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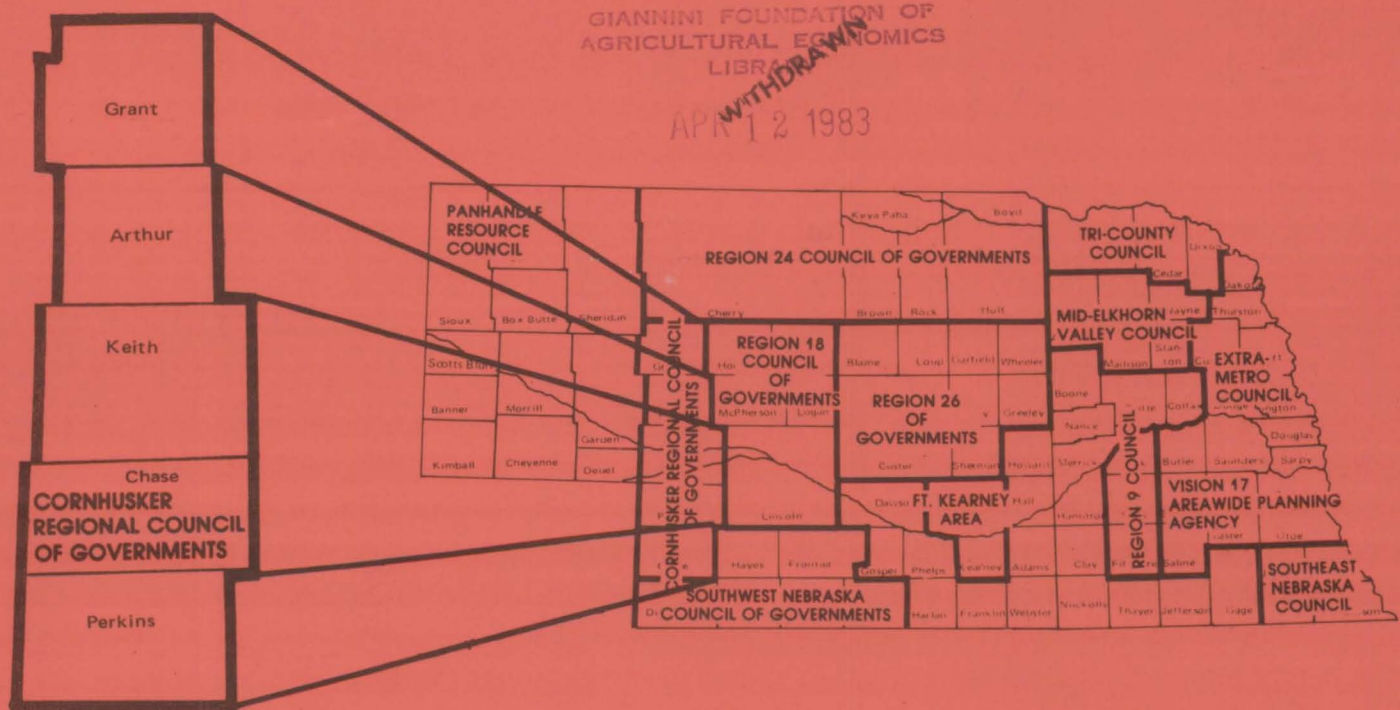
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LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND THE CORNHUSKER REGIONAL COUNCIL

AN EXAMINATION OF SELECTED INTERACTIONS



By

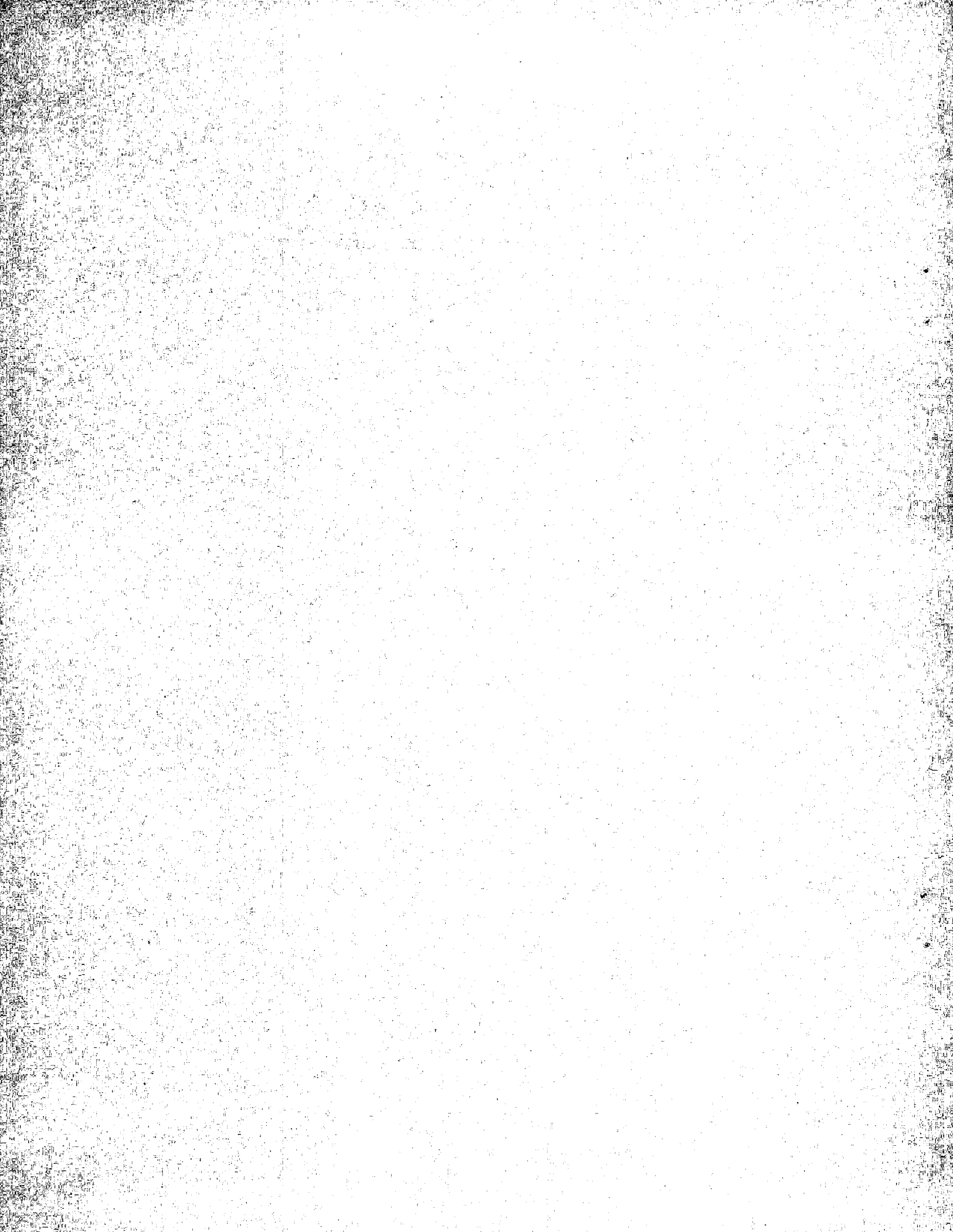
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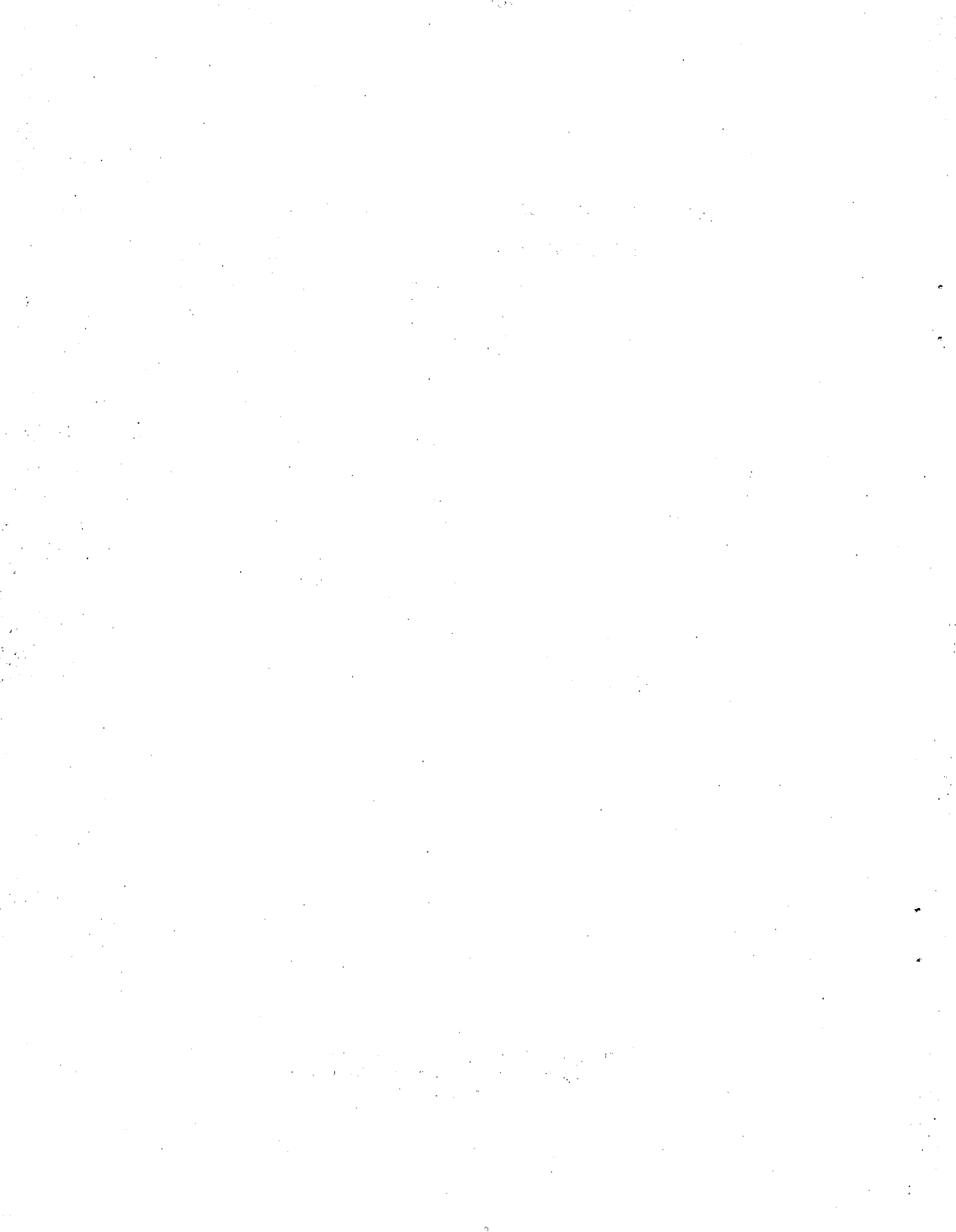


