



Regional Partnerships for Wastewater: Guidelines and Principles

What is Regionalization?

Regionalization is a term resource managers and practitioners use to describe an aggregated system for wastewater treatment that improves planning, operation, and management.¹ It often involves a partnership among independent public bodies to share the responsibility of providing wastewater services to their residential, commercial, and industrial customers. In other states that have adopted this approach, regionalization has been shown to solve compliance problems while also creating relationships and opportunities for addressing an array of other issues including drinking water, housing, and regional socio-economic planning.² Regionalization can occur on three different levels:

1. Large scale: grouping of municipalities
2. Small-scale: systems built outside the service area of a larger regional plant forming an areawide system
3. Simple regionalization: requesting service and connecting to a viable neighboring system

Why Regionalize?

Reasons to regionalize might include:

- To increase plant efficiency.
- To increase a community's access to water resources and capacity and competency of water resource management.
- Cost-sharing allows for all participating communities to have access to efficient wastewater treatment.
- To enable access to a skilled workforce for those communities that lack capacity.



Principles of regional partnerships for wastewater treatment

The Coastal Bend Council of Governments (COG) recognizes the value of regionalization. As part of our work through the Regional Resilience Partnership (RRP) we have established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Nueces River Authority (NRA). The Coastal Bend COG and the NRA share a similar mission, geographic service area and stakeholder base working to ensure water infrastructure priorities such as wastewater treatment, clean drinking water, and watershed restoration contribute to the overall resiliency of our region. To better serve our communities, we have created the following principles to guide our work as we partner on efforts to address water quality issues across our region.

1. **Transparency**- All information regarding the process and outcomes will be made available to the public to better inform and educate our communities. We aim for transparent and honest communication between our collaborators and the communities we serve.
2. **Fiscal sustainability**- Monitoring and evaluating the efficacy and sustainability of the regionalization, taking into account changing environmental conditions, risk management tools and changing funding sources.⁴
3. **Best available science**- We will use the best available science and expertise to inform and guide decisions.
4. **Environmental stewardship**- We will responsibly manage natural resources to ensure responsiveness, effectiveness and efficiency.
5. **Inclusive collaboration**- We will strive to involve our communities in the co-production process that is integral to regionalization so that we can be inclusive of all their needs.
6. **Resilience**- Through the creation of durable partnerships we are contributing to building reliable and resilient systems.

References

1. Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Water Quality Division (2022). Draft TCEQ Regulatory Guidance: Evaluating Regionalization for Potential New Wastewater Systems. https://www.tceq.texas.gov/downloads/permitting/wqpawg/tceq_rg_draft_evaluating_regionalization_for_potential_new_wastewater_systems.docx
2. U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Rural Housing and Economic Development Gateway. (2022) Wastewater Treatment Through Regionalization. https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/19567_WASTEWATERTREATME.PDF
3. Frone, S. (2008) Factors and challenges of regionalization in the water and wastewater sector. *Romanian Journal of Economics* 27, 36.
4. Finucane, M. L., Clancy, N., Willis, H. H., & Knopman, D. S. (2014). The Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force's infrastructure resilience guidelines: an initial assessment of implementation by federal agencies. Rand Corporation.