A Guide to Hosting Your Own Conversation

Public Consultations on Regional Government
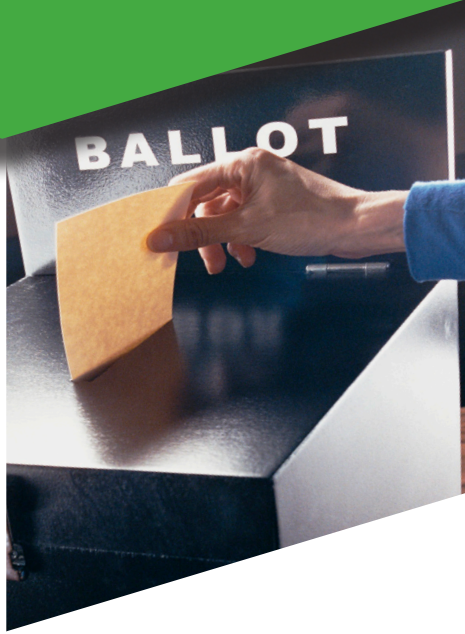
Newfoundland
Labrador

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Introduction

The Provincial Government has heard from residents and key stakeholder groups about the need to seriously explore a potential model of regional government for our province.

As a province we are working to address how local government and service delivery in this province can be supported in the long-term. The aging population in this province has put considerable strain on communities, particularly in rural regions. Ensuring that the province has mechanisms in place to support changing demographics is essential.

The Provincial Government has committed to exploring a potential model for a new regional government structure. In **The Way Forward: Realizing Our Potential**, the Provincial Government stated its intention to implement regional government and/or sharing of service pilot(s), as appropriate, by 2019.

A decision to implement regional government constitutes a significant shift in the current local government structure and would impact most residents. As the next step in continuing conversation about implementation of a potential regional government structure, it was decided that public consultations were required to ensure that appropriate and responsive policy and legislative changes are made.

There are many opportunities for residents to engage on the subject of regional government, including public discussion sessions in 22 communities across the province, completion of an online questionnaire, and submission of written or verbal entries by email or phone. For more detail on the ways to provide input, visit www.EngageNL.ca.

The Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment recognizes that there may be interest from local governments, local stakeholder groups or residents to have conversations and submit feedback on regional government consultations. For that purpose, the department has developed this guide to help support that process.

Who Should Use this Guide?

Any resident or local stakeholder interested in hosting a conversation or session related to the public consultation on regional government should use this guide to provide feedback.

The guide provides information on how to plan and facilitate meaningful conversation, references other helpful resources to assist in running a smooth and effective session and provides templates for note-taking. A Sample Agenda (Appendix B) and a Sample Event Scenario (Appendix C) have been developed for your use. All content may be photocopied for use during your session.

This guide has been designed to assist those interested in hosting smaller community-based conversations (about 15 people or less); however, many of the ideas and sample materials contained can be used- with modification for larger audiences. If you expect more than 15 participants, please use Appendix E: How to Adjust for Larger Groups.

Documents You Will Need

For your discussion, you will need:

Copies of the discussion document, Public Consultations on Regional Government Discussion Guide 2017, which outlines key issues relating to the conversation about implementing a potential regional government model in Newfoundland and Labrador.

- Copies of the Note Taker's Template (Appendix H), and/or a laptop computer to capture ideas emerging from the session

- Copies of the Printable Participant Document for all participants (Appendix G) to ensure that all participants' ideas are captured.

- An electronic copy of a PowerPoint presentation deck or alternate presentation materials, as desired. If you wish to present the PowerPoint presentation developed by the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment for in-person public sessions on regional government, please contact the department by emailing regionalgovernment@gov.nl.ca.

- If you have any questions about the materials or would like a copy sent to you, please contact the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment at (709)729-5466 or regionalgovernment@gov.nl.ca.

Important Considerations for Hosting a Conversation

Planning the Session

We recommend that individuals interested in hosting a session:

- Set a date for the session that allows sufficient time to notify participants and a time that you think can work for the most number of people.

- Arrange an appropriate venue for the session; ensuring it is accessible, appropriately-sized and comfortable (visit the location in advance to be sure it meets participants' needs).

