

Position Paper

Regionalization - State of Kansas Review of Accomplishments and Future Direction January 2009

Background

The concept of regionalization in the State of Kansas began during the fall of 2005 when state homeland security officials formed a task force to study how the state might define the evolving direction of homeland security initiatives and the ultimate needs of Kansas relative to risk and vulnerabilities. The language coming from the national level at that time was beginning to lead states towards enhancing regional collaboration in order to begin establishing more formal approaches to sharing resources and expertise to maximize on financial investments.

The task force was comprised of key leadership from various disciplines, organizations and associations that had a vested interest in homeland security strategies and resources and was positioned to objectively define what regionalization could mean for Kansas. The membership of this task force included representatives from:

- Association of Chiefs of Police
- Association of Counties
- Association of Local Health Departments
- Department of Health and Environment
- Division of Emergency Management
- Emergency Managers Association
- Emergency Medical Services Association
- Fire Chiefs Association
- Fire Fighters Association
- Highway Patrol
- Hospital Association
- League of Municipalities
- Peace Officers Association
- Professional Fire Chiefs Association
- Sheriffs Association

This task force met on three (3) different dates during the fall of 2005 and discussed various options related to forming an infrastructure of regional councils that could represent each of the seven homeland security regions of the state. At the conclusion of the meetings, the task force set forth some general guidance for establishing regional council membership based on the intent of homeland security grants and the relationships with other revenue sources; consideration

was also given to maintaining an inclusive structure to ensure fair representation of all vested partners within the region.

Each region of the state has unique characteristics in respect to risk and vulnerabilities, resources, and pre-established group processes so a great deal of autonomy was given to each of the councils for developing their own governing structure and group processes. Each council created their own governing by-laws and participation requirements as well as maintaining a voice in establishing meeting schedules and agendas. (Note...meeting schedules and agendas are largely driven by DHS grant requirements and timelines)

Review of Regionalization

The regionalization concept began to formalize in early 2006 when the newly formed regional councils participated in a capability review workshop in which each regional conducted a self-assessment of certain capabilities within their region. This process identified strengths and weaknesses based on standard measurements created through the DHS Office of Domestic Preparedness Program. The process also was designed to begin structuring a forum to share cross-discipline issues and expertise and to establish dialogue for creating common solutions to ever-changing needs and expectations. This initial workshop proved to have some lasting impacts on the ability of the councils to evolve through the group formation process.

Since that time, regional councils, as well as state homeland security officials, have virtually been learning as the process has unfolded. The newly formed infrastructure has become more and more familiar each year with the grant guidance expectations and the application process has matured over the years to include more inclusive development practices. Those involved with the councils over the years have experienced some valuable insight into the various roles/responsibilities in the homeland security arena as well as the day-to-day challenges of the preventer/responder communities.

The councils have been active now for three (3) years and, as with any new programming or structures, it is only proper to evaluate where the state stands on regionalization efforts; to celebrate the accomplishments gained as well as understand the challenges and potential barriers to future successes.

On January 29, 2009 a group of dedicated individuals from each of the regions came together as a “think tank” to discuss and process what has worked for regional councils as well as provide input into direction necessary for improved collaboration. The group was provided a history and overview of regional efforts and concepts established through the Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) and how effective sharing voices and resources for the betterment of all can be so beneficial, especially when resources are limited.

The following is a synopsis of the meeting and is intended to provide homeland security officials some recommendations and expectations from a local / regional council perspective. Although not all regions experience the same degree of challenges and limitations, there was an obvious display of similar respect and understanding to certain issues across the board and a strong sense of commitment to ensuring regionalization remains effective and beneficial to creating a safer Kansas.

