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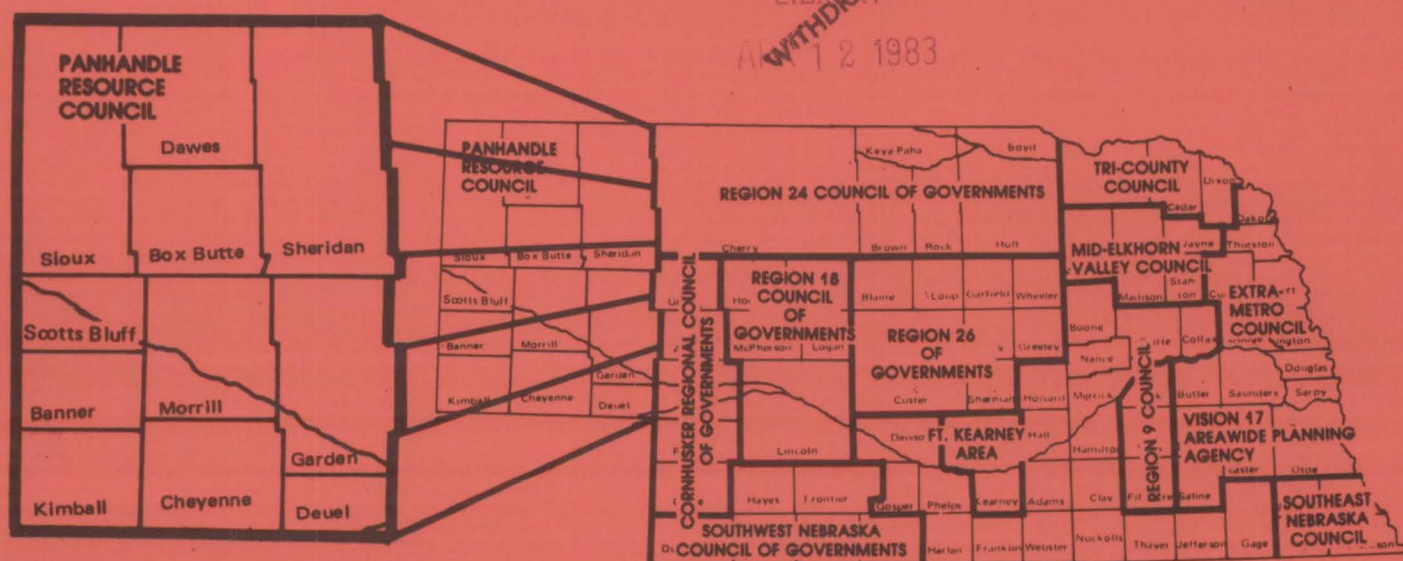
January, 1983

LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND THE PANHANDLE RESOURCE COUNCIL

AN EXAMINATION OF SELECTED INTERACTIONS

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By

Michael Lundeen
Paul Gessaman



The Agricultural Experiment Station
Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Irvin T. Omtvedt, Director



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Michael Lundeen and Paul H. Gessaman

Department of Agricultural Economics
University of Nebraska-Lincoln
Lincoln, NE

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LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND THE PANHANDLE RESOURCE COUNCIL
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by
Michael Lundeen and Paul H. Gessaman**

Objectives of the Research

The research reported here examines the effects that programs and activities of the Panhandle Resource Council (PRC) have had on local units of general purpose government. The PRC serves an eleven-county region of rural Nebraska and is one of two regional councils selected for this phase of the research.¹ An earlier report based on the first phase of the research effort provides a descriptive overview of regional councils in Nebraska.² This report focuses on the nature and effects of interactions between the PRC and the local units of general purpose government within its jurisdiction. Objectives of the research were:

1. To identify the number and types of programs and services provided to local government units by the regional council.

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

¹ A companion publication by the same authors, Local Governments and the Cornhusker Regional Council: An Examination of Selected Interactions, Department of Agricultural Economics Report No. 128, 1982, reports on 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.

2. To identify selected characteristics of local government units that utilize regional council programs and services.
3. To determine how local elected officials perceived: (a) local problems, (b) regional issues, and (c) the appropriateness of the programs and activities of the regional 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 PRC, and (3) the insights and inferences derived from 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. State and federal legislation and regulations resulted in minimum standards for local government services that were, in some cases, absolute requirements. In others, they were requirements for participation in categorical funding programs. Affected services included: health care, housing, education, law enforcement, job training, public assistance, and environmental conditions. In addition, the personnel practices of government units at all levels were subjected to more stringent requirements. Local governments, then, were expected to increase their delivery of human services 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.

³ The Appendix provides an account of the formation and evolution of the PRC. Since the Insights and Inferences 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 PRC.

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 in the late 1970s by supporting the enactment of a "lid" on local spending, after which operating surpluses disappeared and services were cut. In the mid-1970s, many local officials had discovered they were unable to take full advantage of the state and federal funding programs (categorical grants and revenue sharing) intended to help them raise the levels of government service. Public opinion had often discouraged the use of federal funds; and many local officials had not understood 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 Act⁴. This Act authorizes two or more units of 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); and (4) an organization through which special services can be supplied.

⁴ Sections 23-2201 to 23-2207, Reissue Revised Statutes of Nebraska, 1943.

The Panhandle Resource Council

The Panhandle Resource Council was one of the earliest regional councils formed in Nebraska. It began as a Resource Conservation and Development Project in 1970. The organization subsequently added the functions of an areawide planning organization, a council of governments, and an A-95 review board. Support for regional organization in the Panhandle came from a variety of elected officials and private citizens, which contributed to the changing structure of the PRC.

The PRC's membership in 1980 included: three Natural Resource Districts (Upper Niobrara-White NRD, North Platte NRD, and South Platte NRD); five first class cities, 32 second class cities or villages; and the 11 Panhandle counties (Dawes, Scotts Bluff, Morrill, Garden, Sioux, Box Butte, Sheridan, Kimball, Cheyenne, Deuel, and Banner). The PRC is the only regional council in Nebraska whose membership includes NRD's. All Panhandle municipalities are identified as Council members because the organization's bylaws give memberships to all municipalities in a county if the county has paid its membership dues.

The Panhandle is the largest unified geographic area in Nebraska, encompassing more than 9 million acres and 94,795 people.⁵ The region contains 18 percent of the state's land area, but only 6 percent of its population. The 35 municipalities in the Panhandle range in size from Marsland, with a population of 37, to the regional trade center of Scottsbluff, Gering, and Terrytown, with a combined population of 20,190. In addition to being a trade

⁵ All population data taken from 1976 Population Estimates and 1975 and Revised 1974 Per Capita Income Estimates for Counties, Incorporated Places, and Selected Minor Civil Divisions in Nebraska, U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Series P-25, No. 766, January, 1979.

center, Scottsbluff is a county seat and the location of the offices of many state and federal agencies serving the Panhandle, including the PRC's offices. Sidney, Alliance, Bridgeport, Gordon, and Chadron are other county seats and trade centers. The five remaining county seats provide county government services, but are not major trade centers. For the region as a whole, 18 municipalities have populations of less than 800, 11 are in the range of 800 to 2,500, and the remaining six exceed 2,500.

