



**County-Wide Shared Services Initiative 2019, 2020, and 2021  
Guidance Document**

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## Program Overview

In 2017, New York State introduced the County-Wide Shared Services Initiative (Initiative or CWSSI) to provide a process whereby each county can work to develop, approve, and submit to the State a County-Wide Shared Services Property Tax Savings Plan (Plan) with new shared services actions that, once implemented, achieve demonstrable taxpayer savings. The CWSSI has been extended through December 31st, 2021, per the SFY19 Enacted Budget of Article 12-I of the General Municipal Law.

This Guidance is intended to assist counties with their participation in the CWSSI during the 2019, 2020 and 2021 calendar years. It summarizes the planning process in accordance with the laws governing the CWSSI: 1) Part BBB of Chapter 59 of the Laws of 2017; 2) Article 12-I of the General Municipal Law; and, 3) SFY19 Enacted Budget.

Under the CWSSI, a Shared Services Panel (Panel) must be established in each of the 57 counties outside of New York City, to be chaired by the Chief Executive Officer of the county. Each Panel works to develop, and ultimately approve, a Plan through intergovernmental cooperation to find new opportunities to share and coordinate services. The Panel meetings, public hearings, and public presentation of the Plan should be seen as an opportunity to incorporate meaningful public feedback and participation and build support for the Plan.

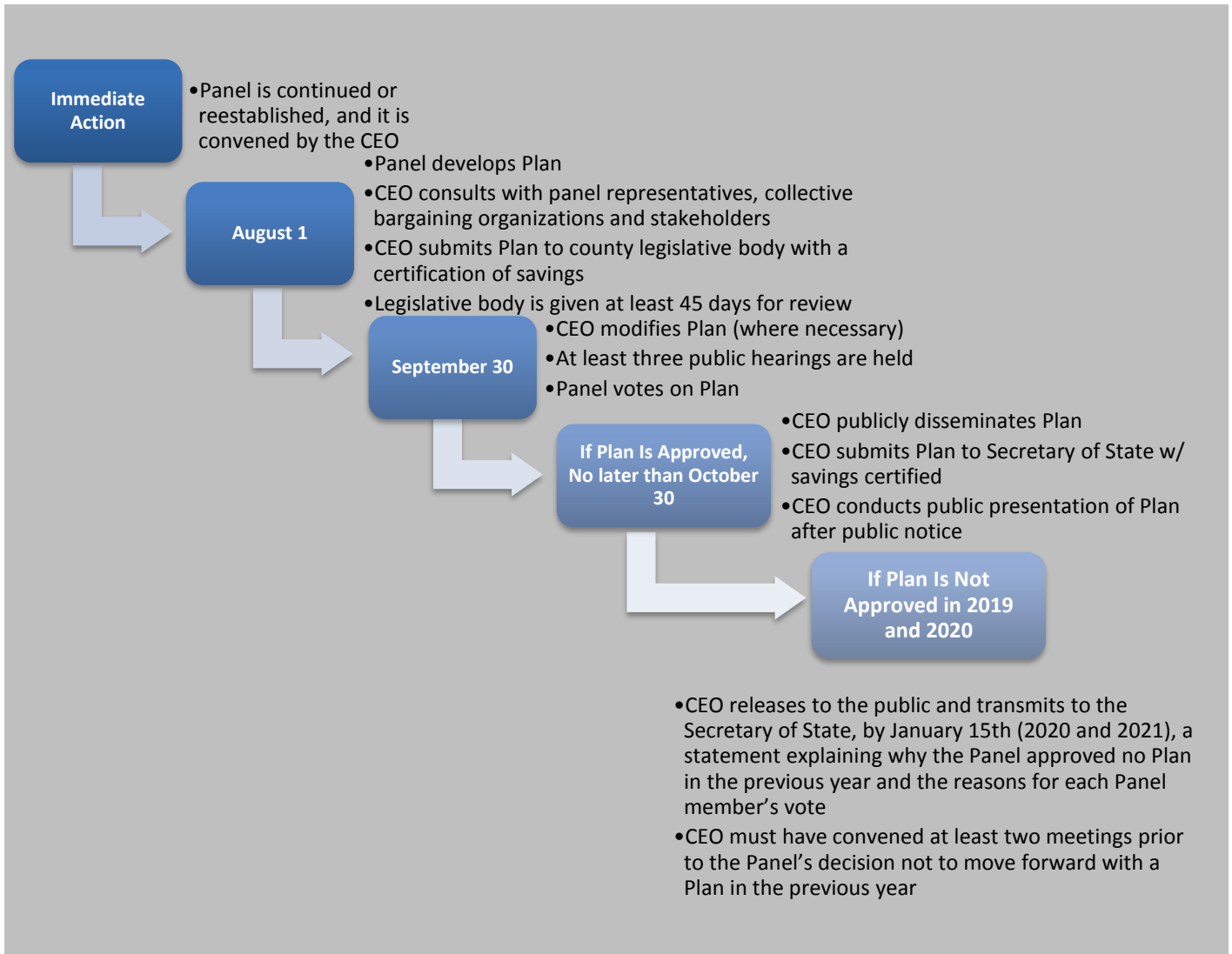
While much of Article 12-I of the General Municipal Law (effective April 12, 2018, and covering the CWSSI for years 2019, 2020 and 2021) is similar in substance to Part BBB of Chapter 59 of the Laws of 2017 (covering CWSSI activities in years 2017 and 2018), there are some differences to note that warrant the issuance of this new guidance document. One such change is that, for CWSSI in 2019, 2020 and 2021, the Chief Executive Officer of each county is authorized to add to the membership of and participation on the existing (or a reestablished) Panel by inviting fire districts and fire protection districts to join the county's Panel, in addition to any school district, board of cooperative educational services, or special improvement district. Another notable distinction is that final approved Plans for years 2019, 2020 and 2021 will be submitted directly to the Department of State, rather than the Division of the Budget. Also, General Municipal Law Article 12-I provides more flexibility in the timeframes for CWSSI Panel activities, as time periods rather than specific dates are mandated, leaving decisions regarding the specific dates on which certain actions may take place to the Panel and County CEO.