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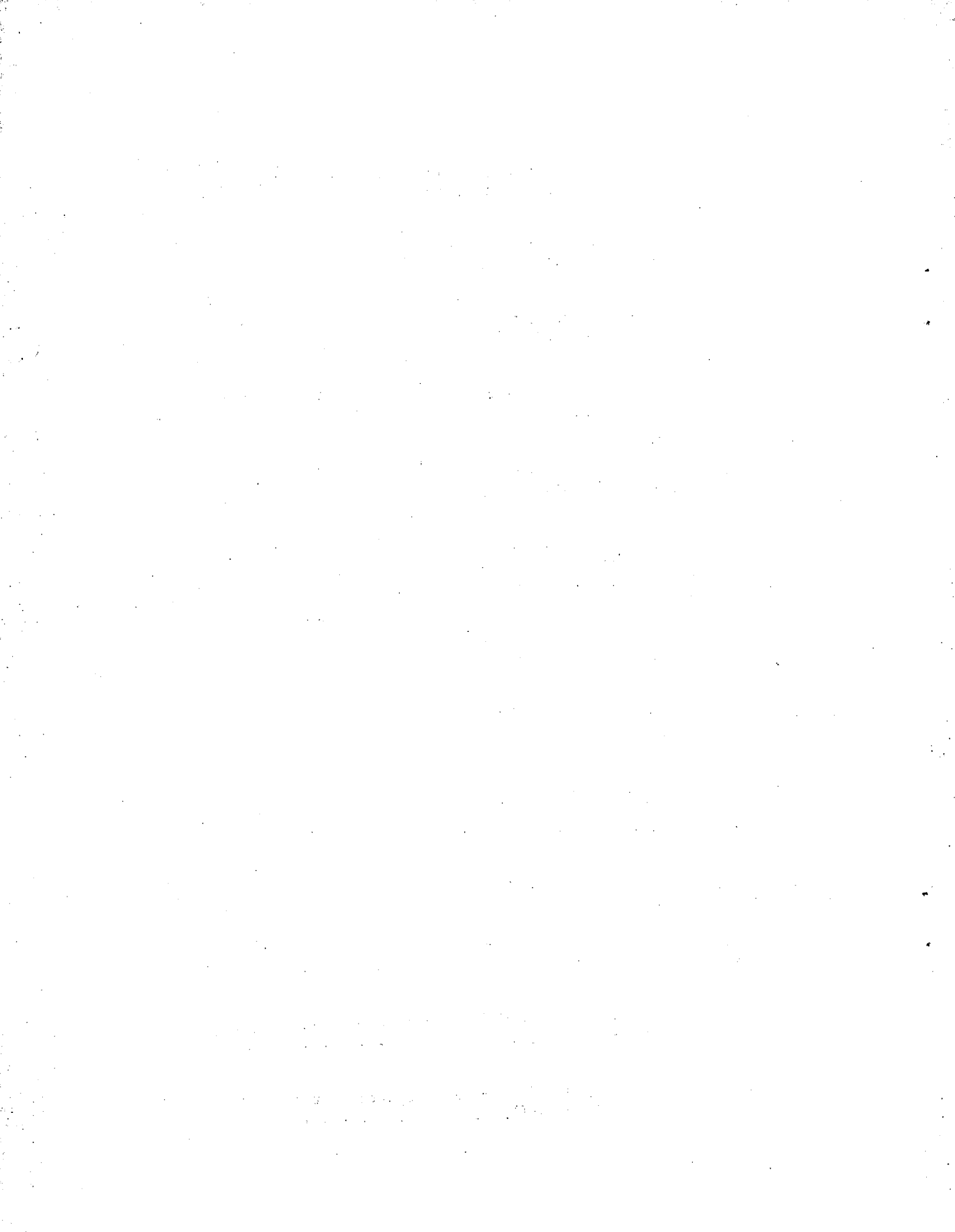
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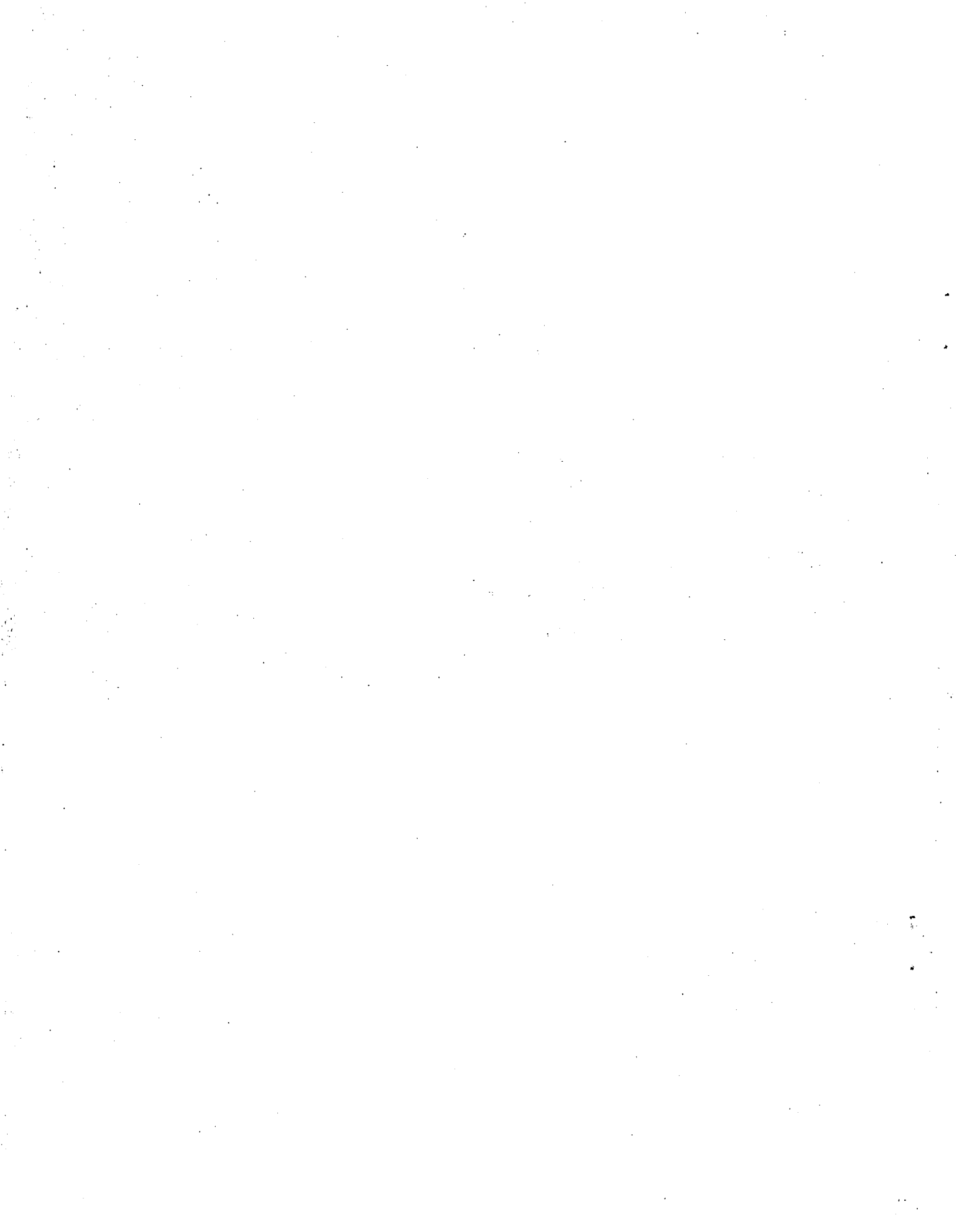
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AN EXAMINATION OF SELECTED INTERACTIONS*