- Invite those you want to attend or believe will be interested in the topic (see Appendix A: Sample Invite).

- Find an individual who you believe can be an effective note taker (see the section Important Reminders for the Note Taker.)

- Review the discussion document, Public Consultations on Regional Government: Discussion Guide 2017, and become familiar with the issues and questions under consideration.

- On the day of the session, set up the room appropriately (e.g., to encourage a relaxed atmosphere and to stimulate discussion, consider arranging chairs in a circle or semi-circle, or around a table). Ensure that accessibility remains a priority when setting up.

- Ensure you have a laptop computer for use by the Note Taker or sufficient paper copies of the Note Taker's Template available at Appendix H.

- Ensure that you have ample copies of the discussion document and the Printable Participant Document as well as enough pencils/pens for your audience.

- All hosts are encouraged to use all discussion questions at their sessions. However, if you or your organization has specific interest in only one or two of the discussion topics, you may modify your session accordingly.

Delivering the Session

- Get started on time.

- Ensure safety remains top priority. Let people know where emergency exits are located and any other safety-related messages you feel are necessary.

- Introduce yourself and welcome the participants. See Appendix D: Sample Introductory Script for the Host.

- Describe the purpose of the session and review the agenda.

- Advise the participants that the note taker will not write down the names of people making comments, but to keep in mind this is a public event.

- Give participants any special instructions/reminders about the session (see the section Important Reminders for the Host).

- If the size of audience and time allows, invite participants to introduce themselves.

- Ask participants to briefly review the discussion document (ideally, each should have a copy) or make a brief presentation on the content.

Idea Sharing and Discussion

- Begin the discussion by reminding people that there will be nine discussion questions and one polling question to cover.

- Ask the first question and encourage the audience to begin sharing ideas.

- If the conversation is slow to start, ask some prompting questions (see Appendix F: Questions and Sample Prompts).

- Work through the questions with participants and encourage all to participate. If required, take steps to ensure single individuals do not dominate the discussion.

- Ensure the note taker captures the key points on the provided templates (written or electronically).

- Between each question, if time permits, ask participants, "Now that you have heard ideas from everyone on this question, have any new ideas emerged for you? Is there anything you want to say about one or more of the ideas raised by another?"

Concluding the Session

- Thank everyone for attending and for participating in the conversation.

- Let them know that all comments collected during the session will be sent to the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment where they will be organized and merged with input from all other public sessions and then be provided to decision-makers for consideration. The privacy of individuals will be protected throughout the process.

- Collect all public input.

- Ensure all e-files and hand-written inputs collected are provided to the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment by November 17, 2017.

Important Reminders for the Host

- Clearly state that your main role is to ensure that ideas are collected and discussion occurs among participants.

- Ask participants to turn off phones, or set to vibrate.

- Tell the participants where the washrooms and emergency exists are and inform them of any other safety issues related to the facility.

- Should any media be present at your session, identify them to the audience and ask the media to conduct any conversations with participants outside the main room to avoid disruptions and not to record individual statements unless authorized.

- Encourage participants to speak openly and honestly, and listen to and respect the views of others.

- Explain the role of the recorder (see the next section Important Reminders for the Note Taker).

- Ask the main questions as outlined and try to keep participants focused on the question being discussed.

- Explain how we want to capture all ideas (even those ideas where not everyone agrees).

- Stay neutral on specific ideas presented.

- Ensure no one individual dominates the discussion time. If an individual talks beyond the agreed upon time, you can ask them to wrap up their remarks and tell them that this idea has been captured and that if time permits, you will revisit the topic at the end of the session.

Important Reminders for the Note Taker

- Ensure that any identifiable information is not written down (e.g., if someone says "as a person with four children living in Port Rexton, my idea is..." you should record "as a parent who lives in a small community my idea is...").

- Capture all individual ideas related to the questions using participants' words on the Note Taker's Template.

- Seek clarification on comments noted, if required, by repeating back what has been captured.

- Enter each idea into the appropriate (electronic or paper) form provided.

- Capture an idea multiple times if it is raised multiple times.

Other General Public Engagement Resources

For additional information on public engagement principles and practices, the Public Engagement Guide, is available at http://ope.gov.nl.ca/publications/pdf/OPE_PEGuide.pdf.

