



EXPLAINER: LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONSOLIDATION



CIVIC FEDERATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

REPORT SUMMARY	2
WHAT IS GOVERNMENT CONSOLIDATION?	3
WHY DO GOVERNMENTS CONSOLIDATE?	4
ECONOMIES OF SCALE AND FISCAL PRESSURES.....	5
SYSTEM SIMPLIFICATION AND IMPROVED PLANNING CAPACITY	5
ADMINISTRATIVE EFFICIENCY AND REDUCED DUPLICATION	5
WORKFORCE CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS	6
SERVICE QUALITY AND CONSISTENCY	6
ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY FOR RESIDENTS AND BUSINESSES	6
COMPLIANCE, REPORTING, AND TECHNOLOGY MODERNIZATION	6
WHAT DOES EXISTING ANALYSIS SUGGEST ABOUT CONSOLIDATION OUTCOMES?	7
WHEN CONSOLIDATION WORKS WELL.....	7
CHALLENGES AND RISKS ASSOCIATED WITH CONSOLIDATION	8
KEY TAKEAWAYS	9
ILLINOIS' EXPERIENCE WITH CONSOLIDATION	9
STATE-LEVEL STUDY AND TASK FORCE ENGAGEMENT	9
LEGISLATIVE CHANGES TO ENABLE (BUT NOT REQUIRE) CONSOLIDATION	10
SHARED SERVICES AS THE DOMINANT CONSOLIDATION STRATEGY.....	11
SPECIAL DISTRICT CONSOLIDATION AND DISSOLUTION: COUNTY-LEVEL ACTION.....	11
SCHOOL DISTRICT CONSOLIDATION AS A LONGER-STANDING EXCEPTION	12
ONGOING LEGAL AND CULTURAL BARRIERS.....	12
KEY CONSIDERATION BEFORE PURSUING CONSOLIDATION	13
CONCLUSION	14

REPORT SUMMARY

With nearly 9,000 units of local government, Illinois is among the most fragmented states in the nation. Government consolidation is frequently proposed as a mechanism to improve efficiency, accountability, and fiscal sustainability in fragmented systems of local governance. In practice, consolidation can take many forms, ranging from full structural mergers and dissolutions of governments to narrower functional consolidation and shared service arrangements. These approaches differ substantially in legal complexity, political feasibility, fiscal impact, and governance implications, underscoring that consolidation is not a single policy choice but a continuum of options that can be applied selectively based on the problem to be solved.

Governments pursue consolidation for multiple reasons, including fiscal stress, administrative duplication and accountability, workforce capacity constraints, compliance and technology demands, and the desire to improve service quality and consistency. While consolidation is often framed as a cost-saving measure, savings are neither automatic nor universal. Economies of scale are service-specific, and consolidation outcomes depend heavily on what functions are consolidated, how service levels and workforce conditions are harmonized, and how governance and cost allocation are designed.

Research and policy discussions indicate that consolidation is most effective when it is targeted, function-specific, and supported by clear implementation and accountability structures. Shared services and narrow functional consolidation are more likely to produce administrative efficiencies than broad structural mergers, particularly for standardized or capital-intensive functions. In many cases, the most significant benefits of consolidation are improvements in administrative capacity, coordination, and transparency rather than immediate or large fiscal savings. Conversely, broad or poorly planned consolidation efforts often fall short due to high transition costs, implementation complexity, service disruption risks, and equity and representation concerns.

Rather than mandating consolidation, Illinois has generally pursued a piecemeal approach, lowering procedural barriers for specific districts/counties while leaving decisions to local governments and voters. This framework has resulted in relatively limited consolidation activities. Consolidation in Illinois has therefore been incremental and slow, locally driven, and highly focused on shared services and selective dissolution of special districts. Structural consolidation has occurred primarily where fiscal or capacity pressures are clear, and voter approval has been obtained, such as in certain school district mergers.

Overall, consolidation should be viewed as one tool among many for improving government performance, not a panacea. Effective use requires service-specific analysis, realistic expectations about costs and benefits, explicit planning for transition and governance risks, and

careful attention to local legal and political constraints. The central policy question is not whether consolidation is inherently beneficial, but whether it is the appropriate response to a clearly defined problem in a given context.