by

Michael Lundeen and Paul H. Gessaman**

Objectives of the Research

The research reported here examines the effects that programs and activities of the Cornhusker Regional Council of Governments had on local units of general purpose government. The Cornhusker Regional Council, since reorganized as the West Central Nebraska Economic Development District (WCNEDD), served a five-county region of rural Nebraska from 1974 to 1980. It was one of two regional councils selected for this phase of the research.¹ An earlier report based on the first phase of the research provides a descriptive overview of regional councils in Nebraska.² This report focuses on the nature of

* This research was conducted under Project 10-081R of the Nebraska Agricultural Experiment Station, and was a portion of Nebraska's contribution to the regional research activities of the NC-144 Technical Research Committee. States contributing to the regional project were: Colorado, Iowa, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota. Reports reflecting research findings for the five state region are being prepared by South Dakota (a descriptive overview of all subject councils) and Iowa (an analysis of regional council effects on local governments). The Cornhusker Regional Council of Governments was reorganized as the West Central Nebraska Economic Development District in June, 1980.

** The authors are Research Technologist and Professor, Department of Agricultural Economics, respectively.

¹ A companion publication by the same authors, Local Governments and the Panhandle Resource Council: An Examination of Selected Interactions, Department of Agricultural Economics Report No. 129, 1982, is a report of research conducted in the second multi-county region. These two regional councils were selected as the research domain due to their: (1) non-metropolitan locations, (2) below state average population density, (3) above state average funding per capita (for regional councils), and (4) willingness to cooperate with the research effort.

² Michael Lundeen, Terese Seay, and Paul Gessaman, Nebraska's Regional Councils: A Descriptive Overview, Department of Agricultural Economics Report No. 102, April, 1980.

and effects of interactions between the Cornhusker Council and the local units of general purpose government within its jurisdiction. Objectives of the research are:

1. To identify the number and types of programs and services provided to local government units by the Cornhusker Council.
2. To identify selected characteristics of local government units that utilize Regional Council programs and services.
3. To determine how local elected officials perceive: (a) local problems, (b) regional issues, and (c) the appropriateness of the programs and activities of the Cornhusker Council.

Initial sections of this report briefly discuss: (1) changes in the context of governmental operations at the local and regional levels, (2) the region served by the Cornhusker Council, and (3) the implications and conclusions of this study. The research approach, research findings, and Appendix follow.³

The Context

The Situation of Local Government

During the 1960s and the 1970s, rapid changes took place in the operations of local units of general purpose government. Citizens generally expected more and more services from their units of local government. In addition, state and federal programs and regulations required minimum standards at the local level for health care, housing, education, law enforcement, job training, public assistance, and environmental conditions. The personnel practices of government units at all levels were also subjected to more

³ The Appendix provides an account of the formation and evolution of the Cornhusker Council. Since the Implications and Conclusions of this study were derived in part from the information in the Appendix, the reader may find reading that section helpful in understanding the programs and activities of the Cornhusker Council.

stringent standards because of federal programs and policies. Local governments, then, were expected to increase their roles in human services delivery at a time when citizens were demanding improvements in the condition of roads and bridges, in the rapidity and quality of snow removal, and in the accessibility and quality of local government facilities.⁴

Local governments found that meeting these expectations became increasingly difficult and costly. Continuing inflation combined with these expectations to increase costs and taxes. Nebraska taxpayers responded by supporting the 1978 enactment of a "lid" on local spending. Operating surpluses disappeared and services were cut back as funds ran out. At the same time, many local officials had discovered they were unable to take full advantage of the funding programs (categorical grants and revenue sharing) intended to help them raise the levels of government service. Public opinion often discouraged the use of federal funds; and many local officials did not understand grant application processes.

Under these circumstances, officials in many rural areas acknowledged they faced a funding and knowledge gap when they tried to respond to their changing situation. Many sought help during the 1970's by joining with other local officials to form multi-county councils of governments (regional councils).

In Nebraska, councils of governments are organized under provisions of the Interlocal Cooperation Act⁵. This Act authorizes two or more units of

⁴ An interview conducted in the course of this research was interrupted by a rancher who wished to check with the county commissioner being interviewed about a county road maintenance problem. The county commissioner subsequently commented that road maintenance had become a priority concern of ranchers in the more distant parts of the county. In the past, ranchers had traveled to town infrequently. Visits to town were now frequent, and the ranchers' desire for a good county road system had consequently increased.

⁵ Sections 23-2201 to 23-2207, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, 1943.

government to undertake jointly any activities or functions for which they have individual authorization. As an entity organized under the Interlocal Cooperation Act, a regional council can provide local governments with:

- (1) a forum for discussion of problems and issues of mutual interest,
- (2) an organization through which local resources can be pooled and external resources received (e.g., state or federal funds),
- (3) a source of technical assistance and services (e.g., grantsmanship, assistance with paperwork, problem-oriented information, and in-service training of personnel),
- (4) an organization through which special services can be supplied.

The Cornhusker Regional Council

The Cornhusker Regional Council was organized in August, 1974, by the county commissioners of Planning and Development Region 19. Rachel Dobscha was hired as Director in November, 1974, and continued in that position throughout the period examined in this study. In June, 1980, the Council was reorganized to serve Regions 18 and 19 as the West Central Nebraska Economic Development District (WCNEDD). Throughout this report the former organizational name, Cornhusker Regional Council, will be used since it is correct for the period covered by this research.

Region 19 contains five counties (Grant, Arthur, Keith, Perkins, and Chase) with 13 cities and villages. The estimated population of this area in 1976 was 19,051, with nearly half residing in Keith County.⁶ Ogallala is the Keith County seat and a regional trade center. It is by far the largest municipality in the region, with a 1976 population of 5,568. The region has a

⁶ Population data taken from U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1976 Population Estimates and 1975 and Revised 1974 Per Capita Income Estimates for Counties Incorporated Places, and Selected Minor Civil Divisions in Nebraska, Series P-25, No. 766, January, 1979.

stable and prosperous agriculture. Tourism and recreation associated with Ogallala's location near a major Interstate 80 interchange and immediately south of Lake McConaughy supplement the city's economic base. All other municipalities are relatively small and their economic base includes few nonagricultural industries.

