



## **Economic & Community Development Committee**

### **Policies & Priorities**

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports the notion that economic and community issues are best solved when communities work together at a regional scale to address them. Regional leaders are partnering with local education and workforce experts to prepare individuals and businesses for new workplace opportunities, markets and technologies. More people are choosing to age in place, challenging regional councils to consider how they can better connect seniors to transportation, healthcare resources and social activities. Regional councils are continuing to plan for, build and expand local infrastructure – including roads, bridges, water/wastewater systems, public facilities and broadband. NARC members are also working with their local stakeholders to respond to the nation’s increasing rent and housing prices. Through these actions and more, regional councils are promoting sustainable, workable and livable communities for the 21st century.

#### **REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

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 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**

##### **The federal government should:**

- Provide opportunities that encourage and support regional approaches to comprehensive economic development and future interagency partnerships, aligning economic, community, business development initiatives and infrastructure projects with workforce needs.
- Provide increased, flexible funding for local capacity building and technical assistance to local governments and regional planning organizations in their pursuit for regional economic diversification and vitality.
- Support opportunities for partnerships with businesses and academic institutions in urban and rural areas.
- Support full funding for federal-state-regional commissions such as the Appalachian Regional Commission, Delta Regional Authority, Northern Border Regional Commission and Southeast Crescent Regional Commission.
- Enhance efforts that provide best practices and a new framework of innovation for promoting economic development and job creation in rural communities.
- Reauthorize the Farm Bill with enhanced resources for rural development opportunities, particularly related to infrastructure maintenance and creation.
- Continue to support the USDA Strategic Economic and Community Development Program, which gives priority for projects that support the implementation of regional economic development plans.
- Streamline the application and administration processes of federal grant and loan programs to improve accessibility for rural constituents.

- Include federal funding in applicable disaster supplemental packages and reauthorization bills that will go towards rebuilding a local economy and supporting displaced workers in the aftermath of a natural disaster.
- Encourage regional economic cluster initiatives, innovation labs and business incubators that benefit urban and rural areas through new federal funding sources and technical assistance.
- Remove barriers, provide incentives and allow flexibility to identify and remediate industrial and commercial land as a catalyst for redevelopment of economically distressed areas.
- Support opportunities and incentives for expansion of alternative energy research programs and renewable energy grants to enhance urban and rural economies that are reliant on non-renewable energy sources such as coal.
- Support regional food system planning and programs that links rural and urban networks.
- Use current and newly created federal tools to help economically distressed communities with long-term economic stagnation, persistent unemployment, chronic shortages of private investment capital, and poverty.
- Provide federal funding opportunities for communities seeking to address technologically-driven economic shifts, including automation of jobs.

### **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION**

The Economic Development Administration (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 and technical assistance. Many NARC members serve as the federally designated Economic Development Districts (EDDs) of their region. NARC supports robust funding for the EDA, which invests in infrastructure, job creation programs, and local, regional and national economies. In order to accomplish this, EDA must be empowered to ensure regional economic development needs are met to grow our economy and create jobs.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **The federal government should:**

- Reauthorize the EDA at robust funding levels to support the agency’s core mission to promote innovation and competitiveness while preparing American regions for growth and success in the worldwide economy.
- Increase funding and flexibility for EDA’s core programs, including Public Works, Partnership Planning Grants, Technical Assistance, Research and Evaluation, Trade Adjustment Assistance and Economic Adjustment Assistance.
- Strengthen professional development training, organizational capacity-building and continued learning for EDA’s national network of federally-designated Economic Development Districts (EDDs).
- Increase individual planning grants for EDDs.
- Examine the expanded use of Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) 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 and transferred local ownership to local control after a specified number of years.
- Encourage projects that contribute to sustainable construction, resource conservation and green economy opportunities.

- Recognize the role that EDA plays in assisting our regions through disaster recovery and resiliency efforts and that the economic resiliency of our regions and local businesses ahead of disasters is critical.