Advantages:

- The formation of regional councils has aided efforts to “regionalize” thought processes.
 - Those involved are now able to begin thinking beyond individual [i.e. discipline / department] needs to creating solutions for a broader spectrum of partners.
- Communication infrastructure has truly become more “interoperable”
 - There is a true sense of sharing roles and responsibilities and needs and expectations across disciplines as well as across regional boundaries.
- The forum for sharing information has improved, not only vertically but horizontally
- Participation from the various disciplines and leadership has been good, despite the challenges on time involved.
- By bringing together various perspectives and expertise, there has been experience gained in developing some bargaining power; there seems to be a better sense of “win / win” ideas.
- The regional councils have been given some broad power over the investments made within the region; the “rules” have only been tied to what the grant will and will not allow.
- Better planning processes have evolved through the regional council infrastructure. Over time, the councils have become more and more “strategic” across regions by building investments that benefit and support what other regions are working on.
- The regions are building projects with some sustainability efforts built in.
- The State of Kansas has been receiving some federal acknowledgement of our regional collaboration effort.
 - DHS officials have been impressed with the grant application process and the level of engagement of local/regional partners in defining investment priorities.
- Regional councils are local
 - Solutions are being defined and supported by local expertise
- Regional efforts have experienced the “forming, storming, norming and performing” process of group interaction and have solidified partnerships.
 - There are growing levels of respect for each other and a true commitment to see everyone succeed.

Challenges

- Participation on the council is somewhat driven by “getting something”
 - A change needs to occur where participation is driven by accomplishing something *without* the “cash carrot”.
 - Need to find common solutions that don’t *depend* on DHS monies; we still have the need or goal, even if there are no dollars available.
 - Some disciplines see only how to get money (“what’s in it for me” mindset)
- Some representatives on the council unfamiliar with what regional councils are about; unfamiliar with the broader goals and objectives
- Information may not be getting to the right people / peers
 - Some of the disciplines represented on the council are not sharing the information within their discipline within the region, and thus, are potentially not bringing forth accurate needs and expectations from that discipline to the council
 - Some disciplines have no well-established system for sharing information (some may have the system in place but don’t use it, while others are working on developing the system)
- Membership on the councils are “volunteer”
 - There is a huge time commitment to serving on a council and an overload of efforts in creating direction and investments for the region as a whole.
- Participation on the council is not equal
 - Some individuals dedicate a large amount of time in developing projects and ensuring overall success of council efforts while others may not; unfortunately, they expect to reap the same rewards as everyone else.
- Economic downturns will have affect on future participation on the council
- There is no statutory authority for regional councils; struggling with ownership and gaining the support to be effective
- The concept behind Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) is very effective. Unfortunately, not all RPCs are equal and able to partner in the same ways
- Grant guidance is changing from “toys” to more of strategic thinking (i.e. planning, training, exercise)
 - The process of buying equipment is simpler than developing strategy for “services”
- Various discipline views cloud vision
 - Disciplines tend to see mainly their lane of responsibility and develop their priorities based on their own priority response needs; oftentimes the different perspectives compromise the priorities of other disciplines.

- Maintaining and sustaining inventories
 - Who actually owns the piece of equipment and how it is shared are valid issues and requires formal expectations and use protocols
- There are huge differences between regions and “within” regions
 - Lack of basic services and infrastructure across the state and the abilities to develop and support those differences vary (i.e. communications)
- Grant writing on a regional level is difficult
- When the grant money goes away or match is expected, there is a strong belief that regional councils will go away
- Many of the regions tend to support projects that benefit the region as a whole; it is becoming more difficult to swallow funding areas that have non-participating members (i.e. set asides protect the non-participating members)
- There is no overview of all the Federal requirements across all the different funding sources; no single footprint of requirements
 - Requirements of Federal preparedness grant programs need to be coordinated
- Not all jurisdictions within a region are at the same basic level of response capability
- Regional boundaries of various agencies and functions do not match which creates coordination challenges

Recommendations / Solutions

- Invest in video conferencing capabilities to streamline travel time for meetings (i.e. Microsoft live meeting, webinars, etc)
 - ITV capabilities in hospitals
 - Suggestion: Involve Jason Moses in this discussion
- Reimbursements for travel costs
- Explore the option of becoming a sub-committee of Regional Planning Commissions
 - Advantages: grant writing support, buying powers, manage paperwork and trail
- Need to enhance ways to play well together
- Information sharing needs to occur within each functional area
- Re-enforce why we started regionalization
- Local/regional partners need to be included in writing the state strategy
- View state partners as a region – one of us, working side by side
 - This cannot be a “we” versus “they” game. Unfortunately, time constraints on grant requirements impact this type of thinking.
- Find ways to support regional councils (i.e. administrative)
- Strive for all-hazards funding
- Funding should be 100 % project driven and shouldn’t be tied to a discipline
 - Funding should be based on needs assessment / capabilities

