



State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli and Cornell University

***Beyond the Fiscal Crisis:  
How to Build Partnerships and  
Leverage Opportunities***

***August 13-14, 2009***

"The mission of the New York State Comptroller's Local Government Leadership Institute is to inform and challenge elected local government leaders through constructive engagement on regional issues of common concern, while reinforcing key leadership principles throughout each program – leadership skills that can help them navigate today's increasingly difficult fiscal environment."



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## ABOUT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

### *Beyond the Fiscal Crisis: How to Build Partnerships and Leverage Opportunities*

The New York State Office of the State Comptroller (OSC), in partnership with Cornell University's Community and Rural Development Institute (CaRDI), sponsored the OSC Local Government Leadership Institute. The Institute at Cornell University was held on August 13-14, 2009, and involved elected and appointed officials located in 32 counties across the western, central and southern tier regions of New York.

The Institute provided local government officials with the opportunity to enhance their knowledge, leadership, and decision-making skills. The goal of the Institute was to bring together officials across various classes of local government in a venue designed to increase dialogue and regional collaboration on common concerns.

The Institute featured expert panel discussions, keynote speakers, and interactive case studies. Following the completion of the institute, participants were encouraged to develop networking groups designed to address challenges specific to individual regions of the State. **Of the 120 or so registrants, participation included:** City CFO and CEO's, Town Supervisors, Village CFO and CEO's, School Superintendents and Presidents of the Board, School CFO's, BOCES CFO and CEO's, IDA's, Representatives from Southern Tier East, West and Central, Officials from Other Corporations, Pipeline4Progress Members, and Directors, Managers, and Department Heads

The Honorable Anthony Williams, former Mayor of the District of Columbia, served as the keynote speaker of this event. Mayor Williams is a dynamic speaker who brought a wealth of knowledge and experience in managing adverse fiscal conditions on the local level.

Through Mayor Williams' keynote speech, panel discussions, and interactive case studies, the 2009 Institute focused on these topic areas:

- Comprehensive Planning for Local Governments and School Districts: Strategically Planning for the Future
- Thinking Regionally, Acting Locally: How to Develop and Leverage Public and Private Partnerships for Community Development
- Municipal Shared Services: How Do I Know if Entering Into a Shared Services Agreement Will Be Effective?
- Fiscal Difficulties and Economic Underperformance: What InterGovernmental Cooperation Can Do to Help our Regions Address These Critical Issues
- Leveraging Colleges, Universities, and BOCES as Engines for Development
- Achieving Greener Communities through Civic, Private, and Government Sector Innovation

Objectives and goals of the Institute included:

- Enhance participants' knowledge, leadership and decision-making skills

- Network officials across various classes of local government
- Increase dialogue and regional collaboration on common concerns
- Address complex challenges through best practices, lessons learned
- Enhance leadership skills, reinforce key leadership principles
- Establish benchmarks for sound and efficient government
- Identify follow-up steps to move forward on these goals

Institutes took place at Hofstra University (June 11) and Cornell University (August 13-14). For more information about Local Government Leadership Institute, please contact:

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**Division of Local Government and School Accountability:**

The New York State Office of the State Comptroller’s Division of Local Government and School Accountability provides a variety of services to local governments and school districts to help them improve their operations. These services include: performance audits designed to identify cost savings and improve fiscal operations; accountability audits; training and technical assistance to local government officials; and publications to assist local officials in carrying out their fiscal responsibilities.

**Goals of the Division:**

- Enable and encourage local government and school officials to maintain or improve fiscal health by increasing efficiency and effectiveness, managing costs, improving service delivery, and accounting for and protecting assets.
- Promote government reform and foster good governance in communities statewide by providing local government and school officials with up-to-date information and expert technical assistance.

**Local Government Training Unit:**

The goal of the Local Government Training Unit is to support the Division’s mission by providing high quality training to local officials throughout the State. Such training is provided through a number of low cost methods which include the newly created Local Government Leadership Institute, seminars, workshops, accounting schools, teleconferences and online training. In providing these services, the Local Government Training Unit collaborates with various associations and State agencies to ensure that local officials receive up-to-date information which will allow them to perform their duties. The unit provides training through the development and use of core curricula and standards for presentation materials. In addition, the Training Unit conducts assessments of all training that is offered and assists with the logistics associated with planning training events when necessary.

