The Triumph of the Commons: Governing 21st Century Regions
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Foreword

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Metropolitan regions drive our national and global economy. Yet, regional governance has not kept pace with the economic progress of our regions. As we enter the 21st Century, many of our policies, practices and institutions are still stuck in the 19th Century. We are faced with an “ingenuity gap,” where our aspirations exceed our current capacity. What we need is innovation in regional governance.

In order for experimentation in regional governance to flower in the U.S., we need to be innovative about the functioning of the federal system—the relationships among the Federal government, the 50 state governments, and the many local governments. At its core, there is much genius in our federal system. Yet it is encrusted and interwoven with a bewildering array of barriers that frequently serve as roadblocks to achieving the outcomes that all of us value. The processes are bewildering, often in ways that are hard to track.

Nowhere in this system is the resistance to inclusive, thoughtful, rational decision making more challenging than with the governance of metropolitan regions. Plans and proposals often have to run through a seemingly endless gauntlet of people and institutions that can, and do, say no with few, if any, that can say yes and make something happen. Getting to yes can be tough and can take a long time in the bargain.

Happily, there are some notable successes around the country where regions have come together and are doing good things. And in many more regions, enlightened public and private sector leaders and other regional citizens regularly struggle to find solutions to complex, vexing challenges of metropolitan life, if only because so many decisions now lead inexorably to the doorstep of regional governance.

It should be said that successful practitioners in the regional governance business must have an extremely high tolerance for messiness. Creative, unique approaches are often needed to find a path through the thicket. Is it any wonder that those citizens who do try to keep track of, let alone participate in, the actions of the public sector frequently lose
heart and attention when attempting to stay abreast of extended, convoluted efforts at regional decision making? Confusion and cloudy processes are not conducive to enhancing broad citizen engagement.

There is also an important new federal role in regional governance. Rather than a “one-size-fits-all” approach, a more “bottom-up” strategy is required today of the federal government. Because there is not a single model for regional governance, regions today are involved in a wide variety of public-private “experiments” in governance. The federal government, as well as each state government, should act as a partner with regions in solving regionally defined priorities. While the federal government has tried some new approaches to regions of late, much more innovation is needed. And we need reliable sources for timely, professional assistance on the latest regional governance models.

An important area of federal government reform relevant to regional governance is a commitment to performance. The federal agencies are now required by federal law to develop performance goals and measures. Many regions are also involved in developing performance measures and community indicators. As regions develop performance-based regional compacts, they should be able to negotiate partnerships with federal agencies around performance outcomes. In this way, we can move to a new form of governance more appropriate for the challenges of the 21st Century.

This monograph on regional governance has been prepared by one of our nation’s leaders in the field, in cooperation with members of the Alliance for Regional Stewardship. Bill Dodge is a practicing “regionalist” who has literally written the book on the subject. The Alliance is composed of many of the most innovative regional leaders in America. The monograph provides a welcome guide to navigating the challenges of regional governance.

The monograph uses the metaphor of the “commons” to help us see what we share in common in our regions. In contrast to the “tragedy of the commons” outlined by Garrett Hardin, this monograph provides creative ways for a “triumph of the commons.” It captures precisely the sentiment of many people who work to find common ground in their regions.
In 1968, at the advent of the new era of regional cooperation, Garrett Hardin wrote a pessimistic article, “The Tragedy of the Commons.”

Mr. Hardin illustrated his article with examples of what happens when each member of a commons is allowed to pursue his or her individual interests in an unfettered manner. If the commons is open pastureland, for example, new livestock herders can be accommodated as long as they do not exceed the grazing capacity of the commons. When they do, all may continue to benefit for at least a while, but then catastrophe will occur. The pastureland will not replenish itself, causing the livestock to die of starvation.

Mr. Hardin was equally pessimistic about the ability of people to change their behavior. First, they cannot easily change their individual behavior; to do so would make one look like a fool to fellow herders or, even worse, condemn him or her to less wealth or even poverty. Second, they are equally reluctant to change their collective behavior, either through a private arrangement among fellow herders or through public regulation. Neither individuals nor groups like mutual coercion; both find it hard to accept that “freedom is the recognition of necessity.” In general, they are suspicious of arrangements for governing the commons, believing that such efforts would be either inefficient and ineffective at one extreme or arbitrary and corrupted at the other.
The same phenomena can occur on the regional commons. Some regional citizens believe it is already happening, that we have already exceeded the carrying capacity of regions.

In the natural environment of the regional commons, for example, some people argue that we have already exceeded the capacity of the air and water to absorb pollution and have even overwhelmed the ability of human immune systems to fight diseases. In the National Capital (Washington, D.C.) region, for example, sport-utility vehicles (SUVs) have replaced sheep. Now that SUV sales equal half of new-vehicle sales, the region has exceeded its air-pollution limits, threatening individual health and future federal transportation support.

In the built environment of the regional commons, some people argue that we might have already grown in profligate ways that exceed our capacity to provide affordable housing, transportation, and the other amenities of a good life. In the social environment of the regional commons, some people argue that we might have already built too many exclusionary neighborhoods and abandoned too many distressed ones to build the regional community necessary to govern the commons equitably.

Such pessimism is unwarranted as we enter the new century, if we change our focus from finding solutions in structures to finding solutions with people.

Most regional cooperation efforts have focused on creating the public, private, and civic mechanisms—the structures—to address regional challenges. As these challenges—such as competing in the global economy, preserving environmental quality, and overcoming neighborhood inequities—have become tougher, new mechanisms have developed. As those mechanisms have become more numerous, attempts have developed to connect them, even weave them into a regional decision-making network that can effectively tackle the next generation of even tougher challenges. Success is usually measured by the ability of the network in each region to convince key stakeholders to participate in designing and implementing collaborative strategies for addressing priority regional challenges.

All too often these networks have not been as successful as the regions desired because they lacked two complementary components:
the regional citizens to guide them and the regional equitable growth compacts to set the rules for regional cooperation.

Real regional success is especially measured by how many regional residents—the people—have made a commitment to regional citizenship. This commitment requires individuals to move beyond simply enjoying the rights of regional citizenship and the freedom to consume what the region has to offer regardless of boundaries. It requires individuals to subscribe to the responsibilities of regional citizenship, to foster regional cooperation that allows all regional residents to live in neighborhoods that provide a high quality of life.