- Cycle of Preparedness – need to blend the requirements
- CEPR might want to re-zone the LEPC planning districts
- Common regional boundaries
- Sell the functionality of regional councils on a continuous basis to:
 - County commissioners, functions, associations

Conclusion and Action Items

The following items are a brief synopsis of areas the group felt needed further attention in order to enhance the potential of the regional council system. Over the past three years, there have been major advancements made in improving capabilities statewide, some of which can be directly attributed to the shared knowledge and expertise amongst the memberships of councils.

Clearly define the mission of regional councils and why they exist.

There seems to be variations in understanding of the purpose of regional councils and, in many cases, a general lack of awareness that they even exist. A large portion of regional council activities have been consumed with grant funding and related expectations; up to now, a majority of the motivation for participating in regional councils has been about the money and determining investment priorities.

Many feel that the purpose of the regional councils goes beyond just the money and that issues and needs brought forth still exist and remain constant, even if no grant monies were available. The value of the regional council infrastructure has proven the ability to bring together key local leadership with vested interest in the public safety arena and create solutions to problems beyond the financial constraints. The regional councils can become the influence to moving the system towards a strategic thinking process and engaging resources and personnel in new and more efficient ways to better serve the disaster response efforts in Kansas.

The Strategic Thinking model has three components:

- Generative (who are we?)
- Strategic (what are our goals and objectives?)
- Fiduciary (how will we get there?)

Recommendation: Kansas homeland security officials need to dedicate some time to formalize the Generative piece of this model, both as a statewide vision as well as at the regional level.

Provide an annual regional council report

This report could list some basic information on accomplishments from each of the (7) regional councils. It could also serve as an excellent marketing tool for what regional councils are and the initiatives they have sponsored / supported. The reports could also be posted to a website with links to other key informational networks.

Samples of key components of the report could include:

- Who serves on the council (could help with membership recognition)
- General project descriptions and the impacts of the investment(s)
- Accomplishments
- Priorities

Regional Councils have no true “authority” to exist

The State of Kansas does not have any regional form of government which limits the regional council's momentum for making things happen. Critical decisions are being made each year that establish priorities for investments without any legal authority to make those decisions. Regions are purchasing equipment they can't legally own and, thus, are reliant on local commitments to sustain these purchases and maintain the agreements for use. Fortunately, the state has a wealth of dedicated individuals that have stepped forward to lead the preparedness efforts defined by the councils with a focus on the greater good for all. They have seen local boundaries disappear; partnerships develop and flourish across the region and state, and have optimistically created approaches that build “shared” capabilities.

Regional councils are reaching a point that may not be able to guarantee this honest collaboration and objectivity to making critical decisions. Some level of recognition or status needs to be given to the membership of the councils to justify the actions taken by the council.

Discussion may be warranted to define current statutory requirements and authorities to engage participation on councils. A suggestion was made to explore the expectations of the Local Emergency Planning Committees (LEPCs) under the SARA Title III requirements and define the levels of compliance. LEPCs are formed under statutory requirement and carry similar purposes to the regional councils. Possibly the planning districts defined by the Commission on Emergency Planning and Response (CEPR) need to be re-visited.

Regional council membership needs to understand they are “key communicators” for sharing information with their respective disciplines

The basic premise behind the membership guidance on regional councils was primarily defined around disciplines; each of the disciplines recommended for the council was on the DHS list that should benefit from the federal preparedness grants. It was the intent that the named representative(s) from each of the disciplines were to serve as the conduit of information with their respective peers across the region as well as function as the voice for the issues and priorities relative to that discipline and their perspectives. Experience has shown that some of the disciplines are not acting in that “representative” capacity or may not have that well-established system in place to share information back and forth.