The region is largely agricultural with numerous irrigated and dryland farms and rangeland cattle operations. As agricultural activity has intensified, farm supply firms have flourished. Railroad-related development in Alliance increased investments, jobs, and personal incomes in the late 1970s. Plans for energy development suggest that railroad and mining activity will increase in other parts of the northern Panhandle. Tourism is also stimulating economic activity, especially in the Fort Robinson region of Dawes County.

Insights and Inferences

Survey responses reported in this publication indicate the PRC served as a focal point for the discussion of regional issues and as an adjunct to local governments in the Panhandle. Council meetings brought together local officials from throughout the region to discuss local and regional issues. Most respondents identified regional-level solutions to regional-level problems as desirable and appropriate. Nonetheless, the Council provided no tangible regional services.

The PRC's major contribution to the region was providing assistance to local governments, particularly with planning and local government administration. Although few respondents questioned the quality of these services, some criticized the timeliness and consistency of the PRC's planning

assistance. Relatively frequent changes in PRC personnel (see Appendix) contributed to this problem.

The nature of the region served by the PRC limited its activities and effectiveness. Travel and communications among PRC members can be expensive and time consuming, since the Panhandle is a large, sparsely settled, geographic region. It has one regional trade center, several county trade centers, and many smaller cities and villages. The expectations of the larger and smaller municipalities often differed regarding the services and assistance they desired from their regional council. This divergency in expectations made it difficult for the PRC to provide a program that served and gained the support of all the region's governmental units (by the Council bylaws all were members). Member governments utilizing the Council's services at the time of this study were primarily the small towns and cities. Without PRC assistance, they have limited ability to secure the services of persons knowledgeable of state and federal mandates, programs, and channels of communication.

Despite the uncertainties and instability inherent to any new voluntary association of individuals or governments, the PRC survived. A variety of local officials supported the PRC because of a belief in a regional organization for the Panhandle or because their governments benefited from its services. Most city and county officials in the region, however, did not give a high level of allegiance and support to the PRC. The Council's heritage of structural change, turnover of personnel, affiliation with state and federal agencies, and involvement in controversial activities (e.g., providing planning assistance) appear to be major factors in the limited local support evident in the responses of several persons interviewed for this research.

The PRC's continued existence over more than a decade indicates it has performed useful functions, even though the data gathered in this research do

not indicate the PRC is a major influence in the Panhandle. The Council has provided a forum for the discussion of local and regional issues and concerns. Through completion of A-95 reviews, it has helped local governments complete procedural requirements for many forms of federal assistance. The PRC has generally provided these services and others requested by the active members with a modest budget and a small number of staff. Largely because of the diversity of local government needs and of local attitudes towards regional councils, the PRC staff has not been able to generate continuous nor widespread support for the Council in the Panhandle. Nonetheless, the PRC's existence throughout a decade of change indicates that it has had the support of a number of local government officials in the Panhandle.

Research Approach

Data for this report came from interviews conducted with the PRC staff and with a sample of the elected and appointed officials of the Panhandle's counties and cities. The staff were interviewed at their Scottsbluff offices in May, 1980. The elected and appointed officials were interviewed the following month. During their interviews, staff members identified the member governmental units and their respective Council representatives. They also provided information on the nature of Council interactions with the sample governmental units during the two years immediately prior to the interview, listing the PRC's: (1) grantsmanship activities; (2) planning assistance; (3) consulting services; and (4) technical assistance (e.g., providing planning information, assistance with local government administration or budgeting assistance, assistance in preparing forms for revenue sharing, assessing needs, in-service training for public officials or employees, and other activities).

The sample city and county officials were subsequently asked about their perceptions of the services provided by the regional council. Each activity identified in the earlier interviews with Council staff was specifically discussed if the respondent's government unit had been directly involved. Follow-up questions were asked, if the local official was knowledgeable about an activity or service. The interview also included questions about the PRC's other services, the respondent's background, and the respondent's assessment of regionalism. Respondents who represented their governments on the PRC 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 the Panhandle counties, (2) each county's council representative, (3) the mayors of a sample of Panhandle municipalities, and (4) the council representative from each of the sample municipalities. This resulted in 38 interviews for the PRC--16 county officials and 22 city officials (Tables 1 and 2). The PRC representative for each of four counties was the county board chairman. These four chairmen responded to questions from two interview schedules: (1) the schedule for county board chairmen, and (2) the schedule for the council representative. The county board chairmen of the other seven counties agreed to be interviewed, but only five of the PRC representatives of those counties agreed to interviews. The study design required interviews with the mayor and the council representative of each municipality with populations over 2500, and with a selected number of mayors and council representatives from smaller municipalities. The municipal sample included the six Panhandle municipalities with more than 2500 population, plus 10 other towns and villages. This resulted in interviews with 15 mayors, four city councilmen, and three public employees. Although all Panhandle municipalities are identified as members of the PRC, not all have designated PRC

representatives. Thus, the number of PRC representatives was less than the number of municipalities in the municipal sample.

Table 1. Distribution of respondents in study sample by official position and membership on Panhandle Resource Council.

Official Position	Number
County Commissioner:	
County Board Chairman, not Council Representative	7
County Board Chairman, also Council Representative	4
Commissioner, also Council Representative	5
City Official:	
City or Village Mayor, not Council Representative	14
City or Village Mayor, also Council Representative	1
City Councilman, also Council Representative	4
Public Employee, also Council Representative	3
Total	38

Table 2. Distribution of governmental units in study sample by county and city and by membership in Panhandle Resource Council.

Governmental Unit	Membership Status	Number
County	Member	11
City: 2500 or more population	Member	6
City: less than 2500 population	Member	10
Total		27

Research Findings

The interviews with local officials are the bases for the text and tables appearing in the body of the report. Each of its five sub-sections begins with discussion of interview questions that generated the 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.

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, interlocal agreements, and problems.

Only the 26 mayors and County Board chairmen answered the questions about the adequacy of local resources (Table 3). Virtually all reported their governments had sufficient personnel for their programs (25) and equipment for desired services (21). A smaller majority reported their governments had sufficient local revenue for needed services (17) and capital investment needs (16). The respondents were evenly divided (12 agreeing, 12 disagreeing, and 2 undecided) in their responses to the statement, "We have sufficient local revenue to meet state and federal mandates."

Despite responses that imply local resources were adequate, 11 cities received funds from the State Department of Roads (DOR) and ten from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), primarily for CETA programs (Table 4). Seven and six of the sample cities, respectively, received funds from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). All but one county commission chairman reported receiving DOR funds. Eight counties received funds from the LEAA; six received funds from the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare.

Table 3. Responses of Mayors and County Board Chairmen to five statements about the sufficiency of local revenue and personnel.