To the extent that the \$225 million appropriation for CWSSI made in the SFY19 Enacted Budget is available, local governments participating in the CWSSI in 2019, 2020 and 2021 will continue to be eligible for a state match of the net savings resulting from the implementation of new shared services actions not included in a previous Plan.

## Summary of the CWSSI Timeline

The current law dictates that the same steps in the CWSSI process be followed, but allows for more flexibility with the timeline. For years 2019, 2020, and 2021, the County CEO is required to annually convene the Panel. Chart 1 and the Plan Development Timeline section below illustrate a process that, if followed by each county, would fully comply with the requisite timeframes for the CWSSI through December 31st, 2021. Please note that the specific dates used in Chart 1 are for purposes of example only.

**Chart 1**



After having convened at least two meetings in a calendar year, a Panel may, by majority vote, determine that it is not in the best interest of the taxpayers to revise and update a previously approved Plan or to develop a new Plan in such a year. The county CEO of such Panel shall then release to the public and transmit to the Secretary of State a statement explaining why the Panel did not approve a Plan that year, including, for each vote on a Plan, the vote taken by each Panel member and an explanation by each Panel member for his or her vote.

## Participants

The Panel Chair and Panel Members are required to participate in the development of the County-Wide Shared Services Property Tax Savings Plan, and vote on whether to approve any such Plan in a calendar year, as described in the table below. Panel meetings must comply with New York State Open Meetings Law.