This report provides an overview of the conceptual arguments for and against government consolidation and describes how these issues have appeared in the Illinois context. Much of the discussion draws on the findings of the Illinois Local Government Consolidation and Unfunded Mandates Task Force, which conducted a statewide review of consolidation laws, surveyed local governments, and compiled information on consolidation and shared services. The report is intended as a framework for understanding consolidation policy debates rather than as an evaluation of specific consolidation proposals.

WHAT IS GOVERNMENT CONSOLIDATION?

Government consolidation refers to the merger, absorption, or shared governance of public entities or public services. The [purpose](#) of consolidation is to reduce fragmentation in governmental structures or operations in order to improve efficiency, accountability, service quality, or fiscal sustainability.

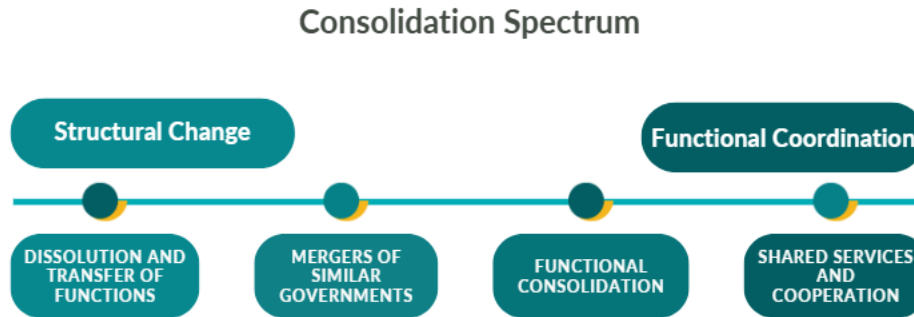
Consolidation can take [many forms](#) and occurs along a spectrum of options. At one end, there are structural changes, such as dissolving an existing unit of government or merging multiple governments into a single entity. At the other end, are service-level arrangements, in which governments remain legally separate but coordinate or share the delivery of specific functions. While both approaches are often grouped under the umbrella of “consolidation,” they differ significantly in legal complexity, political feasibility, fiscal impact, and long-term governance implications.

Consolidation can appear in several overlapping but distinct forms:

- **Dissolution and transfer of functions.** Entire units of government are eliminated, with their powers, responsibilities, and, in some cases, taxing authority transferred to an existing county or municipality. Common [examples](#) include the dissolution of small special districts or townships whose functions can be absorbed by a general-purpose government.
- **Mergers of similar governments.** Two or more governments providing comparable services close in geography are combined into a single unit. These [mergers](#) may occur through voter referendum or, in limited cases, by action of a county board, depending on statutory authority.
- **Functional program or office consolidation.** Specific offices or functions are consolidated across jurisdictions while the underlying governments remain intact. [Examples](#) include consolidating township assessment functions into a single countywide

assessor or merging duplicative administrative offices to standardize practices and reduce overhead.

- **Service sharing and intergovernmental cooperation.** Governments retain their separate legal entities but share services, assets, personnel, or administrative functions under the [Intergovernmental Cooperation Act](#). In this context, consolidation is often framed as a mechanism for achieving “[significant savings](#)” through cooperation rather than through structural elimination.



[These forms](#) illustrate that consolidation is not a single policy choice, but a set of tools that governments can deploy selectively depending on local conditions, service demands, fiscal capacity, and political constraints.

WHY DO GOVERNMENTS CONSOLIDATE?

Governments pursue [consolidation](#) for a range of fiscal, administrative, and service-delivery

Common Drivers of Consolidation

- Fiscal pressures and cost containment
- Administrative duplication
- Workforce capacity constraints
- Service quality and consistency
- Compliance and technology demands

reasons. While the specific motivations vary by jurisdiction and level of government, consolidation is most often framed as a mechanism to stabilize finances, improve administrative capacity, and deliver services more effectively in an increasingly complex policy and regulatory environment.

This overview draws primarily on the findings of the Illinois Local Government Consolidation and Unfunded Mandates Task Force. The Task Force conducted a statewide review of consolidation laws, surveyed local governments, and compiled information about consolidation and intergovernmental cooperation. Because the Task Force report provides the most comprehensive summary of consolidation issues in the Illinois context, it is referenced frequently throughout this report.

The discussion below summarizes commonly cited reasons governments pursue consolidation.

Economies of Scale and Fiscal Pressures

Fiscal stress is a [frequent catalyst](#) for consolidation discussions. Rising service costs, pension obligations, infrastructure needs, and revenue constraints can place pressure on local governments to identify ways to stabilize spending while maintaining service levels. In these contexts, consolidation is [often viewed](#) as a cost-containment strategy.

