

2026 National Association of Regional Councils Federal Policy Principles

Regional councils work across jurisdictional silos to provide a thirty-thousand-foot view of their region. They convene the region's elected officials and community leaders to plan for the future and deliver services that change lives. Regional councils have the local, on-the-ground knowledge and information to connect federal funding and policy priorities to local projects, maximizing the return on each federal dollar invested and responding to the needs of local communities. Whether it's transportation, housing affordability, or job training, certain issues don't stop at county and city lines. They tackle all these issues and more.

Regional councils are also referred to as Councils of Government (COGS), Regional Planning Organizations or Agencies (RPOs/RPAs), Regional Development Organizations (RDOs), or are federally designated as Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), Economic Development Organizations (EDDs), among others.

The National Association of Regional Councils supports regional and their roles in project prioritization and programming, and promoting regional solutions that support economic growth, mobility, sustainability, and resilience. NARC also works on behalf of our regional council members to share their voice in Washington, DC. Founded in 1966 by NLC and NACo, NARC represents 140+ regional councils, which in turn represent over 550 counties and 6800 municipalities nationwide.

Economic Development

NARC believes regional collaboration is key to solving economic and community development challenges. Regional leaders work with education and workforce partners to prepare people and businesses for new technologies and markets. Councils of government are planning for and improving infrastructure—roads, bridges, water systems, broadband—while addressing rising housing costs and helping seniors age in place with access to transportation, healthcare, and social services. Through these efforts, regional councils are promoting family-friendly, wholistic, 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.

Regional Economic Development Recommendations

- 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 of 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.
- Reauthorize the Farm Bill with enhanced resources for rural development opportunities, particularly related to infrastructure construction and maintenance.
- 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.
- Use current and newly created federal tools to help economically distressed communities with long-term economic stagnation, persistent unemployment, chronic shortages of private investment, 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. To accomplish this, EDA must be empowered to ensure regional economic development needs are met to grow our economy and create jobs.

Economic Development Administration Recommendations

- Fully fund the EDA at authorized funding levels to support the agency's core mission to promote innovation and competitiveness while preparing American regions for growth and success in the global economy.
- Fully fund EDD Partnership Planning Grants at authorized levels.
- 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).
- Consider expanding the 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 ownership to local control after a specified number of years.
- Recognize the role that EDA plays in assisting our regions through disaster recovery and resiliency efforts.
- Reaffirm that the economic resiliency of our regions and local businesses ahead of disasters is critical.

HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Support strong federal investment in community planning and development programs. These programs are essential for sustainability, economic growth, and global competitiveness while creating opportunities for businesses, communities, and families. NARC advocates for robust funding for U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and U.S. Department of Agriculture programs that promote housing and sustainable development in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

Housing and Community Development Recommendations

- 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, and the Neighborhood Stabilization Program that provide direct funding and flexibility for local communities to determine priorities.
- 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,

Rehabilitation 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.
- Support federal initiatives that invest in and stabilize neighborhoods impacted by 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 infill 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 America's senior population grows, regional planning organizations—whether or not they serve as Area Agencies on Aging—are increasingly focused on preparing communities to meet the unique needs of older adults. NARC supports flexible, sufficient funding under the Older Americans Act (OAA) to help regions deliver essential services.

Older Americans Act Recommendations

- Preserve the Administration on Aging to ensure that the existing aging network—including the U.S. Administration on Aging (AoA), Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs), Title VI Native American aging programs, and state and territorial aging agencies—remains the central hub for delivering aging services, while effectively coordinating with more than 30,000 public and private stakeholders nationwide.

- Support better integration of 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 authorization levels for OAA to ensure all programs have the resources to serve the rapidly growing aging population, especially the most vulnerable individuals aged 85 and older.
- 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.
- 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.

EDUCATION and WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Regional councils help build a skilled workforce by promoting regional, market-based approaches to education and training. They form strategic partnerships with businesses, community leaders, and academic institutions, leveraging economies of scale and replicable programs. Many councils also serve as the administrative body for local Workforce Development Boards. The goal is to create a flexible workforce that can adapt to a rapidly changing economy and provide new opportunities for both employers and workers. NARC supports sustained funding for programs that meet business needs and individual education goals, including reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), to ensure competitiveness in the global marketplace.

