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Federal Regional Commissions and Authorities: Overview of Structure and Activities

Federal regional commissions and authorities (FRCAs) address perceived regional economic underdevelopment. These organizations accommodate multileveled and multijurisdictional participation in and implementation of assistance programs. How FRCAs generally implement such programs is informed by federal and state partners as well as substate level stakeholders. Outside groups have speculated that the FRCAs' flexible design and federal-state-local model is particularly important because it may contribute to their effectiveness in rural communities.

This In Focus outlines each active FRCA's structure, core activities, and recent funding. In addition to the core activities described below, these FRCAs also undertake various partnerships and initiatives unique to their regions' opportunities and challenges (e.g., the J-1 Visa waiver program, which provides visa waivers for physicians who are willing to provide medical services in distressed communities).

Appalachian Regional Commission

The Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) was established in 1965 to address economic distress in the Appalachian region. The ARC's jurisdiction spans 423 counties in Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Ohio, New York, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. The ARC is a federal-state partnership, with administrative costs shared equally by the federal government and member states; its economic development activities are federally funded. Thirteen state governors and a federal co-chair oversee the ARC. The co-chair is appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the U.S. Senate. The current federal co-chair is Gayle Manchin, whose tenure began in May 2021. Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves is the states' co-chair, which is selected by the governors.

According to authorizing legislation (40 U.S.C. §§14101-14704), the ARC's programs abide by a Regional Development Plan, which is comprised of the strategic plan, bylaws, state development plans, the annual strategy statement for each participating state, the annual program budget, and internal implementation and performance management guidelines. The strategic plan is typically a five-year document, reviewed annually, and revised as necessary. The current strategic plan, adopted in October 2021, prioritizes five investment goals: (1) entrepreneurial and business development; (2) workforce development; (3) infrastructure development; (4) natural and cultural assets; and (5) leadership and community capacity.

The ARC's structure enables local and state-level agenda-setting and implementation tied to federal and multistate

regional perspectives. Similar to other FRCAs, the ARC's economic development activities include significant state and local input. Through state plans and annual work statements, state governments regularly establish goals, priorities, and agendas for fulfilling them. State-level planning typically includes consultation with a network of 74 multicounty local development districts (LDDs), which are financially supported by the ARC and advise on local priorities and issues. Accordingly, state and local governments, governmental entities, and nonprofit organizations are eligible for the ARC's funding. This includes federal and potentially state-designated tribal entities.

The ARC statutorily designates counties according to levels of economic distress, which determine matching fund requirements for grants. The ARC's multileveled and multijurisdictional structure and activities make it a unique model of federal economic development, which is emulated in other FRCAs.

Delta Regional Authority

The Delta Regional Authority (DRA) was established in 2000 (P.L. 106-554) to address economic distress in the Mississippi River Delta region. The DRA's jurisdiction includes 255 designated parishes in Louisiana and counties in Alabama, Arkansas, Illinois, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, and Tennessee. Like the ARC, the DRA is a federal-state partnership that shares administrative expenses equally, while activities are federally funded. The DRA is governed by the eight state governors and a federal co-chair appointed by the President with the advice and consent of the U.S. Senate. The current federal co-chair is Corey Wiggins, whose tenure began in March 2022. The states' co-chair is currently Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear.

The DRA strategic plan illuminates economic development priorities. Its current strategic plan—Regional Development Plan IV—was released in February 2023. The strategic plan lists four goals related to public infrastructure; workforce; business growth and entrepreneurship; and community place-making and capacity-building. State development plans are required by statute, and are issued every five years to coincide with the strategic plan. The DRA funds projects through a supported network of 45 LDDs. By statute, the DRA directs at least 75% of funds to distressed counties; half those funds target transportation and infrastructure.

Denali Commission

The Denali Commission was established in 1998 (P.L. 105-277) to provide rural economic development in Alaska. It is unique as a single-state regional commission and relies on federal funding for its expenses and activities. By statute, it is comprised of seven members appointed by the U.S.

Secretary of Commerce, including the: federal co-chair, Julia Kitka; Alaska Governor, who is state co-chair; University of Alaska president; Alaska Municipal League president; Alaska Federation of Natives president; Alaska State AFL-CIO president; and Associated General Contractors of Alaska president.