The International Association for Public Participation website at www.iap2.org/ also contains a variety of resources on how to plan and organize effective public participation activities.

Where to Send Your Conversation/ Session Information

Mail:
Subject: Public Consultations on Regional Government
Municipal Affairs and Environment
Attn: Local Governance and Planning Division
PO Box 8700, 4th Floor, West Block,
Confederation Building, St. John's, NL
A1B 4J6

Fax: 709-729-4475

Email: regionalgovernment@gov.nl.ca

Appendices

Appendix A: Sample Invitation

The following is meant to suggest what you might say in an invitation to the session you are planning. Feel free to personalize this and adjust it to make it relevant to the participants you are inviting.

Good Afternoon,
You are invited to a public engagement session in (**Community**) at the (**Venue**) on (**Date**) beginning at (Time).

The Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment is currently conducting public consultations on the potential implementation of a regional government model in Newfoundland and Labrador. Officials are seeking feedback from residents of communities across the province given the wide ranging impacts of changes to the local governance system in this province.

We are hosting our own conversation to provide an additional opportunity for (residents/ members/ etc.) to participate in these public consultations. All feedback we receive will be submitted to the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment for consideration.

For details on this session and to register, call (**Telephone number**).
Thank you,

Host's Name (and organizational affiliation if appropriate)

Appendix B: Sample Agenda

The following is a recommended agenda for a session of approximately 15 participants. If you expect your sessions to be attended by more than 15 people, see the Appendix D: How to Adjust for Larger Groups.

A Conversation about Implementing a Potential Regional Government Model in Newfoundland and Labrador	
Date:	Location:
Welcome/ Introduction	5 minutes
Overview of the Session (purpose; agenda)	5 minutes
Contextual presentation on Regional Government or alternative presentation created by host	20 minutes
Questions	
Question 1	10 minutes
Question 2	10 minutes
Question 3	10 minutes
Polling Question 1	2 minutes
Question 4	10 minutes
Question 5	10 minutes
Question 6	10 minutes
Question 7	10 minutes
Question 8	10 minutes
Question 9	5 minutes

Appendix C: Sample Event Scenario

Event Name: **A Conversation about Implementing a Potential Regional Government Model in Newfoundland and Labrador**

Organized by: _____

Date: _____

Start time and expected duration: _____

Location: _____

Event set up:
- Note taker will use a tablet/ laptop/ paper template to record participant.
- Participants will be provided with copies of the discussion document.
- Pens and paper

Order of Events:
- Sample times are provided. Please adjust to the time of day your session is being held:

7:00 PM   **Welcome/ Introductions**
- Host welcomes participants
- If time permits, ask participants to introduce themselves
- Read the introductory script

7:05 PM   **Overview of the Session**
- Review the purpose of the session
- Review the format for the session
- Explain roles of the host, note taker, etc.
- Review the privacy notice

7:10 PM   **Informational Overview**
- Briefly review the information contained in the discussion document that provides the basis for your discussion. The host may also use a PowerPoint requested from the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment regarding regional government.

7:30 PM   ### Discussion Question #1:

- The host introduces the first discussion topic and asks first question.
  - What are the advantages and disadvantages of all municipalities, local service districts and unincorporated areas being part of a regional government system?
- The note taker captures ideas and comments without attributing names or personal information.
- Facilitator provides a time check three minutes before the session ends.

7:41 PM   ### Discussion Question #2:

- The host thanks everyone for their contributions to the first question and introduces the second question.
  - What are the impacts for the regional government system if certain communities are given the ability to opt out?
- Process repeats as above.

7:52 PM   ### Discussion Question #3:

- The host thanks everyone for their contributions to the second question and introduces the third question.
  - What criteria should determine whether communities are governed at the local level by a regional government?
- Process repeats as above

8:03 PM   **Polling Question #1**
- The host thanks everyone for their contributions to the third question and introduces the first polling question:
- Which of the following services should be delivered by a regional government? (Select all that apply. If there are others which you feel would be beneficial please note in the space below):
    ○ Infrastructure planning
    ○ Engineering services
    ○ Tendering and contracting
    ○ Waste management
    ○ Civic addressing
    ○ Land use planning and development control
    ○ By-law making, inspections and enforcement
    ○ Recreational facility and program planning
    ○ Fire and emergency services
    ○ Watershed management
    ○ Wastewater management
    ○ Other
- As this is a polling question, ensure that everyone's votes are counted and recorded. You may use Appendix G: Printable Participant Document to collect the votes.