## **ABOUT THIS REPORT ON THE INSTITUTE AT CORNELL UNIVERSITY, AUGUST 13-14, 2009**

This report serves to document the speeches, discussions, and ideas that were shared at the Institute. This report has two objectives:

1. To provide highlights of key themes.
2. To support networking by enabling readers to put names and faces together, along with the contact information that makes this useful.

## **SPONSORS**

### **The New York State Comptroller's Office**

#### **The Honorable Thomas P. DiNapoli, Comptroller**

Since taking office in February 2007 Thomas P. DiNapoli, the 54th Comptroller of the State of New York, has transformed the way the Comptroller's Office does business. DiNapoli has increased oversight of government spending, provided greater openness to the public and developed new opportunities for New York's entrepreneurs. DiNapoli, as chief fiscal officer for the State, is responsible for managing the State's pension fund, auditing the spending practices of all State agencies and local governments, overseeing the New York State and Local Retirement System, which serves over one million members and retirees, reviewing the New York State and City budgets, approving State contracts, and administering the State Oil Spill Fund. DiNapoli has also instituted tough new ethics rules at the Office of the State Comptroller. He created the position of Inspector General and appointed a new special counsel for ethics. He also issued an executive order restricting the use of agency equipment and banning employees from accepting gifts, and mandated ethics training for every employee of the Comptroller's Office.

### **The Community and Rural Development Institute at Cornell University**

#### **Rod Howe, Executive Director**

The Community and Rural Development Institute (CaRDI) is a multidisciplinary social sciences institute of Cornell University. CaRDI focuses on research, extension, training and outreach that support community-level innovation and sustainability. CaRDI is administered by the Department of Development Sociology with key collaboration from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the College of Human Ecology, and Cornell Cooperative Extension. Working with Cornell faculty and staff – including Cornell Cooperative Extension's network of county offices – and other state and regional institutions, CaRDI is a center of dialogue and collaboration addressing needs at the local, state, and national levels.

CaRDI offers research-based information in support of community problem solving; provides training, based on research and data, for elected and appointed officials and community leaders to foster informed decision making; and builds partnerships between faculty and staff throughout the University who identify and work to support community development opportunities.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

New Yorkers, like all Americans, face historic challenges. Today, as much as at any time in our history, leaders are needed who can guide us into the future. We often look to our national leaders for inspiration, but when it comes to getting what we need to protect and nurture our families, to operate productive and profitable businesses and to generally manage our day-to-day affairs we turn to our local leaders. For many Americans, local government is as important as it has ever been and every indication is that it will remain that way.

This Leadership Institute was inspired by the recognition that effective local government is absolutely essential for New York to prosper. In conceptualizing this Institute, we recognized that for a variety of reasons local government leadership was no easy task. New Yorkers are living through a period of remarkable change. We face challenges and new opportunities few of us could have predicted just a year ago. We're confronted with changes wrought by national and global forces that affect the local economy, housing, health care and a variety of other areas important to our well-being. The needs of New Yorkers are also changing given our increasingly diverse population, and some communities face rapid population growth while many others face population decline or stagnation. In this context, better cooperation within communities and more cooperation with neighboring localities is an approach that local leaders must consider if they are to more effectively meet the needs of their constituents.

But how can leaders foster such cooperation? One of the goals of this Institute was to provide insights relevant to daily leadership activities. A related goal was to give participants the opportunity to network with fellow leaders. One of the most important resources available to local leaders in New York is the experience of fellow leaders.

There is widespread recognition that localities need to re-position themselves to stay vital in the contemporary context. Communities need to be entrepreneurial, and capable of leveraging both local and regional assets. Leaders that understand their community's role in a regional context are better positioned to build from available strengths and assets. Indeed it is this conviction that led us to focus this Institute on building partnerships to leverage opportunities.