### **HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

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. NARC supports robust funding for programs within the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture that support housing and sustainable community development for urban, suburban and rural areas.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **The federal government should:**

- Increase HUD funding to allow for expansion of economic and community development programs in both rural and urban areas, including those that promote regional approaches.
- Increase USDA funding for programs that provide homeownership opportunities, housing development, financing and home renovations and repair to rural communities.
- Support proven programs like Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), the HOME Partnerships Investment Program, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) and the Neighborhood Stabilization Program that provide direct funding and flexibility for local communities to determine priorities.
- Increase minimum threshold for the *Davis-Bacon Act* from \$2,000 to \$200,000, increase minimum threshold for lead abatement from \$25,000 to \$50,000, and lessen environmental review required on rehabilitation projects to help federal funding for construction to be more effective for community projects.
- 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.
- Maintain the status of tax credits created to stimulate private investment in single-family and multifamily affordable housing and neighborhood revitalization, including the Low Income Housing Tax Credits, New Markets Tax Credits, Commercial Revitalization Tax Credit, Single-Family Homeownership Tax Credit, Historic Tax Credit, Earned Income Tax Credit and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit.
- Provide for the allocation of National Housing Trust Fund dollars to local governments.
- Support full funding for federal homeless assistance programs.
- Provide increases in funding to Emergency Shelter Grants to improve the quality and number of emergency shelters for homeless individuals and provide essential social services to shelter residents.
- Increase funding for mental health, medical, addiction and veteran services for the homeless.
- Reevaluate the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Veterans Affairs (VA) mortgage limits.
- Include affordable housing investments in any federal infrastructure package.
- Support federal initiatives that invest in and stabilize neighborhoods feeling the impact of the housing affordability crisis.
- Support federal strategies that preserve and expand the supply of housing for low- and moderate-income individuals and families.
- Expand programs focusing on diverse, affordable and workforce housing options.

- Encourage in-fill redevelopment of urban, suburban and rural areas.
- Preserve the tax exemption for municipal bonds to promote investment in our regions.
- Encourage the participation of faith-based and community-based organizations in housing and community development activities.

### **OLDER AMERICANS ACT**

As the senior population continues to grow, regional planning organizations – whether they serve as the locally designated Area Agencies on Aging or not – are increasingly focused on preparing communities to address the significant and unique needs of this demographic. NARC supports sufficient and flexible funding prescribed in the current version of the *Older Americans Act* (OAA) to meet the needs of the growing aging population and the regional planning organizations responsible for administering crucial support services. The OAA must provide adequate support to allow states and AAAs the flexibility to adapt programs that help seniors age with dignity and independence.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **The federal government should:**

- 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 Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act program delivery and coordinated transportation and transit planning.
- 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.
- Preserve or expand the OAA’s current person-centered, community-centric and locally flexible service delivery.
- Avoid imposing new restrictions on AAAs and Title VI service providers that would inhibit or prevent effective service delivery.
- Support cost-effective strategies such as aging in place that are designed to keep seniors nationwide healthy and independent.

- Expand local 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.
- Develop regional case studies to demonstrate regional planning best practices for aging planning and service delivery.

### **EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

Regional councils promote regional, market-based approaches to worker education and training through strategic alliances with the private sector, community leaders and academic institutions; economies of scale; and opportunities for program replicability. Some regional councils also serve as their area’s administrative body for their local Workforce Development Board. Creating and incentivizing a fluid and flexible workforce that can assist in a rapidly changing economy and provide both employers and workers new opportunities. NARC supports sufficient and sustained funding of programs designed to meet the workforce needs of businesses and the educational needs of individuals to ensure competition in all sectors within the global marketplace, most notably in the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **The federal government should:**