If a substantial percentage of regional residents declare, and practice, their regional citizenship, they can successfully tackle almost any regional challenge. If only a small percentage are committed to regional cooperation, they can tackle few challenges successfully. If we forget the “individual” regional citizen side of regional cooperation, we all too often experience the unraveling of the “wholesale” regional decision-making network.

Finally, efforts to address the toughest regional challenges will continue to be thwarted until the rules of the regional cooperation game are defined. Even the most dedicated of regional citizens cannot make regional networks succeed if no agreement exists about the future growth of the region and the impact of that growth on rich and poor neighborhoods. A regional equitable growth compact—presenting the protocols, policies, processes, and practices for shaping future growth—can provide the first articles in a regional constitution for guiding regional decision making.

Citizens—excellent regional citizens—plus networks—effective regional decision-making networks—and compacts—equitable neighborhood growth regionwide—result in successful regional communities, ones that will have the regional governance capacity to achieve the triumph of the regional commons.

This monograph provides background information on the current state of governing the regional commons and presents the tale of the Greater Nirvana region in developing a vision and strategy for governing its regional commons.
The State of the Regional Commons

Regions are the new communities of the 21st century.

Regions have emerged just as villages, towns, cities, and counties did before them. When the challenges we are facing no longer fit nicely within the boundaries of our current jurisdictions, we began thinking about regions. When these challenges become compelling, we began creating regional problem-solving and service-delivery mechanisms to address these challenges. Now when we realize that almost all major challenges have regional implications, we begin to think of the region as community and ourselves as citizens responsible for governing the regional commons.

Regional communities now determine our fates. They drive the local, national, and global economies. The largest ten regions in this country out-produce 31 states. Regions worldwide capture almost half—47—of the first 100 slots in the combined list of top regional and national economies. Regions also sprawl uncontrollably, contribute most of our air and water pollution, and condemn the poor to distressed neighborhoods. Most important, regions connect us to the places where we work, play, recreate, shop, pray, and learn.

It takes a whole region to live the good life.

Regional commons are almost impossible to govern.

Regions are our most organic human settlements, having multiple organs—central business districts, suburban employment centers and shopping malls, outlying agricultural areas, and regional parks and other facilities—tied together with the sinews of transportation, the arteries of commerce, and the protoplasm of community. We are organized to address challenges and deliver services at the federal, state, and local levels, but the tough challenges are not respecting jurisdictional boundaries. They are primarily emerging at the neighborhood, regional, and global levels.

To make the situation even more difficult, we have regions within regions, each defined by the nature of the challenge being addressed.
Sometimes the challenge cuts across only a few neighboring municipalities, such as to deliver a common service that no jurisdiction can effectively provide alone. Sometimes the challenge cuts across central cities, adjoining towns and counties, and outlying rural areas, such as to promote economic competitiveness, overcome interjurisdictional inequities, or address common air- and water-quality challenges. Sometimes the challenge cuts across state and national borders, requiring complementary, even look-alike actions by fiercely independent higher levels of government.

These constantly changing boundaries have made defining regions a quixotic pursuit of federal, state, and local officials. How do we provide enough certainty to empower regional groups to develop plans and deliver services along with enough flexibility to respond to new challenges…and yet not offer too great a threat to local governments and other groups?

In addition, regional challenges now cut across all sectors—public, private, and civic. Everyone, including individual citizens, wants to be engaged in, and is critical to, resolving regional challenges.

The changing nature of regional challenges, and especially their changing boundaries, ended the flirtation of the last century with all-powerful regional governments. Even if we had the political moxie to create such governments today, their authorities, and especially their boundaries, would be outdistanced by the challenges of tomorrow. And even for the challenges that fell within their authorities and boundaries, they still might not successfully engage the private and civic sectors and the public at large.

We have struggled mightily to address this mismatch with an arsenal of groups and goodies. Federal, state, and local governments have created regional councils of governments, transit, port and other special authorities, air- and water-quality districts, and other, all too often, single-purpose—“stovepipe”—regional groups. Business leaders have created regional chambers of commerce and regional economic development programs. Civic groups have created regional citizens leagues, regional associations of neighborhood groups, and regional faith-based coalitions. In addition, we have regional united ways, regional community foundations, and even regional academic
institutes. At times, sectors come together, such as to design common visions for the future and create regional leadership forums to identify new challenges.

For all these efforts, we continue to be stymied. We have difficulty coming together to take advantage of regional opportunities until they are all too easily lost. We simply avoid dealing with common threats until they have exploded into crises. Once we finally decide to address regional challenges, we have an equally miserable track record in pushing any of the common strategies for addressing these challenges into implementation. And, then, we often forget what we have learned and go through the same effort to address the next challenge. Weaving public, private, and civic-sector efforts into an effective regional governance network with the ongoing capacity to address newly emerging challenges is still an elusive will-o’-the-wisp.

It takes the entire federal system—national, state, and local governments—along with private and civic sectors to govern the regional commons.

The regional stakes have become higher in the new century.

Regional citizens—leaders and followers—and their organizations now realize that they have to be able to address the toughest challenge of the new century: shaping balanced growth that promotes economic competitiveness, preserves the natural environment, and benefits rich and poor neighborhoods equitably. Decisions already made will determine growth for the balance of this decade. New decisions are necessary now, or the teens—the 2010s—will look like the “aughts”—the 2000s—only longer and more frustrating.

Regional citizens and their organizations have had some success in addressing even the toughest challenges. Efforts to negotiate regional compacts for shaping growth have begun in a number of regions, and they are beginning to work, from the more top-down approaches of the METRO regional planning and service-delivery organizations in the Minneapolis/St. Paul and Portland (Oregon) regions to the more bottom-up approaches of the Denver Regional Council of Governments in the Denver region and Envision Utah in the Salt Lake City region. (See Exhibit 1 for more information on regional growth compacts.)
Exhibit 1: Regional Growth Compacts

METRO, the regional planning and service-delivery organization in the Portland (Oregon) region, has a directly elected governing body. It is advised by a Metropolitan Policy Advisory Committee, which is composed of local-government–elected officials and representatives of regional service-delivery agencies and state government. State legislation has mandated METRO to develop regional growth compacts since the 1970s, the most recent update resulting from a decade-long Region 2040 regional planning process that extensively involved public, private, and civic sectors and the general public.

