



Regional Report

Volume Three • Number Four
April 2006

Local Governments Sharing Services Across Our Region

CREDITS

Research Funders

Helen Bader Foundation
Lynde and Harry Bradley Foundation
Richard and Ethel Herzfeld Foundation

Study authors

Anneliese Dickman, J.D.
Researcher
James L. Robinson, Jr.
Research Associate

Research assistance

Jeffrey K. Schmidt
Researcher
Dan Nedset
Research Intern

Jeffrey C. Browne
President

Ryan Horton, M.U.P.
Researcher

Jerry Slaske
Communications Director

Catherine A. Crother
Office Manager



633 W. Wisconsin Ave., Suite 406
Milwaukee, WI 53203
www.publicpolicyforum.org
Phone (414) 276-8240

In today's world of budget deficits and tax cuts, local governments have few viable options to cut costs while maintaining quality of service. Municipal collaboration appears to be a practical solution. By working together, municipalities may be able to maintain or improve the quality of service and reduce costs at the same time.

In an effort to create an inventory of intergovernmental cooperative service agreements in southeastern Wisconsin, the Forum surveyed municipal leaders across the region. Our findings indicate that while many shared service agreements exist, not enough is known about them. Without better publicity and record-keeping, the result could be redundant or inefficient service agreements.

Key Findings

- Among the 63 municipalities responding, there are approximately 145 different shared service agreements (Table 1).
- 23 respondents have agreements with one other municipality, while the majority have agreements with more than one municipality (Chart 1).
- 11 respondents report having four agreements with other municipalities and three respondents each report having one shared service agreement (Chart 2).
- Fire protection, emergency services, and libraries are the most frequently shared services in the region (Chart 3).

Chart 1

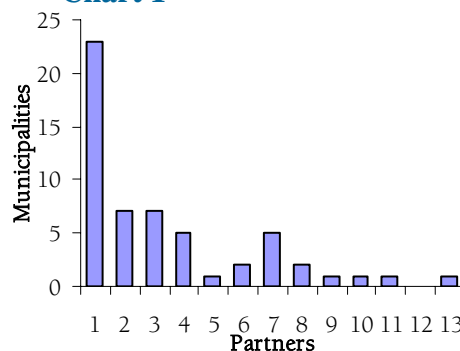
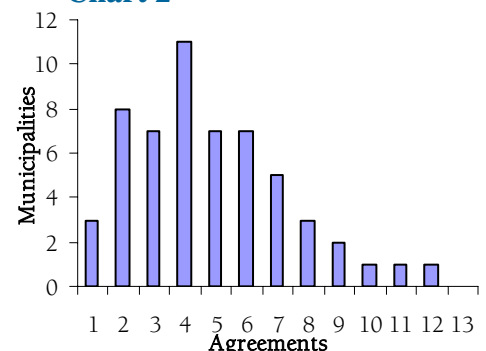


Chart 2



One Region

Table 1: Number of Shared Service Agreements in Each County

* = county wide service	Kenosha	Milwaukee	Ozaukee	Racine	Walworth	Washington	Waukesha
Fire Protection	3	1*	4	2	10	2	7
Emergency Services	1*	1*	6	3	9	2	6*
Libraries	1*	1*	1*	1	1*	1*	1*
Law Enforcement	2	1*	3	3	3	1	4
Animal Control	1	1*	1	1	1	1	1*
Public Health		6	2	4		1	1*
Recreation & Culture		1	2	1	2		4
Recycling	1	1*	1		1		4
Procurement		3	3		1		1
Public Transportation			1*			1	2
Solid Waste Collection & Disposal		1	2		1		1
Youth Services		1					2
Human Services	1		1			1	
Public Housing							1
Human Resources		1					

Methodology

The Forum emailed an invitation to all county executives or administrators; city mayors or managers; village presidents, managers, or administrators; and town clerks in southeastern Wisconsin to participate in an online survey. Three emails were sent: the first went to the entire list of 175 individuals; the second went to the individuals who had not yet completed the survey; and the third to individuals from counties or municipalities that had not yet responded to the survey but had been identified by another survey respondent as being in a service agreement with another county or municipality.