The cities and counties in Region 19 renewed their membership in the Cornhusker Council each year. Consequently, the number of city and county members varied from year to year. At the time of data collection in mid-1980, the Council staff listed four of the five counties and 11 of the 13 municipalities in Region 19 as Council members.

Implications and Conclusions

Survey responses reported in this publication provide considerable evidence that the Cornhusker Council became an important adjunct to local government during its 6 years of operation. Those interviewed gave opinions and answers that were generally favorable to the Council's existence and activities. They indicated consistent support for local government generated responses to local problems, while reporting utilization of the Council's assistance and services. This implies the Cornhusker Council was perceived as a source of useful services and assistance without being a threat to local government autonomy.

Responses to questions with one or more evaluation components generally approved of the Council's activities and recognized the services provided by the Council staff. Responses to questions about the preparation of grant applications and plans consistently testified to the Council's importance and effectiveness in these activities. (Most respondents indicated the applications and plans would not have been completed without the services of Council

staff.) These responses imply member units have received services that were important to the attainment of local goals.

As a regional council serving a sparsely settled multi-county region, the Cornhusker Council provided both regional services and assistance to member units of government. The Council promoted and supported several regional programs (more fully described in the Appendix) in ways consistent with the conventional image of the regional council as a provider of specialized services throughout the region. Regional programs were identified as desirable because they were needed, and because these programs provided a basis for stability of Council operations.

Direct assistance to member units of government was the primary form of services provided by the Council. The preparing and expediting of grant applications and assistance in the preparation of functional plans were the principal components of direct assistance. These activities were consistent with the conventional image of regional councils as providers of grantsmanship services and planning. However, these services were delivered on a unit-by-unit basis rather than as regional services as discussed in most reports of regional organization activities. We conclude that the Cornhusker Council provided the benefits of a regional approach to problems while providing individualized assistance to member units.

Local government units that utilized the Council's services were not notably different from other units of their type in sparsely settled portions of Nebraska. Counties and small municipalities were members of the Council and availed themselves of its services, though several were reported to have had intermittent membership. Officials of the City of Ogallala and Arthur County helped to found the Council, but had ceased to be members at the time this research was conducted. The shared characteristics of member governments

that utilized Council services were: (1) they served relatively small populations, and (2) they had limited ability to secure and retain the services of persons knowledgeable of state and federal government mandates and programs. We conclude that member governments availed themselves of Council services because those services were needed (indicating a symbiotic relationship existed between the Council and governments that utilized its services). This relationship appeared to strengthen and support the effectiveness of local government units that relied on services provided by the Cornhusker Council.

Most respondents indicated positive perceptions of the Cornhusker Council. This conclusion is based on responses to evaluative questions about the services provided by the Council staff. These responses indicate the Council staff (1) provided services that were available from no other source, (2) performed functions that otherwise would not have been carried out, (3) individualized their responses to member governments' needs, and (4) provided information and insights not readily available to member governments from other sources. The pattern of responses that generally approved of regionalism was apparently an outgrowth of these positive perceptions of the Cornhusker Council.

Overall, we conclude that the Cornhusker Council survived and thrived because its staff provided services needed by member governments without threatening local autonomy. By providing services that supplemented those available to local governments through the efforts of their officials and staff, the Council made local elected officials more effective in the discharge of their responsibilities. By increasing the effectiveness of local officials the Council gained the commitment and support of its member units, thus gaining legitimacy while increasing the benefits received by citizens.

In so doing, the Cornhusker Council appears to have been an asset to the region it served.

Research Approach

The data for this report came from background interviews with the Cornhusker Council staff and from subsequent interviews with a sample of the elected and appointed officials of Region 19 counties and cities. The staff was interviewed in May, 1980, and asked to identify member governmental units and their representatives plus the nature of Council interactions during the two preceding years with the counties and municipalities selected for this study. The staff listed the services they provided to these sample governmental units during those years, including: (1) grantsmanship activities; (2) planning assistance; (3) consulting services; and (4) technical assistance, such as providing planning information, assistance with local government administration or budgeting, assistance in preparing forms for revenue sharing, assessing needs, in-service training for public officials or employees, and other activities.

City and county officials were interviewed in June, 1980, and asked how they perceived the services provided by the regional council. Each activity mentioned in earlier interviews by the Council staff was identified. If the local official was knowledgeable about that activity or service, follow-up questions were asked. The interview also included questions about the Cornhusker Council's other services and about the respondent's background and assessment of regionalism. Respondents who represented their government on the Cornhusker Council were asked a series of questions about decision making within the Council.

The study design called for interviews with: (1) all county board chairmen in a Council region, (2) each county's Council representative, (3) a

sample of the mayors in a Council region, and (4) the Council representative from each sample municipality. This resulted in fourteen interviews for the Cornhusker Council--five county board chairmen and nine mayors (Tables 1 and 2). The four board chairmen of member counties also acted as their county's representatives on the council. The remaining county board chairman in the region was from a non-member county (Arthur County). The study design required interviews with the mayor and Council representative of all municipalities with a population of 2500 or more and a selected number of mayors and Council representatives from smaller municipalities. The only city in Region 19 with a population over 2500 is Ogallala. Since Ogallala was not a Council member, only the mayor was interviewed. In the eight sample municipalities with less than 2500 population, seven mayors were Council representatives. The other sample city (Grant) was not a Council member.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents in study sample by elective office and membership on Cornhusker Council.

Elective Office	Number
County Commissioner:	
County Board Chairman, not Council representative	1
County Board Chairman, also Council representative	4
City Official:	
City or village mayor, not Council representative	4
City or village mayor, also Council representative	5
Total	14

Table 2. Governmental units in study sample by type of government unit and membership in Cornhusker Council.

Governmental Unit	Membership Status	Number
County	Member of Council	4
County	Not member of Council	1
City, < 2500 population	Member of Council	7
City, < 2500 population	Not member of Council	1
City, 2500 or more population	Not member of Council	1
Total		14

Research Findings

The interviews with local officials are the basis for tables and text in the body of the report. The five sub-sections that follow each begin by identifying the set of interview questions that generated responses reported in that sub-section. If the set of interview questions was directed to a sub-group of respondents, the relevant sub-group is identified. A summary paragraph concludes each sub-section.

Funding and Service Needs of Sample Governments

The extent of the sample governments' use of outside funding and multi-government services was identified through a series of questions about local government finances, services, problems, and inter-local agreements.

Responses to questions about local government finances, personnel, and equipment are reported in Table 3. Most respondents agreed with statements indicating their governments had sufficient local revenue, personnel, and equipment. Eight of the 14 agreed with a statement that there was "sufficient local revenue to support capital investment needs." Only four of 14 agreed with a similar statement about the availability of "sufficient local revenue to meet state and federal mandates."

Despite their agreement with statements implying that local resources were sufficient, the respondents indicated the sample cities and counties did receive revenue from several state and federal sources (Table 4). The funding sources named most often by the mayors were federal agencies: the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Labor. The respondent county commissioners most frequently listed the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare; and the Nebraska Department of Roads. Other federal agencies identified as sources of financial aid for the sample cities and

counties were the United States Department of Agriculture and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

Table 3. Responses to five statements about the sufficiency of local revenue and personnel.

Statement	Responses		
	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
	-----Number-----		
We have sufficient local revenue for needed services.	11		3
We have sufficient personnel to operate programs.	12		2
We have sufficient equipment for desired services.	13		1
We have sufficient local revenue to support capital investment needs.	8	1	5
We have sufficient local revenue to meet state and federal mandates.	4	3	7

Table 4. Number of sample cities and counties reporting outside revenue, by source, Fiscal Year 1979.

Revenue Sources	Cities	Counties
	-----Number-----	
State Department of Roads	4	5
U.S. Department of Labor (CETA)	5	3
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development	5	2
U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare	1	4
Law Enforcement Assistance Administration	2	2
Economic Development Administration		2
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	1	
U.S. Department of Agriculture	2	3
Other	4	

The number of interlocal agreements entered into by the sample cities and counties provided another measure of local governments' need for additional services. The nine mayors in the sample reported their municipalities had a total of 26 interlocal agreements in the six categories listed on the interview form (Table 5). The five county commission chairmen reported nine interlocal agreements.

