



Updated December 20, 2021

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. For this report, FY2022 appropriated funding amounts are from P.L. 117-58. FY2022 amounts do not include funding provided through the annual appropriations process, as annual appropriations had not been enacted as of the date of publication.

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 (**Table 1**). 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. Virginia Governor Ralph Northam 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.

Table 1. Appropriations for the ARC FY2015-FY2022
\$ in millions

FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22
\$90	\$146	\$152	\$155	\$165	\$175	\$180	\$200

Source: Compiled by CRS using data from P.L. 113-235, P.L. 114-113, P.L. 115-31, P.L. 115-141, P.L. 115-244, P.L. 116-94; P.L. 116-260, and P.L. 117-58.

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 (**Table 2**). 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 DRA has operated without a federal co-chair since January 2021. The alternate federal co-chair is Leslie Durham. The states’ co-chair is currently Missouri Governor Mike Parson.

The DRA strategic plan illuminates economic development priorities. Its third and current strategic plan—Regional Development Plan III—was released in April 2016. The strategic plan lists three goals: workforce competitiveness; strengthened infrastructure; and increased community capacity. 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 44 LDDs. By statute, the DRA directs at least

75% of funds to distressed counties; half those funds target transportation and basic infrastructure.

Table 2. Appropriations for the DRA FY2015-FY2022

\$ in millions

FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22
\$12	\$25	\$25	\$25	\$25	\$30	\$30	\$150

Source: Compiled by CRS using data from P.L. 113-235, P.L. 114-113, P.L. 115-31, P.L. 115-141, P.L. 115-244, P.L. 116-94; P.L. 116-260; and P.L. 117-58.

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 (**Table 3**). 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. Garrett Boyle is the 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 FY2018-FY2022 strategic plan, released in October 2017, lists four strategic goals and objectives: (1) facilities management; (2) infrastructure protection from ecological change; (3) energy, including storage, production, heating, and electricity; and (4) innovation and collaboration. The Denali Commission's recent activities are oriented to energy and infrastructure protection. Denali does not make explicit use of LDDs or similar entities.

Table 3. Appropriations for the Denali Commission FY2015-FY2022

\$ in millions

FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22
\$10	\$11	\$15	\$30	\$15	\$15	\$15	\$75

Source: Compiled by CRS using data from P.L. 113-235, P.L. 114-113, P.L. 115-31, P.L. 115-141, P.L. 115-244, P.L. 116-94; P.L. 116-260; and P.L. 117-58.

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 (**Table 4**). 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. Harold B. Parker is the current federal co-chair since October 2018. New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu is the state co-chair.

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; (2) the regional forest economy partnership; (3) local development districts; and (4) comprehensive planning for states. The NBRC also uses 16 LDDs to identify opportunities, conduct outreach, and administer grant funds, from which LDDs receive fees.

Table 4. Appropriations for the NBRC FY2015-FY2022

\$ in millions

FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22
\$5	\$7	\$10	\$15	\$20	\$25	\$30	\$150

Source: Compiled by CRS using data from P.L. 113-235, P.L. 114-113, P.L. 115-31, P.L. 115-141, P.L. 115-244, P.L. 116-94; P.L. 116-260; and P.L. 117-58.

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 2019.

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.

Table 5. Appropriations for the SCRC FY2015-FY2022

\$ in millions

FY15	FY16	FY17	FY18	FY19	FY20	FY21	FY22
\$0.25	\$0.25	\$0.25	\$0.25	\$0.25	\$0.25	\$1.00	\$5.00

Source: Compiled by CRS using data from P.L. 113-235, P.L. 114-113, P.L. 115-31, P.L. 115-141, P.L. 115-244, P.L. 116-94; P.L. 116-260; and P.L. 117-58.

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 in FY2021 and FY2022, but does not appear to be active.

Julie M. Lawhorn, Analyst in Economic Development Policy

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.