Statement	Responses			
	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Don't Know
	-----Number-----			
We have sufficient local revenue for needed services.	17	2	7	
We have sufficient personnel to operate programs.	25		1	
We have sufficient equipment for desired services.	21	1	4	
We have sufficient local revenue to support capital investment needs.	16	1	8	1
We have sufficient local revenue to meet state and federal mandates.	12	2	12	

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

Revenue Sources	Cities	Counties
State Department of Roads	11	10
U.S. Department of Labor (CETA)	10	3
U.S. Law Enforcement Assistance Administration	7	8
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency	4	
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development	6	
U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare	3	6
U.S. Department of Agriculture	1	2
Other	4	4

The mayors and county commission chairmen also described the number and nature of their governments' interlocal agreements. For the 16 municipalities, the mayors listed 39 interlocal agreements in six categories;

for the counties, the chairmen listed 29 agreements (Table 5). Twenty of the interlocal agreements for the cities involved the sharing of personnel or equipment; eight involved the joint provision of services (two or more local governments jointly provide a service). Twelve of the counties' interlocal agreements concerned the joint provision of a service.

Table 5. Number of interlocal agreements⁶ reported for sample cities and counties, by category of agreement.

Category of Agreement	Cities	Counties
	-----Number-----	
Joint construction or leasing of facility	3	2
Joint leasing of equipment	2	
Sharing of personnel or equipment	20	6
Joint provision of services	8	12
Supplying services to other governments	3	6
Buying services from other governments	3	3
Total	39	29

The mayors of the sample cities reported their cities had 24 interlocal agreements with counties (Table 6). Sixteen of the interlocal agreements reported by county board chairmen were with cities. Most of these agreements (27) concerned road maintenance, which requires machinery too expensive for many small municipalities to purchase and maintain on their own (Table 7). The other major category of interlocal agreements, law enforcement (14 responses), is another expensive public service which small communities and countries often jointly finance. Other categories reported for interlocal agreements were services for the elderly, health, and sanitation.

⁶ 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.

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

Government Unit Reporting Interlocal Agreement	City	County	Other
	-----Number-----		
City	3	24	12
County	16	11	2
Total	19	35	14

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

Type of Function or Service	Number of Interlocal Agreements
Law enforcement (personnel and equipment)	16
Sanitation	6
Fire protection	3
Recreation	1
Health	9
Road equipment and maintenance	27
Elderly (handi-bus)	4
Social services	2
Total	68

Twenty-three of the mayors and county commission chairmen answered a series of questions about the consequences of their governments' interlocal agreements (Table 8). Twenty-one indicated disagreement with a statement implying they lost some control as a consequence of interlocal agreements. Nineteen agreed with the statement, "In evaluating your interlocal agreements, would you agree your government receives higher quality services?"

Eleven respondents indicated "yes" to a statement saying interlocal agreements gave their governments access to more professional services. The majority indicated their governments experienced no higher per unit costs or "red tape" because of interlocal agreements. Fifteen said "yes" in response to the statement that interlocal agreements permitted their governments to provide previously unaffordable services. Fourteen indicated "yes" to the statement implying interlocal agreements gave their governments the ability to provide a wider variety of services.

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	2	21	
Receives higher quality services	19	2	2
Gains more professional services	11	11	1
Experiences higher per unit costs	3	19	1
Encounters more red tape	6	17	
Provides a wider variety of services	14	8	1
Provides previously unaffordable services	15	8	
Finds coordination costs increasing	7	15	1

A list of 15 potential problem areas was given to each respondent, and each was asked to identify those that were locally important (Table 9). For each problem identified by the respondent the follow-up question was asked, "Are you willing to commit local resources to this problem?" Questions about the scope of the problem and who should solve it were also asked. Vandalism

was selected most often (26 times) as a problem for city and county governments. Fourteen of the 26 respondents who identified vandalism as a problem, identified it as a regional problem (Table 10). Most (23) indicated its solution rested with local governments with 24 suggesting a willingness to commit local resources to its resolution. Other problems with numerous responses were: jail facilities and public housing with 12 responses each and land use planning with 11 responses. Eight respondents identified jail facilities as a regional problem with seven indicating solutions should be by state or "other" authorities. (In most instances responses of "other" in Table 10 meant federal government.) Responses followed a similar pattern for funding social services and flood control, activities for which local governments must comply with state or federal regulations. A majority of respondents also identified mental health services, solid waste disposal, and energy development as primarily regional problems. Nonetheless, in all categories, at least half of those selecting a problem as a concern of their government were willing to contribute local resources to its solution.

Survey responses tabulated in Tables 3 through 10 indicate that units of government in the Panhandle are fairly typical of local government units elsewhere in rural Nebraska. The respondents acknowledged that their governments faced a variety of problems. Although most respondents indicated their governments had sufficient local revenue for needed or desired services, grants from state or federal agencies were accepted and used. The counties and the sample cities had entered into interlocal agreements for a number of purposes. Respondents reported that most problems should be solved locally, though they specified state or federal solutions for problems in areas affected by state or federal policies and regulations. Panhandle municipalities most often sought outside funding or expertise when dealing with public service needs and with changing state and federal regulations.

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	26	24	2
Jails	12	11	1
Parks and campgrounds	7	6	1
Mental health	7	4	3
Health	5	2	2
Fire protection	2	2	
Public housing	12	8	4
Water supplies	10	8	
Social services	10	8	2
Solid waste	10	10	
Water pollution	5	5	
Land use	11	11	
Flood control	9	7	2
Energy development	9	5	4
Environment	6	4	2

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	12	14	23	1	1	1	
Jails	4	8	3		2	4	3
Parks and campgrounds	5	2	5			1	1
Mental health	1	6	1	2	2	1	1
Health	3	2	3	1			1
Fire protection		2	2				
Public housing	9	3	8		1	1	2
Water supplies	8	2	6	2	1		1
Social services	1	9	1		2	3	4
Solid waste	4	6	7		2		1
Water pollution	2	3	2		2	1	
Land use	7	4	7		3	1	
Flood control	5	4	5	1			3
Energy development		9	1	1	2		5
Environment	1	5	2	1	1	1	1

Council Programs and Services

Regional councils typically have provided local governments with planning assistance, technical assistance, administrative services to local governments, and help with grants. Grant assistance involves writing and expediting grant applications and assisting governments when grants are approved. For this study, the respondents reported on seven categories of

Council services, with the most of the questions directed to aspects of grant-writing and planning assistance. Grant-writing, planning, and technical assistance during the 2 years prior to the interview were the major topics addressed in the interview schedule.⁷

The PRC staff reported they assisted the sample governments with 12 grants and 11 plans (Table 11). Six of the grants were for water and sewer improvements, four were for recreation developments, and two were for aspects of transportation. The staff also reported assisting seven members with comprehensive plans, two with zoning ordinances, and two with transportation plans. Respondents who were familiar with the grants and planning assistance reported by the PRC staff provided the data for Tables 12 and 13. All respondents provided information for Table 14. According to the respondents, local officials initiated six of the grant applications (Table 12). Five respondents indicated "yes", four "no", when asked whether the grants would have been written without the PRC's assistance. Four reported the PRC wrote their grant applications. Of the two grants that were funded, one respondent indicated that local expenditures were expected to decrease as a result. Six respondents reported satisfaction with the PRC's grant assistance.

