

Research Partnerships with UVM

Office of Engagement and Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships

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Overview

- Types of research partnerships with UVM
- Examples of regional/county governance research
- Opportunities and next steps

Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships



Research Partnerships

- Research: working with faculty to develop collaborative research
- Programmatic: co-developing partnerships for service delivery/technical assistance
- Community-engaged learning: course-based projects
- Internships: undergraduate and graduate



Regional/County Governance Research

- Undergraduate research on Council of Government models in the United States
- MPA Capstone course that leveraged previous research to produce:
 - Comparison of regional governance models, including
 - Typology of terms related to regional and county governance



Regional Governance Comparisons

Governance structure

Legal fit for VT

Funding model

County role

Staffing

Services provided

Regional scope

COMPARING MODELS OF REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

How different regional structures organize services, staffing, and support for municipalities.

	Regional Planning Commission (RPC)	Council of Governments (COG)	COG Example #1: New York County Board of Supervisors (NY)	COG Example #2: Full-Service Regional COG (MA-FRCOG)	COG Example #3: Large Regional COG (TX-Alamo Area COG)
	Planning and advisory commissions; limited authority.	Regional body combining planning and shared municipal services.	1 of 3 models for county governance in NY State.	Comprehensive COG delivering public health, emergency mgmt, shared staffing.	Large multi-county COG delivering broad regional services.
Governance Structure	Town representatives (appointed or elected).	Governing board of local elected officials from member municipalities.	Board of elected representatives (Town Supervisors) from municipalities across the county; serve 2-4 year terms.	Council of elected municipal officials with operating sub-committees; operates as a COG and a regional planning agency.	Board of elected representatives of local member governments; serve voluntarily on COG.
Legal Fit for Vermont	Already established in statute.	Medium-High Requires expanding RPC authority for shared services and direct service delivery.	Low-Medium County: legally difficult, needs new state law to create a board of supervisors. RPCs: could adapt with town reps for regional services, needs expanded authority and defined scope.	Medium Requires expanding RPC statutes to allow direct service delivery.	Medium Requires broader statutory authority for large regional services.
Funding Model	Grants, contracts, and small municipal assessments.	State support, grants, municipal assessments, and fee-for-service programs.	Tax revenue, State & Federal aid, and fee-for-service programs.	Municipal assessments, grants, fees-for-service programs, public health funding.	Municipal assessments, member government dues, grants, and state/federal program funding.
County Role	None; RPCs transcend county boundaries.	None; organized by municipalities, not counties.	Operates at county scale, but governed by municipal representatives.	Operates at county scale, but governed by member municipalities.	Strong county role; multi-county regional governance.
Staffing	Small professional staff, paid.	Larger professional staff, paid; dedicated to shared and direct service delivery.	Large professional staff, paid; some boards choose to hire executives in addition to service staff.	Large professional staff, paid; spanning multiple service areas.	Large professional staff, paid.
Services Provided	Advisory and Technical Regional planning, transportation planning, housing, water quality, and emergency planning.	Direct and Advisory Shared admin, zoning, procurement, emergency coordination, and grant admin.	Direct Public safety, transportation infrastructure, health and human services, public parks & recreation, and economic development.	High-Capacity Direct Services Public health, emergency mgmt, shared municipal staffing, and procurement, planning.	Technical and Direct Assistance Planning, plus wide range of regional programs, including aging services, transportation, and emergency services.
Regional Scope / Area Covered	Several towns. Can range from 10-48 depending on the region.	Multi-town region.	Several towns. About one-third of the 62 NY counties operate under this model.	Franklin County's municipalities.	13 counties.

Regional Governance Definition Guide

Working definition

Key themes

Range of interpretations



REGIONAL GOVERNANCE TERMS DEFINITION GUIDE

The definitions in the table below are intended to support clear communication among stakeholders by providing a shared understanding of terms commonly used in discussions about regional governance in Vermont.

These working definitions synthesize themes from the Vermont Regional Governance Survey (March 2026), highlighting both common patterns and the variation in understanding across municipal officials, staff, volunteers, and community members.

	Governance	Regionalization	Municipal Operations	Shared Services
Working Definition	Structures, processes, and decision-making systems through which a municipality or organization directs operations and fulfills responsibilities.	Collaboration or coordination across municipalities to address shared needs, deliver services, or achieve efficiencies beyond a single town.	Day-to-day activities, services, and administrative functions carried out by a municipality to meet responsibilities and serve residents.	Functions, staff, or resources jointly used by two or more municipalities to improve efficiency, reduce costs, or expand capacity.
Key Themes	• Decision-making authority and processes • Oversight of functions and operations • Rules, norms, and policies • Leadership roles and responsibilities	• Pooling or sharing resources • Service delivery across boundaries • Economies of scale • Coordination across a region	• Service delivery (roads, public safety, utilities) • Administrative and staffing functions • Policy and budget implementation • Statutory obligations	• Cost-sharing and economies of scale • Joint staffing arrangements • Cross-municipal service delivery • Collaboration to meet shared needs
Range of Interpretations	Emphasis varied between formal structures, day-to-day oversight, and broader community leadership.	Ranged from informal cooperation to formal regional governance structures, including county systems.	Focus varied between service delivery and administrative or organizational functions.	Viewed as formal agreements, informal cooperation, or internal collaboration models.

***"Working definitions" are shared descriptions developed from survey responses to support consistency in discussion. They are not formal or legal definitions.**

Opportunities and Next Steps

- Identify the research questions/partnership opportunities of relevance
- Consider funding opportunities available to support this work
- Partners to consider:
 - UVM Leahy Institute for Rural Partnerships
 - Masters of Public Administration
 - Center for Rural Studies
 - VT Research Open Source Program Office
 - UVM Extension
 - Vermont Data Collaborative



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