’s local governments and the Federal Government. The project team was charged with coming up with strategies to engage the new President and Congress to work more effectively as partners in the National Capital Region. Specific goals were:

1. Understand the unique roles and complexities of the Federal Government in the National Capital Region
2. Identify opportunities for renewed federal-regional partnership in the National Capital Region through collaboration between the Federal Government and the public, education, business and civic sectors
3. Recommend specific ways the President and Congress can build on historic roles to address the challenges and opportunities facing the NCR as home of the Federal Government

Research revealed an uneven track record of federal-local partnerships, and it became apparent that state governments need to be engaged in such collaborative efforts as well if there is to be any chance at success. Another key factor to success in the past has been strong leadership which embraces the value of regional collaboration, and likewise, deterioration of partnerships occurred when there were changes in leadership. Thus the objectives were redefined as seeking sustainable intergovernmental collaboration to improve efficiency and outcomes across all levels and jurisdictions in the region.
Alternatives were thus weighed against the following criteria for success in light of this broader vision:

1. Sustainability
2. Regional focus
3. Opportunities for resource sharing, dialog and planning
4. Benefit to constituencies
5. Politically viable
6. Participation by local, state and federal stakeholders

The Web 2.0 solution, MWCOGNet, promises to be sustainable over the long term, regardless of changes in leadership. Being administered and supported by MWCOG, where staff are non-partisan and not affiliated with any particular department, branch, or jurisdiction of government. Furthermore, promoting and facilitating regional collaboration is at the heart of the MWCOG mission. Implementation and maintenance are expected to be manageable by reallocating existing resources, and such a reallocation has the support of MWCOG IT staff and member governments which fund the organization. Many elected officials and their support staff are already creating and participating in similar networks to help them in their work. Interviews indicated strong interest in participating in such a regional forum from a cross section of individuals at the local, state and federal levels.

The Congressional NCR Caucus recommendation would seize the timely opportunity of new executive and congressional leadership by providing informal opportunities for elected officials to discuss issues of common interest and seek common ground and mediate compromise as representatives of the region. MWCOG can promote the Caucus by reminding members that what is good for each congressional district in this region is whatever is best for the entire region because of our symbiotic relationship. History has demonstrated that the informal nature of a caucus and the changing agendas of elected officials have made it very difficult to sustain. MWCOG can only be the voice that stands ready to support and encourage a caucus. MWCOGNet has the potential to become a helpful tool for NCR Caucus members and congressional staff to identify, define and prioritize issues, and to solicit input from state and local representatives as legislative solutions are explored.

The MWCOG Intergovernmental Liaisons Committee seeks to coordinate the efforts of individual jurisdictions as they set legislative agendas and send lobbyists and other representatives to speak to those agendas. These individuals also connect the local jurisdictions to federal and state agencies for
the same purpose. We propose to include these representatives as participants in MWCOGNet as yet another way to facilitate ongoing communication and collaboration. We ask that these representatives allocate time specifically to collaborate on regional policy issues, so that we might speak with a single voice when possible.

Our citizens want better and smarter government. They demand that government employees and elected officials find ways to economize while performing at higher levels to serve them. This three-pronged solution is sustainable, economical, has high potential for participation, and therefore for success. Furthermore, the timing is excellent. Federal, state and local governments need to combine resources and seek collaborative solutions now more than ever before, and the new batch of elected officials and their appointees have a mandate for collaboration, engagement and enhanced use of technology. Federal, state and local elected officials would benefit because their constituents are being served. The Federal Government benefits from the success of the region that provides its infrastructure and work force. The Maryland and Virginia governments benefit because their economic wealth is concentrated and dependent upon the portion of these states that lies within the Metropolitan Washington Area. The District and local governments benefit from engagement in the process of finding appropriate solutions that work well and are needed by the people and businesses that make our communities one of the best places in the nation to live, work and play.
Appendix: Interview Questions

1. A basic premise of our project is that increased collaboration between all levels of government in the National Capitol Region (NCR) would be beneficial to all stakeholders. Do you agree with this premise? What importance would you attach to the value of such collaborative efforts?

2. From your perspective as a former local elected official and active member of the Metropolitan Washington council of Governments (MWCOG), what would be the ideal partnership/collaboration configuration between your local jurisdiction and the Federal Government? What would success look like?

3. What types of projects or programs do you see as opportunities for local governments to interact with the Federal Government?

4. What successes or failures have you experienced collaborating between levels of government?

5. Political and economic climates often affect the value placed on issues as well as approaches to address them. Are there any circumstances under which the importance of intergovernmental collaboration is increased, particularly federal/local efforts? How would you judge the timing of this project in light of the current climate?

6. Do you think closer collaboration between MWCOG constituents and the Federal Government would cause friction between those constituents and their state governments?

7. What do you see as the biggest challenges to a federal/local partnership in the NCR?

8. Are you aware of any past successes or failures of intergovernmental partnerships from which we could learn?

9. What form of partnership or collaboration do you think would be most likely to succeed and offer the best chance of sustainability? Is there an existing forum where this issue belongs or should it be a new initiative?

10. Who do you see as essential members of the ideal partnership?

   Congress?
   President and/or cabinet members?
   Federal Agencies?
   MWCOG?
   ICMA?
   Virginia, Maryland & DC elected leaders?
National Capitol Planning Commission?
Others?
Bibliography


Connelly, G (2009, April 6). Representatives 11th District of Virginia. Interview


Gross, P, Mason District Supervisor, Fairfax County Board of Supervisors. Interview


Interview: Erin Hromada, History and Preservation Archivist, Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives, January 13, 2009


Morningstar, S. Federal Liaison, Montgomery County Office of Intergovernmental Relations

MWCOG American Recovery & Reinvestment Act (ARRA) Regional Information Center Retrieved May 9, 2009 from http://www.mwcog.org/publications/recovery/


Salmon, M. Lobbyist and resident of Prince William County


Wenger, M. Director Montgomery County Office of Intergovernmental Relations