### SUMMARY OF COMMON LOCAL LEADERSHIP THEMES:

#### Challenges

- Current lack of communication (communities & people operating in silos)
- Competition
- Fear of Change
- Politically entrenched interests

#### Lessons Learned

- Communication is key
- Collaboration = positive outcomes
- Monitoring and oversight are critical
- Facts and data are important
- Be in it for the long haul
- Planning strategies are essential
- Need to think "out of the box"
- Highlight Successes

#### Policy Issues

- Tax incentives
- Need flexibility in use of funds
- Need to document opportunity for cost savings

#### Leadership Skills

- Appreciate & see diverse perspectives
- Inspire
- Direct people's energy
- One for all and all for one
- See value in collaboration
- Park ego at door
- Create environment to support innovation

## **OPENING KEYNOTE, THOMAS P. DINAPOLI, COMPTROLLER, NEW YORK STATE**

### The Context:

- Revenues are declining and the pressure for spending continues to grow. Overburdened property taxpayers are crying “uncle.” Local officials are left with very few options to balance budgets.
- State aid is flat in most cases and sales tax revenue is down by almost seven percent in the first half of the year compared to last year.
- When aid is cut there are many consequences for cities. Cities have been impacted due to the decline in manufacturing as well as the flight to the suburbs.
- Even with the current fiscal difficulties, it is important to note that school districts have been able to keep property tax increases relatively low. The average property tax increase was less than two percent growth over the previous year. There were no major service cuts.
- Moving forward, there is no reason to think that there will be a significant increase in state aid for schools and local governments although expenditures will rise.
- We have ongoing infrastructure issues.
- We are all going through difficult fiscal times and it is important for the Comptroller’s Office to reach out to local governments and work together.

### The Institute:

- One of the purposes of bringing everyone together for the Institute is not to waste the current opportunity that the current fiscal crisis has provided. This current situation serves as an occasion to think differently and creatively on how to operate so that we can come out in a stronger position.
- The Institute is meant to sharpen knowledge of trends and initiatives as well as focus on leadership skills that can be used in municipalities.
- The Institute can strengthen the partnership between the Comptroller’s Office and local governments. This forum provides local officials with an opportunity to engage with each other and OSC staff.
- The Leadership Institute will not duplicate the efforts of the various local government associations. The Institute serves as a unique opportunity for local officials across various jurisdictions to come together.

### Key Comments:

- The Office of the State Comptroller has worked with the New York State Department of State to promote ‘shared services,’ and to fully explore such options.
- Having trained elected officials is the key to managing during tough times.
- We must identify new approaches on both the state and local level.
- It is important to work together and build collaborations.

## KEYNOTE SPEAKER, ANTHONY WILLIAMS

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The Honorable Anthony Williams, former Mayor of the District of Columbia, served as the keynote speaker of this event. In addition to his two terms as Mayor of the District of Columbia, Mr. Williams has served as the Chief Executive Officer of Primum Public Realty Trust, the District of Columbia Chief Financial Officer, and as the first CFO for the US Department of Agriculture under President Clinton. Mr. Williams is currently the Director of State and Municipal Practice for the law firm Arent Fox LLP in Washington, DC.

Mr. Williams spoke about planning and creating strategies, stressing that good financial management is a fundamental underpinning. From his experience at multiple levels of government (local, state, & federal), he found that there are more similarities than differences. He pointed out that the key issue is how to compete at the global level, noting that the answer from his perspective is to situate communities as part of urban metro centers where everyone works together.

Key to success “Moving Beyond the Crisis ...and Leveraging Opportunities” based on four systems:

- *Strategy system* – what is my mission?
- *Dashboard system* – monitor situation – am I doing what I said I would do? (spending time and energy not on side issues & distractions but on key aspects of plan)
- *Managerial system* – control system; lay down ground rules & follow them
  - Take risks
  - Expect shortcomings but be prepared with audit of shortcomings or potential slip-ups in advance so that you can respond
- *Feedback loop system* – evaluate progress and modify accordingly to achieve goals (things even as simple as citizen summits)

Mr. Williams concluded his speech by stating that the stimulus is short term, and will be followed by a long hard period for local officials. However, he’s optimistic. The challenges provide opportunities for innovation; we need to meet them and in doing so will positively influence our future.

Memorable quotes:

- Winston Churchill – “Americans will always do the right thing once they’ve exhausted all other options.”
- From conversation with one of his constituents who came in saying she needed to speak to someone and it had to be “no one lower than the mayor.” He said, “Ma’am, there is no one lower than the mayor.”
- Sign at a hair salon he saw as a kid with his mother: “You must have enough hair for the style you want.” Point being governments have to develop themselves within the confines of their means.

