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E C O N O M I C F U T U R E

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REGIONAL DATABASE DETAILING COST OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS DEVELOPED, AVAILABLE TO PUBLIC

CLEVELAND (July 14, 2008) – An online database detailing how much the hundreds of governmental units throughout the 16 counties of Northeast Ohio collect in taxes and spend on services is available for public review.

The Center for Governmental Research (CGR) in Rochester, N.Y., which was asked to assess the cost of government in the Northeast Ohio region, developed the database. CGR also incorporated information in the database that makes it possible to compare local costs to government expenditures in other selected regions of the United States.

The database and research were funded by the Samuel H. and Maria Miller Foundation, Greater Cleveland Partnership, Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce, Youngstown-Warren Regional Chamber of Commerce, The George Gund Foundation and the Fund for Our Economic Future.

A link to the database is available on the Fund for Our Economic Future's Web site at www.futurefundneo.org.

"The online database allows Ohio taxpayers, government officials, students in classrooms and anyone else to find out what a particular local government is paying for, where it gets its revenues and how costs compare with selected peer areas," said Charles Zettek Jr., director of government management services for CGR. "In essence, people now have at their fingertips an interactive 'data dictionary' that they can use in countless ways to educate themselves about local governments in the Northeast Ohio region."

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Robert Jaquay, vice president of the Fund for Our Economic Future, said, “Our region is engaged in an intense economic global competition, and we must be smart about how we invest our public dollars. An essential first step is increasing our ability to measure government expenditures. We expect that elected officials and the public will use this information to inform ongoing and new efforts to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of government in Northeast Ohio.”

Zettek said developing the database was challenging. “There is no one complete source of government spending and revenue data in Ohio,” Said Zettek. Unlike some other states, according to CGR, Ohio does not collect local government spending data in a consistent manner, and not every government entity complies with the requirement that it report financial data every five years to the U.S. Census of Governments.

“As a result, what CGR has compiled is the most comprehensive-to-date information about government spending and revenues for the 16-county Northeast Ohio region. Although it was not possible to capture data for every government entity, the data is certainly accurate enough to serve as the starting point for comparisons of government spending,” Zettek said. Database users, he added, can also make comparisons with other regions, since CGR also examined government spending and revenues for Dayton; Columbus; Indianapolis; Raleigh-Durham, N.C.; and Minneapolis-St. Paul.

Key Findings

CGR said the key findings of its examination of government spending in Northeast Ohio included:

- 656 Ohio government entities (16 counties, 169 municipalities, 164 townships, 99 special districts and 208 school districts) provided data for the most recent Census of Governments (2002) and reported total spending of nearly \$16 billion; more than 10% of the region’s overall economy.
- In the prior Census (1997), 852 governments had reported. Thus, the \$16 billion in government spending reported to the most recent Census is conservative. Had all entities provided information, reported spending would have been higher.

- In analyzing data for the 604 Northeast Ohio governments that reported for all three of the most recent Census of Governments (1992, 1997 and 2002), CGR found spending rose from \$9.25 billion to \$15.7 billion. On a per capita basis, spending rose 68%. The inflation rate in the Midwest for the same period was about 29%.
- There is a wide disparity in spending on a per capita basis among the counties in Northeast Ohio. Even with under reporting of information, the database illustrates there is a multiplicity of government entities delivering similar services in the region.
- Of all regions studied, the two with the highest government expenditures – the Twin Cities and Northeast Ohio – also had the greatest number of governmental units.

Timeliness of the Project

The U.S. Census of Governments is presently collecting data for 2007 and will make it publicly available in 2009. It is anticipated that 2007 data for local governments in the region will be added to the database developed by CGR.

“It is very important that all governments in Northeast Ohio send the required information to the 2007 Census of Governments. Governments must file by July to be included,” said Zettek. “If all governments in the region report, the database can be updated through 2007. That would mean anyone in Northeast Ohio could have access to critical information, and that, in turn, can lead to informed discussion and decision making.”

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ABOUT THE FUND FOR OUR ECONOMIC FUTURE

The Fund for Our Economic Future (www.futurefundneo.org) is a collaboration of more than 100 foundations, organizations and philanthropists from across Northeast Ohio that strengthens the region’s economic competitiveness through grantmaking, public engagement and research.