The Denali Commission is statutorily required to create an annual work plan, which solicits project proposals, guides activities, and informs a five-year strategic plan. The current FY2024-FY2028 strategic plan, released in March 2024, lists seven strategic goals and objectives: (1) infrastructure for distressed communities; (2) village infrastructure protection and climate resiliency; (3) energy, including storage, production, heating, and electricity; (4) workforce development; (5) transportation; (6) other programs, such as sanitation, health facilities, housing, and broadband; and (7) innovation and collaboration. Denali does not make explicit use of LDDs or similar entities.

Mid-Atlantic Regional Commission (MARC) and Southern New England Regional Commission (SNERC)

P.L. 118-272 amended 40 U.S.C. §15301(a) to establish the Mid-Atlantic Regional Commission (MARC) and Southern New England Regional Commission (SNERC) in January 2025. The authorizing legislation requires that the President must nominate and the Senate must confirm a federal co-chairperson before the MARC or SNERC may convene. The new commissions are not active, as of publication. Federal co-chairs have not been nominated and the two FRCAs have not received initial appropriations.

Northern Border Regional Commission

The Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) was created in 2008 (P.L. 110-234) to alleviate economic distress in northern Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York. Administrative costs are shared equally between the states and the federal government, while activities are federally funded. The NBRC includes a federal co-chair, appointed by the President by and with the advice and consent of the U.S. Senate, and the five governors, of which one is appointed state co-chair. Chris Saunders is the current federal co-chair since March 2022. Maine Governor Janet Mills is the states' co-chair since January 2024.

The NBRC's activities are guided by a five-year strategic plan. Its 2024-2029 strategic plan lists five focus areas: communication and collaboration; programs and funding; systems and processes; diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility; and capacity building. The NBRC has four program areas: (1) economic and infrastructure development (the Catalyst program); (2) the forest economy; (3) timber for transit; and (4) state capacity-building. The NBRC also works with LDDs to identify opportunities, conduct outreach, and administer grant funds, from which LDDs receive fees.

Great Lakes Authority

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023 (P.L. 117-328) amended 40 U.S.C. §15301(a) to establish the Great Lakes Authority (GLA) in December 2022. The GLA is not yet active. The GLA received initial appropriations in FY2024. Similar to most FRCAs, the authorizing legislation requires

that before the GLA may convene, the President must nominate and the Senate must confirm a federal co-chairperson. In May 2024, a federal co-chairperson was nominated; as of publication, a nominee has not been confirmed. The GLA region includes the counties in the watershed “as such terms are defined in section 118(a)(3) of the Federal Water Pollution Control Act (33 U.S.C. 1268(a)(3))” in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin.

Northern Great Plains Regional Authority

The Northern Great Plains Regional Authority (NGPRA) was created in 2002 (P.L. 107-171) to address economic distress in Iowa, Minnesota, North Dakota, Nebraska, and South Dakota. The NGPRA was authorized \$30 million from FY2002 to FY2018, and appears to have received appropriations twice—for \$1.5 million each year in FY2004 (P.L. 108-199) and FY2005 (P.L. 108-447). Its authorization lapsed in 2018, and it was reauthorized in 2025 (P.L. 118-272). As of publication, a federal co-chair has not been nominated and NGPRA has not received subsequent appropriations.

Southeast Crescent Regional Commission

The Southeast Crescent Regional Commission (SCRC) was established in 2008 (P.L. 110-234). SCRC's jurisdiction includes parts of Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and all of Florida. In December 2021, the Senate confirmed the first federal co-chair, Jennifer Reed, enabling the commission to convene. North Carolina Governor Josh Stein is the state co-chair. In 2022, SCRC published its inaugural strategic plan, covering FY2023-FY2027, which includes the following focuses: (1) critical infrastructure, (2) health and support services access and outcomes, (3) workforce capacity, (4) entrepreneurial and business development activities, (5) affordable housing stock and access, and (6) environmental conservation, preservation, and access.

Southwest Border Regional Commission

The Southwest Border Regional Commission (SBRC) was established by Congress in 2008 along with SCRC and the NBRC, and shares an identical governing structure and authorization language. SBRC encompasses the southern border regions of Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas. SBRC has received consistent funding authorizations since 2008. SBRC received appropriations each fiscal year from 2021 through 2024. In December 2022, the Senate confirmed the first federal co-chair for the SBRC, Juan Eduardo Sanchez, enabling the commission to convene and begin other activities. New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham is the states' co-chair. SBRC published its inaugural strategic plan for FY2025-FY2030, which includes goals focused on underserved communities; regional competitiveness; workforce and economic mobility; resiliency, local capacity, and infrastructure; and efficiency and impact. The SBRC's strategic plan prioritizes investments in infrastructure, workforce development, and community resilience.

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