Contact: METRO (Portland, Oregon), 503-797-1700, www.metro-region.org

The Metropolitan Council of the Twin Cities Area, the regional planning and service-delivery organization in the Minneapolis/St. Paul region, has a gubernatorially appointed governing body. It, like its Portland counterpart, oversees all regional transportation and land-use planning and reviews local plans for their consistency with regional plans. Both metro organizations also have some responsibility for delivering regional services to citizens—such as the zoo and convention center in Portland and transit and sewer services in Minneapolis/St. Paul.

Contact: Metropolitan Council of Minneapolis/St. Paul, 651-602-1304, www.metrocouncil.org

The Denver Mile High Compact is an agreement among local governments for shaping future regional growth. It resulted from the Metro Vision 2020 regional planning process, guided by Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG), which extensively involved public, private, and civic sectors and the general public. DRCOG, together with the Metro Mayors Caucus, developed the Mile High Compact to endorse the principles of Metro Vision 2020 and provide a regional context for local decision making. Almost three dozen (33) jurisdictions, along with some private and civic groups, have endorsed the Mile High Compact.

Contact: Denver Regional Council of Governments, 303-455-1000, www.drcog.org

Envision Utah is a public/private community partnership dedicated to studying the effects of long-term growth in the Greater Salt Lake/Wasatch Area of Northern Utah. It has developed a quality growth strategy based on numerous growth workshops with community leaders and citizens. Now, the Coalition for Utah’s Future, which sponsors Envision Utah, is guiding the implementation of this strategy, including developing a quality growth-strategy implementation toolbox and recognizing quality growth with an awards program. Utah, unlike Colorado, also has state growth-management legislation to help guide implementation of the Envision Utah strategy.

Contact: Envision Utah, 801-973-3307, www.envisionutah.org

Numerous tools for shaping growth and related challenges have been tested, and they also work. Housing-market mechanisms (such as the Montgomery County, Maryland, Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit
program) have been influenced to provide affordable housing, fast-growing municipalities (such as in the Minneapolis/St. Paul and Dayton, Ohio regions) have been convinced to share revenues with slowly growing and declining neighbors, and growth standards and boundaries have been accepted by municipalities region-wide (such as in the Portland, Oregon, and Denver, Colorado regions). (See Exhibit 2 for more information on tools for shaping regional growth.)

Exhibit 2: Tools for Shaping Regional Growth

Housing-market mechanisms have been influenced to provide affordable housing. The Montgomery County, Maryland, Moderately Priced Dwelling Unit program requires developers to set aside 12.5% to 15% of housing units for low- and moderate-income housing. Developers are supportive because they can build additional market-rate housing units (up to 20%) to compensate for the affordable housing units, and the County's Housing Opportunities Commission handles the affordable housing units. More than 10,100 units of affordable housing have become available through this program, creating a rainbow of housing by class and race across the county.

Contact: Montgomery County (Maryland) Department of Housing and Code Enforcement, 240-777-3600, www.hca.montgomery.org

Fast-growing municipalities have been convinced to share revenues with slowly growing and declining neighbors. The Minnesota Fiscal Disparities Act redistributes 40% of the growth in the commercial/industrial property-tax base in the Minneapolis/St. Paul region. The Economic Development/Government Equity (ED/GE) program redistributes a small proportion of the local property and income taxes in the central county—Montgomery County—in the Dayton, Ohio, region. The Minneapolis/St. Paul region redistributes more than $300 million in tax base annually; the ED/GE program redistributes less than $1 million in tax revenues annually. Researchers indicate that the Minneapolis/St. Paul program narrows property-tax disparities among jurisdictions—from 20:1 to less than 6:1.


Growth standards and boundaries have been accepted by municipalities regionwide. In the Portland region, the most recent change in the growth boundary added less than 10,000 acres for future growth through 2040, and the Mile High Compact reduced the area for future growth from 925 to approximately 700 square miles.

More and more regions are determined to design their futures with visions as opposed to responding to crises. Regional visioning processes have become commonplace, and ongoing, in regions large and small. They are, as Ken Blanchard, author of *The One Minute Manager*, has wisely opined, making a commitment to “dreams with deadlines” and making sure that all citizens and neighborhoods “cross the finish line together.”

However, regional citizens have to put all these activities together, and quickly, or risk losing local control to state and federal governments. Look at the Atlanta region. When local leaders and their organizations could no longer shape growth to keep air and water pollution within bounds, local environmental and equity interests successfully challenged transportation priorities in the courts, the federal government froze transportation funds, and the state government created a new, all-powerful Greater Georgia Transportation Authority governed by gubernatorial appointments.

It takes an abundance of excellent regional citizens, supported by effective regional decision-making networks and equitable regional growth compacts, to maintain local control of the regional community.

**Regional citizens now realize that they need to develop new models for playing the regional cooperation game.**

Most important, regional citizens now understand what they need to play the regional cooperation game and govern the regional commons.

Regional citizens now realize that they need regional experts to transform fellow residents into regional citizens. They need regional information, meeting places, funding, supporting state and federal legislation, and other equipment to play the regional game. Most important, they need venues to play the regional game, including regional visioning alliances, regional problem-solving arenas, regional service-delivery agents, and regional performance audits. They need acceptable rules to play the regional cooperation game, such as those provided by regional growth compacts. Finally, regional citizens need other regions, not as competitors, but as part of a global learning laboratory experimenting with alternative approaches for achieving regional excellence.
Regional citizens believe that time is no longer on their side. They realize that the best way to preserve local control is to embrace, not run away, from regional cooperation. Regional citizens are beginning to conduct regional governance examinations, such as the Regional Government Efficiency Commission in the San Diego region and the Commission on Regionalism in the State of California. (See Exhibit 3 for more information on regional governance examinations.) To succeed in these efforts, however, they need to have access to the best existing and new models for playing the regional cooperation game.