- Reauthorize WIOA at robust funding levels to help job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workers they need to compete in the global economy.
- Maintain efforts to uphold the authorities, responsibilities and obligations that are reserved to the states and localities on labor and employment law.
- Grant local and regional workforce development entities authority and flexibility to creatively respond to local and regional employment and economic development issues.
- Encourage various types of employment training operated by the existing local workforce delivery system and managed by the Workforce Development Boards in partnership with local elected officials.
- Recognize that even in times of low unemployment, federal investment in workforce and education is still critical to those individuals that are hardest to serve.
- Offer federal funding opportunities and technical assistance to local and regional efforts that help maintain economic environments that promote job creation and job access.
- Create a GI Bill or 401K type program to enable workers to obtain federal support for, and set aside, resources to finance back to school opportunities as a possible solution to rising unemployment and the needs of emerging business.
- Provide robust funding for the Pell Grant and expand the program to cover needed workforce skills training for short-term and certificate training programs.
- Support college preparation programs that help to bridge the transition from high school to college, provide college awareness to middle- and high-school students, and assist adults wanting to go back to school to obtain a post-secondary degree.
- Provide additional educational opportunities in multiple career pathways to retiring veterans to ensure a smooth transition from military to civilian life.
- Encourage greater use of apprenticeship programs with access to funding for local programs.

- Recognize that there are multiple career pathways that can be utilized to help individuals access high-quality, long-term careers.
- Encourage competitive, inclusive regional economies by supporting the training of a diverse workforce to meet the needs of high-tech employers and advanced industry clusters.
- Encourage regional forums to identify and detail plans to support specific workforce development initiatives.
- Promote regional and market-based approaches to worker training through strategic alliances with local governments, the private sector, community leaders and academic institutions.
- Encourage the integration of workforce development into plans that build livable/sustainable communities.
- Support transitional jobs designed to provide temporary employment for low-income workers that leads to full-time permanent employment.
- Allow incumbent workers access to federally sponsored training and employment programs so that they may upgrade their skills and adjust to changing job markets.
- Urge, where applicable, the expansion of “green job” workforce training.
- Update traditional workforce development and education programs to make sure we are training at-risk/underemployed people for the jobs of tomorrow in emerging energy, environmental and advanced manufacturing skills.
- Increase funding for skills trade training specifically for middle and high school students.
- Incentivize the integration of the workforce and education systems so there are less obstacles for K-12 and post-secondary transitions.
- Prepare for changing workforce due to impact of autonomous vehicles and emerging technology by having programs in place for the transition and retainment of transit drivers, truck drivers and service technicians (who will most likely be the first implementors of this technology).

### **THE CENSUS**

The decennial census, American Community Survey (ACS) and related surveys conducted by the U.S. Census Bureau provides critical information about our communities. NARC recognizes that the demographic, social, economic and housing data collected through these surveys is vital to planning for our regions. Funding for and robust implementation of the decennial census, ACS, and related surveys is critical to making regional leaders have the most up-to-date information needed to make long-term decisions. Additionally, NARC urges the federal government to effectively plan for and implement a fair, timely and accurate decennial census. This critical survey determines the allocation of more than \$800 billion in federal funding across regions. It also could redraw congressional districts, impacting how many federal representatives our communities have.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **The federal government should:**

- Promote the U.S. Census Bureau’s complete, accurate and timely data collection in all its surveys to inform regional councils in their long-term planning and decision-making.
- Support the implementation and mandatory nature of the ACS to improve the utility of census data and permit more frequent releases of data to demonstrate emerging local and regional trends.
- Continue to address the challenges our regions face associated with the digital divide when planning and executing the decennial census and other surveys by having the U.S. Census Bureau coordinate with their federal, state, regional and local partners.

- Maintain emphasis on the creation and work of complete count committees at the local and regional level.
- Invest in research and public outreach to further bridge language barriers for those participating in the decennial census.
- Provide additional resources, including funding and technical assistance, to rural areas that have limited literacy.
- Continue the use of local decision-making of census tracts through programs like the Local Update of Census Addresses Operation (LUCA) program and the Participant Statistical Areas Program (PSAP) and take account for any future development plans that may have an impact on census responses.
- Minimize the use of differential privacy where possible to make sure we have more accurate data from the census.
- Provide the same opportunities for residents in rural areas to participate in census surveys as those in more urban and suburban areas.