A central rationale for consolidation is the pursuit of [economies of scale](#). By merging staff, facilities, and governing bodies, governments [may reduce](#) per-unit costs for administration, management, and service delivery. [Larger entities](#) can spread fixed costs, such as executive leadership, legal services, auditing, and facilities, across a broader tax base and population. Consolidation is sometimes [pursued](#) as a way to address longer-term fiscal pressures by better aligning expenditures, staffing levels, and revenue capacity with service demands.

However, research and practical experience suggest that economies of scale are highly service-specific. Some administrative or capital-intensive functions may benefit from larger service areas, while others do not. As a result, [consolidation](#) does not automatically generate fiscal savings, and outcomes depend heavily on the services involved, the design of governance and cost-sharing arrangements, and the costs associated with transition implementation.

Myth	Reality
Consolidation always saves money	Savings are service-specific and may be offset by transition costs

System Simplification and Improved Planning Capacity

[Fragmented systems](#) of local government can create overlapping regulatory regimes, inconsistent service standards, and fragmented fiscal decision-making. Consolidation is often [pursued](#) to simplify regulatory and fiscal systems, enabling more uniform service levels and clearer accountability. [Larger or consolidated governments](#) may also have stronger planning capacity, allowing for more coordinated land use, infrastructure investment, and capital planning across a broader geographic area. In some cases, consolidation is [discussed](#) as a way to strengthen financial oversight and governance structures, factors that may be viewed favorably by credit agencies.

Administrative Efficiency and Reduced Duplication

In highly fragmented systems, [multiple governments](#) may maintain parallel administrative functions such as finance, procurement, information technology, and human resources. Consolidation can [reduce](#) duplicative administrative structures, standardize processes, and centralize systems and leadership functions. Even when service delivery remains decentralized,

[shared or consolidated](#) administration can lower overhead costs and improve internal coordination.

Workforce Capacity Constraints

[Smaller governments](#) often face challenges recruiting and retaining specialized staff, particularly in areas such as finance, information technology, public safety leadership, engineering, and regulatory compliance. [Consolidation](#) can expand the effective workforce pool, allowing governments to share expertise and reduce reliance on external consultants, particularly for specialized functions. [In this context](#), consolidation is less about reducing headcount and more about ensuring adequate professional capacity.

Service Quality and Consistency

[Differences](#) in fiscal capacity and administrative sophistication can lead to uneven service quality across neighboring jurisdictions. Consolidation is [sometimes pursued](#) to promote more consistent service standards, particularly in areas where fragmentation can complicate coordination and oversight. [Larger service areas](#) can also enable investments in specialized equipment, training, or technology that may be unaffordable for smaller entities.

Accountability and Transparency for Residents and Businesses

From the perspective of residents and businesses, [fragmented governance](#) can be confusing and inefficient, requiring interaction with multiple agencies for permits, taxes, inspections, or services. Consolidation can [simplify](#) governance structures by reducing the number of governmental entities involved and clarifying responsibility for service provision. This simplification is often framed as improving transparency, accessibility, and accountability.

Compliance, Reporting, and Technology Modernization

Modern governments face [increasing demands](#) related to compliance, data reporting, cybersecurity, and technology modernization. [Smaller or highly fragmented entities](#) may struggle to meet these requirements due to limited staff and outdated systems. Consolidation can [facilitate](#) technology upgrades, standardized data systems, and centralized compliance functions, reducing risk and improving oversight. [In this sense](#), consolidation is sometimes discussed as a response to the growing administrative complexity of modern public governance rather than solely a cost-saving measure.

WHAT DOES EXISTING ANALYSIS SUGGEST ABOUT CONSOLIDATION OUTCOMES?

When Consolidation Works Well

[Analyses of](#) consolidation efforts frequently indicate that consolidation tends to perform best when it is targeted to specific functions and supported by clear governance and implementation structures, rather than applied as a broad structural remedy. Shared services and narrow functional [consolidation](#) are more likely to achieve administrative efficiencies than full governmental mergers, particularly for specific administrative or operational functions. In these cases, consolidation can [reduce](#) duplicated leadership and overhead, standardize processes, and consolidate systems such as finance, human resources, procurement, and information technology. However, even in shared-service arrangements, [cost savings](#) are not consistent and depend heavily on what functions are shared, how costs are allocated, and how agreements are governed.