Exhibit 3: Regional Governance Examinations

The Regional Government Efficiency Commission (RGEC) was created by the California state legislature to examine governance in the San Diego region. The 13-member Commission is composed of representatives of the regional planning and service-delivery organizations and gubernatorial representatives. RGEC’s charge is to make two recommendations for improving regional governance: one plan for consolidating regional organizations and another plan for better coordinating their activities. In August 2001, RGEC recommended creating a new regional agency to develop a regional plan integrating regional transportation, land use, and related planning and assure compatibility of regional transportation agency and municipal plans with the regional plan. This agency would have a governing board with directly elected and appointed members and a policy committee of county and municipal officials to guide the preparation of the regional plan. RGEC also recommended creating a new airport authority to site, build, and operate a new airport or expand its current facilities.

Contact: Councilman Byron Wear, 619-533-3920, www.sdrgec.org

The Speaker’s Commission on Regionalism was created by the Speaker of the California General Assembly to “develop innovative state government policies and strategies among local governments; and to encourage regional collaboration among local governments and civic, business, and other community organizations, to better enable our citizens to address California’s major economic, social and environmental challenges in the years ahead.” The 31-member Commission is composed of public, private, academic, and civic representatives engaged in fostering regional cooperation. It is developing three sets of recommendations to make state government more region—friendly: first, for local finance reform that will promote cooperative equitable economic development, second for regional planning reform that will facilitate coordinated planning for growth and other multifaceted challenges, and third for governance reform that will strengthen regional decision making and build regional community.

Contact: California Center for Regional Leadership, 415-882-7300, www.regionalism.org
It takes regional governance examinations and access to the best existing and new regional governance models to play the regional game successfully.

**In sum, the governance of the regional commons is at a critical crossroads at the dawn of the 21st century.**

Public, private, and civic leaders and citizens recognize that they need to develop their regional governance capacity to address tough crosscutting challenges, such as shaping balanced growth and overcoming intercommunity disparities. They realize that they need to develop their individual skills to be excellent regional citizens. They recognize that they need to develop more sophisticated tools to address these challenges, such as effective regional decision-making networks and equitable regional growth compacts. They are experimenting with new models for regional governance training and tools in each region, but realize that they improve their chances for success if they can collaborate with each other and the regional experts that are in public, private, academic, and civic settings worldwide. Most important, they realize that they need to continually strengthen their capacity to govern the regional commons if they are to address the new, and probably tougher, regional challenges of the future.

It takes action now to take advantage of the last best chance for the regional commons to triumph.
Governing 21\textsuperscript{ST} Century Regional Communities

Greater Nirvana might offer one of the new models for 21\textsuperscript{ST} century regional governance.

Imagine a progressive region called Greater Nirvana. Greater Nirvana struggles with all the same challenges that other regions face, but its residents—at least its budding regional citizens—decided to do something about it.

These individuals had already started the process of becoming regional citizens. They educated themselves on the growing array of regional challenges and began to develop regional initiatives for addressing these challenges. They shared these ideas in informal conversations at work, in their clubs and religious institutions, and in their neighborhood groups and encouraged their organizations to pursue these initiatives.

Then, they began to meet each other and decided that they could do some things cooperatively that they could not do alone. They organized a set of informal dialogues among colleagues across their organizations and called them “regional confabs.” They encouraged the Nirvana Gazette to run a series of articles on the overall state of the region, especially on the priority regional challenges identified in the regional confabs. They met with public, private, and civic leaders—and state and federal officials—and secured their support for holding a summit on the future of the region.

The participants in the regional summit reached a startling conclusion: Greater Nirvana needed to strengthen its regional governance. In fact, they determined that developing the capacity to address regional challenges, in general, was more important than addressing any single regional challenge, in particular. The lack of an effective regional governance capacity had undermined most attempts to resolve regional challenges going back as far as anyone could remember.

Participants agreed to commit their time and resources to a single project over the past year: to develop a vision and strategy for strengthening regional governance and initiate its implementation.
One of the participants had a dog-eared copy of *Regional Excellence* that laid out a process for conducting a regional governance examination and producing a SARGE, a Strategy for Achieving Regional Governance Excellence (**summarized in Exhibit 4**).

**Exhibit 4: Regional Governance Examination Process**

1. Design the examination process.

2. Identify and assess regional challenges.

3. Inventory and assess regional mechanisms and resources.

4. Design a future vision of regional governance.

5. Develop a strategy for achieving regional governance excellence.

6. Implement the SARGE and report to community leaders and citizens.

7. Update the SARGE periodically.
First, an organizing group designed the regional governance examination process and recruited members for a Greater Nirvana Governance Committee to conduct the examination.

The organizing group of summit participants designed a process to prepare a SARGE. The organizing committee carefully recruited individuals who represented the region’s interests to serve on a Greater Nirvana Governance Committee and oversee preparation of the SARGE. Each of the participants was asked to make a contribution of time and, to the degree possible, resources for conducting the examination. In addition, a community foundation, major business, and local college provided support for the examination.

Second, the Greater Nirvana Governance Committee identified and assessed regional challenges, both those that were currently on the region’s agenda and those that were likely to emerge in the first two decades of the 21st century.

Identifying the current regional challenges was easy; identifying emerging challenges required participants to consult with regional and other experts worldwide.

Third, the Greater Nirvana Governance Committee inventoried and assessed the mechanisms and resources to address these challenges.

The Committee especially critiqued how well the region “played the regional cooperation game” in dealing with a couple of recent regional challenges. The Committee also explored a couple of other regions to determine how well Greater Nirvana—compared to other regions—plays the regional cooperation game.

The Committee concluded that playing the regional cooperation game requires skilled coaches (regional experts) to transform raw recruits (regional residents) into trained players (regional citizens). Playing the regional cooperation game also requires various types of equipment, including:

- Timely, user-friendly regional information
- Safe, neutral meeting places—regional front porches and country stores—stocked with decision-making tools
• Seed and program funding to explore and launch new regional
  initiatives
• Supporting state and federal legislation and funding to breathe life
  into regional strategies
• Awards to recognize individuals and organizations that achieve
  regional excellence
• Even regional edifices to cohouse regional decision-making
  mechanisms

The Committee found that Greater Nirvana had some regional wiz-
ards. It found that Greater Nirvana and other regions provide some,
but rarely all six, types of regional resources for addressing regional
challenges. It also found that some other regions are considering
creating regional resource coalitions to assess equipment needs and
facilitate their availability for playing the regional cooperation game.

Playing the regional cooperation game also requires various playing
fields or courts, such as regional visioning alliances, regional problem-
solving arenas, regional service-delivery agents, and regional
performance audits.