| Panel   | Composition   | Duties  |
|---|---|---|
| Panel Chair (the Chief Executive Officer [CEO] of the county) | The county executive, county manager, county administrator or other chief executive of the county, or, where none, the chair of the county legislative body.  | <p>Responsible for the proper creation, development and state submission of the County-Wide Shared Services Property Tax Savings Plan (Plan).</p> <p>Must assemble and convene a Panel of Required Panel Members (see below) to work together to develop and approve the Plan and, upon request, advise the Secretary of State.</p> <p>The CEO is permitted to identify and invite the Panel participation of Optional Panel Members (see below).</p>   |
| Required Panel Members  | Mayors of every city and village, and supervisors of every town, within the county.   | Participate in development of the Plan and in advising the Secretary of State, as requested.  |
| Optional Panel Members  | One representative of the governing body of any school district, board of cooperative educational services (BOCES), fire district, fire protection district and/or special improvement district in the county, upon receipt and acceptance of an invitation to participate in the Panel from the Panel Chair (CEO). | <p>Vote on matters before the Panel in a calendar year, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Whether it is in the best interest of taxpayers to adopt a revised, updated or new Plan;</li> <li>2) Adopting a revised, updated, or new Plan; and</li> <li>3) What advice to provide to the Secretary.</li> </ol> <p>If no Plan is approved in a calendar year, each Member must provide in writing to the CEO the vote the Member took with an explanation for the vote.</p> |

## Plan Development and Submission

The goal of the county-wide planning process is to save property taxpayers money, by identifying collaborative opportunities for shared services between as many local governments as possible. The Panel should consider prospects for short-term and long-term savings by thinking of the process as multi-year planning that can be amended annually identifying all potential property tax saving actions and a timeline for their undertaking. The CEO must submit in each calendar year a Plan to the Secretary of State in accordance with the timeline outlined below, or transmit a statement to the Secretary explaining why the Panel failed to approve a Plan for the year.

### Plan Development Timeline

The following Plan development timeline outlines responsibilities and important timeframes. Example dates have been inserted for illustrative purposes to help facilitate the collaboration and work on the County-Wide Shared Services Property Tax Savings Plan.

| Timeline  |  |
|---|--|
| Start Immediately   |  |
| Action  | Explanation  |
| <p><b><u>The CEO shall</u></b> convene a Shared Services Panel within the county.</p>   | <p><b><u>Creation of the Panel</u></b><br/>The CEO shall serve as chair of the Panel. In addition to the CEO, the Panel must consist of the mayor of every city and village within the county, and the supervisor of every town within the county.</p> |
| <p><b><u>The CEO may</u></b> invite to participate on the Panel any: School District, BOCES, fire district, fire protection district and/or Special Improvement District.</p> | <p>Upon invitation by the CEO, the governing body of the invited entity may accept the invitation by selecting, by a majority vote, a representative of the governing body to serve on the Panel.</p>  |

During the Calendar Year (2019, 2020, and 2021)

**The CEO shall** consult with and take recommendations from Panel representatives.

**Development of the Initial Plan**

The CEO shall regularly consult with and take recommendations from all the representatives of the Panel as well as the representative of each collective bargaining unit of the county and the cities, towns, and villages and other optional invited Panel members.

**The CEO shall** submit the Plan to the county legislative body. The Plan must be accompanied by a certification as to the accuracy of the property tax savings.

**Submission to the County Legislative Body**

CEO shall submit the Plan to the county legislative body. The Plan must be accompanied by a certification as to the accuracy of the property tax savings. The following certification may be used: *“By my signature below, I hereby certify that the savings identified and contained herein are true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.”*

Thereafter, the county legislative body shall review the Plan, and may, by a majority of its members, issue an advisory report with recommendations to the CEO. At least 45 days must be provided to the legislative body for review of the Plan, prior to a Panel vote on the Plan.

**The CEO may** modify the Plan in response to any advisory report issued by the county legislative body.

**Public Hearings, Modifications, and Panel Vote on Plan**

Upon receipt of an advisory report from the county legislative body, the CEO may modify the Plan. If modified, the CEO shall produce an updated certification as to the accuracy of the property tax savings.

**The CEO shall** arrange three or more public hearings to occur within the county.

**At Least Three Public Hearings**

The CEO, the county legislative body, and the Panel shall accept input and testimony on the Plan from the: public, civic, business, labor, and community leaders. To facilitate such input, a minimum of three public hearings shall be held within the county. All such public hearings shall be conducted prior to the submission of the Plan to a vote of the Panel. Public notice of all such hearings shall be provided at least one week prior in the manner prescribed in subdivision 1 of section 104 of the Public Officers Law. This process should begin as early as possible, as at least three public hearings must be conducted prior to the Panel vote on the Plan.