The respondents indicated the regional council staff had initiated the use of their planning assistance in six instances (Table 13). Nonetheless, eight respondents reported their government's plans would have been completed without the Council. Nine said "yes" when asked, "could your government have afforded to hire planning consultants?" Six of the 11 respondents indicated

⁷ The provision of grant, planning, and technical services to nonmetropolitan 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).

they were satisfied with the PRC's planning assistance. Several respondents said in the course of the interviews that some plans took a long time to complete.

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

Public Problem or Service	Grant		Planning Assistance	
	City	County	City	County
	-----Number-----			
Transportation		2	2	
Comprehensive planning			7	
Zoning ordinances			2	
Recreation	4			
Water and sewer	6			
Total	10	2	11	

Regional councils provide a variety of technical services to local governments in addition to grant and planning assistance. Fourteen respondents reported that the PRC assisted their governments with administration and in-service training (Table 14). Thirteen indicated the Council assisted with planning. Most of the PRC's planning assistance was reported to be the providing of general information, with some assistance in the preparation of documents and regulations. Within the public meetings and surveys category, the respondents indicated the PRC was most active in holding forums and meetings. Sanitation was the most frequently identified topic of in-service training. The interview schedule included a set of questions about PRC assistance with revenue sharing, but none of the respondents reported Council assistance in that area. By a large margin in every category, those reporting PRC technical assistance were satisfied.

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

Questions	Responses			
	-----Number-----			
	Citizen	Local Official	Council	
Who suggested grant be written?	1	6	2	
Would grant have been prepared without the Council's assistance?	Yes		No	
	5		4	
	Wrote Grant	Advisor	Other	
What was the Council's function?	4	3	2	
	Funded	Rejected	Being Considered	
What was result of application?	2	3	4	
	Increase	Decrease	None	
What are the expected effects on local revenues?			2	
What are the expected effects on local expenditures?		1	1	
	Satisfied	Uncertain	Dissatisfied	Don't Know
How satisfied were you with the Council's assistance?	6	1	1	1

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

Questions	Responses			
	Citizen	Local Official	Regional Council	Don't Know
Who suggested using the Council?	1	3	6	1
Would plan have been done without the Council?			Yes	No
			8	3
Could you have afforded to hire a planning consultant?			9	2
How satisfied were you with the Council's assistance?	Satisfied	Uncertain	Dissatisfied	
	6	1	4	

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

Categories of Council Supplied Technical Assistance	Level of Satisfaction			Don't Know
	Satisfied	Uncertain	Dissatisfied	
	-----Number-----			
Assistance to planning (preparing plans, maps, documents, zoning regulations, etc.)	10	3		
Administrative assistance (providing information, advice, technical assistance, etc.)	3	1		
Public meetings and surveys (holding forums and meetings, conducting needs assessment surveys, etc.)	12	1		1
In-service training (informing local officials about technical assistance, weatherization, and public housing, etc.)	9	2	1	2

The data in Tables 11 through 14 indicate the PRC staff assisted the sample governments with a number of grants and plans. A majority of those reporting grant or planning assistance concluded their governments could have completed the grant or plan without the PRC's help. More cities than counties utilized PRC grant and planning assistance. Most grant and planning assistance concerned local government activities that are under state or federal guidelines (specifically, comprehensive planning and water and sewer treatment facilities). Within the five technical assistance categories, interviewees reported the PRC staff served primarily as a source of information and advice for local governments.

Member Participation in the Council

An evaluation of members' participation in PRC meetings and business begins with Tables 15 and 16, which report perceptions of decision making within the Council. The data in Tables 17, 18, and 19 indicate local officials' participation in and perceptions of the PRC. Only Council representatives answered the questions in Tables 15 and 16; all respondents provided information for Tables 17, 18, and 19.

The majority of the 16 Council representatives credited the Policy Council with the most influence in decisions on policy, budget, and program (Table 15).⁸ The representatives reported the Executive Committee and Director had considerable influence, especially with regard to programming.

⁸ The interview schedule referred throughout to Policy Council and Executive Committee. Within the PRC, these two bodies are called the General Assembly and Board of Directors, respectively. This difference in terminology was explained to all respondents. The membership of the General Assembly included representatives of all member cities, counties, and NRD's. The Board of Directors included 11 county commissioners, 5 first class city representatives, 3 to 8 second class city representatives, and 3 NRD directors, according to a 1979 PRC report, The Panhandle: Objectives for tomorrow . . . and the day after.

The majority of the representatives indicated the planning staff and other committees had some influence over policy, budget, and program decisions. Several representatives responded with "don't know" to questions about the influence of the Executive Committee or other committees on PRC decision making.

The 16 representatives also reported their individual participation in Council meetings and business. Eleven responded that they seldom or never opposed budget recommendations (Table 16). Eight indicated they sometimes or often introduced issues in meetings without having full support. A larger majority (11) said they sometimes or often openly disagreed with other members.

Table 15. Reported degree of influence on Council decisions by type of decision and by type of participant in decision making.

Decision and by type of participant in decision making.				
Type of Decision and	Degree of Influence			
Type of Participant	Considerable	Some	None	Don't Know
	-----Number-----			
Policy decisions:				
Policy Council	12	2	1	1
Executive Committee	9	2	1	4
Executive Director	8	6	1	1
Planning Staff	2	10	3	1
Other Committees	5	8	1	2

Budget decisions:				
Policy Council	11	3		2
Executive Committee	8	3		5
Executive Director	8	6		2
Planning Staff		10	4	2
Other Committees	1	10	3	2

Program decisions:				
Policy Council	10	2		1
Executive Committee	9	3		4
Executive Director	12	3		1
Planning Staff	4	11	1	1
Other Committees	4	9	1	2

Nine representatives reported they seldom or never disagreed with the outcome of Council votes. These responses are consistent with Council meetings in which participants freely raise issues and disagree with one another, but operate within the framework of the organization.

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

Questions	Degree of Participation				No Response
	Never	Seldom	Sometimes	Often	
	-----Number-----				
How often have you					
opposed budget recommendations?	5	6	5		
attempted to introduce an issue without full support?	5	1	5	3	2
openly disagreed with other members?		4	7	4	1
disagreed with the outcome of a vote?	3	6	5	1	1

Attendance by the representatives of member governments at PRC meetings was reported on by all the respondents (Table 17). Ten of the 38 responding indicated the representatives of their governments attended all Policy Council meetings, six reported representation at all meetings of the Executive and Advisory Committee, and three reported representation at all public meetings. Some sample governments were not represented on the Executive or Advisory committees, resulting in the smaller number of responses reporting attendance at those meetings. A small number (2 to 3) indicated that the PRC had not held any Executive Committee, Advisory Committee, or public meetings. Only one respondent reported his government had contributed equipment to the PRC. Twenty stated their governments frequently or occasionally provided information to the Council staff.

