



## **Assessment of State Infrastructure Coordination Models - West Virginia Infrastructure and Jobs Development Council**

**Year of inception:** 1994. The Council was initiated by a few key individuals from the Department of Environmental Protection who researched national models. Robert Kiss, Speaker of the West Virginia House, strongly supported enabling legislation to establish the Council.

**Formality:** The council has formal, statutory authority. State funding agencies can not issue funds without a clearinghouse letter from the Council.

**Meetings:** Monthly; these are open to the public and communities sometimes attend.

**Membership:** Full members include: six state agencies, four public members, three federal agencies, and eight non-voting advisory members - a total of 21 regular participants. The four public members are citizen experts appointed by the governor. They frequently include a banker, an engineer, and a lawyer, and have also included an ex -USDA employee. The Governor attempts to ensure that each of the four geographic regions of the state are represented. One of the public members serves as council chair and typically runs meetings.

**Committees/Sub-committees:** The council has five standing committees, one of which is optional and rarely used. These include a water technical committee, sewer technical committee, technical review committee, funding committee and an optional consolidation committee which oversees proposals to consolidate water and/or sewer facilities. Most of the work occurs in committees. The Public Service Commission has one member on each committee.

**Staff:** The Council has two in-house staff members. Staff members from other agencies also handle much of their work.

**Budget:** The Council operates on a budget of less than \$400,000 per year. The Legislature originally allocated \$300 million for its initial work. The Council also receives up to \$40 million per year from the state lottery, which goes directly to infrastructure projects.

### **Description:**

Any community in West Virginia seeking state infrastructure funding must go through the Council. Agencies are statutorily required to attend coordination meetings and work together. One agency reported that the Council saved the agency time and money by providing beneficial staff such as engineers and attorneys. Council members provide technical comments and feedback for the applications. Thus, the agency can avoid hiring or contracting their own experts to review project applications.

Engineering firms or regional planning development districts (similar to NC Council of Governments) typically put together applications for communities. As illustrated in Figure 1, applications first go to the Council, which then passes them to either the water or sewer technical

committee. The committee sends them to a group which has ten days to review and return the applications to the technical committee with a summary of their findings. The technical committee submits these materials to the funding committee, which meets to identify information gaps. During the same week, the committee reconvenes and makes its determination on the application. At the council meeting, the technical committee and funding committee make short presentations of their recommendations. The council will make a decision about the technical and funding feasibility of the project and then draft a clearinghouse letter to the applicants and funders stating which agencies are expected to fund the project. By this final council meeting, there is very little discussion about the projects - members vote quickly on each one to pass it through. Funders apply individual prioritization criteria to assign points and rank the applications.

Once the Council approves a project, the Public Services Commission (PSC) must approve it. The PSC has its own set of requirements which can differ from the Council's objectives. Assuming the PSC approves the project, public notice is given and public comment is taken. If there is public protest, the PSC is required to hold a public hearing. This will delay the process for an additional 270 days. If there is no public protest, the process only takes an additional 180 days.

The Council has facilitated many co-funded projects and funded more than 500 water and wastewater projects from 1996 to 2005<sup>1</sup>.

**Shared Information:**

- 1.) Central Information Database – updated by the council staff.
- 2.) Joint application – helpful in making initial decisions about projects, but funding agencies often require supplemental information.
- 3.) Summary of eligibility criteria
- 4.) Needs assessment - The Council consolidates needs assessments from around the state. This is an open process that accepts information from any community/organization. The Rural Water Association has a one page form that requests communities to enter information regarding their needs. The Council compiles these and creates a report every three years.

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<sup>1</sup> West Virginia Infrastructure & Jobs Development Council. (2005). Public Water Systems & Public Wastewater Systems: Inventory and Needs Assessment Report. Charleston, WV.

Figure 1: West Virginia Infrastructure Council Organizational Structure