**The Panel shall** vote on the Plan submitted by CEO.

A majority vote of the Panel is required for approval of the Plan. Each Panel Member must state in writing the reason for his or her vote. However, prior to the vote each member of the Panel may remove any proposed action that affects his or her local government. Written notice of the removal will be provided to the CEO prior to the Panel-wide vote.

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>If the Plan is Approved, no later than 30 days following Approval by the Panel, the CEO shall</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Finalize the Plan;</b></li> <li><b>2. Submit the final, approved Plan to the Secretary of State with a certification of the Plan and the accuracy of its projected property tax savings;</b></li> <li><b>3. Disseminate the Plan to residents of the county in a concise, clear, and coherent manner using words with common and everyday meanings; and</b></li> <li><b>4. Conduct a public presentation of the Plan</b> (with public notice provided at least one week prior to such public presentation in the manner specified in Public Officers Law §104(1)).</li> </ol> |  |
| <p><b><u>The Panel may</u></b> decide not to approve any Plan in a calendar year.</p>  | <p><b><u>At Least Two Public Meetings Must be Convened:</u></b></p> <p><i>“After having convened at least two public meetings in a calendar year, a Panel may, by majority vote, determine that it is not in the best interest of the taxpayers to review and update a previously approved Plan or to develop a new Plan in such year and present to the public.”</i> Thereafter, by the next January 15th, the <b>*CEO shall</b> release a statement to the Secretary of State and the public that no such Plan was approved.</p> |
| <p><b>By January 15<sup>th</sup> of the Following Year, if No Plan is Approved in the Previous Calendar Year</b></p>   |  |
| <p><b><u>*The CEO shall</u></b> release a statement to the Secretary of State and the public, if no approved Plan is transmitted for the Secretary for a calendar year.</p>  | <p><b><u>Statement to the Secretary of State and Public on no Plan</u></b></p> <p>By January 15th, 2020 and 2021, following the calendar year during which a Panel failed to approve a Plan, the CEO must release a statement to the public and transmit the statement to the Secretary of State. Such statement should explain why the Panel did not approve a Plan during the previous calendar year and it should include the vote of the Panel, the vote of each Panel Member, and the reasons for each Member’s vote.</p>     |

### Plan Contents

County-Wide Shared Services Property Tax Savings Plans should include “actions” that relate but are not limited to shared and coordinated actions that can be implemented from January 1st of the subsequent calendar year of the Plan’s approval. “Actions” in the Plan can be described as actions, projects or proposals. However, each must be implemented among the county, and the cities, towns and villages within the county, as well as any invited school districts, BOCES, fire districts, fire protection districts and/or special improvement districts.

The Plan must contain new recurring property tax savings to be achieved through actions such as, but not limited to, the elimination of duplicative services; shared services arrangements including, joint purchasing, shared highway equipment, shared storage facilities, shared plowing services and energy and insurance purchasing cooperatives; the reduction of back-office administrative overhead; and improved coordination of services.



If the Plan contains a proposed action that is subject to a procedural requirement imposed under other law, such as a referendum, then the planned action will not be operative until said procedural requirement occurs.

## **Appendix A**

The Plan must begin with the summary document (APPENDIX A) when it is publicly disseminated and when it is submitted to the Secretary of State.

The individual proposals contained within each county plan must be written in a concise, clear, and coherent manner. An Appendix A spreadsheet (electronic version) has been provided to help with the county shared services planning process and counties are encouraged to prepare their plans using the spreadsheet. Notably, the cells beneath the “Project Category” column on the “Projects—Actions” tab of the Appendix A spreadsheet includes drop-downs of categories/subcategories each county may use in tracking and reporting project details. Should you have difficulty with this step, please contact the Department of State for assistance at [countywidesharedservices@dos.ny.gov](mailto:countywidesharedservices@dos.ny.gov).

A certification of the Plan and the property tax savings set forth therein is required when the final Plan is transmitted by the CEO to Secretary of State (APPENDIX B, Certification). The Panel Chair (CEO) may obtain individual certifications from all local governments participating in each Plan action from which demonstrable savings are expected to generate.

