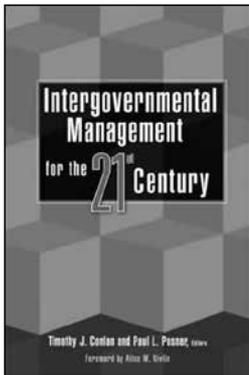


Book Review



Intergovernmental Management for the 21st Century

Edited by Timothy J. Conlan and Paul L. Posner

The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 2008, 368 pp.

Reviewed by Col. Dwayne Wagner, U.S. Army, Ret.
- Assistant Professor
U.S. Army Command and General Staff College

Intergovernmental Management for the 21st Century provides a forward-looking perspective of public management to help professionals and academics understand the challenges of maximizing the effects of government.

Editors Timothy J. Conlan and Paul L. Posner organized the book into three parts and relied on 15 subject matter experts from government, academia, and privately funded research organizations in determining the focus of individual chapters. Part 1, “Framing the Intergovernmental Debate,” describes the governmental interagency systems through an historical lens of how our government was established, developed, and evolved due to the influence of technology and external factors such as world trade, finance, war, and social rights. Part 2, “Testing the Intergovernmental System: Issues and Challenges” provides a multitude of topics – homeland security, education policy, welfare reform, Medicaid waivers, and climate change policy – in showing the complexities of issues and resolutions. Finally, Part 3, “Issues of Governance in the Intergovernmental System”, explains how government manages or responds to problems, as the editors conclude the book by discussing how to manage complex problems in the establishment, maturation, and evolution of our government.

In part 1, the authors indicate that early federalism led to a federal government with restricted powers that would be influential in time of war, but have only limited influence over domestic issues, because the states were expected to provide government for their citizens. The narratives focus on how early regulation was introduced across various states to help grow and manage commerce and compares this to a later time (1980s) when America started focusing more on social programs to help Americans. The authors insinuate that one must look closely at how government grows to determine what leadership or management approach by the intergovernmental specialist works best. Finally, the authors ask if a global economy, ever-changing technology, and an integrated world finance system overwhelm government’s ability to manage and adapt to change.

“Testing the Intergovernmental System: Issues and Challenges,” comprises part 2 and reflects on developing a national Homeland Security system, new directions in education policy and management, welfare reform, Medicaid waivers, and regionalism and global climate change policy as examples of newer stresses on the management of intergovernmental programs. The

need for orchestrated federal, regional, state, and local solutions to problems of governance are discussed as the writers talk of the dysfunction wrought by the lack of strategic coordinated efforts in all cases. Policies developed during the formative years of our nation become obsolete as government struggles to keep up with changing social and national security demands. The Department of Education provides an example of how the knife cuts both ways regarding the viability and relevance of a federal agency. An author cites a 1995 Republican led effort to abolish the Department of Education and compares this to a Republican president, former President George W. Bush, touting the “No Child Left Behind” policy and the influence of the Department of Education in implementing the accompanying educational strategy. The exploration of welfare focuses on the roles of local authorities, state officials, and federal policy, and the evolution of control from the states to the federal government and the current pendulum swing back to regional or local responsibility. Federal-to-state block grants, a state’s role, and historical federal oversight are discussed as the various ways intergovernmental managers responded to poverty. Medicaid is introduced as a challenge, given the United States is the only industrialized nation without a comprehensive national health care program.

Part 3, “Issues of Governance in the Intergovernmental System,” addresses the evolution of the information age, performance management, block grants, and opportunistic actors, then provides several approaches in leading or managing intergovernmental agencies or programs. For example, the authors believe that the federal government should do more research or provide increased oversight when it relies on state and local jurisdictions to implement federally-funded policies. Several examples are provided to show how relevant government research helps to report on a program’s efficacy or impact on citizens. Performance management within a government construct provides an example of complexity due to overlapping governmental responsibilities and the difficulty in making quantitative judgments from qualitative data. The Government Accountability Office and other government watchdogs are presented as a mechanism, albeit imperfect, in ensuring the federal dollar is properly spent. The discussion of block grants focuses on both liberal and conservative Presidents trying to reduce government by pushing funding, accountability, and responsibility to states, counties, and cities and the difficulty of measuring effectiveness. The opposite of the block grant—the mandate—is exposed as a relatively easy executive or legislative action, but much harder to inspect, manage, or again, measure. Local entities interpret mandates as they see fit, forcing the legislator or the intergovernmental manager to write them in more detail than probably needed. Interest groups are presented as wild cards that over time have negatively altered the landscape of policy development and service provision to constituents.

The authors conclude with a discussion on how the political process impacts intergovernmental management and how the paradigm has shifted due to opportunistic actors, specifically lobbying groups, special interest groups, and other external entities who are more concerned about their ability to influence and make money and less concerned about America and its citizens. The narrative then ends with a transition to three faulty or misleading assumptions: (1) states will always oppose the federal government’s attempt to dictate policies and programs; (2) local citizens favor state, county, and city government over federal control; and (3) people tend to favor the entity they are controlled by and are less concerned about others’ problems. The authors conclude that these false assumptions may unduly influence how leaders manage intergovernmental agencies, since federal government growth and reach over time has diluted the power and influence of states, counties, and lobbying groups (corporate, private, and special interest).

The editors of *Intergovernmental Management for the 21st Century* do a good job of identifying separate and disparate issues, but the shotgun approach of assembling 15 different voices has a drawback in that the reader is left wondering what management and leadership approaches work best with most of the issues. **IAJ**