Consolidation also tends to [perform better](#) when applied to services with characteristics that plausibly lend themselves to economies of scale, such as standardized or capital-intensive functions. Some local public services [exhibit](#) moderately increasing or constant returns to scale, while others do not, underscoring that scale economies are service-specific rather than universal. [Evaluations](#) of certain functional consolidations indicate that measurable savings are possible where processes are standardized and implementation is tightly defined, though results vary by service and context.

When Consolidation Is Most Likely to Succeed

- *Targets specific functions rather than whole governments*
 - *Focuses on standardized or capital-intensive services*
 - *Includes clear governance and accountability structures*
 - *Defines cost allocation upfront*
-

Beyond cost considerations, consolidation [can improve](#) coordination and administrative capacity, particularly by enabling access to specialized staff, shared infrastructure, and more consistent standards. These [gains](#) are most often associated with improved capacity and coordination rather than large or immediate

reductions in spending. In [governance terms](#), reducing the number of overlapping entities can clarify accountability and improve transparency around budgeting and service tradeoffs, provided governance structures are clearly defined and accessible to the public.

Challenges and Risks Associated with Consolidation

There are some limitations and risks of consolidation, particularly when it is pursued broadly or without careful attention to transition costs, equity considerations, and institutional design. Consolidation does not automatically generate cost savings. In the case of broad structural mergers, anticipated efficiency gains are often modest, delayed, or absent once transition costs and service-level changes are taken into account. Workforce integration, particularly aligning compensation structures, benefits, and job classifications across governments, can reduce anticipated savings and may increase long-term costs.

Key Risks to Consider

- High upfront transition and implementation costs
 - Workforce integration challenges
 - Service disruption risks
 - Equity and representation concerns
 - Legal and procedural complexity
-

Transition and implementation costs are a [central challenge](#). Common [one-time costs](#) include legal and administrative restructuring, systems migration, integration planning, and the alignment of compensation and personnel policies. [Implementation complexity](#), particularly in large shared-service initiatives, can limit anticipated benefits when standardization or migration proves more difficult than expected.

[Service delivery risks](#) are also present. Short- to medium-term [service disruption](#) becomes more likely as the scope of consolidation widens and as differences in service levels across jurisdictions increase. In shared-service arrangements, [coordination burdens](#) related to contract management, performance monitoring, and renegotiation can offset administrative efficiencies if governance frameworks are weak or unstable.

[Equity and representation concerns](#) further complicate consolidation outcomes. [Redistribution conflicts](#), centered on who pays versus who benefits, are often central to consolidation debates and can shape political feasibility and perceived fairness, particularly when merging jurisdictions differ demographically or fiscally. Additionally, some observers have raised [concerns](#) consolidation into larger governmental units could make decision-making feel more distant from residents or reduce opportunities for local participation, particularly in communities where local governance structures are closely tied to civic identity, although these effects vary by institutional context and governance design.

Finally, special districts present [distinct challenges](#) because they often operate under specialized statutes and governance structures. These legal frameworks can make consolidation or dissolution procedurally complex, particularly when voter approval or multiple governmental approvals are required.

Key Takeaways

Several conclusions emerge. First, [consolidation outcomes](#), including fiscal and service impacts, vary widely depending on the type of consolidation, the services involved, baseline fragmentation, and governance design. Second, [transition costs and implementation complexity](#) are common and must be explicitly planned for; otherwise, they can outweigh near-term efficiency gains. Third, [economies of scale](#) should be treated as conditional and service specific, rather than as a blanket justification for consolidation.

Consolidation is not a panacea, but a tool that can produce benefits under specific conditions, particularly when narrowly applied, carefully governed, and evaluated against realistic expectations about costs, capacity, and tradeoffs. These all point to the need for careful planning and pre-analysis of costs and benefits.

ILLINOIS' EXPERIENCE WITH CONSOLIDATION

Illinois has one of the most fragmented local government systems in the U.S. The Civic Federation [analysis of local governments](#) found that Illinois has 8,923 units of local government, with thousands of independent taxing and service entities, including municipalities (1,298), counties (102), townships (1,426), and special districts (6,097). As a result, Illinois residents often pay property taxes to numerous overlapping taxing districts. Property tax bills in some areas include levies from up to seven or more separate governments, including counties, municipalities, school districts, townships, and multiple special districts.