The most common methods for carrying out interlocal agreements by cities were reported to be the sharing of personnel or equipment and the joint provision of services. For counties, the principal methods were the joint provision of services (two or more local governments jointly provide a service) and the supplying of services (one government unit sells a service to another unit of government).

Table 5. Interlocal agreements reported for sample cities and counties, by category of agreement.

Category of Agreement	Cities	Counties
	-----Number-----	
Joint construction or leasing of facility	3	1
Joint leasing of equipment		1
Sharing of personnel or equipment	9	
Joint provision of services	11	4
Supplying services to other governments	1	2
Buying services from other governments	2	1

⁷ The order of the categories of agreement in Table 5 is the same as on the interview schedule. This format is followed in all subsequent tables which report data from pre-coded questions which were asked in a specific order.

Cities were reported to have most of their interlocal agreements with counties rather than with other cities (a total of 20, compared to two with other cities and four with other governmental units) (Table 6). County commission chairmen similarly reported more interlocal agreements with cities (7), than with other counties (2). Interlocal agreements most often dealt with various maintenance functions (8), law enforcement (8), or sanitation and water (3) (Table 7).

Table 6. Participation in interlocal agreements as reported for the sample cities and counties, by type of participating unit.

Government Unit Reporting Interlocal Agreement	Type of Government Unit Reported as Participant in Interlocal Agreement		
	City	County	Other
	-----Number-----		
City	2	20	4
County	7	2	

Most of the mayors and county commission chairmen responding reported their governments benefited from their interlocal agreements (Table 8). Eight of the 12 agreed with a statement that their governments did not experience higher per unit costs as a result of interlocal agreements. Nine agreed with statements that their governments were able to provide a wider variety of services and previously unaffordable services. Half indicated that interlocal agreements increased coordination costs. Seven of 12 disagreed with the statement that their governments lose some control as a result of interlocal agreements, and six did not agree that they encountered more red tape. Ten of 12 indicated that their governments gained more professional services from their interlocal agreements.

Table 7. Interlocal agreements for the sample cities and counties, by type of problem or service.

Type of Function or Service	Number of Interlocal Agreements
Law enforcement	8
Personnel and equipment for maintenance	8
Sanitation and water	3
Fire protection	2
Transportation	2
Elderly	2
Health	2
Library	2
Social services	2
Recreation	1
Communication	1
Energy	1
Regional Council	1

Table 8. Agreement with eight statements beginning "In evaluating your interlocal agreements, would you agree your government . . . ?" by statement conclusion.

Conclusion	Would You Agree?		
	Yes	No	Don't Know
	-----Number-----		
Loses some control	4	7	1
Receives higher quality services	8	3	1
Gains more professional services	10	2	
Experiences higher per unit costs	4	8	
Encounters more red tape	5	6	1
Provides a wider variety of services	9	2	1
Provides previously unaffordable services	9	3	
Finds coordination costs increasing	6	5	1

After reviewing a list on the interview form of possible problems for local governments, the respondents selected 14 problems as pertinent to the sample governments (Table 9). Vandalism was the most frequently selected problem (9), followed by health (8). The majority of the respondents who identified a given problem area indicated they would be willing to expend local resources on a solution, except in the cases of mental health, social services and energy development (Table 10). A majority of those selecting social services and energy development as problems classified them as being regional in scope. A majority of those selecting housing and mental health problems indicated that solutions should be found beyond the local government level. Very few respondents reported a regional council should have primary responsibility for solving any of these 14 problems.

Table 9. Number identifying problems and responses to "Are you willing to commit local resources to this problem?" by identified problem areas.

Problem Area	Identified as Problems for Respondents' Governments	Willing to Commit Local Resources?	
		Yes	No
-----Number-----			
Vandalism	9	8	1
Jails	4	3	1
Mental health	4	1	3
Health	8	6	2
Fire control	2	2	
Housing	3	3	
Water supplies	2	2	
Social services	5	1	4
Solid waste	2	2	
Water pollution	1	1	
Land use	1	1	
Flood control	5	5	
Energy development	4	1	3
Environment	3	2	1

Table 10. The scope and appropriate source for the solution of the identified public and social service problems by problem area.

Problem Area	Scope		Who should solve?				
	Local	Regional	Local Gov't	Special District	Regional Council	State	Other
	-----Number-----						
Vandalism	3	6	9				
Jails	3	1	1	1		1	1
Mental health	2	2		1	2	1	
Health	4	4	5	1	1		1
Fire	2		2				
Housing	2	1	2		1		
Water supplies	2		2				
Social services	1	4		1		4	
Solid waste	2		2				
Water pollution	1		1				
Land use	1		1				
Flood control	5		5				
Energy development		4	1	1		1	1
Environment	2	1	2			1	

Survey responses tabulated in Tables 3 through 10 suggest that the respondent local officials in Region 19 approached their problems locally and pragmatically. Their responses to questions about public and social service problems indicated differing views about the scope of problems. Most preferred that problems be solved at the city or county level. The respondents reported their governments had received some funding from state or federal agencies and had entered into a number of interlocal agreements. Usually these agreements were between a city and a county to jointly provide public services such as law enforcement or sanitation. This pattern of local government activities indicated the respondent local officials were willing to use a variety of approaches to solve local problems, despite their clear preference for local control.

Council Programs and Services

Regional councils typically have provided local governments with planning and technical assistance, administrative services, and help with grants. Grant assistance involves writing and expediting grant applications and assisting governments when grants are approved. The Council's grant, planning, and technical assistance to member governments during the 2 years immediately prior to the interview were the major topics addressed in the interview schedule.⁸

The Cornhusker Council staff reported they provided the sample cities and counties with assistance with 10 grants and 18 plans (Table 11). The most frequently identified topics of Council-supplied grant-writing assistance were

⁸ The provision of grant, planning, and technical assistance to non-metropolitan governments has long been a justification for the creation of regional councils. Gerald Doeksen, et. al. The Role of Multicounty Development Districts in Rural Areas. Economic Research Service, USDA, Agricultural Economic Report #307, Washington, D.C., August, 1975, p. i.

recreation (swimming pools, golf courses, and parks) and housing. The principal planning assistance category was economic development. The Council drafted a regional economic development plan as part of an effort to secure the designation of Regions 18 and 19 as an Economic Development District. The Council also assisted five communities with land use planning and zoning.

Table 11. Council grant-writing and planning assistance for member cities and counties, by public problem or service being addressed.

Public Problem or Service	Grant-writing		Planning Assistance	
	City	County	City	County
Public housing	2			
Transportation		1		
Fire	1			
Economic development			8	5
Land use and zoning			5	
Law enforcement	1			
CETA		1		
Recreation	3			
Elderly		1		
Total	7	3	13	5

Of those interviewed, nine were familiar with the Council's grant assistance and answered a series of questions about the staff's grant-assistance to their governments (Table 12). The respondents indicated local officials and Council staff initiated the grant applications in five and three instances respectively. The respondents indicated that nine of the grants would not have been written without the Council's assistance, even though they reported the Council actually wrote only three of the grant applications. The

results of the grant applications were seven funded and two under consideration. Fewer than half of those responding expected increases in either local revenues or expenditures from the funded grant applications. The respondents were universally satisfied with the Cornhusker Council's assistance with grant applications.

Table 12. Responses to seven evaluatory questions about Council assistance with the reported grant applications.

Questions	Responses			
	-----Number-----			
	<u>Citizen</u>	<u>Local Official</u>	<u>Council</u>	
Who suggested grant be written?	1	5	3	
		<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	
Would grant have been prepared without the Council's assistance?			9	
	<u>Wrote Grant</u>	<u>Advisor</u>	<u>Both</u>	<u>Other</u>
What was the Council's function?	3	3	2	1
	<u>Funded</u>	<u>Rejected</u>	<u>Being Considered</u>	
What was result of application?	7		2	
	<u>Increase</u>	<u>Decrease</u>	<u>None</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
What are the expected effects on local revenues?	2		4	1
What are the expected effects on local expenditures?	3	1	2	1
	<u>Satisfied</u>	<u>Uncertain</u>	<u>Dissatisfied</u>	
How satisfied were you with the Council's assistance?	9			

Fourteen respondents answered a similar set of questions concerning the 18 reported instances of Cornhusker Council planning assistance (Table 13). Local officials reportedly suggested using the Council's planners in 11 instances; the Council staff initiated the planning effort in two instances. All those reporting Council planning assistance indicated the planning effort would not have been completed without the Cornhusker Council. This undoubtedly reflects the fact that none of the governments could have afforded private planning consultants and that most of the plans in question were part of the regional economic development plan. All the respondents were satisfied with the Council's planning assistance.

