

## The Need

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Suburban areas frequently face community and economic development challenges on par with those in large cities. However, most smaller municipalities do not have the staff capacity and expertise to tackle their challenges, which rarely adhere to municipal borders. In metropolitan Chicago's 280+ suburbs, there is a critical need to build capacity and lower costs.

## Encouraging Signs

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Inspired by successes in Silicon Valley and Washington's King County, the Metropolitan Planning Council, Metropolitan Mayors Caucus, and Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning have been working with four clusters of municipalities in suburban Chicago to pilot interjurisdictional or multi-town solutions. Two of the clusters represent the "hardest hit" towns in Illinois, in terms of the foreclosure crisis; the South Cook County and West Cook County clusters began working jointly in 2009 and have since secured philanthropic support to hire shared staff.

These two collaboratives – one with five communities, the other with 19 – have attracted over \$34 million in federal funding over three years. These dollars for addressing vacant and foreclosed homes flowed – per federal formula grants – through the State of Illinois and Cook County. Many of the participating communities would not have been able to submit an application, let alone implement a foreclosure response effort on their own. The South and West collaboratives are plugged into broader initiatives on jobs, transit and the environment that have attracted an additional \$5 million. While impressive, each time these clusters secured resources jointly, it was a painful, bureaucratic process. This must change.

These collaborations are precisely the kind of approach needed in the current economic climate to make governments more efficient and effective. Coordination like this also sends a signal to the private sector that they are a smart place to invest.

## What is Needed from the Public Sector

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The success in South and West Cook County did not come easy. Government funding, through quirks of history, often discourages an application from a group of communities. While an unintended consequence, federal programs frequently force municipalities to compete against each other and more experienced applicants, which tends to perpetuate the status quo. Another barrier is federal funding often covers capital dollars for projects, but fails to deliver administrative dollars that can support the shared capacity that is often lacking.

There are actions that would help a greater number of communities become more efficient:

- Modify/design government funding programs such as CDBG to encourage innovative collaborations.
- Direct administrative as well as capital dollars to communities with shared staff and coordinated efforts.
- Reward incentives to municipalities that engage in collaborative approaches.

## For More Information

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Visit [metroplanning.org/ij](http://metroplanning.org/ij) or call:

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