### **OPPORTUNITY ZONES**

Created by the *2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act*, the Opportunity Zones (OZ) program aims to stimulate economic development and job creation, by incentivizing long-term investments in low-income neighborhoods. NARC urges the U.S. Treasury to continue providing guidance and regulation on the OZ program to prevent abuse, encourage development that leads to public benefit and protect local jurisdictions and stakeholders. NARC also applauds the creation of the White House Opportunity and Revitalization Council, and encourages the use of this council to prioritize technical assistance for small/midsized regions and markets; foster a digital marketplace that can connect underserved communities and investors; ensure interagency coordination of federal programs and incentives that may also be active in OZs; and help investors understand their stake in the success of communities inside OZs.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **The federal government should:**

- Develop of program of accountability and performance measures to track Opportunity Funds nationally and evaluate the impact of qualified investments within Opportunity Zones and against other Opportunity Zones.
- Encourage early engagement between Opportunity Fund managers, regional councils, and locally-elected officials to reduce the chance that factors outside private control – including regulations relating to zoning, permitting, and public and environmental health – do not result in unanticipated costs or delays.
- Create a formal process for local and regional authorities to request a review of an Opportunity Fund investment that is irregular or abusive.
- Support measures that would coordinate opportunity-funded projects with federal and state grant-funded projects; and integrate opportunity-funded projects into long-term regional plans.
- Consider proposals that would allow qualified Opportunity Funds to purchase and hold municipal bonds as qualified financial property, so long as the bonds are used to finance new or improve existing infrastructure projects that are substantially all within a qualified OZ.

### **TECHNOLOGY & TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

As new and evolving technologies emerge, local governments play an important role as regulators, service providers, and consumers of these services. NARC supports the development of these new and emerging technologies where they encourage better quality of life of communities through economic development; public and homeland security matters; efficient access to information; transportation; job training; healthcare and social

services; and improved local government services. While new technologies should be allowed to flourish, a balanced approach should be taken to ensure that the traditional local regulatory role is preserved and universal access is promoted.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **The federal government should:**

- Design and support federal proposals that would increase high-speed broadband access, adoption and affordability in unserved and underserved regions.
- Create, maintain and modernize programs aimed at providing broadband access to those in low-income households through the support of low-cost plans, such as the E-Rate and Lifeline programs.
- Provide more funding and technical assistance to regional councils planning and deploying broadband to support the delivery of telehealth services to rural and low-income residents.
- Allow local governments to charge reasonable fees for the use of publicly owned land to build out wireless infrastructure Identify effective, collaborative solutions to providing high-speed Internet to unserved and underserved residents instead of pursuing a one-size-fits-all approach.
- Protect local authority over their rights-of-way, including their powers to maintain neighborhood character/aesthetic; public safety; undergrounding requirements; and fair compensation for private use of public assets.
- Oppose any legislative or regulatory proposals that seek to alter the terms of existing cable franchises, including efforts to require that non-financial obligations be subject to offset against franchise fees.
- Support federal proposals that promote community broadband, encourage public-private partnerships that provide broadband access to underserved areas, and override state preemption that would prohibit local governments from providing community broadband services to their regions.
- Include funding for broadband infrastructure as a part of any formal federal infrastructure package developed by Congress.
- Recognize the increase in smart regions projects across the country and help support them through federal funding and technical assistance.
- Provide additional resources to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to utilize the best technology and methods available to improve the FCC broadband mapping process.
- Research alternative methods to accurately represent the broadband speeds within census tract areas across the United States.
- Look at additional ways to protect the privacy and security of local government data.
- Encourage the sharing of data between all levels of government where there are opportunities to enable data sharing.
- Support no-cost data sharing between local government and private entities to allow better public decision-making.
- Ensure that regional councils are eligible entities in federal broadband grant opportunities, including the USDA Reconnect Program.