8:06 PM   **Discussion Question #4:**
- The host thanks everyone for their contributions to the polling question and introduces the fourth question.
    ○ What are the impacts of a regional government delivering a set of required services, or being allowed to deliver regional services as determined by communities within their boundaries?
- Process repeats as above.

8:17 PM   **Discussion Question #5:**
- The host thanks everyone for their contributions to the fourth question and introduces the fifth question.
    ○ Should regional governments have a role in regional economic development? If yes, what kind of role should it be? If no, why not?
- Process repeats as above.

8:28 PM   ### Discussion Question #6:
- The host thanks everyone for their contributions to the fifth question and introduces the sixth question:
  - How should a regional government raise revenue to pay for the services provided?
- Process repeats as above.

8:39 PM   ### Discussion Question #7:
- The host thanks everyone for their contributions to the sixth question and introduces the seventh question:
  - How should a regional government council be composed and how should regional representatives be selected?
- Process repeats as above.

8:50 PM   ### Discussion Question #8:
- The host thanks everyone for their contributions to the seventh question and introduces the eighth question. For this question please ensure everyone has a copy of the draft potential regional government maps attached at Appendix A in the discussion document.
  - Review the distributed regional government maps. Are the draft boundaries appropriate? If not, what changes would you make and why?

9:01 PM   ### Discussion Question #9:
- The host thanks everyone for their contributions to the eighth question and introduces the ninth question:
  - Are there any other issues you would like to raise on regional government?

9:06 PM   ### Thank you and Wrap Up

Event concludes.

Appendix D: Sample Introductory Script for the Host

This sample script is meant to help you introduce the session. Feel free to personalize it and make it relevant to the participants you are hosting.

Welcome and thank you for attending this conversation on regional government. My name is (**state your name**) from (**state your organization**), and I am the host of this session.

The Provincial Government has announced public consultations on the potential implementation of a regional government system in Newfoundland and Labrador.

As a province, we must address how local government and service delivery in this province can be supported. The aging population in this province has put considerable strain on communities, particularly in rural regions. Ensuring that the province has mechanisms in place to support changing demographics is essential.

Government is asking all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians to contribute their thoughts and opinions on the subject of regional government. The contributions you make at this session today will be sent to the Department of Municipal Affairs and Environment for consideration as the department develops options for decision-making on the subject of regional government.

This session will last approximately two hours. We will be providing you with a presentation on contextual information that will hopefully inform you to give comment on a series of nine discussion questions and one polling question. We will have approximately 10 minutes to discuss each question.

Please speak openly and remember to respect the views of others during the session. This is an issue that many people will have strong and differing opinions on, and it is important to allow all participants time to speak. My job as your host is to ensure the discussion stays on track, that everyone has the opportunity to contribute, and that we cover all questions in the time we have.

Be advised that none of the input collected at this session will be personally attributed. No names will be associated with any answers or input captured. Any language used that would potentially allow someone to be inadvertently identified after the fact will not be captured. This is, however, a public session and we remind you to use your own judgement when sharing personal stories or information.

Appendix E: How to Adjust for Larger Groups

Be ready to adjust your session if more people arrive than expected by having additional chairs and materials available. However, if you expect or are planning for more than 15 people at your session, some pre-session modifications to the agenda and additional planning are recommended.

Larger group sessions are more complex and difficult to plan for and implement than smaller sessions. The larger the group, the more difficult it becomes to capture the views of all participants. As individuals may be more intimidated to speak openly, there is an increased risk of disruptive sidebar conversations, and there may not be enough time to hear from everyone adequately.