Table 13. Responses to four evaluatory questions about Council assistance with the reported planning activities.

Questions	Responses			
	-----Number-----			
	Citizen	Local Official	Regional Council	Don't Know
Who suggested using the Council?		11	2	1
			<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
Would plan have been done without the Council?		2		12
Could you have afforded to hire a planning consultant?				14
		<u>Satisfied</u>	<u>Uncertain</u>	<u>Dissatisfied</u>
How satisfied were you with the Council's assistance?	14			

Although grant-writing and planning are often portrayed as the primary regional council services, many of the Cornhusker Council's services fell into the technical assistance category. Those interviewed indicated that the Council's technical assistance consisted primarily of holding public meetings and drafting personnel policies, job descriptions, and job application forms for local governments (Table 14). The least active technical assistance categories for the Cornhusker Council staff were in-service training and assistance in planning. No respondent reported Cornhusker Council assistance in revenue sharing. The respondents indicated almost universal satisfaction with the Council's technical assistance.

Table 14. Level of satisfaction with reported Council technical assistance, by categories of assistance.

Categories of Council Supplied Technical Assistance	Level of Satisfaction			
	Satisfied	Uncertain	Dissatisfied	Don't Know
	-----Number-----			
Assistance to planning (preparing plans, maps, documents, zoning regulations, etc.)	3			
Administrative assistance (providing information, advice, technical assistance, etc.)	5			
Public meetings and surveys (holding forums and meetings, conducting needs assessment surveys, etc.)	8	1		1
In-service training (informing local officials about technical assistance, weatherization, public housing, etc.)	4			

Those interviewed indicated the Cornhusker Council was a source of expertise in grant-writing and planning for the sample cities and counties. They also reported that only a few of the grants or plans would have been completed without the Council's help. The regional economic development plan, in particular, was apparently an outgrowth of the Council staff's initiative and regional perspective. Responses to questions about grant and planning activity show that local governments have been concerned in recent years about the provision of social services. (Categories of local government grants applications and planning included: services for the elderly, public housing, recreation, and planning and zoning.)

Member Participation in the Council

Members' participation in Council business and meetings was evaluated through a series of questions. Tables 15 and 16 contain tabulations of the respondents' perceptions of decision making within the Council. Tables 17, 18, and 19 provide tabulations of responses indicating how local governments participated in the Council. The decision-making structure of the Cornhusker Council was typical for a Nebraska regional council in that it had a policy council with one representative from each member unit and a smaller executive committee dominated by county commissioners.

The Council representatives indicated that decision making involved primarily the Policy Council, the Executive Committee, and the Director (Table 15). Of the nine officials responding to this set of questions, more than half reported the Policy Council had considerable influence over policy (5) and program decisions (6). Respondents credited the Director with some or considerable input in all categories and attached less significance to the influence of the planning staff and other committees.

Table 15. Reported degree of influence by participants on selected types of Council decisions, by type of decision and by type of participant.

Type of Decision and Type of Participant	Degree of Influence			
	Considerable	Some	None	Don't Know
	-----Number-----			
Policy Decisions:				
Policy Council	5	3		1
Executive Committee	4	4		1
Executive Director	4	4		1
Planning Staff	2	4	2	1
Other Committees		6	2	1

Budget Decisions:				
Policy Council	3	4	1	1
Executive Committee	4	3	1	1
Executive Director	4	3	1	1
Planning Staff	1	4	3	1
Other Committees	1	4	3	1

Programming Decisions:				
Policy Council	6	2		1
Executive Committee	3	4	1	1
Executive Director	3	3	2	1
Planning Staff	2	3	3	1
Other Committees		4	4	1

The representatives took a variety of positions when asked about their participation in Council meetings (Table 16). The majority of the nine representatives indicated they sometimes or seldom opposed budget recommendations, openly disagreed with other members, or disagreed with the outcome of Council votes. Only three representatives said "often" when asked "How often have you attempted to introduce an issue without full support?"

Table 16. Responses of Council representatives to four questions about their degree of participation in Council meetings.

Questions	Degree of Participation				
	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	Always
	-----Number-----				
How often have you...					
...opposed budget recommendations?	2	1	4	1	1
...attempted to introduce an issue without full support?	2	2	2	3	
...openly disagreed with other members?		1	6	2	
...disagreed with the outcome of a vote?	1	4	3	1	

All respondents except non-members reported on attendance by their government's representative at Council meetings (Table 17). Seven indicated their representative attended all Policy Council meetings; four that their representatives attended all Executive Committee meetings. The Cornhusker Council Policy Council had 14 members (5 county representatives and 9 city representatives); the Executive Committee had seven members (5 county and 2 city). The responses to questions about attendance at Advisory Committee and Public Meetings were not in agreement; some indicated representatives attended these meetings, and others reported that no meetings had been held. The respondent for only one member reported his government contributed equipment for the support of the Council. Most respondents indicated their governments provided information to the Council, although several mentioned the city or county clerk would be better able to answer that question.

Table 17. Responses to questions about member governments' commitment and contributions to the Council.

Questions	Responses				
	Number				
	Never	Some	All	No Meetings Held	Don't Know
How often has your representative attended the following meetings?					
Policy Council	2	5	7		
Executive Committee	5	3	4		2
Advisory Committee	6	2	3	3	
Public Meetings Sponsored by Council	2	3	3	5	1

	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom	Never	
How often has your government...					
...contributed equipment to Council?			1		13
...provided information to Council?	4		6	2	2

Representatives of member governments interviewed in this survey reported that they and other local officials obtained information about the Cornhusker Council at meetings, by phone, or through the mail from the Council's newsletter or correspondence (Table 18). Non-member governments indicated no contact with the Council. To make their government's preferences known to the Council, the respondents stated they relied on several methods. Comments during the interviews were: "I often stop at the Council office when in Ogallala," or "we ask a Council staff member to visit the city council whenever there is a problem."

Table 18. Reported methods by which the officials of member governments obtain information about the Council and make their preferences known to the Council.

Methods	Obtain Information	Make Preferences Known
	-----Number-----	
Through the media	1	
In person at meetings	1	2
Through Council representative	1	1
By phone		2
Through the mail	6	
Combination of above	4	7

According to the Council's by-laws, each member city and county pays yearly dues based on population. Six respondents reported their governments paid only dues, and five reported their governments paid dues and fees (Table 19). The Council staff explained that it provides most Council services free of any charges other than annual dues. However, cities and counties were sometimes assessed for the printing or extraneous costs of plans, grant applications, and other projects.

Table 19. Reported financial contributions of the sample cities and counties to the Council, by type of contribution.

Type of Contribution	Cities	Counties
	-----Number-----	
Pay dues plus technical assistance fees	1	1
Pay dues and only infrequently, fees	3	
Pay only dues	3	3
Pay no dues or fees because non-member	2	1

The respondents generally were knowledgeable about Cornhusker Council decision making processes, and about their governments' interactions with the Council. Most respondents reported that member representatives largely determine what Council programs and policies will be. The importance attached to this role is reflected in the high proportion of representatives reportedly attending Council meetings. Each member government paid equal per capita dues and reimbursed the Council for any extraordinary expenses that arose from planning, grant-writing, or technical assistance.

Regionalism and the Council

Responses to questions about attitudes toward regionalism and reactions to the activities of the Cornhusker Council are reported in this section. These questions were responded to by all interviewees. Their responses provide insights into members' and non-members' assessments of the roles and activities of the Cornhusker Council. Although the Cornhusker Council existed primarily because of local support, its formation was also a result of federal policies during the 1960s and 1970s that encouraged the creation of regional councils. In the past several years, many local and some federal officials have questioned the usefulness of and rationale for regional councils.⁹ As a result, local and federal support for regionalism and regional councils is waning in many parts of the nation. The responses reported here provide limited insights into local support for a specific regional council.

When asked about their acceptance of regional organization, most respondents indicated approval of a regional approach to solving appropriate problems

⁹ Jerome Stam, "Substate Regionalism: A Review of Current Issues," ESCS, November, 1979, p. 9; Jerome M. Stam and J. Norman Reid, Federal Programs Supporting Multicounty Substate Regional Activities: An Overview, USDA, ESCS, Rural Development Research Report No. 23, August, 1980, p. 3.