• **Regional visioning alliances** are the places where regional citizens,
supported by regional wizards, can come together to identify emerg-
ing regional challenges, assess their potential impact on achieving
the regional vision, debate and even issue charges for following up
on the challenges, and modify the regional vision. They are the
“keepers of the regional vision.” They also are the places that can
track the new regional cooperation techniques that are developing
in other regions, such as to coordinate neighborhood and regional
planning, and assess them for their applicability at home. Finally,
they are the places that can develop and test rules for playing the
regional cooperation game. Regional leadership groups or visioning
projects are examples of regional visioning alliances. Regional
visions that guide the development of strategies for addressing
new regional challenges are examples of their products.

• **Regional problem-solving arenas** are the places where regional
citizens, supported by regional wizards, can come together to design
strategies for addressing regional challenges and guide them into
implementation. Almost all regional public, private, and civic orga-
nizations serve as regional problem-solving arenas, from regional
councils of governments to regional chambers of commerce, academic regional studies institutes, regional united ways, and regional faith-based, neighborhood, and civic organizations. Regional transportation, smart growth, and affordable housing plans are examples of their products.

• **Regional service-delivery agents** are places where regional citizens, supported by regional wizards, implement components of regional plans and deliver common regional services, such as information/maps, economic marketing, joint purchasing, and aging, transit, water, sewer, parks/recreation, airport, and housing services. All organizations delivering these and other regional services are examples of regional service-delivery agents. Services to citizens and their organizations are their products. Sometimes their activities are coordinated by a regional service-delivery coordinating mechanism.

• **Regional performance audits** are the places where regional citizens, supported by regional wizards, monitor and evaluate regional decision making and make recommendations for improving regional governance. Academic regional studies institutes and regional civic organizations are places that conduct regional performance audits. Annual state-of-the-region reports that measure regional performance are examples of their products.

The Committee found that regional citizens need these interconnected venues to play four different positions in the regional cooperation game: visionary, planner, service deliverer, and monitor. It found that Greater Nirvana and other regions offer various, even numerous, regional problem-solving arenas and regional service-delivery agents. It found that few regions offer more than one regional visioning alliance; few offer any ongoing regional performance audits—at least independent ones. It found that some organizations, such as regional councils, offer multiple venues. Regional citizens, themselves, often have a variety of groups to support them in playing the game, from neighborhood groups to regional citizens leagues.

The Committee also found that playing the regional cooperation game requires rules, such as those in a regional growth compact or a regional constitution. Finally, it found that the region needs other regions, not as competitors, but as part of a global learning laboratory experimenting with alternative approaches for achieving regional excellence.
On the basis of these first two sets of activities, the Greater Nirvana Governance Committee produced a State of Regional Governance report to share with individuals and organizations region-wide.

**Fourth, the Greater Nirvana Governance Committee designed an inspiring, dynamic future vision of how the region could be governed.**

The Committee engaged as many residents as possible in this process—especially children, who represent the region of the future. As part of this process, they drew upon the creative efforts in collaborative and even chaordic (chaos with order) decision making, to define principles for governing the region and building regional community. These principles, and examples of their application, include making regional governance in Greater Nirvana:

- **Inclusive,** and diverse, by making decisions that reasonably engage all relevant and affected parties and are dominated by none.

  METRO, in the Portland (Oregon) region, set an objective of engaging 1 million people in the Region 2040 regional visioning process. Region 2040 went through various iterations during the 1990s, including negotiating agreements for growth standards, urban growth boundaries, and affordable housing commitments. Region 2040 probably captured the attention, and even the participation, of a majority of the region’s residents and started many down the path to regional citizenship.

  **Contact:** METRO, 503-797-1700, www.metro-region.org

- **Educational,** by preparing everyone to be a regional citizen, both a follower and a leader.

  The Atlanta Regional Commission and Metropolitan Chamber jointly administer a group of programs to make residents regional citizens. The core program is the Regional Leadership Institute, which guides 40 to 50 individuals through an annual weeklong process to become regional leaders. The graduates of the Institute participate in an alumni program that publishes a periodic newsletter on regional developments and takes on practical regional projects, such as developing regional cooperation curricula for use in primary and secondary schools. The core program has led to additional leadership institutes focused on youth (Model Atlanta Regional Commission) and retirees (Leadership Academy).

  **Contact:** Atlanta Regional Commission, 404-463-3100, www.atlantaregional.com
Empowering, by authorizing any individual or group to “self-organize” and address regional challenges consistent with the regional governance vision and principles and vesting authority to make decisions at the most local level that includes all relevant and affected parties.

Eastward Ho! is an initiative to revitalize the urban corridor of South Florida to accommodate future growth without further compromising the Everglades and the economic sustainability of the region. The region’s regional councils of governments—South Florida Regional Planning Commission and Treasure Coast Regional Planning Commission—contracted with the Florida Department of Community Affairs to develop guidelines for development. The Federal government provided additional guidelines for development through legislation and funding for preserving the Everglades. Public, private, and civic groups have pursued a wide variety of initiatives consistent with these guidelines. The regional councils provide a secretariat for sharing these activities, promoting educational and other activities, and preparing periodic reports on growth in South Florida.

Contact: South Florida Regional Planning Commission, 954-985-4416, www.sfrpc.com

Flexible, to address new and changing challenges affecting different peoples and geographic places.

Many regions have pursued regional visioning processes in the past decade. Some have institutionalized a visioning capacity to respond to new regional challenges and keep the vision up-to-date, such as Region 2020, a non-profit corporation, in the Birmingham, Alabama, region.


Other regions have created regional leadership forums to convene regional public, private, and civic leaders to respond to new regional challenges, such as:

- The Central Ohio Regional Forum in the Columbus region
  Contact: Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission, 614-233-4101, www.morpc.org

- The Greater Triangle Regional Council in the Research Triangle region of North Carolina
  Contact: Triangle J Council of Governments, 919-549-9390, www.tjcog.dst.nc.us

- The Potomac Conference in the Washington, D.C., region
  Contact: Greater Washington Board of Trade, 202-857-5900, www.potomacconference.org
Professional, by offering neutral, safe venues for holding controversial conversations, providing trained experts and adequate resources for effective regional decision making, and supplying timely, user-friendly information in a variety of forms that meet citizen needs.