## PLENARY SESSION: LEADERSHIP AND ORGANIZATION SKILLS FOR SUCCESS, CLINT SIDLE

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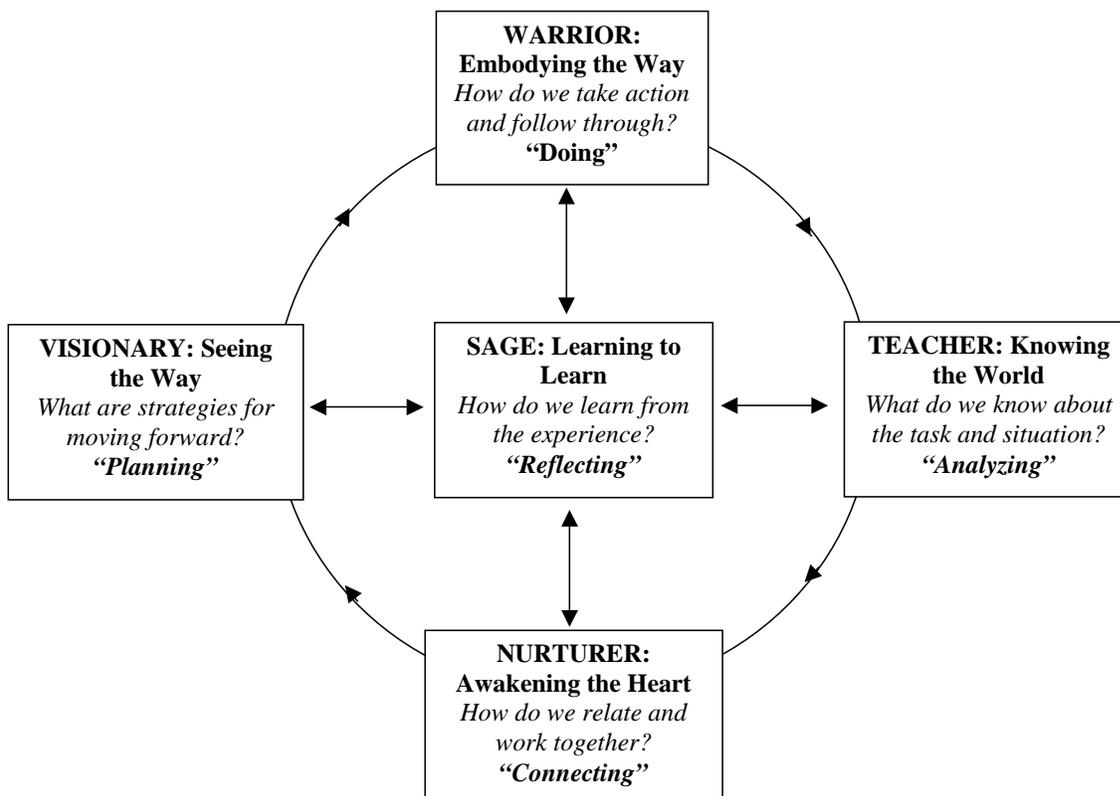
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C. Clinton Sidle, director of the Roy H. Park Leadership Fellows Program in the Johnson School of Management at Cornell and a top consultant for companies around the world, discussed *The Leadership Wheel*, a framework for understanding self and realizing one's full human potential.

Mr. Sidle pointed out that leadership is a particular way of approaching life, one that is dedicated to fulfilling human potential and becoming a fully effective human being. In fulfilling that promise, one naturally learns to serve the greater good.

*The Leadership Wheel* is depicted below:

### Framework for Action Learning



# THINKING REGIONALLY, ACTING LOCALLY: HOW TO DEVELOP AND LEVERAGE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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The topic of public/private and intermunicipal partnerships is of renewed interest because of the pressures the current fiscal economic situation puts on local government. Although the times are challenging, communities that rise to the challenge often discover opportunities to do things better through partnerships. However, taking advantage of the opportunities requires a change in perspective and a new emphasis on collaboration over competition at both local & regional scales. This shift can be supported by new laws and policies that are emerging to support, encourage and facilitate creative partnerships. “We are on the cutting edge of opportunity – the sky’s the limit.”

The panelists highlighted the following keys to thinking regionally and acting locally in community development partnerships.