8,923

units of local government

- most in the nation
- 3,000+ more than the next highest state

This extreme fragmentation has been central to the consolidation debate because overlapping jurisdictional boundaries can complicate service delivery, raise administrative costs, and blur accountability. Illinois' fragmented local government structure developed over more than a century as new governmental units were created to provide specific services such as fire protection, drainage, sanitation, or road maintenance. Many of these governments were established at a time when counties and municipalities lacked the administrative capacity or statutory authority to provide those services directly.

Legal complexity, strong norms of local control, and the barriers to functional consolidation have all shaped Illinois' incremental approach. As a result, consolidation in Illinois has been selective, locally driven, and functionally focused, rather than broad or transformative.

State-Level Study and Task Force Engagement

The most comprehensive statewide examination of consolidation occurred in 2015, when then Governor Bruce Rauner convened the [Local Government Consolidation and Unfunded](#)

[Mandates Task Force](#). The task force was charged with reviewing state law governing consolidation and unfunded mandates, identifying opportunities to reduce duplicative units, and developing recommendations for the Governor and the General Assembly.

The task force conducted multiple public meetings across the state, collected input from local governments and residents, and ultimately advanced [27 recommendations](#) related to consolidation, shared services, and mandate reform. Importantly, the task force's [final report](#) and associated surveys document that many local governments were already engaging in shared services and collaborative arrangements across municipalities, townships, school districts, and special districts.

A key takeaway from this effort was that consolidation in Illinois is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Rather than recommending mandatory structural consolidation, the task force emphasized identifying opportunities and barriers, explicitly acknowledging legal constraints, fiscal tradeoffs, and the deeply localized nature of Illinois government. While the Task Force produced a number of recommendations intended to reduce barriers to consolidation and improve intergovernmental cooperation, relatively few structural reforms were adopted at the statewide level following the report.

Legislative Changes to Enable (but Not Require) Consolidation

Following the task force's work and earlier legislative efforts, Illinois adopted targeted statutory changes intended to make certain forms of consolidation or dissolution easier, particularly for small or specialized units of government.

Some statutory changes related to consolidation predated the Task Force's work, while others were considered or enacted in the years following its recommendations. Notably, [HB5856](#), Dissolution and Consolidation of Fire Protection Districts, amended state law to allow fire protection districts to annex or consolidate with neighboring fire protection districts. In addition, legislation beginning in 2013 empowered county boards, initially in DuPage county, to audit and under defined conditions, dissolve very small governments such as certain sewer, lighting, mosquito abatement, and sanitary districts, subject to voter referendum if opposition emerged. In DuPage County, the county board initiated the Accountability, Consolidation, and Transparency (ACT) Initiative, which used new statutory authority to review small special districts and recommend dissolution or consolidation when districts were inactive, financially distressed, or duplicative. The initiative later served as a model for similar authority granted to other counties.

These changes reflect a piecemeal policy approach in Illinois: lower procedural barriers to consolidation where local officials choose and advocate for it, rather than lowering barriers statewide. The General Assembly has largely favored enabling tools over top-down restructuring.

Shared Services as the Dominant Consolidation Strategy

In practice, shared services and intergovernmental cooperation have been the most common and politically feasible form of consolidation in Illinois. Rather than pursuing widespread structural mergers, local governments have more frequently chosen to collaborate on specific

Shared services and intergovernmental cooperation, not full structural mergers, are the most common and politically feasible forms of consolidation.

functions while retaining separate governance structures. Examples of shared services in Illinois include joint purchasing cooperatives, shared public safety dispatch centers, cooperative public works agreements, and shared administrative services such as finance, procurement, or information technology.

In northeastern Illinois, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning has [documented](#) widespread service sharing, including joint purchasing cooperatives, shared equipment and staffing arrangements, and coordinated infrastructure delivery. Similarly, [surveys](#) conducted in connection with the 2015 task force highlighted numerous examples of shared service agreements across school districts, municipalities, and townships statewide.

This pattern reflects the fact that functional consolidation of specific programs or departments is easier to implement and sustain than structural consolidation, particularly in a state with strong traditions of local control.