If you know in advance that you are likely to get a large number of people at your session, we recommend that you arrange the room to allow for smaller table discussions (**i.e., six to eight people per table**). You can identify one volunteer person per table to act as table note taker/facilitator (**Note: if you have the people required, a better alternative is to have one facilitator and one note taker per table**). In this case, as Host, you become the lead-facilitator who periodically gives guidance to your table volunteers. The session agenda would also need to be modified somewhat to reflect the need for tables to give brief 'report-backs' to the larger group. For instance, if you opted to go with three tables of eight people because you did not want to have an open plenary discussion with 24 people, instead of allotting 30 minutes per question for individuals to present ideas (**the scenario for 15 or less people**), you would give each table 20 minutes to discuss their ideas and then each table would also have approximately three minutes each to present the key ideas or highlights emerging from their table discussion.

If you are caught off guard by the arrival of more people than anticipated and there are not enough discussion documents available for everyone, ask people to share the discussion document and to write down their ideas on note paper. (**Note: it is always advisable to have extra materials on hand, including note paper and pens, no matter how many people you are expecting**).

Discussion Question 1:   **What are the advantages and disadvantages of all municipalities, local service districts and unincorporated areas being part of a regional government system?**

Possible Prompts:
- Why should all municipalities, LSDs and UIAs be required to be part of a region and receive certain services from a regional government? Alternatively, why not?
- What are the benefits of more communities working together?
- Is efficiency of service delivery better ensured if all communities in the province are required to be part of a regional government system?
- Should it be mandatory or optional for municipalities, LSDs and UIAs to be part of a regional government?
- What ideas presented already do you like/not like?
- After listening to what others have presented, have you thought of any additional comments?

Discussion Question 2:   **What are the impacts for the regional government system if certain communities are given the ability to opt out?**

Possible Prompts:
- Will the efficiency and cost of service delivery be impacted if communities are given this opportunity?
- Under what scenario would a community opt out of a regional government system?
- What ideas presented already do you like/not like?
- After listening to what others have presented, have you thought of any additional comments?

Discussion Question 3:   **What criteria should determine whether communities are governed at the local level by a regional government?**

Possible Prompts:
- Should a feasibility test be developed to determine whether a community should receive governance and service delivery solely from a regional government?
- Should population size be a factor in determining whether a community should be solely governed by a regional government?
- Should consideration be given to all LSDs and UIAs being governed solely by a regional government, regardless of viability?
- What are the advantages/ disadvantages of communities struggling with sustainability being governed solely by a regional government?
- What ideas presented already do you like/not like?
- After listening to what others have presented, have you thought of any additional comments?

Polling Question 1:   **Which of the following services should be delivered by a regional government? (Select all that apply. If there are others which you feel would be beneficial please note in the space below)**

a. Infrastructure planning
b. Engineering services
c. Tendering and Contracting
d. Waste Management
e. Civic Addressing
f. Land Use Planning and Development Control
g. By-law making, inspections and enforcement
h. Recreational facility and program planning
i. Fire and Emergency Services
j. Watershed Management
k. Wastewater Management
l. Other

Discussion Question 4:   **What are the impacts of a regional government delivering a set of required services, or being allowed to deliver regional services as determined by communities within their boundaries?**

Possible Prompts:
- Would requiring regional governments to deliver legislatively mandated services ensure that efficiencies and consistency in service delivery are achieved across the province?
- Do different areas of the province need regional governments to be flexible in addressing different and unique service needs?
- What ideas presented already do you like/not like?
- After listening to what others have presented, have you thought of any additional comments?

Discussion Question 5: Should regional governments have a role in regional economic development? If yes, what role should it be? If no, why not?

Possible Prompts:
- Whether regions in this province would benefit from a centralized entity responsible for economic development advancement.
- Whether municipalities should retain their authority under the **Municipalities Act, 1999** regarding economic development?
- If you agree, please consider:
    - What entities could a regional government partner with to enhance regional economic development?
    - What role, if any, should the provincial/ federal government play in supporting economic development at the regional level?
    - What types of resourcing would be required for regional governments to advance regional economic development?
- If you do not agree, please consider:
    - Is there an alternative way to support regional economic development?
- What ideas presented already do you like/not like?
- After listening to what others have presented, have you thought of any additional comments?

Discussion Question 6: How should a regional government raise revenue to pay for the services provided?