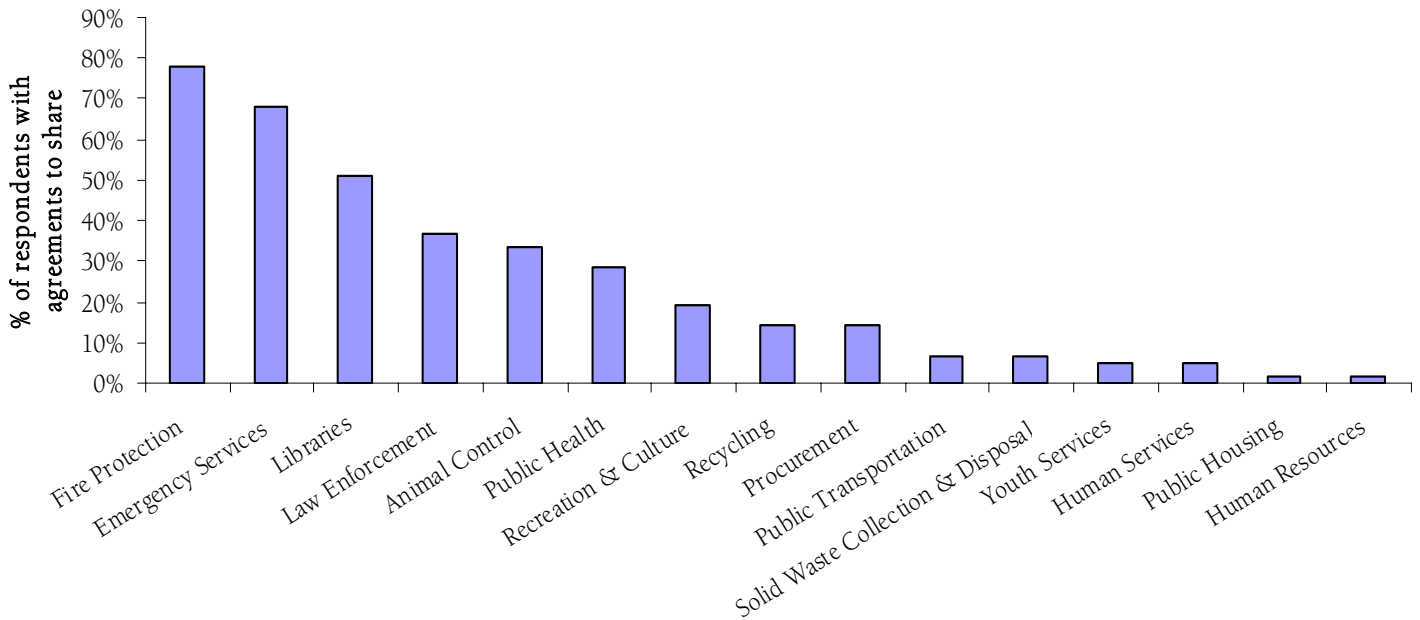
Sixty-nine surveys were completed. After combining duplicates, 26 of 63 towns, 24 of 55 villages, 10 of 29 cities and 3 of 7 counties, Kenosha, Ozaukee and Waukesha, participated in the survey, yielding a total of 63 valid responses.