### **Plan Submission**

Plans approved as part of the County-Wide Shared Services Initiative must be transmitted to the New York Secretary of State with a summary cover sheet and a signed certification of savings, as illustrated in APPENDIX A of this guidance document.

Specific instructions for the manner in which finalized Plans, including the required Plan summary and signed certification, may be transmitted to the Secretary of State will be forthcoming.

### **State Support**

The Department of State will provide technical assistance to local governments engaged in this Initiative. FAQs and all previously submitted plans are available on the Governor’s website. Please check regularly at <https://www.ny.gov/programs/shared-services-initiative> for additional updates and assistance opportunities. The Department of State has established an email address ([countywidesharedservices@dos.ny.gov](mailto:countywidesharedservices@dos.ny.gov)) through which questions about Plan content and other questions and requests may be submitted.

Participation in other grant programs supporting local government consolidation, dissolution, or government reorganization does not disqualify entities for the one-time match under this initiative.

### **Panel Continuance and Recommendations to the Secretary of State**

During calendar years 2019, 2020 and 2021, each county must continue to maintain its Panel after discharging its yearly Initiative activities related to the development, approval, state submission, and public dissemination of new, revised, or updated Plans.

In addition, in accordance with Article 12-I of the General Municipal Law, the Secretary of State may request, and the Panel may provide, recommendations concerning matters related to the operations of local governments and shared services initiatives, including, but not limited to, making recommendations regarding grant proposals incorporating elements of shared services, government dissolutions, government and service consolidations, or property taxes and such other grants where the Secretary of State deems the input of the Panels to be in the best interest of the public. The Panel shall advance such advice or recommendations by a vote of the majority of the members present at such meeting.

## APPENDIX A: County-Wide Shared Services Property Tax Savings Plan Summary

### Instructions

Complete the attached Appendix A as follows:

1. **Contact Information:** You are required to complete the contact information.
2. **Rows 1 - 4:** In each header line fill-in the information in red. You are required to list the name of each participating local government and the name of its representative on the Panel, and how each such local government representative voted (Yes or No)\* on the Plan.
3. **Rows 5 - 11:** You are required to answer all questions concerning local property taxes and the tax savings that will be realized from the implementation of actions included in the Plan.
4. **Projects - Actions:** A table has been provided for you to list the projects/proposals/actions that will be included in this year's Plan. If you choose to use the table, you must enter the Project Title, Project Partners, Project Description, Project Category and Total Anticipated Savings for 2020, 2021 and annually thereafter.

Counties are encouraged to prepare their Plans using the following categories:

1. public health and insurance;
2. emergency services;
3. sewer, water, and waste management systems;
4. energy procurement and efficiency;
5. parks and recreation;
6. education and workforce training;
7. law and courts;
8. shared equipment, personnel, and services;
9. joint purchasing;
10. governmental reorganization;
11. transportation and highway departments; and
12. records management and administrative functions.

\* The written justification provided by each Panel representative in support of his or her vote on the Plan should be attached to Appendix A (County-Wide Shared Services Property Tax Savings Plan Summary), as Exhibit 1.

**APPENDIX B: Certification**

**CERTIFICATION OF PLAN AND PROPERTY TAX SAVINGS TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE**

By my signature below, I hereby certify that the County-Wide Shared Services Property Tax Savings Plan submitted herewith is final, that it was completed in accordance with the requirements of Article 12-I of the General Municipal Law, and that the savings identified and contained herein are true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief.

\_\_\_\_\_  
County Chief Executive Officer (Print Name)

(Signature) \_\_\_\_\_

(Date) \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX C: Best Practices

In addition to the use of Appendix A: County-Wide Shared Services Property Tax Savings Plan Summary, the development of a similarly well-organized narrative is highly recommended. It is recommended that counties review and consider “A Review of the Plans Submitted Under the State County-Wide Shared Services Initiative,” as authored in October 2017 by The Rockefeller Institute of Government, The Benjamin Center, and the Center for Technology in Government (available online at: <http://rockinst.org/issue-area/review-plans-submitted-state-county-wide-shared-services-initiative-2/>). The Review outlines the “lessons learned” from the plans submitted to the state during the first round of the Initiative.