Special District Consolidation and Dissolution: County-Level Action

Where structural consolidation has occurred in Illinois, it has most often taken place at the county level, rather than through statewide mandates. Evanston Township and Lake County provides the clearest examples. In 2014, Evanston voters elected to dissolve their coterminous township, which shared the same geographic boundaries as the City of Evanston. Evanston was unique in that the City Council and Township Board were composed of the same individuals serving dual roles but acting through separate taxing bodies. The dissolution eliminated a redundant layer of government and consolidated the township's responsibilities under the City, simplifying governance and removing a separate property tax levy while maintaining the services previously provided by the township.

Spotlight: Evanston Township Dissolution (2014)

- Coterminous with the City of Evanston
 - Same officials governed both entities
 - Eliminated a redundant layer of government
 - Removed a separate property tax levy while maintaining services
-

Using audit authority granted under state law, [Lake County](#) has pursued the dissolution of small special districts, including actions to merge the South Lake Mosquito Abatement District with the North Shore Mosquito Abatement District after reviewing its finances and operations.

Local officials have emphasized that these actions are intended to eliminate redundant governmental units while maintaining service provision under county administration and removing separate tax levies. Evanston and Lake County illustrate how incremental, locally driven consolidation can occur when political will, statutory authority, and administrative capacity align.

School District Consolidation as a Longer-Standing Exception

School district consolidation offers a longer historical example of structural consolidation in Illinois. Over several decades, multiple rural school districts have merged into larger units through voter-approved referenda, often in response to enrollment declines and fiscal or capacity pressures. In 1960, Illinois had about [1,550](#) school districts. Today, it has around [850](#). [Examples](#) include the formation of El Paso-Gridley Community Unit School District 11 in 2004 and Marengo-Union Elementary School District 165 in 1986.

These cases highlight a recurring pattern in Illinois: structural consolidation is most likely where pressures are clear, benefits are locally understood, and voter approval is required and obtained.

Ongoing Legal and Cultural Barriers

Despite periodic legislative changes intended to enable consolidation, structural consolidation remains difficult in Illinois due to legal complexity, political considerations, and strong traditions of local control. Illinois law has historically lacked streamlined mechanisms for consolidation across different types of governments, such as townships and municipalities. Cultural resistance to merging deeply local institutions, particularly townships and fire protection districts, remains strong, reinforced by political attachment to local control.

In addition, aligning labor contracts, service levels, and pension obligations across entities continues to pose substantial challenges, limiting the feasibility and appeal of broader mergers even where fragmentation is widely acknowledged.

KEY CONSIDERATION BEFORE PURSUING CONSOLIDATION

[Consolidation](#) is not a single policy decision but a design process. It can take different forms, from shared services and functional consolidation to the dissolution or merger of entire governmental units. Outcomes depend heavily on what problem is being addressed, what is

Before pursuing consolidation, ask:

- ✓ What problem are we trying to solve?
- ✓ Does this service benefit from economies of scale?
- ✓ What are the transition costs?
- ✓ How will governance and accountability work?
- ✓ How will costs be shared over time?

being consolidated, how the change is governed, and how costs and risks are managed over time. Before pursuing consolidation, governments should define the specific problem they are trying to solve, such as duplication, fiscal stress, weak administrative capacity, or fragmented service delivery, and then determine which consolidation approach, if any, is the best fit.

Define the Scope and Approach. Governments should [specify](#) what is being consolidated—a full structural merger, a shared service, or a special district reorganization—and through what legal and administrative mechanism. In some cases, [consolidation](#) is pursued through shared services or functional consolidation of specific programs. In other cases, dissolving or merging an entire governmental unit may be appropriate, particularly where a government no longer serves a distinct purpose or where its functions can be effectively absorbed by another entity. The appropriate approach depends on the problem being addressed, the functions involved, and local legal and political conditions.

Evaluate Whether Scale or Coordination Gains Are Likely. [Not all services](#) benefit from consolidation. Governments should [assess](#) whether the targeted services plausibly exhibit economies of scale or coordination advantages in their specific context, based on service characteristics, cost structure, and delivery model.

Make Service-Level Assumptions Explicit. Consolidation [frequently entails](#) changes in service levels, staffing, or compensation, including potential “leveling up.” These [assumptions](#) can significantly affect fiscal outcomes and should be explicitly identified to distinguish efficiency gains from cost increases tied to expanded services.

Plan for Transition Costs and Fiscal Risk. [Transition costs](#)—such as aligning pay, benefits, and job classifications, IT integration, legal restructuring, and facilities changes—should be understood before pursuing consolidation. Governments should [budget](#) for one-time costs and clarify who bears them, how savings are expected to materialize, and over what timeframe.