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?	7	19	10		2	
. . . Executive Committee?	11	13	6	2	6	
. . . Advisory Committee?	7	10	6	3	12	
. . . Public Meetings Sponsored by Council?	10	15	3	3	7	
	Frequently	Occasionally	Seldom	Never	Don't Know	
How often has your government . . .						
. . . contributed equipment to Council?				1	35	2
. . . provided information to Council?	10	10	7	8	3	

The respondents reported several methods for communicating with the PRC (Table 18). The most frequently identified source was the Council's monthly newsletter. Council representatives or attendance at Council meetings and combinations of these categories were also identified by much smaller numbers of respondents. Thirteen respondents reported making their preferences known in person at meetings; nine depended on their Council representatives.

Only member counties were required to pay dues under the PRC by-laws. Some paid fees for technical assistance in addition to dues as noted by two of the 15 county respondents who answered the question. Ten municipal respondents reported their cities paid only for services (Table 19). Other responses indicated that not all respondents understood the nature of the funding obligations incurred by their governments.

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-----	
In person at meetings	2	13
Through Council representative	3	9
By telephone		2
Through the mail (newsletter, etc.)	21	
Combination of above	10	9
Have no contact with Council	2	5

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
Pay dues and only infrequently fees.		1
Pay only dues.	1	13
Pay only for services	9	
Never pay dues.	2	
Not expected to pay.	6	
Don't know	5	

Local officials interviewed in this study had varied knowledge of the PRC. Many reported regular receipt of PRC information and established patterns of making their preferences known. Data in Tables 15 through 18

indicate that some respondents had regular contact with the PRC, but others did not participate and may have had only secondhand knowledge of the Council's services and functions. This might be expected considering the large geographic size of the Panhandle region. Several elected officials from outlying cities in the Panhandle noted it was difficult, expensive, and time-consuming for them to travel to Scottsbluff for meetings or other PRC business.

Regionalism and the Council

Although the PRC exists primarily because of local support, its present organization as a regional council is related to federal policies during the 1960s and 1970s that encouraged the creation of regional councils. In the past several years, many local officials and some federal officials have questioned the usefulness of and rationale for regional councils.⁹ As a result, financial and political support for regionalism and regional councils has waned in many parts of the nation.

Responses to questions about attitudes towards regionalism and reactions to the activities of the PRC are reported in this section. Each interviewee had an opportunity to respond to these questions. Their responses provide insights into members' and non-members' assessments of the roles and activities of the PRC. They also provide limited insights into the extent of local support for regionalism and for the Panhandle Resources Council.

When asked about the acceptability of various types of regional organizational arrangements, all 38 respondents said "yes" to voluntary cooperation between local governments (Table 20). Most said "yes" to long-term voluntary associations between governments and to problem oriented

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.

multi-county special districts. Twenty of the respondents said "yes" to a two-tier system of local and regional governments, but 17 said "no." Thirty-six of the 38 said "no" to full-scale regional government.

Table 20. Reported acceptability of different types of organizational arrangements, by type of organization.

Type of Organizational Arrangement	Acceptable?		
	Yes	No	Don't Know
	-----Number-----		
Voluntary cooperation between governments as needs arise.	38		
Long-term voluntary associations.	30	7	1
Multi-county special districts that address problems that arise.	30	6	2
A two-tier system with a regional government for regional problems and local governments for local problems.	20	17	1
Full-scale regional government that replaces local governments.	2	36	

The respondents also reacted to a series of statements about the activities and functions of regional councils (Table 21). Twenty-seven of the 38 respondents agreed with the statement "Regional councils are an acceptable way to cope with federal mandates." Most (25 and 22, respectively) disagreed with statements indicating that: (1) regional councils are imposed by the federal government, and (2) are part of a federal effort to limit local authority. Twenty-nine disagreed with the statement, "Regional Councils are not acceptable because they remove local control." Responses were more evenly divided (12 agreeing and 16 disagreeing) for, "Regional councils are an acceptable way to reduce state and federal control over local governments." About

four-fifths gave responses of "agree" to statements indicating that regional councils were a good way to make planning experience available to local governments and a good way to pool local resources to address regional problems.

The interview schedule included two sets of questions about typical Council roles and activities. The respondents were asked whether the PRC performed a particular role, how effectively it performed that role, and whether that role was appropriate. The two roles attributed to the PRC by the most respondents (31 and 32, respectively) were: (1) "Serves as a forum for discussing problems," and (2) "Reviews federal grant applications" (The A-95 review and comment responsibilities related to federal grant applications) (Table 22). Twenty-eight respondents reported the PRC was somewhat or very effective as a forum; 30 gave this same response when asked about the PRC's effectiveness as a review board. Virtually all respondents indicated these roles were or would be appropriate.

The respondents also answered questions about the four other roles listed in Table 22. Twenty-four indicated the Council "Promotes a regional perspective" and "Establishes priorities among regional problems." A smaller number (10 and 18 respectively) reported the Council "Assists with the formation of contracts between local governments" and "Implements comprehensive and functional plans." For all roles, a majority of those reporting the Council performed a role concluded the Council was very or somewhat effective in that role. A majority of all respondents said "yes" when asked whether or not each of the four roles was or would be appropriate for the Council.

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

Description of Role or Effect	Level of Agreement			Don't Know
	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	
	-----Number-----			
Regional councils are...				
...an acceptable way to cope with federal mandates.	27	4	6	1
...imposed on local governments by federal mandates.	5	4	25	4
...part of a federal effort to limit local authority.	8	7	22	1
...imposed on local governments by state mandates.	2	7	25	4
...part of a state effort to limit local authority.	7	3	27	1
...not acceptable because they remove local control.	6	2	29	1
...an acceptable way to reduce federal or state control over local governments.	12	9	16	1
...a good way to make planning experience available.	30	3	3	2
...a good way to pool local resources to address regional problems.	29	4	4	1

Table 22. Assessment of regional council roles, by description of role.

Role	<u>Performs Role?</u>			<u>Effective in Role?</u>			<u>Is Role Appropriate?</u>		
	Yes	No	Don't	Very	Somewhat	Not	Yes	No	Don't
			Know						Know
-----Number-----									
Serves as a forum for discussing problems.	31		7	7	21	3	34	2	2
Assists in the formation of contracts between local governments.	10	19	9		10		23	14	1
Promotes a regional perspective.	24	5	9	1	21	2	28	7	3
Implements compre- hensive and functional plans.	18	8	12	5	10	3	29	9	
Establishes priorities among regional problems.	24	7	7	4	19	1	28	9	1
Reviews federal grant applications.	32		6	16	14	2	34	4	

The respondents then reported their perceptions of ten actual or potential PRC activities. Five of the ten were identified as PRC activities by 19 or more respondents (Table 23). Technical assistance for planning received the most "yes" responses (25). Lobbying for funds received the least (4). For each of the ten activities, at least ten respondents indicated "don't know" when asked whether the PRC performed the activity. A majority of those reporting that the PRC did perform each activity indicated the Council was somewhat effective in the activity. The largest counts of "very effective" rankings (7 each) were for "Provides technical assistance for planning," and "Helps write grants." The activities of providing social

planning, assistance to local management, and lobbying each received one-half or more "no" answers to the question, "Is activity appropriate?"

