

National Association of Regional Councils

Economic & Community Development Committee Policies & Priorities

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports federal funding for regional economic development programs in urban, suburban and rural areas that invest in infrastructure development, job creation and local, regional, and national economies.

The economic health and competitiveness of the United States depends on creating strong regional and local economies. Regional planning organizations – large and small, urban and rural – are experienced leaders in economic development, promoting sustainable, workable, and livable communities. The federal government must leverage public and private investment, incentives, innovation and entrepreneurship to ensure that local governments and regional planning organizations have the tools needed to make communities economically vibrant and sustainable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- NARC supports an enhanced federal-state-local-regional partnership on economic development issues.
- NARC urges the federal government to engage directly with local elected officials, as they work closely with their communities to understand local needs and opportunities.
- Federal economic development policies must encourage local collaboration on a regional-scale for the planning and implementation of economic development initiatives and infrastructure projects in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.
- NARC urges the federal government to enhance opportunities for public-private partnerships with businesses and academic institutions in urban and rural areas.
- The federal government should continue expanding federal interagency partnerships to provide for continued involvement and coordination with the U.S. Department of Commerce and U.S. Department of Agriculture.
- NARC supports federal-state-regional commissions such as the Appalachian Regional Commission.

The federal government should:

- The federal government should engage directly with local elected officials, who understand the local needs, opportunities, and obligations through their “on-the-ground” perspective.
- Provide continued and robust funding of the Economic Development Administration (EDA).
- Increase funding and flexibility for EDA’s core programs – Planning, Public Works, and Economic Adjustment Assistance programs.
- Support regional economic cluster initiatives through new funding sources that benefit urban and rural areas.
- Support agency initiatives to coordinate workforce programs aimed at building job skills to meet the needs of new employers.

- Reauthorize the Farm Bill with enhanced resources for rural development opportunities, particularly related to infrastructure maintenance and creation; streamline the application and administration processes to improve accessibility for rural constituents.
- Increase disaster response and recovery funding in applicable reauthorization bills.
- Fund brownfields cleanup and assessment programs and eliminate regulatory hurdles that hinder economic development.
- Support regional food system planning that links rural and urban networks, and connects comprehensive regional planning.
- Provide increased funding for local capacity and technical assistance to local governments and regional planning organizations.
- Authorize “Regional Infrastructure Improvement Zones” (RIIZs), a change to the federal tax code that would allow for businesses or individuals to make tax deductible contributions toward regional planning organization pre-approved infrastructure projects.

Federal economic development policy should:

- Support locally-driven, flexible, and livable community strategies to help spur economic development opportunities.
- Provide opportunities that encourage and support regional approaches to comprehensive economic development.
- Endorse holistic approaches to economic development and seek coordination among federal agencies that are responsible for economic development issues to streamline and maximize programs, policies, and funding.
- Assist communities and all regions in pursuing economic development and vitality.
- Use current and create new federal tools to help distressed communities with long-term economic stagnation, persistent unemployment, chronic shortages of private investment capital, and poverty.
- Support regional planning efforts for broadband expansion and implementation, particularly in rural areas.
- Provide incentives to regions and localities that perform comprehensive, integrated regional planning and innovative implementation that crosslink transportation, housing, and economic development with environmental considerations.
- Support opportunities and incentives for expansion of alternative energy research programs and renewable energy grants to enhance urban and rural economies.
- Enhance efforts that provide a new framework of innovation for promoting economic development and job creation in rural communities.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports robust funding for the Economic Development Administration (EDA), which invests in infrastructure, job creation programs, and local, regional, and national economies.

EDA’s mission is “to lead the federal economic development agenda by promoting innovation and competitiveness, preparing American regions for growth and success in the worldwide economy.” In order to accomplish this, EDA must be empowered to ensure regional economic development needs are met to grow our economy and create jobs.

EDA is the only federal agency focused solely on private sector job growth and serves as a vital resource for distressed communities striving to improve their local economies through bottom-up economic

development strategies with infrastructure grants, strategic planning assistance, business development capital, or technical assistance. EDA's programs help create new American jobs and leverage private sector investments for every taxpayer dollar invested.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- NARC supports policies that enhance the federal government's partnership with local governments and regional planning organizations on economic development issues.
- NARC encourages the federal government to engage directly with local elected officials.
- The federal government must encourage local collaboration on a regional-scale for the planning and implementation of economic development initiatives and infrastructure projects in metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas.

The federal government should:

- Provide EDA with robust funding to provide for programs and operations resources at all levels of the agency. EDA dollars are a critical resource in the face of the fiscal budget crisis currently affecting many state and local governments.
- Increase funding and flexibility for EDA's core programs – Planning, Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance programs, which should remain the primary focus of EDA.
- Increase individual planning grants for Economic Development Districts (EDDs).
- Promote regional approaches to economic development.
- Provide funding for regional business incubators and clusters.
- Authorize "Regional Infrastructure Improvement Zones" (RIIZs), a change to the federal tax code that would allow for businesses or individuals to make tax deductible contributions toward regional planning organization pre-approved infrastructure projects.