Design Governance and Accountability Upfront. Consolidation [alters](#) accountability relationships. [Clear provisions](#) for representation, transparency, performance reporting, and

dispute resolution are essential, particularly for shared-service arrangements involving multiple governments.

Establish Durable Cost-Allocation Rules. [Shared services](#) require clear and adaptable frameworks for allocating and adjusting costs over time, whether based on usage, population, or tax base. Poorly designed [allocation systems](#), how participating governments divide the costs of shared services, can undermine participation and long-term viability.

Account for Legal and Procedural Constraints. Governments should [assess](#) statutory requirements and approval processes, especially for special district consolidation or dissolution, which often involve complex procedural steps and voter referenda.

CONCLUSION

Government consolidation can be an effective tool under certain conditions, but its benefits are neither automatic nor universal. When well designed and carefully implemented, consolidation can improve administrative efficiency by reducing duplicative governance structures and back-office functions, and it can simplify governance and service delivery by clarifying responsibility and streamlining interactions for residents and service users. These potential benefits are most evident where consolidation targets specific functions or services with overlapping responsibilities, rather than broad structural mergers.

At the same time, evidence shows that consolidation does not automatically produce cost savings. Transition and implementation costs can be significant, and consolidation can introduce new fiscal, operational, or governance risks, if not carefully planned. Absent clear objectives, realistic assumptions, and durable accountability, anticipated efficiencies may be delayed, reduced, or offset entirely.

In Illinois, consolidation occurs within a legal framework that generally permits but does not mandate structural change. State law places primary responsibility on local governments to initiate, design, and approve consolidation efforts, emphasizing local discretion, voter approval, and incremental reform. As a result, consolidation outcomes vary widely and depend heavily on local capacity, leadership, and political feasibility.

Taken together, consolidation should be viewed as one of several tools available to improve local government performance, not as a stand-alone solution to fiscal stress or service delivery challenges. Effective decision-making requires service-specific analysis, transparent cost estimation, and careful attention to governance and implementation risks. In many cases, governments may achieve comparable or greater improvements through alternatives or complements to

Bottom Line

Consolidation is one tool among many for improving government performance. Its effectiveness depends on context, design, and implementation—not scale alone.

consolidation, such as shared services, process and management reform, or targeted technology investments.

For policymakers, the central question is not whether consolidation is inherently good or bad, but whether it is the right tool for the specific problem being addressed, given local conditions, statutory constraints, and capacity for implementation.

RELATED RESEARCH

Local government consolidation and government fragmentation have long been areas of research and policy engagement for the Civic Federation. The following reports and analyses highlight examples of consolidation efforts and research related to the structure of local governments in Illinois.

[Cook County Mosquito Abatement Districts: Governance, Transparency, and Finances](#)

This report examines the governance structures, finances, and transparency practices of the four suburban Cook County mosquito abatement districts. The Civic Federation has raised concerns about whether these districts should continue to operate as independent governments and has suggested that policymakers consider whether their responsibilities could be consolidated or absorbed by other units of government.

[The Civic Federation Supports Efforts to Lower Barriers to Township Consolidation](#)

The Civic Federation has also supported legislative efforts to make it easier for voters to consolidate or dissolve townships where appropriate.

[Lake County Leads the Way in Local Government Consolidation](#)

This analysis highlights county-level consolidation efforts in Lake County, where local officials have used statutory authority to review and dissolve certain small special districts.

[An Inventory of Local Governments in Illinois](#)

Different agencies report varying counts of local governments depending on definitions and reporting requirements. To clarify the scope of government fragmentation in Illinois, the Civic Federation compiled available data from multiple sources into a single inventory of local governments across the state.

[Local Government Consolidation in Illinois: Small Steps in the Right Direction](#)

This report examines recent efforts to reduce fragmentation in Illinois government and highlights policy changes that have enabled limited consolidation and shared services among local governments.

A Call for the Elimination of the Suburban Cook County Tuberculosis Sanitarium District

The Civic Federation advocated for the dissolution of the Suburban Cook County Tuberculosis Sanitarium District, a legacy special-purpose government that no longer served its original function. The district was ultimately dissolved and its responsibilities transferred to Cook County, eliminating a separate taxing authority and simplifying the local government structure.