The pattern of responses reported in Tables 20, 21, and 23 indicates regional councils and regionalism were neither fully accepted or strongly rejected by the respondents. Replacement of local government by regional government was overwhelmingly rejected. Many roles and activities were reported to be appropriate, but the responses indicate the PRC's performance of those roles and activities was viewed as being only somewhat acceptable. It appears the respondents believe regional councils (and the PRC) can undertake any activity supported and needed by member governments.

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 Panhandle Regional Council as a specific local entity. When asked whether they agreed that "Regional councils would discontinue without federal funds," 25 respondents agreed, eight disagreed, three were uncertain, and two did not know (Table 24). Twenty-seven respondents indicated agreement with the statement, "Many local governments would withdraw from the Council if federal funds were withdrawn." Only five respondents agreed with the statement, "Citizens in this region would ratify the Council's continued operation." Eighteen responded "no" and 14 responded "uncertain." These responses apparently were based on the respondents' perception that the PRC was not well known. A typical comment during the interviews was, "the average citizen doesn't know the PRC exists."

Table 23. Respondents' assessments of Council services and activities by description of activity.

Description of Activity	Performs Activity?			Effective In Activity?			Is Activity Appropriate?		
	Don't						Don't		
	Yes	No	Know	Very	Somewhat	Not	Yes	No	Know
	-----Number-----								
Provides compre- hensive physical planning.	22	5	11	4	18		31	7	
Provides economic development planning.	19	7	12	5	11	3	28	10	
Provides compre- hensive social planning.	12	14	12	3	7	2	17	18	3
Prepares applica- tions for regional planning grants.	19	6	13	5	12	2	34	4	
Provides tech- nical assistance for planning.	25	3	10	7	17	1	33	5	
Provide tech- nical assistance for local management.	11	17	10	1	8	2	18	20	
Promotes federal programs.	15	12	11	4	7	4	21	16	1
Helps write grants.	22	6	10	7	12	3	32	4	2
Expedite sub- mitted grant applications.	11	11	16	3	7	1	30	8	
Lobbies for funds.	4	15	19	1	3		17	21	

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

Statement	Level of Agreement			
	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Don't Know
		-----Number-----		
Regional councils would discontinue without federal funds	25	3	8	2
Many local governments would withdraw from the Council if federal funds were withdrawn	27	3	7	1
Citizens in this region would ratify the Council's continued operation	5	14	18	1

The respondents were asked to list the three most important local or regional services provided by the PRC. The local services or activities mentioned most often were: planning assistance (9), grant assistance (11), and technical assistance (6) (Table 25). The regional services mentioned most often were: forum for discussion (10), and the same three services mentioned most frequently in the local category. Many respondents had difficulty identifying three local or regional services. It became apparent during the interviews, that respondents having regular contact with the PRC were aware of the PRC's services to their governments. Those who infrequently utilized PRC services had difficulty listing any services--local or regional.

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

Service	Local	Regional
Grant assistance	11	8
Planning assistance	9	8
Technical assistance	6	8
Forum for discussion	4	10
Coordination and communication	3	4
Funding	2	1
Economic development	2	1
Administrative assistance	3	1
Social services		3
Needs assessment		1
Sanitation	1	1
Environment		2
Disaster services		1

Appendix

This Appendix provides insights into the development of the Panhandle Resource Council. Although the discussion centers on the organizational needs and events that contributed to the PRC's growth, it recognizes that state and federal programs were instrumental in the establishment of the PRC (and of many rural regional councils). Regional councils were promoted initially as a means of solving regional problems and, subsequently, as a means of bringing expertise in planning and grantsmanship to local governments in rural America.¹ The PRC's history reflects this evolution of responsibilities and activities.

Information for this history came from (1) a review of the Minutes of the PRC Board of Directors and its predecessor organizations from 1968 through 1977; (2) interviews with staff members, local officials, and citizens; and (3) newspaper articles and published reports.²

Panhandle Resource Council Chronology

In the late 1960s, the interests of the early supporters of regional organization in the Panhandle coincided with those of some state and federal agency personnel who were seeking to expand their programs and activities at the local level. The PRC's supporters used this coincidence of interests to organize a regional council. The creation of the regional organization occurred despite public indifference and occasional hostility to what some perceived as "regional government." The PRC's organizational arrangements

¹ Doeksen, Role, 1975, p.i; Larry M. Hammer, COG: What It Can Do For You, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Extension Division, March, 1972, p. 1.

² The authors would like to thank Dr. Vernon Rockey, Art Johnson, Frank Koehler, and Mary Lou Strauch, Director of the PRC, for reviewing and commenting on an earlier draft of this Appendix.

changed several times in subsequent years, with each new structure reflecting a political compromise among the membership. This legacy of structural instability affects the present status of the PRC and its interaction with, and effects on, local elected officials and governmental units.

The following chronology includes selected events in the PRC's history for the years 1968 through 1980.

- 1968 - Dr. Vernon Rockey meets with Soil Conservation Service (SCS) officials and discusses the nature of a Resource Conservation and Development Project (RC&D).
- 1969 - An ad hoc committee of Panhandle businessmen and public officials completes and sends an application to the USDA and Congress, requesting designation of a Panhandle RC&D.
- 1970 - The RC&D Directors submit their Project Plan to the USDA, making the Panhandle RC&D operational.
- 1971 - Congress funds the RC&D's first measures --- roadside seedings and the Verde Lane Dam --- to a total of \$525,700.

Board assesses member counties yearly RC&D dues of \$100.

Scottsbluff city manager requests that the Board of Directors seek Areawide Planning Organization classification for the RC&D.

- 1972 - State Office of Planning and Programming (SOPP) and Cooperative Extension Service begin work with the RC&D.
- 1973 - The Board hires an administrative assistant.

Ten small communities drop out of the Panhandle RC&D.

The Board adopts fiscal 1974 budget of \$28,000 of which approximately \$14,000 will come from HUD and \$14,000 from members.

General Assembly adopts a new constitution and by-laws for the reorganized Panhandle Resource Conservation Development and Planning Council (RCD & PC).

U.S. Soil Conservation Service RC&D coordinator, reports that the Areawide Planning Organization brought \$2.3 million in federal grants to Panhandle communities.

- 1974 - SOPP explains the activities and responsibilities of an A-95 review agency and holds A-95 training session for Directors.

Board applies for state funding under LB 790 program and hires a Director.

- 1975 - Dawes County Commissioners hire PRC to draft comprehensive land use plan.

Board hires a PRC planner.

- 1976 - General Assembly restructures Board of Directors limiting membership to elected officials.

Directors vote to withdraw from Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) 701 planning program.

- 1977 - PRC Director and planner resign.

Board hires new Director and sets county assessments at 23 cents per capita.

- 1978 - Board considers seeking Economic Development District designation for the Panhandle.

Director resigns and Assistant Director promoted to Director.

Director reports budget for fiscal year 1978 totals \$68,320 and number of staff totals four.

- 1979 - Board hires circuit rider to assist local officials with governmental planning and administration.

Board hires a new PRC planner.

