

Middle Rio Grande Development Council

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Council of Governments?

A Council of Governments is a voluntary association of local governments within a defined State Planning Region. They are special purpose political subdivisions of the state, organized under the provisions of the Texas Local Government Code and serve as the regional planning mechanism for local public services. The MRGDC was organized in 1970 by the local governments of the nine county Middle Rio Grande Planning region.

What does the MRGDC do, and why does it do it?

The MRGDC does whatever its member governments, acting through its Board of Directors, want the Council to do, if resources can be found to pay the costs. In practical terms, this can include a wide variety of planning and program functions, stretching from economic development to education, training and elderly nutrition services.

Can MRGDC levy taxes? How are its programs financed?

The MRGDC and all Councils of Government are expressly prohibited from levying any tax whatsoever by the Texas Local Government Code that created them. Its efforts are supported by local government dues and federal and state contract funds. Having no dedicated tax base, the Council operates like a business; dependent upon the market for its services and the willingness of people and agencies to pay for them.

What major services does the MRGDC provide?

The MRGDC plans and delivers a regional economic development effort, helping to get federal funds to support local economic development projects. It provides basic education and skill training services to help local unemployed people find and hold jobs. It feeds more than 2,500 elderly residents each day through a network of 17 Elderly Service Centers. It provides funds for the Regional Law Enforcement's Training Academy to train local peace officers. It manages the region's 911 Emergency Response system, to help assure rapid access to emergency services; and it provides direct assistance to small business to find financing for proposed expansions and new start ups. Finally, the Council coordinates the planning of more than \$2 million worth of annual public works projects through its Community Development program.

How much does all of this cost?

Local governments pay less than \$25,000 in annual dues to belong to the Council. In turn, the MRGDC has been able to access more than \$6,000,000 each year in state and federal funds to support its programs.

Why have the MRGDC do these things, instead of the local governments?

Some problems are regional in scope, requiring regional scale responses and cooperation among a number of communities. In some cases, such as the elderly nutrition and WIA (Workforce Investment Act) Programs, the economics in administrative costs in a regional scale program, allow more direct service dollars to be available in each

individual local community. It is nine times as costly to administer 9 separate county programs than it is to administer one regional program that operates in all nine counties.

How are MRGDC affairs governed?

The Council's affairs are governed by a 29 member Board of Directors which is made up of the nine-county region's County Judges, Mayors of those County Seats, one additional member from any municipality with more than 25,000 residents, one member from each County selected by the member governments from that County, and one member selected by the region's Independent School Districts. This Board selects the Executive Director who acts as Chief Executive Officer to the Council and who approves all Council budgets and activities.

Are the Council's affairs subject to audit?

The MRGDC and its programs are subject to annual financing and compliance audits by independent outside auditors, and are continually monitored by the agencies that fund them. Since 1980, the Council has managed the administration of almost \$100 million in federal and state funded programs with less than \$25,000 in disallowed costs.

Does the MRGDC play any other functions?

The MRGDC provides a forum for the discussion of local issues at the regional level, and represents its member governments and the region's legislative, administrative, and regulatory arenas in Austin and Washington.

If I need MRGDC's services, or want to participate in its efforts, how can I do so?

Contact your local MRGDC office in your county, or the Operations Department/Planning office at the Central Headquarters office in Carrizo Springs (830-876-3533).

Why is the Headquarters in Carrizo Springs?

From 1970-1980, the Headquarters was in Del Rio. In 1980, after the City of Del Rio and Val Verde County withdrew their memberships, the offices were moved to Carrizo Springs at the invitation of the City of Carrizo Springs and Dimmit County, who contribute to the cost of the office rentals. Since 1981, there has been a Planning office in Uvalde (which has subsequently moved to Carrizo Springs), and since 1985, there have been Workforce Centers in each of the county seats. By 1990, Del Rio and Val Verde County had rejoined, and the Council was once again whole.