- There is no single partnership model – partnerships don’t even have to be among contiguous communities - but there are some key elements common to successful partnerships that include:
  - Planning for the short, mid, and long term
  - Routine monitoring
  - Good management and governance (e.g. setting ground rules)
  - Responsiveness to feedback
  - Transparency
  - Attention to relationship building
  - Inclusiveness and engagement of stakeholders
  - Partnership champions with leadership skills

- Genuine willingness to share risk, failures, & successes
- Commitment to be true to the partnership
- Support of goals with data, facts, cases, and research that tangibly demonstrate regional benefits (won't work forever on faith & trust alone);
- Similarly, partnerships tend to be successful when their leaders adopt leadership styles and skills with strengths in the following areas:
  - Collaborative and inclusionary in practice
  - Able to recognize and pursue opportunities
  - Persistent in making the case (showing others the way)
  - Able to keep moving things along
  - Able to inspire
  - Willing to be a risk taker
  - Able to park ego at the door and see the effort of others, not self
  - Willing to embrace new ways of seeing the world (example of two riverside communities who shifted from seeing themselves as *separated* by a river to being *joined* by a bridge)

#### Challenges exist

- Change is hard. Resistance will come. It takes time to build trust and figure out how to work together.

#### Keys to overcoming challenges and successful outcomes

- Start by talking and listening
- Start with small steps and get bigger
- Build on successes (successes build greater buy-in from new partners)
- Celebrate successes
- Recognize it won't happen overnight – think 10 years+
- Be creative
- Anticipate synergism – you can get more out of these partnerships than you put in

# LEVERAGING COLLEGES, UNIVERSITIES AND BOCES AS ENGINES FOR DEVELOPMENT

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The presenters discussed the extent to which the broad range of institutions of higher education can be successfully integrated into the cluster of regional assets which foster regional economic and community development. Major lessons learned about building partnerships and leveraging opportunities with this sector focused on the dynamics of change. To inspire innovation and change, a leadership group with a similar mindset has to be brought together or created. People must be prompted to step outside their regular "little boxes" and to broaden their acceptance of new ways of doing things. Creating institutional links – someone from the educational institution sitting on the local economic development board, for example – can help.

## The panel presentations included the following main points:

- Strategies for overcoming the challenges and barriers include:
  - Build strong relationships between the community and the institution
  - Foster opportunities for business in the community
  - Create effective communication links between the institution and local organizations
- Significant opportunities/successes/innovations include:
  - Consolidating School District Central Business Office operations, which offers many advantages for school districts: standardization, segregation of duties, cost savings, efficiency gains, cross-training
  - Make it easier to start a business - institutions can give students opportunities to apply their ideas (enable entrepreneurship)

- Internships at both college and grade school levels make expertise available to the community and builds relationships between the students and the community, helping convince some to stay or return
- Major issues identified requiring a policy response:
  - Centralization of services
  - Tax incentives to start new businesses
  - Retain knowledge and resources for local and regional use. Talent is the best resource – places can attract and retain talent through colleges and universities
- Important leadership/organizational skills identified:
  - Ability to channel other people’s energy toward a common goal
  - Ability to be in other’s shoes/think broadly/see other’s point of view

**Other Points Emphasized During the Session:**

- Opportunities start in grade school - focus on math and writing skills
- Think globally, act regionally
- Progress is based upon new knowledge; the source of knowledge is the university; community provides important resources to the university
- Encourage community residents to support existing businesses

# ACHIEVING GREENER COMMUNITIES THROUGH CIVIC, PRIVATE AND GOVERNMENT SECTOR INNOVATION

## PANEL MODERATOR:

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The panelists in this session addressed innovative approaches to creating more environmentally sensitive “green” communities. The panelists stressed the importance of creating community level energy plans to direct action and assist in gaining funding. They also emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts: success is more likely when communities seek outside implementation help rather than trying to do everything on their own; forming partnerships to acquire funding through grants can increase effectiveness and save money.

Green opportunities (and green jobs) were associated with eight areas in particular:

- Technologies to produce new forms of energy
- Alternative fuels
- System integration – ranging from large centralized facilities to smaller on-site power
- Transportation
- Building and construction
- Environmental systems - air and water quality, resource management
- Conservation - waste disposal, recycling
- Emissions trading, carbon credits, licensing, etc.