PRC conducts an economic impact study of sugar beet industry in the Panhandle.

- 1980 - Mary Lou Strauch promoted from Human Resources Coordinator to Director.

Mission

Many organizational aspects of the PRC have changed, but its mission has remained much the same. The PRC emerged in the late 1960s when the Panhandle's economic base was in an apparent decline and, at a time, when the public perceived that the region lacked influence with outside political and economic forces. The PRC's mission has been to help overcome these deficiencies. The public's perception of the Council's ability to fulfill this mission has fluctuated since its formation, but the Board of Directors

generally has supported the Council. In uncertain times, the Directors have argued that the PRC has influenced outside economic and political attitudes toward the Panhandle.

A feeling of economic insecurity and political powerlessness permeated much of the rural Great Plains during the 1950s and 1960s. Residents of small communities often found their local agriculture had consolidated, with fewer farmers and ranchers operating ever-increasing acreages. Young people left the communities and farms for more plentiful, better paying jobs in urban areas, sometimes outside the region. Moreover, the farmers who remained often bypassed the local community when making major consumer purchases, further undermining the local economy and job opportunities.³ This caused apprehensions about the future and some resentment of outside authorities and economic development elsewhere.

Since the growth in job opportunities in the region's towns and cities did not equal the decrease in agricultural employment opportunities, the Panhandle lost population with the exodus of people seeking work.⁴ Between 1960 and 1968, the Panhandle experienced an overall population loss of 4.7 percent and an estimated outmigration rate of 14.5 percent.⁵ Six of 11 counties in the region had population declines in all three decades from 1940

³ Marion Clawson, "Rural Poverty in the United States," Journal of Farm Economics, v. 49, #5 (December, 1967), p. 1233; Carl F. Kraenzel, The Great Plains in Transition, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1955, p. 278.

⁴ The Panhandle economy is generally more diversified today than in the 1960s, nonetheless, a few Panhandle residents are again suggesting that the region secede from Nebraska and join Wyoming. Whether serious or not about secession, such proponents cite lower taxes in Wyoming as one rationale for secession and also argue the Panhandle would have more political influence in Wyoming because of that state's low population (Lincoln Journal, 1/5/82; Omaha World-Herald, 2/12/82).

⁵ Panhandle RC&D project sponsors, Nebraska Panhandle Resource Conservation and Development Project Plan, printed by USDA, SCS, Lincoln, Nebraska, ca., 1970, pp. 22-23.

through 1970. Only two counties, Scotts Bluff and Dawes, exhibited population growth during any of those decades (less than 13.3 percent between 1960 and 1970).⁶ Along with outmigration came a consolidation of Panhandle agriculture. Between 1950 and 1969, the number of farms dropped by 1,320 or 17.5 percent. Average farm size rose by almost 14 percent from 1,383 acres to 1,572 acres between 1959 and 1964. A 19 percent decrease in agricultural employment accompanied this consolidation during the 1963 to 1968 period.⁷

In the 1960s, many community leaders in the Panhandle recognized the region's economic problems. Stan Juelfs of Kimball said he discovered that concern over the Panhandle economy was widespread while attending a meeting of the Western Nebraska United Chambers of Commerce. Consequently, he and several other businessmen and elected officials formed an informal organization called the Panhandle Partners for Progress. The Partners preceded the first formal regional group (the Panhandle Resource Conservation and Development Project), but represented the initial commitment by some community leaders to regional organization.

Organizational Arrangements

Although the Panhandle Resource Council's mission remained relatively unchanged, its structure changed over the years. The sponsors of the newly formed PRC viewed it as a self-help organization, but needed a formal structure to implement their ideas. Dr. Vernon Rockey, an optometrist from Crawford and a strong advocate of regional organization, concluded from discussions with SCS officials that a Resource Conservation and Development

⁶ Paul H. Gessaman, "Migration and Population Change in Nebraska: The Recent Experience and Speculations About the Future," UN-L, Dept. of Agricultural Economics, Staff Paper #3, 1978, p. 5.

⁷ Panhandle RC&D Project Sponsors, Nebraska, ca. 1970, p. 26.

Project was the most appropriate of the possible organizational approaches identified by the sponsors.⁸ Most of the other sponsors accepted this proposal, deciding that an RC&D organization would maintain local autonomy while providing access to state and federal support.

Federal interest in regional organization and planning coincided with these efforts to develop a regional organization for the Panhandle. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, federal agencies operating at the state or local level favored a variety of regional organizations. The Soil Conservation Service sponsored RC&D's; the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) advocated areawide planning organizations (APOs); and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) requested that states form statewide or regional A-95 review boards. HUD required that APOs have a governing body consisting of two-thirds elected officials, or their designated representatives, and that these officials represent at least three-quarters of the population encompassed by the planning organization. This coincided with Nebraska's membership requirements for a council of governments. The state and HUD determined that the Panhandle RC&D conformed to these requirements in 1973. Consequently, the combined RC&D, APO, and council of governments became the Panhandle Resource Conservation Development and Planning Council.

The motivation for this structural change originated with the state and federal governments. In the early 1970s, Panhandle municipalities increasingly sought assistance from the federal government, which required compliance with government regulations as a precondition of assistance. For

⁸ The PRC is the only regional council of governments in Nebraska that has its origins in an RC&D project. Congress instituted those projects with the passage of the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962. The Panhandle RC&D received U. S. Department of Agriculture authorization for planning in early 1970 and became operational with the submission of a Project Plan on September 29, 1970.

example, in 1971, the Scottsbluff city manager, Frank Koehler, informed the Panhandle RC&D Board that the city needed the approval of an APO before the federal government would fund an addition to the city's water and sewer system. He thought that the RC&D could qualify as an APO with a few structural changes. The Panhandle RC&D Board subsequently sought the advice of the State Office of Planning and Programming (SOPP) and then initiated the changes necessary to qualify as an APO.

The A-95 review and comment activity developed from OMB Circular A-95, issued in 1969. In the circular, the OMB requested that state governors establish an agency to review state and local applications for several federal grants. The OMB intended that this review identify and reduce conflicts and duplications in the provision of services or facilities that received federal funding. As soon as state review agencies were established, the OMB encouraged states to turn over review of local grant applications to metropolitan and regional planning bodies. In Nebraska, Governor J. J. Exon directed the SOPP to conduct state A-95 reviews. The SOPP subsequently transferred local reviews to multi-county and metropolitan planning organizations. The Panhandle RCD and Planning Council received provisional certification for the A-95 review function in 1974. In that same year, it changed its name to the Panhandle Resource Council.

These changes in the PRC structure sometimes caused conflicts between member units or their representatives. In 1973, ten small communities dropped their RC&D memberships because their representatives objected to the addition of APO functions. They feared that an APO would be of more benefit to Scottsbluff and the other large municipalities in the Panhandle. They presumed this would lead to a more active role in the RC&D by large communities and a corresponding loss in the organization's responsiveness to villages.