Respondents

- Walworth County: 15 of 27 municipalities (16 towns, 7 villages, 4 cities) completed the survey, giving a county participation rate of 56%, representing 23% of all responses.
- Milwaukee County: 12 of 19 municipalities (9 villages, 10 cities) completed the survey, yielding the region’s highest county participation rate, 63%, representing 19% of all responses.
- Ozaukee County: 6 of 14 municipalities (6 towns, 5 villages, 3 cities) participated in the survey for a county participation rate of 43%, representing 10% of all responses.
- Racine County: 7 of 18 municipalities (9 towns, 7 villages, 2 cities) responded for a county participation rate of 39%, or 11% of all responses.
- Kenosha County: 4 of 12 municipalities (7 towns, 4 villages, and 1 city) responded for a county participation rate of 33%, or 6% of all responses.
- Waukesha County: 12 of 37 municipalities (12 towns, 18 villages, 7 cities) for a county participation rate of 32%, representing 19% of all responses.
- Washington County: 4 of 20 municipalities (13 towns, 5 villages, 2 cities) for a participation rate of 20%, representing 6% of all responses.

One Future

Chart 3: Types of Services Shared in Southeastern Wisconsin



Results

Charts 1 and 2 on the first page illustrate the wide variance in the number of agreements each municipality has and the number of parties to those agreements. Our average respondent has 4.8 agreements with 3.4 partners. The average agreement is between 1.4 parties.

Chart 3 demonstrates the scope to which certain services are being shared by municipalities across the region. Fire protection, which 78% of respondents share with at least one other municipality, is the most shared service, followed by emergency services, shared by 69% of survey respondents.

Library services, shared by 51% of respondents; law enforcement, shared by 37% of respondents; and animal control, shared by 34% of respondents, are, like fire protection and emergency services, shared by municipalities in every county (Table 1).

The least-shared services are human resources and public housing; only one municipality reported sharing each of these services.

Conclusions

Our survey represents the best available data on the extent of shared service agreements in southeastern Wisconsin. Our survey respondents reported more cooperative agreements than are reported on the Wisconsin Department of Revenue's voluntary annual survey. Unfortunately, we suspect there are even more agreements that municipal leaders overlooked when responding to our survey. In addition, very few survey respondents were able to provide real numbers when asked about cost savings as a result of their agreements.

This gap in the data is unfortunate. An inventory of all the shared service agreements in the region would be beneficial to municipal leaders for several reasons. Policymakers would not have to re-invent the wheel each time they proposed a new agreement—existing agreements could serve as models. Moreover, leaders in jurisdictions neighboring those with existing agreements might be more inclined to join in the sharing or cooperation rather than go it alone. Finally, taxpayers and citizens would be better served by having more information on the efficacy of these agreements.

One Region

Regional Agreements to Share Services: A Call to Action

Why aren't more municipalities in our region able to enumerate their various agreements to share services? Perhaps many agreements have been in place for so long they no longer seem like regional cooperation—viewed now as governance as usual and no longer recognized when local leaders are asked about cross-jurisdictional collaboration. This is arguably a positive result of intergovernmental cooperation.

However, even as regional cooperation becomes more routine, we recommend local leaders publicize and monitor their agreements with other jurisdictions. Success stories should be shared, celebrated, and duplicated, while lessons should be learned from ineffectual programs. The Forum challenges local policymakers to evaluate their existing intergovernmental agreements, catalogue them, and share their results, good or bad. Future cooperation can be better achieved once we have an understanding of where we are today.

The Public Policy Forum is facilitating creation of a shared vision action plan for regional cooperation in southeastern Wisconsin based on research and analysis. The Forum will encourage the region to think and act in ways that promote its long-term economic and social health, including . . .

- Developing a Southeastern Wisconsin Leadership Network;
- Establishing priorities for regional action;
- Making the case to citizens that regional cooperation is vital to our future;
- Benchmarking progress toward the shared vision.

The Forum is seeking partners to support its effort. If you would like to participate, provide leadership, receive our reports via email, or offer financial support, please contact:

Jeffrey C. Browne
President, Public Policy Forum
414-276-8240
jcbrowne@publicpolicyforum.org

Acting regionally on issues that are regional in nature is in our economic and social long-term interest.

For more information about the Public Policy Forum and its work, please go to our web site:
www.publicpolicyforum.org.