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# Federal Regional Commissions and Authorities: Overview of Structure and Activities

Federal regional commissions and authorities address perceived regional economic underdevelopment. These organizations generally accommodate multileveled and multijurisdictional participation and implementation, which Congress could utilize to address growing interest in broad-based and intensive economic development efforts. Current commissions and authorities represent some regions; other regions could adopt similar entities. This In Focus outlines each organization's structure, activities, and recent funding. **Figure 1** summarizes key structural features of the regional commissions and authorities.

## 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. Tennessee Governor Bill Lee 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. 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. Uniquely, 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 some other federal regional commissions and authorities.

## 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 252 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 Illinois Governor JB Pritzker.

The DRA strategic plan illuminates economic development priorities. Its fourth and 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. The DRA uses a federal-state-local model similar to the ARC's. 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 (or a designated nominee) appointed by the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, including the federal co-chair; the Alaska Governor, who is state co-chair; the University of Alaska president; the Alaska Municipal League president; the Alaska Federation of Natives president; the Alaska State AFL-CIO president; and the Associated General Contractors of Alaska president. Jocelyn Fenton is the interim federal co-chair. 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.

## 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. New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu is the state co-chair since January 2020.

The NBRC's activities are guided by a five-year strategic plan. Its current 2017-2022 strategic plan lists three goals: (1) modernizing infrastructure; (2) creating and sustaining jobs; and (3) anticipating and capitalizing on shifting economic and demographic trends. The NBRC invests along four program areas: (1) economic and infrastructure development (the Catalyst program); (2) the forest economy; and (3) 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 yet received initial appropriations in FY2024. Similar to most regional commissions, the authorizing legislation requires that before the GLA may convene, the President must nominate and the Senate must confirm a federal co-chairperson. As of March 2024, President Biden had not nominated a federal co-chairperson for the GLA.

The GLA region includes certain areas of the watershed of Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin. The GLA differs from other commissions in that its service region is defined in statute based on federal definitions of the area's 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 each of the eight states noted above. The other commissions typically use county-based designations.

## 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. While the NGPRA was authorized $30 million from FY2002 to FY2018, it appears to have received appropriations once—for $1.5 million in FY2004 (P.L. 108-199). Its authorization lapsed in 2018.

## 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. The SCRC hired its first chief of staff in 2022 and developed its bylaws. South Carolina Governor Henry McMaster is the state co-chair. In 2022, SCRC also published its inaugural strategic plan for FY2023-FY2027. The plan includes the following goals: (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 legislative authorization. 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.

**Figure 1. Structure of the Commissions and Authorities**

| Structure | ARC | DRA | GLA | NBRC | NGPRA | Denali | SCRC | SBRC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Currently Functioning | ◆ | ◆ | | ◆ | | ◆ | ◆ | |
| Local Development Districts | ◆ | ◆ | ◆ | ◆ | | | ◆ | ◆ |
| Multi-State | ◆ | ◆ | ◆ | ◆ | ◆ | | ◆ | ◆ |
| Tiers of Designated Distress | ◆ | ◆ | ◆ | ◆ | | ◆ | ◆ | ◆ |
| Non-Traditional Representation | | | | | ◆ | ◆ | | |
| Allows for Alternates | ◆ | ◆ | ◆ | ◆ | ◆ | | ◆ | ◆ |

**Source:** Compiled by CRS with information from the federal regional commissions and authorities.

**Notes:** For the commissions and authority that are not considered to be functioning, structural characteristics are tabulated according to their statutory design. As noted, the first federal co-chair of the SBRC was confirmed in December 2022.

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