Federal economic development administration policy should:

- Provide improved guidance on the responsibilities of EDDs.
- Reinforce the agency's long-standing relationship with EDDs to secure a comprehensive and consistent network throughout the country.
- Examine the expanded use of Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDs), comprehensive regional plans done every five years, to direct all economic development spending within the region by coordinating other federal agency funding.
- Consider coordinating CEDs with other federally-required planning processes, such as regional transportation planning.
- Provide additional Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) resources with increased local flexibility.
- Support a balance between public and private sector investment to raise planning funding.
- Encourage projects that contribute to sustainable construction, resource conservation and green economy opportunities.
- Increase EDA's role in disaster planning and recovery.
- Provide opportunities that encourage and support regional approaches to comprehensive economic development and future interagency partnerships, aligning economic, community, and business development initiatives with workforce needs.
- Include EDA, its programs, and expertise for job creation, as an important partner in the federal interagency Sustainable Communities Partnership.
- Create new federal tools to help distressed communities address poverty, long-term economic stagnation, persistent unemployment, and chronic shortages of private capital.

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports sufficient and sustained funding for programs within the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that support housing and sustainable community development for urban, suburban and rural areas.

Federal programs and funding are vital to community planning, development, sustainability, and progress to guarantee a competitive edge in a global marketplace, while providing opportunities for American businesses, communities, and families.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- NARC supports a federal-state-local-regional partnership to resolve housing and community-based issues within urban, suburban and rural regions.
- NARC urges the federal government to promote public-private partnerships to enhance community development initiatives.
- NARC recommends that the federal government engage directly with local elected officials on housing issues.
- NARC recommends the expansion of the federal interagency Sustainable Communities Partnership.

Narc supports funding programs that:

- Invest in and stabilize neighborhoods in urban, suburban, and rural regions.
- Increase HUD funding to allow for expansion of economic and community development programs, both rural and urban, that promote regional approaches.
- Provide funding for comprehensive, integrated regional planning and implementation in all regions through HUD's Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant program (SCRPG).
- Authorize and fund the Livable Communities Act.
- Support funding for proven programs like Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), HOME Partnerships Investment Program, Neighborhood Stabilization Program, Brownfields Economic Development Initiative (BEDI) and the Rural Housing and Economic Development (RHED) Program.
- Support regional food system planning that links rural and urban networks and connects comprehensive regional planning.
- Authorize "Regional Infrastructure Improvement Zones" (RIIZs), a change to the federal tax code that would allow for businesses or individuals to make tax deductible contributions toward regional planning organization pre-approved infrastructure projects.

Federal housing, urban & community development policy should:

- Encourage coordination of federal agencies responsible for housing and community development.
- Encourage locally-driven regional collaborations across municipal and geographic boundaries.
- Promote a collaborative process with practitioners and stakeholders at the federal, state, regional, and local levels.
- Provide flexibility for local communities and regions to determine priorities.
- Provide incentives to regions that perform comprehensive, integrated regional planning that links transportation, housing and economic development with environmental considerations.
- Expand programs focusing on diverse, affordable, and workforce housing options.
- Support the Community Renewal Initiative to help distressed rural and urban communities designated as Renewal Communities (RC), Enterprise Zones (EZ), and Empowerment Communities (EC)

execute comprehensive revitalization plans with increased access to a package of federal tax credits, bonding authority and grants for implementation.

- Encourage in-fill redevelopment of urban, suburban and rural areas.
- Remove barriers, provide incentives and allow flexibility to identify and remediate industrial and commercial land (brownfields) as a catalyst for redevelopment of economically distressed areas.
- Ensure that any decisions regarding land use rest within the jurisdiction of local governments.

OLDER AMERICANS ACT

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports sufficient and flexible funding in the reauthorization of a modernized Older Americans Act (OAA) to meet the needs of the growing aging population and the regional planning organizations responsible for administering crucial support services.

Many of NARC's member regional planning organizations function as or work closely with local Agencies on Aging (AAAs). As the senior population continues to grow, regional planning organizations are increasingly focused on preparing communities to address the significant and unique needs of this demographic. Therefore, it is important that the OAA provide adequate support and respond accordingly to allow state and AAAs the flexibility to adapt programs that help seniors age with dignity and independence without imposing unfunded mandates or other onerous requirements on already resource-strapped service providers.

NARC supports federal policies that:

- Support and enhance the federal government partnership with local governments and regional planning organizations on aging issues.
- Ensure that the current Aging Network, including U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA), AAAs, Title VI Native American aging programs (Title VI), and state and territorial agencies on aging, remain the focal point for providing aging services while effectively incorporating over 30,000 public and private stakeholders nationwide.
- Support better integrating AAA and Title VI programs into long-term regional planning to guarantee that aging issues are considered in developing land use, housing, transportation, and economic, community and workforce development policies and programs.
- Increase support for interagency partnerships to more effectively coordinate the AoA, AAAs and Title VI programs into current federal programs including the Sustainable Communities Initiative activities, Workforce Investment Act program delivery, and coordinated transportation and transit planning.
- Strengthen and codify the relationship between AAAs and Aging and Disability Resource Centers (ADRCs) to clarify that the AAA role is set as the local planning and coordinating agency and the ADRC as the primary local service provider.