(Table 20). Nearly all respondents accepted voluntary associations of local governments both as needed (14) and long-term (11). Thirteen also responded "yes" when asked if they would accept the special district approach to solving problems. Eleven approved of a two-tier system of local and regional government. Ten indicated they would not accept full-scale regional government.

Table 20. Reported acceptability of different degrees of regional organization, by type of organization.

Type of Organization	Is organization acceptable?		
	Yes	No	Don't Know
	-----Number-----		
Voluntary cooperation between governments as needs arise.	14		
Long-term voluntary associations.	11	2	1
Multi-county special districts that address problems that arise.	13	1	
A two-tier system with a regional government for regional problems and local governments for local problems.	11	3	
Full-scale regional government that replaces local governments.	4	10	

Respondents were then asked a series of questions about their perceptions of regional councils (Table 21). Thirteen of 14 agreed that regional councils were an acceptable means of coping with federal mandates. Only two agreed with a statement that the federal government imposed regional councils on local governments, and 12 disagreed with the statement that regional councils were part of a federal effort to limit local authority. Only one person each agreed to three statements implying that regional councils are: (1) imposed by state government, (2) part of a state effort to limit local authority, or (3) unacceptable because they diminished local control. Somewhat in contradiction, only five of 14 respondents indicated they agreed with statements that regional councils reduced state and federal control over local

governments. Twelve respondents saw regional councils as a good source of planning help for local governments, and 13 reported that councils help pool local resources to address regional problems.

Table 21. Respondents' level of agreement with nine evaluating statements about regional council functions, by description of the role or effect.

Role or Effect	Level of Agreement		
	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
	-----Number-----		
Regional councils are...			
...an acceptable way to cope with federal mandates.	13	1	
...imposed on local governments by federal mandates.	2		12
...part of a federal effort to limit local authority.	1	1	12
...imposed on local governments by state mandates.	1		13
...part of a state effort to limit local authority.	1		13
...not acceptable because they remove local control.	1		13
...an acceptable way to reduce federal or state control over local governments.	5	2	7
...a good way to make planning experience available.	12		2
...a good way to pool local resources to address regional problems.	13		1

Respondents also were asked to evaluate the functions and activities of the Cornhusker Council (Table 22). Respondents chose the Council's roles from a list of six possible functions. Most respondents indicated the Council promoted a regional perspective (13), served as a forum for discussion of problems (13), and implemented comprehensive plans (12). The majority

identifying these as Council roles reported that the Council was effective and that the roles were appropriate. All other listed roles were also reported to be appropriate. The role for which the largest number (10) of respondents reported the Council was effective was that of reviewer of federal grant applications.

Table 22. Assessment of six Cornhusker Council roles, by description of role.

Role	Performs Role?			Effective in Role			Is Role Appropriate?		
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Very	Somewhat	Not	Yes	No	Don't Know
-----Number-----									
Serves as a forum for discussing problems.	13		1	5	7	1	12	1	1
Assists in the formation of contracts between local governments.	9	1	4	8	1		12		2
Promotes a regional perspective.	13		1	6	7		11	2	1
Implements comprehensive and functional plans.	12		2	4	8		12	1	1
Establishes priorities among regional problems.	10	2	2	4	6		11	2	1
Reviews federal grant applications.	11	2	1	10	1		12	1	1

The mayors and county commissioners interviewed also responded to a series of questions about specific activities of the Cornhusker Council (Table 23). Four or more respondents identified all ten listed activities as Council activities. The activities selected most often concerned planning, grant assistance, and economic development. The respondents indicated that most activities were appropriate for the Council and were performed effectively. The activities that the fewest number of respondents attributed

to the Council were assistance with local government management (8), comprehensive social planning (7), and lobbying for state and federal funds (4). Four respondents concluded that comprehensive social planning was not an appropriate Council activity; six, that lobbying was not appropriate.

Table 23. Assessment of 10 possible Cornhusker Council activities, by type of activity.

Activity	Performs Activity?			Effective			Appropriate		
	Yes	No	Don't Know	Very	Somewhat	Not	Yes	No	Don't Know
	-----Number-----								
Provides comprehensive physical planning.	12	2		8	4		12	1	1
Provides economic development planning.	13		1	8	3	2	14		
Provides comprehensive social planning.	7	5	2	3	3	1	9	4	1
Prepares regional planning grant applications.	9	1	4	7	2		12	1	1
Provides planning assistance.	11	1	2	6	5		12	2	
Provides local government management assistance.	8	5	1	4	3	1	10	3	1
Promotes federal programs.	12	2		5	5	2	11	3	
Helps write grants.	13		1	11	1	1	13	1	
Expedite submitted grants.	13		1	8	4	1	13	1	
Lobbies for funds.	4	6	4	2	1	1	7	6	1

The respondents exhibited no dissatisfaction with regional councils or with the Cornhusker Council. They recognized that the Council acted as a conduit for some federal programs and policies (particularly A-95 reviews), but did not see it as a tool of the state or federal governments. The respondents reported that almost all of the Council roles or activities listed on the interview schedule were appropriate. The responses in Table 20 indicate a general acceptance of regionalism. Some regional councils elsewhere in Nebraska and in the United States have been criticized as manipulators of local governments on behalf of state and federal governments. The activities of the Cornhusker Council staff did not elicit such criticism from the respondents. Regional cooperation was also looked upon as an appropriate and positive force by most of the respondents.

Respondents' Evaluation of the Council

All respondents had an opportunity to respond to questions in which they could evaluate regional councils in general and the Cornhusker Council as a specific local entity. Table 24 presents data on the locus of support for regional councils and two statements about the Cornhusker Council; Table 25 is the respondents' list of the Cornhusker Council's most useful local and regional services.

Twelve of the 14 respondents agreed with the statement, "regional councils would discontinue without federal funds" (Table 24). When responding to a similar statement that referred specifically to the Cornhusker Council, 11 respondents indicated agreement. However, ten responded "agree" to the statement, "Citizens in this region would ratify the Council's continued operation." Three responded with "Uncertain" and one with "Disagree."

Table 24. Level of agreement with statements about support for regional councils, by statement.

Statement	Level of Agreement		
	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
	-----Number-----		
Regional councils would discontinue without federal funds.	12	1	1
Many local governments would withdraw from the Council if federal funds were withdrawn.	11		2
Citizens in this region would ratify the Council's continued operation.	10	3	1

Two open-ended questions allowed respondents to list what they thought were the three most important local and regional services provided by the Cornhusker Council (Table 25). The local services cited most often involved grant assistance, acquisition of surplus property, and technical assistance. The regional activities most often listed were grant assistance, economic development, and providing information and advice.

Table 25. Number of local and regional services reported for the Cornhusker Council, by category of service.

Service	Local	Regional
Grant assistance	6	5
Information and advice	4	3
Economic development		6
Funding	3	2
Surplus property	7	
Technical assistance	3	
Planning assistance		3
Health	1	1
Environmental rehabilitation	2	
Disaster services		2
Administrative assistance	1	2
Needs assessment		1
Forum for discussion	1	1
Transportation	1	
Housing		1
Coordination	1	2
Elderly	1	1
Sanitation		1

Appendix

Introduction

This appendix discusses the formation and development of the Cornhusker Regional Council of Governments. The discussion centers on the forces and organizational needs that affected the Council's evolution. Changing state and federal programs and policies were instrumental in the establishment of the Cornhusker Council, as well as most other rural regional councils. Regional councils were promoted initially as a means of solving regional problems and subsequently as a means of bringing "expertise" to local governments in rural America.¹ This history begins with a chronology, followed by discussions of the Council's mission, organizational structure, and program activities.

Cornhusker Council Chronology

The selected chronology that follows highlights the Cornhusker Council's history from 1974 through July, 1980, when the West Central Nebraska Economic Development District (WCNEDD) dropped its council of governments organizational form.

1974 - August; County Commissioners and city officials in Region 19 organize the Cornhusker Regional Council of Governments after withdrawing from a combined Region 18 and 19 council of governments.

November; Executive Committee hires Rachel Dobscha as Director.

1975 - January; Cornhusker Council receives HUD 701 funds and considers comprehensive planning.

