

**INTER-
GOVERNMENTAL
COOPERATION
ELEMENT**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many cities, townships, villages, and counties begin cooperative arrangements to lower costs and promote efficiency. Most arrangements involve only two governmental units, but there are also agreements among multiple units. Intergovernmental cooperation may range from formal joint power agreements to unwritten understandings. Two cities may have an unwritten agreement about sharing road repair equipment, or a cluster of cities and townships may have a written agreement concerning snow removal or economic development. The opportunities for intergovernmental cooperation are endless.

This section takes a closer look at intergovernmental cooperation including advantages and disadvantages. It examines what the Town of Highland is doing today and what they may consider in the future.

Intergovernmental cooperation is an effective way for local governments to respond to changing and diverse needs by working together with their neighbors, while maintaining their own identity. If an agreement can be reached among two or more units of government, services can often be provided with substantial cost savings. Cooperation can also eliminate unnecessary duplication of services or purchasing of equipment.



Wisconsin State Statute 66.1001(2)(g)

(g) Intergovernmental cooperation element.

A compilation of objectives, policies, goals, maps and programs for joint planning and decision making with other jurisdictions, including school districts and adjacent local governmental units, for siting and building public facilities and sharing public services. The element shall analyze the relationship of the local governmental unit to school districts and adjacent local governmental units, and to the region, the state and other governmental units. The element shall incorporate any plans or agreements to which the local governmental unit is a party under [s. 66.0301](#), [66.0307](#) or [66.0309](#). The element shall identify existing or potential conflicts between the local governmental unit and other governmental units that are specified in this paragraph and describe processes to resolve such conflicts.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION POLICIES

The following are the intergovernmental cooperation policies for the Town of Highland.

➤ **Maintain established intergovernmental relationships.**

The Town of Highland does share some services with other jurisdictions and this should be continued as long as they are beneficial.

➤ **Explore new opportunities to cooperate with other local units of government.**

As costs continue to rise for providing many facilities and services, the exploration of additional ways to cooperate may prove to be beneficial in order to contain costs.

➤ **Establish written intergovernmental cooperation agreements.**

Often time, intergovernmental cooperation agreements are established based on verbal agreements. Changes in leadership can cause problems with agreements if the specifics have not been identified in writing. It may prove to be beneficial to have all intergovernmental agreements in writing to avoid any disputes or misunderstandings.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONSHIPS

A good working relationship between jurisdictions is important. Intergovernmental communication and cooperation with neighboring cities, towns, villages, and county, regional, and state entities can provide economic, environmental, and political advantages for a jurisdiction. Best of all, a positive intergovernmental relationship fosters and supports a sense of community and good fellowship between parties.

Table G.1 shows Highland's rating of its intergovernmental relationships with various governmental units.

Table G.1: Town Of Highland Intergovernmental Relationship Ratings

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	NA
Adjacent jurisdictions (general)		X			
Adjacent jurisdictions (specific) – Village of Highland, Towns of Eden, Castle Rock, Pulaski, Wingville, and Clyde		X			
Wisconsin DNR		X			
Wisconsin DOT		X			
Wisconsin DOC		X			
UW Extension		X			
Iowa County (general)		X			
Iowa County (specific)					
Local School District (Highland, Riverdale, Iowa-Grant, & Dodgeville) – The Town keeps roads clear of snow and ice for school bus travel and determining where there is school in inclement weather. The election process for school board members in each district is also cited as an example of the good working relationship the Town enjoys with the surrounding school districts.		X			
Other: Southwest Wisconsin Technical College		X			

EXISTING AREAS OF COOPERATION

- **Fire Protection and Ambulance Services** - Joint fire and rescue service between the Town of Highland and the Village of Highland.
- **Law Enforcement** – Highland shares law enforcement services with Iowa County.
- **School System** – Highland is part of Highland School District and as such, shares district boundaries with the Village of Highland and the Towns of Eden, Pulaski, Castle Rock, and Dodgeville.
- **Recreation Programs/Services** – Shares support of the Highland Summer Recreation Program with the Village of Highland.
- **Road Maintenance** – The Town of Highland shares the responsibility of mowing, plowing, and grading (Wepking Road) with the Towns of Castle Rock and Eden. Road service is also shared on Bills Road and Willow Springs Road.

INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONFLICTS IDENTIFIED

No conflicts are identified but if any arose, traditionally the Town, Village, and School District work together for common goals.

OTHER INTERGOVERNMENTAL CONCERNS

With increasing population, the Town of Highland will have to work more with surrounding jurisdictions on a cooperative basis.

