

Michigan Association of Regions, Directory of Regions

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What is the MAR?

The Michigan Association of Regions is a state association of the fourteen (14) regional councils in Michigan. MAR consists of a policy board of local elected and appointed officials that meets periodically to discuss regional policy issues and programs, and adopts legislative positions. MAR also has an Executive Directors Committee that meets monthly. Member services consists of advocacy of regional programs, training and education, research, membership surveys, networking, as well as liaison to national associations, including the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) and the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO).

The purpose of MAR is to:

- Establish communication and provide relevant information for and between state-designated planning regions;
- Discuss community challenges and problems of mutual interest and concern, and will collaboratively develop policy recommendations to further the interests of state-designated planning regions;
- Act as a single point of contact for state and federal government to reach regions and to develop a policy-level relationships;
- Act as a mechanism by which state-designated planning regions can establish common standards and practices for its members;
- Act as an advocate for the advancement of state-designated planning regions;
- Act as a resource for planning expertise in Michigan.

What is a Regional Council?

A regional council is a multi-service entity with state and locally-defined boundaries that delivers a variety of federal, state, and local programs while continuing its function as a planning organization, technical assistance provider and “visionary” to its member local governments. As such, they are accountable to local units of government and effective partners for state and federal governments.

Conceived in the 1960s, regional councils today are stable, broad-based organizations adept at consensus-building, creating partnerships, providing services, problem solving and fiscal management. The role of the regional council has been shaped by the changing dynamics in federal, state, and local government relations, and the growing recognition that the region is the arena in which local governments must work together to resolve social and environmental challenges. Regional councils have carved out a valuable niche for themselves as reliable agents and many operate more independent of federal funding. Comprehensive and transportation planning, economic development, workforce development, the environment, services for the elderly, and clearinghouse functions are among the types of programs managed by regional councils. Some states, such as Georgia, have passed legislation that creates a role for regional councils, relying heavily on them to deliver or assist the state with a variety of programs. Of the 39,000 local, general purpose governments in the United States (counties, cities, townships, towns, villages, boroughs) a total of more than 35,000 are served by Regional Councils. (*Source: National Association of Regional Councils*)

What is a State-Designated Planning & Development Region?

Regional planning commissions have been around in some parts of the country since near the start of the last century. Planning & Development Regions look at planning issues from a larger geography than that examined by counties or local units of government in the region. That allows them to identify issues and opportunities that are not apparent at a smaller geography. They also can help local governments resolve issues of overlapping services, help fill gaps in services through service sharing arrangements, and help find resources from the federal and state governments to address unmet needs.

Over the past 65 years the Michigan Legislature has created three separate, but different statutory approaches to addressing regional planning through voluntary substate units of government known variously as state planning and development regions, regional planning commissions, regional planning and development commissions, and councils of government (these terms are used interchangeably in this report). These Acts are:

- Regional Planning Act, 1945 PA 281.
- The regional planning portion of the County or Regional Economic Development Commission Act, 1966 PA 46.
- The regional planning portion of Metropolitan Councils Act, 1989 PA 292.

State Designated Planning and Development Regions are voluntary organizations comprised of local governments dedicated to serving the regional planning needs of multi-county areas in all parts of Michigan. They are a form of local government voluntarily created by their members, which are largely representative of local governments in the region; although membership also includes road authorities, nonprofit organizations and representatives of the business community in many regions.

The land area of Michigan is divided into 14 planning & development regions ([hyperlink to attached map](#)) with counties as the organizing unit. They range widely in size. Five have only three counties, while one has fourteen counties. The two smallest are only 1,711-13 square miles each in size, while the largest is 8,735 square miles in size. Population served varies from 57,510 persons to 4,833,493 based on Census estimates in 2000. Population density ranges from under 14 persons/square mile in Region 13 (Western U.P.), to over 1,043 persons/square mile in Region 1 (Southeast Michigan). The oldest of today's regions, Tri-County Regional Planning Commission (Region 6 in Lansing, formed in 1956), and the three county Detroit Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission (formed in 1947 and subsequently replaced by the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments in 1968 (SEMCOG, which covers seven counties in SE Michigan), originated out of a desire by local officials to coordinate transportation infrastructure planning and to serve as a forum for other regional issues.

For more information regarding the Michigan Association of Region, contact:

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