In that same year, a conflict developed among the General Assembly members over differing visions of the RC&D's structure. The Board of Directors had met several times with SOPP representatives to work out the necessary changes in the bylaws to qualify for HUD approval as an APO. In February, 1973, the Board presented its proposals for new bylaws to the General Assembly for consideration and approval. Some members disapproved of the Board's proposals and offered a revised version of new bylaws to the Assembly. The membership differed over the role of private individuals within a combined RC&D, APO, and council of governments. One faction favored bylaws that restricted membership on the Board to elected officials; another faction, led by Dr. Rockey, preferred to continue previous policies and allow private citizens to participate in the RC&D at all levels. The General Assembly eventually adopted the bylaws of the latter group.

These conflicts over the structure and membership of the APO made 1973 a pivotal year in the PRC's development. The changes and conflicts of that year resulted in expansion of the RC&D's interests to include urban as well as rural problems and to include affiliations with HUD and the SOPP as well as the SCS. The Panhandle RC&D was becoming less of the self-help organization envisioned by many of its founders and more an affiliate of state and federal agencies.

Staffing and Linkages with Agencies

Linkages with state and federal agencies provided the PRC with expertise, credibility with the public and elected officials, and access to funding for staff and programs. Several factors contributed to the Council's early reliance on state and federal agencies and personnel. In the late 1960s, Congress expanded federal services at the state and local level. As a consequence of this Congressional mandate, the SCS, HUD, and the SOPP sought a

means of quickly reaching local governments. The PRC became that means in the Panhandle, in large part because its founders were simultaneously seeking credibility and support for their self-help organization. This resulted in the rapid evolution of linkages between the PRC and a number of agencies, which brought resources to the PRC, but also obligations for the organization and its staff.

The immediate consequence of these linkages was the PRC's reliance on agency representatives to perform daily staff functions. These state or federal fieldmen had been assigned either to the PRC or to the Panhandle region. The first of these was the SCS fieldman at Scottsbluff, Bob Boecking, who assisted with organizing the RC&D. Other agencies that developed ties with the RC&D in the early 1970s were the Nebraska Department of Economic Development (DED), the SOPP, and the Cooperative Extension Service. These agencies naturally became involved in the activities of the PRC. For example, it was the DED fieldman who, first recommended the Panhandle RC&D reorganize as a council of governments. Other agency representatives also encouraged the Board to adopt particular programs and policies--the SOPP proposed the PRC provide its members with comprehensive planning services.

This PRC involvement in land use planning from 1974 through 1977 demonstrated another potential ramification of linkages with state and federal agencies. Nebraskans were only marginally concerned with land use planning in 1972 when Congress first seriously considered land use planning legislation. Nonetheless, several state leaders urged cities and counties to instigate their own plans before Congress mandated such efforts in every state. In 1975, State Senator Douglas Bereuter, former Director of the State Office of Planning and Programming, introduced LB 317 which required comprehensive planning by all Nebraska counties containing all or part of a first class city. The Governor signed LB 317 into law in May, 1975.

In January of that year, an SOPP representative had explained to the PRC Board of Directors that the SOPP could no longer directly assist Panhandle counties and municipalities with comprehensive planning. So, the Board polled the membership to determine whether they would support the addition of a PRC planner to the staff. The Panhandle contained only five first class cities, but six counties expressed an interest in the proposed comprehensive planning services. The Board subsequently hired a full-time planner.

In the meantime, strong opposition to state-mandated comprehensive planning developed among the public and some elected officials in the northern Panhandle.⁹ In Dawes County, the county commissioners including the county's PRC representative opposed mandatory planning. Nonetheless, the commissioners contracted with the PRC for a comprehensive plan in order to comply with LB 317. At the public meetings that were held to discuss the comprehensive plan, a number of individuals opposed the concept of land use planning and criticized the PRC for drafting the comprehensive plan.¹⁰ In this instance, then, the PRC's linkage to an unpopular state law and agency resulted in public criticism of the Council, even though it was providing a service the Board believed the members desired.

To deflate the such criticism, the PRC Board reversed previous policies and, in 1976, limited its membership to elected officials. The Board members hoped this would make the PRC more responsible to the people. They also terminated most of the Council's planning activities after Dawes County cancelled its PRC planning contract. In addition, the Board withdrew the PRC from the HUD 701 program, reasoning according to their minutes that "it amounts to . . . to . . . a lot of work to do for very little in return" and that people did

⁹ Chadron Record, November 23, 1975.

¹⁰ Chadron Record, November 20, 1975.

not support the planning aspects of the program. The following year, the Board members unsuccessfully lobbied Senator Bereuter to modify LB 317, but prevailed upon the SOPP to limit its activities in the Panhandle.

An internal problem which reflected the consequences of state agency linkages developed from the PRC's establishment of a Human Resources Committee to assist with the A-95 review and comment program. During 1974, the Board of Directors conducted the A-95 reviews with the assistance of the Director, which was time consuming and distracted from the Board's other responsibilities. In 1975, the Board hired a Human Resources Coordinator and organized a Human Resources Committee in an effort to streamline the A-95 review program. The committee membership included elected officials from the PRC, representatives of social service agencies, and several private citizens. The Committee members assisted and advised the Human Resources Coordinator and the Board of Directors.

The Board members retained responsibility for the final review and comment on applications and established the voting procedures of the Human Resources Committee. They directed that agency representatives abstain from voting on any applications that directly affected their agency. Committee members generally followed this rule, but not all elected officials attended every Committee meeting. As a result, representatives of social service agencies dominated many Committee meetings by their number and ended up merely exchanging support votes among them. In 1977, the Board members established new membership and voting guidelines for the Committee which insured there would always be at least one more elected official voting than agency representatives. The PRC's A-95 review program improved in subsequent years, but remained a potential source of controversy for the Council.

Summary

In its evolution, the PRC illustrated a developmental pattern common to many organizations. Energetic and motivated individuals (mostly private citizens in the case of the PRC) provided the impetus for the formation of the original organization and carried out many of its activities until that organization acquired public visibility and quasi-governmental functions. At that point, the structure of the organization was formalized. For the PRC this meant, the county commissioners exerted the authority derived from their funding responsibilities and assumed control of the PRC's policies and programs.¹¹ During its period of evolution, the Council had several organizational arrangements and a high staff turnover as the members searched for a viable structure and a politically acceptable approach to dealing with Panhandle problems. Some of these changes caused conflict between member units and between the PRC and the public.

Through all the structural changes and conflicts, the Board of Directors remained committed to the PRC and its mission. As one county commissioner said at a Board meeting in 1977: "The Panhandle has to stick together and it would surely hurt a lot of people if there was no one to represent us." This type of support from a number of local officials sustained the PRC through the 1970s. In the 1980s, several aspects of the PRC's environment changed. There has been (1) a resurgence of public resentment of government and taxes; (2) a decision by many state and federal agencies to establish Panhandle offices and work directly with their clients, rather than through the Council; and (3) a

¹¹ In assuming control, the county commissioners both eliminated many of the responsibilities of private citizens within the PRC and put some distance between the PRC and unpopular state and federal agencies and programs.

decline in federal support for regionalism. At the time of this writing, the
PRC continues as a regional council of governments serving Nebraska's
Panhandle.

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