POSSIBLE FUTURE COOPERATION EFFORTS

As the list above indicates, the Town of Highland is already cooperating with other jurisdictions for services and facilities. The list below identifies possible areas of cooperation in the future.

- **Road Maintenance Equipment** – The possibility exists of sharing the purchasing of supplies like road salt with the Iowa County Highway Commission.
- **Fire Protection and Ambulance Services** – Continue to share these services with the Village of Highland.

COMMUNICATION WITH NEIGHBORS

The Town of Highland currently holds joint meetings with its neighboring jurisdictions for Fire and Ambulance services, Smart Growth planning, and other business as needed. In the past, the Towns of Eden, Castle Rock, Wingville, and Pulaski have used the Town of Highland polling place for school referendums.

FORMAL AGREEMENTS WITH NEIGHBORING JURISDICTIONS

The Town of Highland has formal agreements with

- Village of Highland – A road maintenance agreement signed in March 2000 for maintenance of Tower Road and Farmers Ridge Road.

The Town of Highland also has a Fire and Ambulance agreement.

ADVANTAGES OF LOCAL INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

Intergovernmental cooperation has many advantages associated with it including the following:

Efficiency and reduction of costs: Cooperating on the provision of services can potentially mean lower costs per unit or person. Although these are by no means the only reasons, efficiency and reduced costs are the most common reasons governments seek to cooperate.

Limited government restructuring: Cooperating with neighboring governments often avoids the time-consuming, costly, and politically sensitive issues of government restructuring. For example, if a city and township can cooperate, the township may avoid annexation of its land and the city may avoid incorporation efforts on the part of the township, which may hinder the city's development. Cooperation also helps avoid the creation of special districts that take power and resources away from existing governments.

Coordination and planning: Through cooperation, governments can develop policies for the area and work on common problems. Such coordination helps communities minimize conflicts when levels of services and enforcement are different among neighboring communities. For example, shared water, sewage, and waste management policies can help avoid the situation in which one area's environment is contaminated by a neighboring jurisdiction with lax standards or limited services. Cooperation can also lead to joint planning for future services and the resources needed to provide them.

Expanded services: Cooperation may provide a local unit of government with services it would otherwise be without. Cooperation can make those services financially and logistically possible.

DISADVANTAGES OF LOCAL INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION

Intergovernmental cooperation also has drawbacks, which may include the following:

Reaching and maintaining an agreement: In general, reaching a consensus in cases in which politics and community sentiments differ can be difficult. For example, all parties may agree that police protection is necessary. However, they may disagree widely on how much protection is needed. An agreement may fall apart if one jurisdiction wants infrequent patrolling and the other wants an active and visible police force.

Unequal partners: If one party to an agreement is more powerful, it may influence the agreement's conditions. With service agreements, the more powerful party, or the party providing the service, may have little to lose if the agreement breaks down, it may already service itself at a reasonable rate. The weaker participants may not have other options and are open to possible exploitation.

Local self-preservation and control: Some jurisdictions may feel their identity and independence will be threatened by intergovernmental cooperation. The pride of residents and officials may be bruised if, after decades of providing their own police or fire protection, they must contract with a neighboring jurisdiction (and possible old rival) for the service. In addition, and possibly more importantly, a jurisdiction may lose some control over what takes place within their boundaries. And although government officials may lose control, they are still held responsible for the delivery of services to their electorates.

STEPS TO BEGINNING SUCCESSFUL INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION EFFORTS

As expressed earlier in this section, intergovernmental cooperation should be thoroughly reviewed. Below are some ideas and concerns that should be considered.

- Identify other local governments that may share a common problem or may stand to benefit from cooperation.
- Identify whether the county is cooperating with other jurisdictions on a similar service. What type of arrangement do they have? Are the participating jurisdictions satisfied with the quality and quantity of the service?
- Although cooperation on several services may be desired, analyze each one separately. Initially, it may seem logical to lump services. However, it is best to first understand from a cost and non-cost perspective what cooperation in each service area entails.
- Look at the potential cost savings of each option. This should be done per resident or per unit-of-service-provided basis. For example, will the cost of fire protection per person decrease if the jurisdictions cooperate? Or, can the jurisdiction lower per resident costs of providing snow removal if it plows other jurisdictions' streets?
- Consider the costs associated with each form of cooperation. What type of administrative or insurance costs might be necessary with each option?
- How would residents respond to the change in the level of services they receive? And how would taxpayers respond to additional government expenses? Would they reject it?