March; State Office of Planning and Programming (SOPP) representative explains the A-95 review program.

June; Council oversees first junk car removal program; Council proposes budget for fiscal year 1975-76 of \$58,272, which includes three full-time staff and clerical positions.

¹ Larry M. Hammer, COG: What It Can Do For You, University of Nebraska Extension Division, March, 1972; Doeksen, Multicounty, p. i.

December; Cornhusker Council applies to Economic Development Administration (EDA) for regional designation as an Economic Development District (EDD).

1976 - January; Arthur County drops out of the Council.

February; Cornhusker Council members express reluctance to engage in comprehensive planning required by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as a condition of receiving funds under Section 701 of the Housing and Urban Development Act (HUD 701 funds).

August; Economic Development Administration turns down EDD request; Council members discuss mobile medical clinic.

October; Cornhusker Council counties consider merger of Region 18 and 19 Councils for the formation of a 10-county EDD.

1977 - March; Cornhusker Council turns down HUD 701 funds arguing compliance would cost more than program netted; Council changes proposal for mobile medical clinic to proposal for home health care nursing program.

April; Old West Regional Commission approves grant for \$150,322 for visiting nurses program in two counties in Region 18 and two counties in Region 19.

June; Perkins County and the cities of Grant and Ogallala withdraw from Cornhusker Council.

1978 - June; Grant County rejoins Council and Perkins and Arthur Counties become non-dues paying, non-voting members.

October; Two new counties (Thomas and Hooker) join Sandhills Visiting Nurses Association.

December; Director reports that Council expenditures for fiscal year 1978 total \$90,797 and number of staff totals eight.

1979 - February; Cornhusker Council hires an economic planner.

March; Council sets assessments for members at \$3.16 per capita.

May; EDA funds (\$50,000) the designated WCNEEDD which includes all ten counties in Regions 18 and 19.

1980 - July; WCNEEDD drops its council of governments organizational structure to operate as a formally designated EDD.

Mission

According to the January, 1977, Nebraska Municipal Review, the Cornhusker Regional Council of Governments and three other regional councils were formed at a time when "state and federal complexities were beginning to seriously affect normal local government operations". The purpose of the Cornhusker Council was to assist local governments in complying with those regulations that affected their receipt of state and federal funds. In the 1974-75 Annual Report, the Cornhusker Council staff recognized this situation, but also emphasized its role in facilitating communication between the governmental units within Region 19. The Council staff intended thereby to make the public and elected officials aware of problems common throughout the region, arguing that this understanding would strengthen the member's "identity" and "regional government."

Organizational Arrangements

The Cornhusker Council did not experience the degree of organizational and staff volatility common to many regional councils. The basis for this stability appears to be: (1) the active role played by local elected officials in the Council; (2) the Council's involvement with state agencies, particularly with the State Office of Planning and Programming (SOPP); (3) the hiring of a staff early in the Council's life; and (4) the effectiveness of the staff in working with the membership.

Those attending the August, 1974, organizational meeting of the Cornhusker Council typified the organization's initial and continued reliance on elected officials for support and guidance. The fourteen persons at that meeting elected county commissioners as the Council's chairman and treasurer, and a city councilman as vice-chairman. They selected the Ogallala city

manager as secretary.² Three of the county commissioners attending that organizational meeting served in subsequent years as Chairman of the Council's Executive Committee. A representative of the SOPP also participated in that meeting to provide assistance with structuring the Council.

Council Activities

When a Director was hired in November, 1974, the Cornhusker Council began offering technical services to member governments. The Executive Committee and the Director defined the organizational arrangements, linkages, and goals that would be the basis of both the Council's technical and regional services to members. Variety and flexibility in those services appear to be the philosophy developed by the Director and Executive Committee. For example, in 1975, the Council's technical services to members included assistance in the areas of flood insurance, law enforcement, planning and zoning, grantsmanship, and the acquisition of surplus federal property. The following three sections describe some of the regional programs developed by the Cornhusker Council.

The A-95 Program: One of the first steps the Director and Executive Committee took was to accept an SOPP suggestion that the Council become a regional A-95 review board. In April, 1975, the Cornhusker Council entered a 6-month probationary period as an A-95 clearinghouse. The Executive Committee members soon discovered that the A-95 reviews required a considerable investment of their time and energy. They also learned that the start-up costs of the program might exceed any financial support received from the federal

² The 1974-75 Annual Report of the Council listed forty-five General Assembly members of whom only three were not elected officials: one city manager, one city clerk, and one chief of police.

government. The Director estimated first year costs at \$2,000 to \$4,000 for copying and postage to mail out applications for review.

These discoveries caused some doubts among the Committee members about the program's usefulness as did subsequent developments which exposed additional problems with being an A-95 clearinghouse. A few persons appeared at some Committee meetings and complained about the members' handling of various applications. Some of these critics accused the Committee of approving "wasteful" programs; others regretted the Committee's veto of "useful" programs. The Committee's powers actually only extended to favorably or unfavorably reviewing applications; the ultimate funding agency approved or disapproved an application. It should be noted, though, that Committee members did object when state or federal agencies funded programs the Committee had unfavorably reviewed. By mid-1977, however, the Executive Committee established an A-95 procedure that efficiently and effectively reviewed grant applications and, therefore, satisfied the requirements of the SOPP and federal agencies.

The Sandhills Visiting Nurses Association: Both the interests of the region and the desire for organizational stability influenced the Executive Committee's support for the Sandhills Visiting Nurses Association (SVNA) and for Region 19's designation as an Economic Development District (EDD). These activities augmented the Council's mission to provide desired technical services to member units and enhanced public awareness of the Council and of regional problems.

The Sandhills Visiting Nurses Association developed from the Cornhusker Council's reputation as an effective rural regional council of governments. The Old West Regional Commission (OWRC) approached the Council in 1976 with

an offer to fund a two-year regional health program. In October of that year, the councils of governments in Regions 18 and 19 agreed to cooperate, and jointly requested \$28,000 from the OWRC for planning a mobile medical clinic. During 1977, the Cornhusker Council staff acceded to the requests of some physicians and changed the proposal from a mobile medical clinic to a home health care nursing program.

In November, 1977, the OWRC granted the Cornhusker Council \$150,322 for a visiting nurses program in four of the ten counties in Regions 18 and 19: Keith, Arthur, Grant, and Hooker. The Sandhills Visiting Nurses Association had an independent Advisory Board, but the Cornhusker Council Executive Committee oversaw many of its programs and policies. The SVNA reimbursed the Council for administrative services, rent, and office expenses. During 1978, doctors in two additional counties requested SVNA services, so Thomas County (Region 18) and Perkins County (Region 19) joined the Association. The SVNA provided the Cornhusker Council with additional administrative funds and expanded the Council's services and influence beyond Region 19.

The West Central Nebraska Economic Development District: The Cornhusker Council first requested in 1976 that the Economic Development Administration (EDA) designate Region 19 as an EDD. The EDA turned down that request, citing the region's low population. The staff and Executive Committee of the Council subsequently sought to overcome this deficiency by merging with the Region 18 Council of Governments or, occasionally, by seeking a merger with the Region 20 Council of Governments. The Executive Committee of the Cornhusker Council usually approved these merger efforts, but elected officials in Regions 18 and 20 were seldom enthusiastic about these proposed mergers, or even their own councils of governments. The Region 18 Council disbanded in October, 1978.

Although unable to generate sufficient support for a merger, the staff of the Cornhusker Council did enlist enough support from elected officials in Region 18 to apply to the EDA for a ten-county EDD. The EDA authorized the West Central Nebraska Economic Development District (WCNEDD) in May, 1979. The WCNEDD Board consisted of two-thirds elected officials and one-third private citizens, compared to all elected officials on the Cornhusker Council Executive Committee. For the first year, the EDA granted the WCNEDD \$50,000 to hire an economic planner and to pay administrative and office expenses (to the Cornhusker Council). In July, 1980, the Cornhusker Council was dissolved and replaced by the WCNEDD.

This transition typified the Cornhusker Council's original and continuing method of operation. That method included the provision of innumerable individual services to member governments paid for by annual dues and of regional services funded largely as part of state and federal programs. The WCNEDD structure promised to provide the same services to Region 19 local governments as the Cornhusker Council at the same or lower costs while providing equal or additional regional services.

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