Federal funding programs should:

- Increase authorization levels for OAA to ensure that all titles, programs, and activities have sufficient support to address the rapidly growing aging population, particularly those individuals 85 and older who represent the most vulnerable and greatest need of aging services.
- Provide specific authorization to fund and outline the role of planning, enabling AAAs and Title VI programs to coordinate with regional planning organizations and stakeholders to develop a comprehensive direction for local Aging Network activities.

- Increase authorization levels and maintain or expand local flexibility to ensure that AAA and Title VI programs can efficiently and effectively incorporate local services provided under the National Family Caregiver Support Programs.
- Authorize dedicated funding under the disaster assistance program to guarantee that the unique needs of older adults are considered in federal, state and local emergency preparedness planning and service delivery during disasters.

Federal Older Americans Act policy should:

- Preserve or expand the OAA’s current person-centered, community-centric and locally flexible service delivery.
- Avoid imposing new restrictions on AAA and Title VI service providers that would inhibit or prevent effective service delivery.
- Support cost effective strategies such as aging in place, which are designed to keep seniors nationwide healthy and independent.
- Expand capacity building services to better help staff and volunteer providers with the technical, professional development, and performance evaluation support to guarantee consistent, sufficient local service delivery.
- Provide opportunities that encourage and support regional approaches to comprehensive planning, taking into account the aging population, as well as aging service delivery.
- Develop regional case studies to demonstrate regional planning best practices for aging planning and service delivery.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports sufficient and sustained funding of programs designed to meet the workforce needs of businesses and the training needs of individuals to ensure competition in all sectors within the global marketplace, most notably in the reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

A trained, readily available workforce is essential to retain and attract new industries. Regional planning organizations promote regional, market-based approaches to worker training through strategic alliances with the private sector, community leaders and academic institutions; economies of scale; and, opportunities for program replicability. Local elected officials provide strong leadership and sound oversight for workforce programs. Creating and incentivizing a fluid and flexible workforce can assist in a rapidly changing economy and provide both employers and workers new opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- NARC supports a federal-state-local-regional partnership to resolve critical workforce and sustainable employment issues through an effective national workforce development system.
- NARC urges the federal government to uphold the authorities, responsibilities and obligations that are reserved to the states and localities on labor and employment law.
- The federal government should engage directly with local elected officials, who understand the local needs, opportunities, and obligations through their “on-the-ground” perspective.
- The federal government should assist regions in maintaining an economic environment that promotes job creation and job access.

Federal workforce policies should:

- Support reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) and restoration funding cuts totaling over 40 percent of the program's allocation since 1998. Ensure reauthorization continues to provide flexibility for state and local officials.
- Examine the creation of a "GI Bill" and/or tax deferred assistance to assist workers in financing back to school opportunities as a possible solution to rising unemployment and the needs of emerging business.

Federal workforce programs should:

- Encourage competitive, inclusive regional economies through training a diverse workforce to meet the needs of high-tech employers and advanced industry clusters.
- Ensure various types of employment training are operated by the existing local workforce delivery system and managed by the Workforce Investment Boards in partnership with local elected officials.
- Incent coordination among the many government agencies responsible for workforce development and training.
- Encourage workforce development opportunities based on urban, suburban and rural local and regional economic need.
- Promote regional and market-based approaches to worker training through strategic alliances with local governments, the private sector, community leaders and academic institutions.
- Allow incumbent workers access to federally-sponsored training and employment programs to upgrade skills and adjust to changing job markets.
- Urge, where applicable, the expansion of "green job" workforce training and update traditional workforce development programs to train at-risk/underemployed people in emerging energy, environmental and advanced manufacturing skills.
- Support real-time training initiatives.
- Incentivize implementation of cross-systems or cross-jurisdictional workforce development-related initiatives.
- Coordinate and align resources and strategies between human services, economic development, housing, transportation and workforce development.
- Utilize the training of the current workforce to determine future sectors for workforce development.
- Encourage regional forums to identify and detail plans to support specific workforce development initiatives.
- Support the modernization of the workplace by granting flexibility and choice.
- Support transitional jobs designed to provide temporary employment that can lead to full-time permanent employment.
- Examine the benefits of a consolidated federally-funded, block grant national workforce development system to align resources and streamline requirements.
- Grant local and regional workforce development entities authority and flexibility to creatively respond to local and regional employment and economic development issues.
- Encourage the integration of workforce development into plans that build livable/sustainable communities.

The Census

The demographic, social, economic and housing data collected through the decennial Census and the American Community Survey (ACS) is vital to successful planning in regions. Therefore, NARC supports robust funding for the Census Bureau to conduct these programs. NARC also supports the mandatory nature of the ACS.