**The panel presentations included the following main points:**

- Challenges to be overcome in this area are significant:

- Changes needed to implement green strategies are large and can seem daunting; upfront costs can discourage innovation
- Energy literacy must be addressed – there is much confusion regarding terms and processes
- Making regional coordination work is at the heart of the problem and solution
- Major lessons about approaches to building partnerships and leveraging opportunities include:
  - Choose achievable goals - pinpoint actions based on existing community assets
  - Create incentives for change - make the process easier, show that the outcome will be worthwhile, provide financial incentive
- Major issues identified requiring a policy response:
  - To reduce emissions, adopt emissions caps and trading of allowances
  - Creation of a community energy plan
- Important leadership/organizational skills identified:
  - Ability to encourage landowners to alter behavior to conserve energy
  - Lead by example: take steps to make changes yourself in order to encourage others
  - Offer guidance to make change more approachable and achievable for others
- Help people who want to use alternative energy to get through an often difficult process:
  - Offer people enough direction to make smart decisions

## MUNICIPAL SHARED SERVICES: HOW DO I KNOW IF ENTERING INTO A SHARED SERVICES AGREEMENT WILL BE EFFECTIVE?

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The practice of sharing municipal services, as a way to improve service delivery, enhance efficiency, and lower costs, is not new. However, the intensity of interest has grown in recent years and state policy has offered increasing levels of support to encourage communities interested in sharing services. The panelists were asked to draw on their practical and research experiences to talk about what has been learned on making shared service efforts succeed.

Two panelists were selected to highlight lessons with respect to specific service areas: health care and policing.

- Stephen Locey focused on a county wide consortium designed to create a more efficient delivery system for employee/retiree medical benefits.
- Dr. James Melitski examined state and national data to analyze the factors that drive municipal decisions to maintain local police departments, share services locally, or rely on County Sheriffs or State Police for local policing.

The two final panelists drew their lessons from experiences with a wide range of service consolidation efforts.

- Kyle Wilber discussed what he has learned as a state program administrator with the New York's Shared Municipal Shared Services Initiative (SMSI - now the Local Government Efficiency or LGE Grants program).
- Dr. Michael Hattery drew on his years of experience analyzing many shared service and municipal consolidation efforts, including many that have been involved with the LGE Grants program.

**The panel presentations included the following main points:**

- *Realizing cost savings* - tax rate, service cost (home owner total cost) – often prompts interest in sharing services, but if sharing is to be implemented successfully attention must also be given to concerns about *service quality and service mix* as well as *governance control*, or the extent to which control over current and future decision-making might be lost. Similarly, the long term potential for savings won't be realized if the *costs of transition* in the interim aren't taken into account.
- *Constituencies for change* almost always exist, but are not always fully engaged.
- The *greatest opportunities for sharing* police (and probably some other) services appear to be in growing communities (in terms of population and income) that lack an existing police force, and in communities facing slow growth or decline that already have a police force.
- Getting broad buy-in is critical. In this regard, *leadership, persistence, and inclusive processes* are essential. These factors point to the need for a strong advocate willing to lead the charge, a willingness on the part of at least some parties to put the greater good ahead of narrower interests, and meetings, meetings, meetings.
- For many service sharing arrangements, success revolves around successfully *negotiating employee concerns* about issues such as seniority, retirement, vacation time, and salary.
- An acceptable *structure for negotiating* about the content of a cooperative agreement must be established, including rules of operation and decision making that respect differentials in power, who participates in negotiations in what capacity (including mechanisms for joining or leaving the group and any formal agreements), and for resolution of conflicts. Building on existing relationships and structures like councils of governments can help.

# **FISCAL DIFFICULTIES, ECONOMIC UNDERPERFORMANCE, AND GOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION: WHAT OUR REGIONS CAN DO TO ADDRESS THESE CRITICAL ISSUES**

## **PANEL MODERATOR:**

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Susan Christopherson offered an overview of the current situation, emphasizing that regional cooperation continues to hold unrealized promise, while the economic downturn has actually created new opportunities for changing the way things are done. It is important to pursue regional cooperation that connects new areas and industries and fosters shared municipal services. Christopherson emphasized the importance of planning strategically for the long-term, of being proactive instead of reactive, and of focusing attention on innovative regional assets (e.g. high-tech manufacturing in this area) that can contribute to a successful, diversified economy – diversification builds strength. Regional competitive advantage is built by leveraging assets, attracting businesses/talent, connecting to the global economy/information economy.

Mike Manikowski and Peter Fairweather presented a case study of Ontario County, which in the last couple of years has exemplified success at strategic planning. Overall lessons include building ‘a plan to live by,’ or one that serves as a strict guideline for development projects. This means saying no if necessary, making specific choices, not trying to do too much/everything at once, avoiding haste with plan or in government by taking time to consider, reduce confrontation, and foster understanding. Another lesson is ‘going with what you’ve got’ (i.e. leveraging the natural or existing assets of your county/region to attract businesses, talent, etc.) to create an attractive and engaged community with a good quality of life; competing on a global scale requires building on uniqueness.