Possible Prompts:
- Should all residents of the province be required to pay a form of tax or service fee to the regional government to address service delivery costs?
- Whether a regional government should be empowered to charge a residential property tax to all residents of a region, including LSDs and UIAs.
- How should the provincial government contribute to the revenue of a regional government?
- What ideas presented already do you like/not like?
- After listening to what others have presented, have you thought of any additional comments?

Discussion Question 7: **How should a regional government council be composed and regional representatives be selected?**

Possible Prompts:
- What is the fairest way to ensure representation of municipalities, local service districts and unincorporated areas on a regional government council?
- Whether areas outside of municipalities should elect representatives to sit on a regional council.
- What is the appropriate size for a regional council?
- Whether municipalities should appoint elected councilors to sit on a regional council.
- Whether there should be separate elections for regional council based on a regional ward system.
- How could regional council voting/ decision making be conducted to ensure a balance of interests?
- What ideas presented already do you like/not like?
- After listening to what others have presented, have you thought of any additional comments?

Discussion Question 8: **Review the distributed Regional Government maps. Are the draft boundaries appropriate? What changes would you make and why?**

Possible Prompts:
- Whether the boundaries are appropriate from a service provision perspective?
- Whether the boundaries are appropriate from a governance perspective (e.g. travel to council meetings, access to central regional offices etc.)
- What criteria should be considered when developing final regional maps?
- What ideas presented already do you like/not like?
- After listening to what others have presented, have you thought of any additional comments?

Discussion Question 9: **Are there any other issues you would like to raise on regional government?**

Possible Prompts:
- What ideas presented already do you like/not like?
- After listening to what others have presented, have you thought of any additional comments?

Appendix G: Printable Participant Document

Discussion Question 1:

What are the advantages and disadvantages of all municipalities, local service districts and unincorporated areas being part of a regional government system?

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Discussion Question 2:

What are the impacts for the regional government system if certain communities are given the ability to opt out?

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Discussion Question 3:

What criteria should determine whether communities are governed at the local level by a regional government?

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Polling Question 1:

Which of the following services should be delivered by a regional government? (Select all that apply. If there are others which you feel would be beneficial please note in the space below)

- ☐ Infrastructure Planning
- ☐ Engineering Services
- ☐ Tendering and Contracting
- ☐ Waste Management
- ☐ Civic Addressing
- ☐ Land Use Planning and Development Control
- ☐ By-law making, Inspections and Enforcement
- ☐ Recreational Facility and Program Planning
- ☐ Fire and Emergency Services
- ☐ Watershed Management
- ☐ Wastewater Management

If there are any additional services that should be delivered by a regional government please state them here.

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Discussion Question 4:

What are the impacts of a regional government delivering a set of required services, or being allowed to deliver regional services as determined by communities within their boundaries?

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Discussion Question 5:

Should regional governments have a role in regional economic development? If yes, what role should it be? If no, why not?

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Discussion Question 6:

How should a regional government raise revenue to pay for the services provided?

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Discussion Question 7:

How should a regional government council be composed and regional representatives be selected?

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Discussion Question 8:

Review the distributed regional government maps. Are the draft boundaries appropriate? If not, what changes would you make and why?

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Discussion Question 9:
Are there any other issues you would like to raise on regional government?

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Appendix H: Note Taker Template

Discussion Question #1:
What are the advantages and disadvantages of all municipalities, local service districts and unincorporated areas being part of a regional government system?

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Discussion Question #2:

What are the impacts for the regional government system if certain communities are given the ability to opt out?

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Discussion Question #3:
What criteria should determine whether communities are governed at the local level by a regional government?

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Polling Question #1 (Other responses):
List any other services that participants identify as possible for delivery by a regional government.

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Discussion Question #4:

What are the impacts of a regional government delivering a set of required services, or being allowed to deliver regional services as determined by communities within their boundaries?

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Discussion Question #5:

Should regional governments have a role in regional economic development? If yes, what role should it be? If no, why not?

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Discussion Question #6:

How should a regional government raise revenue to pay for the services provided?

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Discussion Question #7:

How should a regional government council be composed and regional representatives be selected?

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Discussion Question #8:

Review the distributed regional government maps. Are the draft boundaries appropriate? If not, what changes would you make and why?

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Discussion Question #9:

Are there any other issues you would like to raise on regional government?

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