Many examples exist of great public, private, and civic groups that provide professional support for regional cooperation, such as:

- The National Association of Regional Councils for public regional councils of governments
- The Alliance for Regional Stewardship for regional civic leaders
- The Citizens League of Minneapolis/St. Paul for regional civic organizations

Collaborative, by inducing not compelling behavior, to the maximum degree possible, and offering mediation services to resolve conflicts peacefully.

The regions with state growth management legislation can take advantage of options for resolving conflicts and fostering compliance with regional growth compacts, such as in the states of Oregon and Washington, or while conducting reviews of developments of regional impact (DRIs) in the state of Florida.

Balanced, assuring compensating benefits and costs—in terms of economy, environment, and equity as well as for public, private, and civic sectors—for all individuals and organizations.

The regional growth compacts cited in Exhibit 1 are good examples of balancing compensating benefits and costs.

Accountable, continually critiquing and reforming regional governance.

Dozens of regions now prepare periodic state-of-the-region reports to compare regional performance over time as well as to other regions. The State of the Regions 2000 report of the National Association of Regional Councils presents a list of state-of-the-region reports.


Similarly, a number of state regional initiatives require regions to be accountable for their cooperative efforts. For example, the state of Virginia Regional Competitiveness Program holds regions accountable for achieving a given level of regional cooperation to continue to be eligible to receive state economic development assistance.

Contact: Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, 804-371-7030, www.dhcd.state.va.us
Fifth, the Greater Nirvana Governance Committee participants requested suggestions for actions that the individuals and organizations could take to achieve the vision.

For example, the ideas suggested for making everyone a regional citizen included preparing special regional cooperation curricula for primary and secondary schools, offering regional citizenship dialogues to prepare individuals to participate in regional decision making, and launching a regional leadership institute to train budding regional adult and youth leaders.

The Committee shared these and other ideas in the media, at town meetings, and on various Web sites. Then they recruited individuals and organizations to carry out the priority actions and prepared the SARGE. As they developed these ideas, they found that they naturally grouped themselves into three categories—that is, actions—to:

- **Make excellent regional citizens**—the people to govern the regional commons
- **Develop effective regional decision-making networks**—the regional experts, mechanisms, and tools for governing the regional commons
- **Negotiate equitable growth compacts**—the rules for governing the regional commons.

The Committee called these three sets of actions—regional citizens, regional compacts, and regional networks—the three legs of the regional governance stool. It committed itself to pursuing a SARGE that would make each leg of the regional governance stool strong and balanced so as to develop the capacity to govern the regional commons successfully.

The SARGE presented the regional governance vision and principles and the actions that individuals and organizations committed to implement.

Sixth, the Greater Nirvana Governance Committee recommended that an annual state of regional governance report be prepared on progress in implementing the SARGE.
As part of the SARGE, the Committee recommended that the annual report be prepared by a citizens accountability committee, with the assistance of a consortium of colleges and universities, and be presented to the public in an annual summit and newspaper insert. Finally, the Committee recommended that the citizens accountability committee also be responsible for recommending changes in the vision and SARGE. Every five years, the Committee recommended that the citizens accountability committee work with the Greater Nirvana Commons to update the vision and SARGE for the region.

Most important, the Greater Nirvana Governance Committee advanced one overarching recommendation: to establish an ongoing partnership for strengthening regional governance—the Greater Nirvana Commons.

The sole purpose of the Greater Nirvana Commons partnership is to assist regional citizens and their organizations to strengthen the governance of the Greater Nirvana region. As proposed, it:

- **Is guided by the regional vision and principles presented in the SARGE**
  These principles, as well as those in regional growth compacts and other agreements, would be incorporated into a regional constitution guiding the partnership.

- **Is open to any regional citizen or organization that pledges to support the regional constitution**
  Participating regional citizens and organizations might be asked to make a contribution to cover general membership costs.

- **Is overseen by the Greater Nirvana Regional Assembly, representative of all participating public, private, and civic regional interests**
  Participating individuals or organizations are empowered to carry out any activities that are consistent with the regional constitution, without prior Assembly approval. The Assembly only assists participants to strengthen the governance of the Greater Nirvana region.

- **Is empowered by local, state and federal government as well as private and civic sectors**
  The partnership might be a new form of multisector (public/private/civic) corporation to strengthen regional governance. Its activities
could include conducting research on addressing new regional challenges, recommending distribution of state and federal funding to foster regional cooperation, negotiating arrangements across state and national boundaries, serving as the first level of review for regional conflicts, or placing regional initiatives on appropriate jurisdictional ballots.

• Has predictable—even dedicated—funding
The partnership might have access to dedicated federal, state, and local government revenue sources, as well as receive annual contributions from private and civic sources, to assure balanced support for its core regional governance support activities. These activities could include educating regional citizens, providing regional information, researching new regional challenges, mediating regional conflicts, supporting regional accountability mechanisms, providing seed funding for new regional initiatives, and keeping the regional governance vision.

• Carries out most of its activities though its members and rarely provides services directly

The Greater Nirvana Governance Committee also ruminated on how the Greater Nirvana Commons partnership would operate and how it would relate to existing organizations.

In general, the Committee argued that the Greater Nirvana Commons would “add value” to individuals and organizations by strengthening their capabilities, and capacities, to collaborate in addressing regional challenges. It would not replicate, but help those organizations work better.

The Committee developed some hypothetical examples to demonstrate how the Greater Nirvana Commons might work:

• For challenges that are best resolved among adjoining jurisdictions, such as delivering joint services, it might offer critical information on the region or on similar experiences in other regions, facilitate meetings among participants, or offer mediation services to address the inevitable obstacles to cooperation.
• For newly emerging regional challenges, it might convene affected individuals and organizations to facilitate discussions on how to address the challenge— who should do what by when with how much of whose resources. In addition to providing information and facilitating meetings, it might even contract for research on the challenge. Then, it could monitor the development and pursuit of a strategy to address the challenge.

• For overarching challenges, such as negotiating a regional compact to shape growth, it might work with affected individuals and organizations and help guide the planning process. It might help convene the myriad actors and help negotiate the policies, protocols, practices, and programs necessary to establish the compact. Most important, it could use its authority to reward those who support the compact, such as making recommendations for the use of state and federal funding, or to prod those that don’t, such as serving as the first level of review for conflicts among jurisdictions.