Erie County legislator Kathy Konst discussed the importance of fostering cross-municipality, cross-county cooperation, education and understanding about proposals and initiatives, inclusive of not only legislators

but the whole community. This allows for the breadth of community buy-in and enthusiasm that is critical to successful development.

**The panel presentations highlighted the following additional points:**

- Inter-disciplinary communication/education/understanding is a foundation for cooperation, investment, and buy-in. Transparency and accountability are critical.
- Build locally, think regionally - reinforce region as a whole (eg. build a winery in own county, connect to Finger Lakes wine trail as a whole)
- Work with universities – they are a great asset in upstate NY (go to them, be aggressive, create internships for students that might interest them in the region)

**The panelists discussed primary challenges to be faced:**

- Community to community competition (must find ways to escape a zero-sum game, think regionally - communication and education are key)
- Retaining businesses (expand existing industries already invested in the community, remember long-term vision)
- Confusion associated with multiple levels and diversity of government – educating and understanding is needed regarding other levels of government, organizations, etc., and the systems and rules that vary from one county to the next
- Getting community and government buy-in requires persistence
- Regions are diverse across the rural urban spectrum - it is a challenge to apply general strategies that respect this diversity
- Quick turnover of local government officials makes long-term planning difficult

# COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS: STRATEGICALLY PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

## MODERATOR:

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## PANELISTS:

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Communities across the state are experiencing changing demographics, declining property values, increasing property tax rates, increasing healthcare and pension fund costs, and in many areas, declining population. Communities are also challenged to support improvements in their public schools to meet state and federal requirements. A constructive relationship between school districts and local governments is critical for successful comprehensive planning, particularly in these times of shrinking resources. Panelists were asked to discuss particular projects they have been involved with that highlighted successes or “missed opportunities” in developing and sustaining public-private partnerships in their communities and school districts.

John Sipple discussed the recent creation of the NYS Center for Rural Schools, which will be located at Cornell. The Center aims to coalesce needs, interests, and agencies around the plight of New York's small rural communities and the schools that serve them. The goal is to assist the communities and schools through enhanced policy and knowledge that integrates efforts across disciplines and state agencies in order to attract population, jobs, and ensure bright futures for its children.

Janie Nusser has participated in a countywide collaborative called “Partners for Children, Youth, and Families” since its inception a number of years ago. The collaborative has been instrumental in bringing together social service organizations, schools, law enforcement, and various levels of government to address issues of common concern. United Way of Seneca County has taken the leadership in this initiative, resulting in a large accomplishment five years ago of the award of a multi-year, multi-million dollar 21<sup>st</sup> Century Grant to fund after-school programs for secondary students in all four school districts in Seneca County. The collaborative group meets every few weeks, is an official organization with by-laws and

infrastructure, and acts as both an information outlet as well as a planning group for various initiatives, including the after-school program.

**The panel presentations included the following main points:**

- While collaborative strategic planning is often a lengthy, difficult process, it is necessary. How do we convince our communities that these collaborations are in their best interest?
- Vision - it is necessary to have a vision of shared resources to benefit community as a whole, and less regard for individual institutional interests.
- Results - focus on small projects to see results, using data to help determine what areas need attention.
- Relationships:
  - Building relationships provides the foundation for longer-term projects that can have real impact. It is often hard to sustain these partnerships – need to incentivize relationships.
  - Monthly meetings with a varied group can set up a good communication infrastructure in community.
  - Lack of communication between local government and school districts can create unintended impacts.
- Short and long term considerations:
  - Long-term planning often competes with short-term interest.
  - Short-term funding is critical for long-term payoffs. However, categorical funding remains a major obstacle for collaboration – this is a state policy issue that needs to be addressed.
  - While initial collaboration might be easy, systemic change is more challenging to achieve.
- Vertical planning is easier – horizontal planning is more difficult.
- The challenge of boundaries:
  - Since school district boundaries do not match up with county and/or municipal boundaries, this creates challenges – different tax assessments, population, etc.
  - What would be the advantages and disadvantages of changing boundaries to match counties or municipalities?
- The state's role: the state should more openly recognize that schools can play a role in community and economic development and more directly support these collaborations.