Having membership appointments made with some level of recognition or advisory/appointment status can help to improve the participation challenges currently being experienced. But this alone may not have the lasting effects of successful involvement and may require some state level or statewide authority to communicate the importance of participating in the council. This will need to be coupled with a clear purpose and mission of the regional council and the regionalization outcomes defined. Also, having the ability to financially support the costs involved in participating may ease some of the unspoken barriers for participation. State officials may want to also explore more training and staff development options for enhancing leadership skills and abilities.

Administrative support to the councils would ease the burdens of paperwork and tracking project status.

The amount of time and effort required for defining and developing project budgets and work plans are extensive and might be a causal factor for the depreciation in participation. As the ratio of benefit is compared to the requirements to receive grant dollars is examined, the state may see even less interest in participating in regional councils.

Exploring the Regional Planning Commission (RPC) structure within the state might be an excellent option to streamlining resources and expertise in various grant administrative areas. While the current RPC infrastructure has limitations in services statewide, it may be worth the effort in discussing options.

Create the visibility of all the emergency preparedness grants.

There are a number of grants that come into the state with both similar and unique outcome requirements. All of these grants can be tied to certain target capabilities and can enhance areas defined as needing improvement. At the

regional council level, visibility of these grants is limited, not only in the amount of awards available but the scope of requirements expected.

A suggestion was made for building a mechanism to share grant information and the award amounts with the regional councils and allow some visibility and discussion on how the dollars are spent.

Create the opportunity for regions to work together on projects across regional boundaries

Regional council members have come a long way in visioning the enhancement of response efforts. Thinking has gone strictly from a local or county entity, to more of a regional or statewide approach to building capacity. The state is beginning to see more and more focus on projects that impact the system statewide.

The state needs to examine ways to better utilize video conferencing and live meeting capabilities for sharing information and to minimize travel costs and time limitations.

Grant matching requirements will eradicate the councils as they stand today

It is unknown if/when DHS will require some level of match for future homeland security grants. If this occurs, consensus showed that this will harm the regional council infrastructure currently in place for many reasons: 1) there are no "regional" dollars to support the projects, 2) will add accountability burdens on the ownership of the projects, 3) may confuse the issues/protocols for sharing resources, 3) may limit the regional thinking and partnering of what councils have accomplished over the past three years and take things back to a more localized form of developing capabilities instead of building more statewide initiatives, 4) will force an even tighter analysis of priority investments (up to now, there have been no "rules" on what the regions choose to purchase).

The next version of the capability assessment process (occurring during the spring, 2009) will assist state and local officials in truly identifying strengths and weaknesses in our capabilities. As a result of the process, state officials anticipate that priority capabilities will be clearly defined and mirror actual risk and vulnerabilities. The process will not only streamline some of the grant reporting requirements but will provide some valuable input into the next version of the state homeland security strategy.

Variations in regional boundaries cause confusion in programming and sharing information consistently

Not all of the disciplines represented on the regional councils have matching regional boundaries, while some are not set up on any formal regional basis at all. This challenges the ability to ensure information is shared consistently as well as places limitations to some planning and assessment processes.

Key questions:

- Regional council reps would like to know:
 - What state homeland security officials expect of regional councils
 - Challenges and solutions from the state level perspective

Regional Councils...Securing the homeland from the ground up

Solutions exist...it is up to visionary and courageous leaders to implement them in a collaborative setting.

Attendees
January 29, 2009

<u>Region</u>	<u>Represented by</u>
Northwest	Keith Haberer Toby Prine
North Central	Sue Cooper Pam Kemp John Cyr
Northeast	Pat Collins Garry Berges Bill Brubaker
Southeast	Rick Brown Ed Garner
South Central	Amy Miller Jim Leftwich
Southwest	Don Button Karen Luckett
KC Metro	Bob Evans Larry Eker Keith Yoder
State	John Eichkorn Robin Reitmeyer Amy Ayers Suzanne LeBlanc Terri Ploger-McCool