

Clarifying a few terms we'll use in this colloquium:

There's a lot that can be confusing about the language we scholars use to describe regions and the entities that operate within them. To that end, we're doing our part to clarify what we mean and strive to create some consistency (for at least the posts you'll be seeing under the "American Regionalism and the Constellation of Mechanisms for Cross-Boundary Cooperation" banner).

Regions

While there may be formally-defined regions in other national contexts, there is no such formal definition that exhaustively covers the United States. As a result, we take a very broad approach to understanding what a region can look like in the American context. This can include any combination of urban, suburban, or rural spaces, so long as the encompassing territory is affected by the governance of multiple different local governments or regional entities. The local governments or regional entities (and the actors who ratify and implement actions) constitute the regional constellations our colloquium is investigating.

Units within Regions

Municipalities and other political divisions, such as counties, are often (although not exclusively) the building blocks of regions. The units come together in various ways to coordinate at a regional scale. Some of the forms that we investigate in this colloquium include:

Regional entities are the broadest, most inclusive base unit of cross-boundary cooperation among two or more of any kind of local government. This would be any activity or mechanism arising from interlocal agreements (regardless of ratification method) and/or cooperation among leaders (regardless of formality).

Regional Public Sector Organizations (RPSOs) are a specific delineated subset of regional entities. RPSOs have three specific criteria that need to be met: (1) a board of directors composed of appointed representatives from three or more local governments (of any kind) structured to ensure that local governments have a majority of the votes, (2) designated professional staff that serves the board of directors, and (3) a formal charter or bylaws outlining the governance of the RPSO (Rickabaugh, 2021).

Regional Intergovernmental Organizations (RIGOs) are a subset of RPSOs that meet additional criteria on top of those identified in the RPSO definition. First, the board majority must be composed of general-purpose local government members (and not school districts or other forms of local governments). A RIGO also needs to function across multiple policy areas and have the widest geographic reach among all the region's entities. Finally, it needs to be legitimate in the eyes of state or federal governments and take on the role of being a forum for or the voice of the region (Miller and Nelles, 2019).

Regional Entity	Result	Reason
Standard Joint Purchasing Agreement	Entity Only	No regionally delegated professional staff
Popularly-Elected Special District (see: Farmer)	Entity Only	Board composed of elected officials not appointees from local governments
Informal Network of Local Leaders	Entity Only	No formal governance documents or regionally delegated professional staff
Intermediate School District or most freestanding regional MPOs, AAAs, EDDs (see: Rickabaugh & Nelles, Kim submissions)	RPSO/regional entity	Formally-governed organization with local government (any kind) members appointing board and delegated professional staff; single policy area
Broadly Geographic Council of Governments Integrating Transportation Planning and Economic Development (see: Weir on Atlanta/Chicago RIGOs, Leland/Dougherty)	RIGO/regional entity	Formally-governed organization of primarily general-purpose local governments with policy breadth, largest territorial reach, federal/state designations, and regional mission.

Regional Interaction

Regional entities of all shapes, sizes, and flavors and their member local governments work together in unique and interesting ways (see Rickabaugh and Nelles editorial introduction). Here’s how we describe how these arrangements can occur:

Co-Regional is when regional entities (and/or their member local governments) work in shared or overlapping territory. Most often (but not always) this happens with regional entities that have different functions.

Cross-Regional is when regional entities work in collaboration with partners that do NOT share or overlap in territory. Most often (but not always) this happens with regional entities that have similar functions; an example of this is found in Kim’s piece on how MPOs collaborate with one another across transportation planning boundaries.

Co-Regional Example	An Economic Development District serving counties X, Y, and Z collaborates with a Workforce Development Board serving counties X and Y; A RIGO works with the regional libraries covering the same territory to improve household adoption of rural broadband
Cross-Regional Examples	A statewide association of RIGOs advocates for state legislation; MPOs coordinating across regional boundaries (see Kim)