• For a regional visioning process, it might work with affected individuals and organizations and help organize and finance the process. Again, it could use its authority to reward or prod participation in the regional visioning process.

• For preparing a regular report on the state of regional governance, it might work with the citizens accountability committee to contract with an academic regional studies institute or other outside groups to assess the strengths and shortcomings of regional governance.

• For establishing a regional leadership institute or other regional decision-making tools, it might convene a working group to design such an institute and provide assistance in recruiting its first class. It might even create a regional resources coalition to provide the equipment to play the regional cooperation game.

• For periodically updating the SARGE, it might work with the citizens accountability committee to convene affected individuals and organizations and then guide the updating process.
Seventh, the Greater Nirvana Regional Committee worked with participating state and federal officials to develop an agenda of actions to support regions that implement SARGEs.

On the basis of those discussions, the state legislature is considering a Regional Commons Act to create a new form of public/private/civic partnership and authorize it to act as an agent of state and local governments, including serving as the first level of review for resolving regional conflicts.

The Regional Commons Act calls for providing matching funding for supporting the start-up of new regional commons partnerships as well as providing optional funding sources that the regional commons could tap, with voter approval, in the future. The Act also establishes the core principles to be met by regional commons partnerships, calls for an annual assessment of regional commons partnership accomplishments, and conditions continued state support on the partnerships’ year-to-year performance. Finally, the Act gives regional commons fungible boundaries, to permit them to modify their boundaries, with the approval of their neighbors, to respond to new challenges.

The state governor is considering issuing an executive order to reward those regions that develop and implement SARGEs.

The gubernatorial executive order would direct state agencies to confer with the Greater Nirvana Commons, and other similar regional commons partnerships, on any proposed state action that might have regional implications. It would authorize regional commons to coordinate the preparation of “reverse RFPs (Requests for Proposals)” to propose collaborative actions among state agencies that would facilitate a region’s efforts to address common challenges. It would also direct state agencies to call for collaborative, regionwide planning for the delivery of state-funded services, such as for job training, and authorize the regional commons to facilitate the preparation of these plans. Finally, the executive order would direct state agencies to provide priority funding to regions that developed and successfully implemented equitable regional growth compacts.
Both the state legislature and the governor are exploring approaches used by other states to foster regional cooperation, such as the Regional Competitiveness Program in the State of Virginia. (See description earlier in this section.)

On the basis of similar discussions, the President of the United States is considering issuing an executive order echoing the one issued by the state governor.

The presidential executive order would direct federal agencies to foster regional cooperation and offer priority funding to regions that strengthen their governance and pursue equitable regional growth compacts. It would direct federal information agencies to make their economic, demographic, and other information user-friendly for regional decision making. It would direct federal agencies to call for coordinated, regionwide planning and to be responsive to requests from regional commons for “reverse RFPs,” such as those tested with the Partnership for Regional Livability (See Exhibit 5 for additional information on the Partnership for Regional Livability.) Finally, the presidential executive order would define the boundaries of regional areas flexibly so as to foster the collaboration necessary to address the full scope of regional challenges.

The U.S. Congress is considering complementary legislation for a new federal planning assistance program to assist regions to develop strategies for addressing the tough regional challenges.

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**Exhibit 5: Partnership for Regional Livability**

The Partnership for Regional Livability (PRL) began in 1999 to help regional civic leaders to address large-scale, intractable problems, such as air pollution, sprawl, poverty, and unemployment. PRL assists regions to access federal government expertise and resources and assists federal agencies to work with regions. PRL selected four regions—Atlanta, Chicago, Denver, and San Francisco—and assisted them to engage in discussions with federal agencies on how they can add value to their regional projects using existing authorities. Today, the projects are in various stages of development and face an uncertain future with the change in federal administrations.

**Contact:** Partnership for Regional Livability, 707-746-5668, www.prlonline.org

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Both state and federal governments are beginning to see their role as facilitating effective regional governance—first, to provide seed-funding support for pursuing the priority actions in SARGEs and, second, to provide priority, flexible funding to regions that strengthen their governance and pursue regional growth compacts. As necessary, state and federal government participants also indicated that they would apply pressure to recalcitrant jurisdictions and organizations that are reluctant to participate in building regional community.

Eighth, the Greater Nirvana Regional Committee recommended creating regional commons coalitions at the national, and maybe global, level to support the efforts of regions to strengthen their governance.

A national coalition of regional commons would be the keeper of a national regional agenda and work with the regional commons partnerships in each region to update the agenda on a regular basis.

Such a coalition of regional commons could pursue regional initiatives with the federal government as well as other national organizations and foundations. It could especially identify opportunities for federal government action to strengthen regional governance. It could also pursue common initiatives across states, such as legislation facilitating cooperation in regions that cut across state and national boundaries.

A national coalition of regional commons could especially help persuade the federal government to balance its policy of devolving federal authorities and resources to the states with a complementary policy of empowering decision making at the lowest level that effectively includes all relevant and affected parties (sometimes called subsidiarity). This subsidiarity would be consistent with the tenth Amendment to the Constitution, which delegates the powers not delegated to the federal government to the states or to the people. In many cases, this delegation would most logically be at the regional level; the state is too large, individual municipalities are too small to address many crosscutting challenges. The federal government could use its authority and resources to foster effective regional decision making, offering incentives to bring public, private, and civic sector interests together to develop and pursue common strategies for their implementation.
Any individual or organization would be eligible to participate in the national coalition of regional commons. Each participating region would designate a public, private, and civic representative to serve on the governing council for the national regional commons. Each of the participating regions would have one vote, or a weighted vote, on the governing council.

A national coalition of regional commons could also facilitate creating national resources—such as a Center for Regional Governance Excellence (Center) or a Regional Information Clearinghouse (Clearinghouse)—to foster the development of regional commons in each region across the country. The former could offer incentives to develop new models for governing regional commons, such as by commissioning research on new models, assessing results and sharing information, and assisting regions to apply the most robust models. The latter could facilitate access to the information necessary for effective regional decision making, such as by providing user-friendly access to census and other federal and state information, gathering comparative information across regions for state-of-the-region reports, and sharing the latest promising regional practices for strengthening regional governance.

