



NEW YORK STATE COMMISSION ON  
LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
EFFICIENCY &  
COMPETITIVENESS

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## Local Government Efficiency Grant Applications Now Available

The new Local Government Efficiency Grant program helps promote and fund service sharing and consolidations that can save taxpayer dollars. Formerly known as “SMSI” this program received increased funding and enhancements this year, as was recommended by the LGEC Commission. The new name emphasizes the priority being placed on achieving local government efficiency in a variety of ways, including consolidation of services and governments. Changes include:

**New Focus!** Grant scoring is weighted more heavily toward applications expected to have demonstrable financial savings and to result in management improvements from functional consolidation or shared services.

**New Applicants!** Library districts, water authorities, sewer authorities and regional planning and development boards are now eligible applicants. As in the past, counties, cities, towns, villages, special improvement districts, fire districts, school districts, and BOCES are still eligible.

**New Allowable Expenses!** For the first time, the grant program will allow reimbursement for certain personnel costs essential for executing a joint activity.

**New Categories!** The program now includes separate planning and implementation grants, as well as special demonstration grants for exciting new projects with great potential for achieving financial savings.

**New Demonstration Grants!** To support and encourage local leaders willing to undertake changes outside of traditional comfort zones, a select group of municipalities will receive 21st Century demonstration grants. Applications are sought for demonstration projects such as regional school district support services, police and fire consolidations, regional and multi-county services, and regional smart growth compacts. Because of the select nature of these grants, which could include awards in amounts up to \$1,000,000, applicants will have to meet additional program requirements and participation thresholds. A [description](#) of these demonstration project categories and their requirements is available on our website.

**New Noncompetitive Grants!** There is a special category of high priority noncompetitive grants for merger and consolidation studies, county-wide or multi-county sharing or consolidation studies, making changes to city or county charters, and village dissolution studies.

The Department of State is holding workshops throughout the state to present the modified grant program, provide insights into existing shared and consolidated services, and meet one-on-one with potential applicants. [Applications and information](#) on the grants, as well as on the grant [workshops](#), are available from the Department of State.

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## **Town of Clay Voters Approve Police Consolidation**

The LGEC Commission report highlighted an example from Central New York of how consolidation can save taxpayers' money. At the time the report was released, the Town of Clay and Onondaga County had announced a plan to consolidate the Town police with the County Sheriff's Department. This plan is expected to reduce town tax bills by 20 percent, and save up to \$17 million over 10 years, without reducing service.

A referendum on the plan was put to the voters on June 23, and it passed overwhelmingly (by a vote of more than two to one in favor). As of July 7 Onondaga County has taken over police services for the town with the Sheriff providing two patrol cars 24 hours a day, maintaining the existing level of protection. Former town police officers are working out of a mini-station in the current Clay police building. More information from the Town of Clay on their [police consolidation](#) is available on our website.

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## **Survey Finds Support for Local Government Restructuring**

A recent [survey](#) asked northern Westchester and Putnam county constituents of Assemblywoman Sandra Galef questions about both consolidating or eliminating different levels of government and consolidating or sharing services. According to the survey, 89% of the 824 respondents would change the structure of their local government if given an opportunity, 45% are willing to consolidate their town or village government, and 62% are willing to eliminate county government.

When asked whether services between levels of government should be consolidated, 97% said "yes" they should. The most popular services or facilities for consolidation or sharing included: printing services (77% in favor), parks and recreation (76%), tax receiver (74%), highway department (73%), and legal services (70%). Over 80% favored setting up regional as opposed to local courts. Many other shared or consolidated services received more than 50% of positive responses, such as auditing activities, fueling stations, police forces, assessors, water filtration, business functions, investment pooling, and maintenance services.

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## **Ohio Forms Local Government Commission**

Legislation recently passed in Ohio establishes a “Commission on Local Government Reform and Collaboration” to find ways to increase local efficiency and effectiveness, achieve cost-savings for taxpayers, and facilitate economic development. Like New York’s Commission, the Ohio group will focus on restructuring and streamlining opportunities. They join a growing list of Midwestern and Northeastern states that are looking to local government service restructuring and reform to save taxpayer dollars (for more information, see our [brief](#) on this topic ). The Ohio Commission will have two years to report its findings and recommendations.

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## **Health Insurance for Volunteers**

There are 96,000 volunteer firefighters in New York, 15,000 fewer than twenty years ago. To help preserve the volunteer system, the Commission on Local Government Efficiency and Competitiveness recommended development of new incentives more likely to appeal to young firefighters. Governor Paterson recently signed into law a bill sponsored by Senator Seward and Assemblywoman Destito (and co-sponsored by Senator Winner), which will allow members of volunteer fire and ambulance companies to participate in health insurance plans offered to municipal employees. While several technical issues need to be addressed, this bill will provide a way for volunteer emergency service workers to gain access to municipal health insurance benefits. Volunteers desiring such benefits would have to pay for the coverage, but this would be a substantial benefit and incentive for many (particularly those without access group insurance elsewhere).

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**Visit the Commission Website at [www.nyslocalgov.org](http://www.nyslocalgov.org)**

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