- Are the residents willing to give up some control over a particular service? This may take considerable polling to determine and will likely vary depending on the type of service in question. For example, it may be all right to share snow removal and street repair equipment, but residents might not be willing to give up their own police department and the security they feel it provides.
- Keep the public and local officials informed throughout the entire process. Present the options and invite public comment. If residents and officials feel they have played a role in the effort, or at least been given the opportunity to provide their input, they will be more likely to support the initiative. Plus, some creative ideas may be generated.
- Patience is important. The more governments involved in the negotiations, the longer it will take to develop an agreement and reach a consensus. In addition, negotiators may have to go back to their city councils, town, or county boards several times for directions or approval.

ADDITIONAL INTERGOVERNMENTAL COOPERATION IDEAS

The Intergovernmental Cooperation Element Guide published by the Wisconsin Department of Administration provides several ideas for cooperation including the following listed below. These are only ideas to consider.

(Note: the following ideas were taken directly from the Intergovernmental Cooperation Guide.)

Voluntary Assistance: Your community, or another, could voluntarily agree to provide a service to your neighbors because doing so makes economic sense and improves service levels.

Trading Services: Your community and another could agree to exchange services. You could exchange the use of different pieces of equipment, equipment for labor, or labor for labor.

Renting Equipment: Your community could rent equipment to, or from, neighboring communities and other governmental units. Renting equipment can make sense for both communities – the community renting gets the use of equipment without having to buy it, and the community renting out the equipment earns income from the equipment rather than having it sit idle.

Contracting: Your community could contract with another community or jurisdiction to provide a service. For example, you could contract with an adjacent town or village to provide police and fire protection, or you could contract with the county for a service in addition to that already routinely provided by the county sheriff's department.

Routine County Services: Some services are already paid for through taxes and fees. Examples are police protection services from the county sheriff's department, county zoning, county public health services, and county parks. Your Intergovernmental Cooperation Element could identify areas where improvements are needed and could recommend ways to cooperatively address them.

Sharing Municipal Staff: Your community could share staff with neighboring communities and other jurisdictions – both municipal employees and independently contracted professionals. You could share a building inspector, assessor, planner, engineer, zoning administrator, clerk, etc.

Consolidating Services: Your community could agree with one or more other communities or governmental units to provide a service together.

Joint Use of a Facility: Your community could use a public facility along with other jurisdictions. The facility could be jointly owned or one jurisdiction could rent space from another.

Special Purpose Districts: Special purpose districts are created to provide a particular service, unlike municipalities that provide many different types of services. Like municipalities, special purpose districts are separate and legally independent entities.

Joint Purchase and Ownership of Equipment: Your community could agree with other jurisdictions to jointly purchase and own equipment such as pothole patching machines, mowers, rollers, snowplows, street sweepers, etc.

Cooperative Purchasing: Cooperative purchasing, or procurement, is where jurisdictions purchase supplies and equipment together to gain more favorable prices.

TECHNIQUES AND PROGRAMS FOR MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY COOPERATION

As the Town of Highland continues to grow, it may be necessary to consider some type of boundary agreements. Municipal boundaries can be altered in a number of ways including the following:

- **Annexation**

Annexation is the process of transferring parcels of land from unincorporated areas to adjacent cities or villages. More detailed information on annexation can be obtained from Wisconsin State Statute Sections 66.0217-66.0223.

- **Detachment**

Detachment is the process by which territory is detached from one jurisdiction and transferred to another. Essentially detachment is the opposite of annexation. More detailed information on detachment can be obtained from Wisconsin State Statute Sections 66.0227 and 62.075.

- **Incorporation**

Incorporation is the process of creating a new village or city from unincorporated territory. More detailed information on incorporation can be obtained from Wisconsin State Statute Sections 66.0201-66.0215.

- **Consolidation**

Consolidation is the process by which a town, village, or city joins together with another town, village, or city to form one jurisdiction. More detailed information on incorporation can be obtained from Wisconsin State Statute Section 66.0229.

- **Intergovernmental Agreements**

Intergovernmental Agreements provide communities with a different type of approach because it is proactive rather than reactive. There are two types of intergovernmental agreements that can be formed including cooperative boundary agreements and stipulations and orders. More detailed information on intergovernmental agreements can be obtained from Wisconsin State Statute 66.0307 (Cooperative Boundary Agreements) and 66.0225 (Stipulations and Orders).

WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS–MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY REVIEW (DHIR-MBR)

Municipal Boundary Review regulates the transition of unincorporated areas to city or village status through municipal annexation, incorporation, consolidation, or by joint city-village-town activities involving cooperative boundary plans and agreements. Such agreements may change territorial boundaries and may provide for the sharing of municipal services. Staff members are available upon request to meet with local officials and citizens to discuss annexation, incorporation, consolidation and cooperative boundary plans.

MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY REVIEW

**Office of Land Information Services
Municipal Boundary Review
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<http://www.doa.state.wi.us/dhir>