Both the Center and the Clearinghouse could share the experiences in creating regional commons, in publications and Web sites. Both could convene user groups of regional commons participants, through creating list serves and holding periodic dialogues among participants. Both could facilitate developing the tools for playing the regional cooperation game, linking regional commons participants with the latest developments in creating tools, such as Denver’s Metrovision Resource Center (Contact: Denver Regional Council of Governments, 303-455-1000, www.drcog.org). Together with the national coalition of regional commons, they could host an annual RegionFair to showcase the latest developments to strengthen regional governance and recognize individuals and organizations that have been deemed Regional Governance Treasures.

The organizations that have been advancing regional interests at the national level could take the lead in creating a national coalition of regional commons, including the Academy for State and Local
Government, Alliance for Regional Stewardship, Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives, Brookings Institution, Institute for The Regional Community/National Association of Regional Councils, Metropolitan Universities, National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, National Civic League, Partnership for Regional Livability, Urban Institute, state and local government organizations, and community and national foundations.

A global coalition of regional commons would pursue regional initiatives with regions worldwide and international organizations and be the keeper of a global regional agenda.

Increasingly, the regional agenda is becoming global, requiring regions to have an effective voice in the deliberations of international organizations. Moreover, because the world has become a laboratory of regional cooperation, the global regional commons could facilitate the exchange of promising regional initiatives and delegations of regional representatives worldwide. To build a network of regional commons, each national coalition of regional commons or similar organization of regional interests would have an official delegation to the global regional commons. As in other regional commons, any individual or regional organization would be eligible to participate in the activities of the global regional commons.
The Role of Regional Stewards in Strengthening Regional Governance

Will this network of regional commons partnerships—regional, national, and global—work?

Will the Greater Nirvana Commons partnership—or similar partnerships in other regions—be able to guide the implementation of a new model of regional governance that makes excellent regional citizens, develops an effective regional decision-making network, and negotiates an equitable regional growth compact?

Yes, if a strong core and growing supply of committed regional citizens—regional stewards—exists across all jurisdictions who are willing to be pioneers, to come together, and to breathe life into the regional commons. Such regional stewards already exist in a variety of public, private, and civic organizations that are fostering regional cooperation and have been reported on in earlier Alliance for Regional Stewardship monographs.

But rarely have the efforts of regional stewards been focused on developing new models for governing the region. More often, their efforts have been dedicated to a particular economic, environmental, or equity challenge and, all too often, their accomplishments have been undermined by ineffective regional governance. Each region needs to develop new models for governance that will enable it to address any current or future challenges. Then it will be able to compete globally and thrive locally in the new century.

Overall, the regional citizens of Greater Nirvana followed an eight-step process that can be duplicated in other regions:

- **Become a pioneer regional citizen**—initially, a few individuals declared their regional citizenship.

- **Design a strategy for achieving regional governance excellence**—then, these regional pioneers organized support for conducting a regional governance examination and preparing a SARGE.

- **Make everyone an excellent regional citizen**—the SARGE recommended actions to strengthen each of the three legs of the regional governance stool; first, individuals and organizations implemented actions to make everyone a regional citizen.
• **Develop an effective regional decision-making network**—second, individuals and organizations implemented actions to develop the regional decision-making network.

• **Negotiate an equitable regional growth compact**—third, individuals and organizations implemented actions to negotiate a regional growth compact.

• **Celebrate regional success**—as individuals and organizations achieved regional governance excellence, they were appropriately recognized.

• **Connect with regions globally**—individuals and organizations pursued creating national and global coalitions of regions.

• **Institutionalize a regional commons partnership**—throughout these steps, individuals and organizations institutionalized a regional commons partnership to continue to strengthen regional governance.

_Will similar regional commons partnerships develop at the national and international levels?_

Again, yes, given a core of regional stewards who are willing to be national and international pioneers for making regions work.

And it does not require an inordinate number of regional stewards to create a regional commons partnership at regional, national, or global levels.

Studies of primates suggest that individual monkeys, like humans, are constantly developing new ideas. At first, the adoption of these ideas moves slowly. The innovator takes a long time to introduce the idea to the first convert and the innovator and convert take almost as long to introduce it to two more monkeys. But once the innovation has been adopted by a relatively small number of monkeys, a strange phenomenon occurs. Once 100 monkeys, more or less, have adopted a new idea, all the monkeys adopt or at least accept it almost overnight. Only a few pioneers are necessary to introduce even the most controversial of ideas, such as regional cooperation.

_May you have or make the regional stewards, find the 100 monkeys, and achieve regional governance excellence!_
Recommended Reading

State of California Speaker’s Commission on Regionalism reports (www.regionalism.org)

Regional Government Efficiency Commission reports (www.sdrgec.org)

Alliance for Regional Stewardship reports (www.regionalstewardship.org)

Camille Barnett, “Net Governance” (www.regionalism.org)


Elinor Ostrom, Governing the Commons, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom, 1990


About the Author

William R. Dodge is a regional consultant advising community leaders and citizens on strengthening their capacity to address tough regional challenges. He is the former Executive Director of the National Association of Regional Councils and the author of Regional Excellence: Governing Together to Compete Globally and Flourish Locally, a guide sharing the range of approaches for fostering regional cooperation. He is currently working on a new book, tentatively The Triumph of the Commons: Eight Steps to Regional Governance Excellence, a guide sharing alternative models and a strategy for strengthening regional governance.

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About the Alliance for Regional Stewardship

The Alliance is a national, peer-to-peer learning network of regional leaders who benefit by sharing experiences and working collaboratively on innovative approaches to common regional challenges. The Alliance is for proven leaders who recognize the interdependencies of their regions’ economy, environment, and society—and are seeking practical ways to effect change. These leaders can come from business, government, education, or community sectors, but they share a common commitment to collaborative action and regional stewardship.

The Alliance supports regional stewardship by helping leaders learn about best practices from other regions, communicate to state/federal leaders and the media about regional challenges and innovations, and develop new leaders to regional civic efforts.

Alliance activities include:

• Semi-annual leadership forums
• Ongoing communities of interest and web conferences
• Monthly e-newsletter
• Monograph series on key regional topics
• Innovation scans of regional best practices
• Media roundtables to bring regional leaders and media professionals together
• Pathways to regional stewardship projects

For more information about the Alliance for Regional Stewardship, please visit our website at www.regionalstewardship.org