Education and Workforce Development Recommendations

- 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.
- Provide additional educational opportunities in multiple career pathways to retiring veterans to ensure a smooth transition from military to civilian life.
- 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, especially for Short-Term Pell grants that support short-term workforce 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.
- Encourage greater use of apprenticeship programs with access to funding for local programs.
- 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.
- Allow incumbent workers access to federally sponsored training and employment programs so that they may upgrade their skills and adjust to changing job markets.
- 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, technology, and advanced manufacturing fields.
- Incentivize the integration of the workforce and education systems so there are less obstacles for K-12 and post-secondary transitions.

THE CENSUS

The decennial census, American Community Survey (ACS), and related U.S. Census Bureau surveys provide essential data about our communities. Demographic, social, economic, and housing information from these surveys is critical for regional planning and long-term decision-making. Strong funding and effective implementation of the census and ACS ensure leaders have accurate, up-to-date data. The decennial census alone determines how more than \$800 billion in federal funding is distributed and influences congressional district boundaries, shaping representation in Washington. NARC urges the federal government to plan and execute a fair, timely, and accurate census to support regions nationwide.

Census Recommendations

- 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 save costs, 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 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.

TECHNOLOGY AND 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 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.

Technology and Telecommunications Recommendations

- Design and support federal proposals that would increase high-speed broadband access, adoption and affordability in unserved and underserved regions, including rural America.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

Public Safety Emergency Management Policies and Priorities

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) believes that the most effective way to ensure emergency preparedness and public safety is through a holistic, collaborative, and regional approach. Protecting metropolitan and rural areas requires coordination among many jurisdictions across municipal and state boundaries. To build and maintain safer, healthier, and more prepared communities, NARC urges the federal government to support regional efforts to coordinate emergency planning, response, and recovery.

DISASTER RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

Ensuring public safety during natural disasters is a shared responsibility of state, local governments, and regional councils. NARC strongly supports federal efforts to coordinate and strengthen disaster response, recovery, and mitigation across all levels of government. At the same time, NARC advocates for significant federal reforms to provide local governments with the resources and tools they need to recover more effectively and build long-term resilience.

Disaster Response and Recovery Recommendations

- Pass comprehensive FEMA reform legislation, such as the *FEMA Act of 2025*.
- Pass legislation to prevent insurance companies from cancelling insurance during a natural disaster, retroactively canceling insurance to just before a natural disaster, or cancelling insurance in the immediate wake of a natural disaster.
- Preserve and increase funding for the Fire Management Assistance Grant program.
- Clarify that debris removal is in the public interest, not a luxury, supporting faster local recovery with FEMA funds.
 - Recalculate asset value assumptions; many assets are not valued to their local taxation levels, causing local communities difficulties with reimbursement.
- Improve FEMA assessment timelines to accelerate the reimbursement process.
- Simplify local government reimbursement processes from FEMA and expedite reimbursement timelines for most assistance to less than 18 months post-disaster.
- Conform response and reimbursement rates with the Stafford Act, including those funds provided by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), various

cabinet level departments, and other agencies responsible for providing assistance before, during, and after a natural or man-made disasters.

- Establish standardized guidelines for post-disaster assistance applications across FEMA and other agencies such as the Department of Housing and Urban Development to ensure that standardized guidelines are known and adhered to.
- Include regional council representation on FEMA's Regional Advisory Councils and National Advisory Council. The National Advisory Council (NAC) advises FEMA's Administrator on all aspects of emergency management, including preparedness, protection, response, recovery, and mitigation for natural disasters, acts of terrorism and other man-made disasters. While the legislation establishing the NAC requires municipal and county representation, it does not require regional representation. The current NAC includes at least six city and county officials but does not include any regional representation.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND MITIGATION

NARC advocates for the federal government to provide support to state and local governments in their efforts to prepare for natural and man-made disasters. Planning and preparing for natural or man-made disasters is an effective, preventative approach and advocates for federal funding for preparedness and mitigation. Proactive planning and preparedness are the most effective ways to prevent harm and reduce risk. NARC advocates for dedicated federal funding for both preparedness and mitigation efforts. By investing in these measures before disasters occur, communities can reduce damage, lower the resources needed for emergency response, cut rebuilding costs, and most importantly, protect lives.

Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation Recommendations

- Preserve and increase funding for the Next Generation Warning System Grant Program and programs that fund Early Warning Systems.
- Establish and provide grant funding directly to local governments and regions for Emergency Management Personnel Training.
- Restore funding to and permanently authorize the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Program to help communities reduce their risk hazards before a disaster occurs, saving communities money, resources, and lives.
- Incentivize local and regional communities recovering from natural disasters to take preventive steps when rebuilding public facilities. This means ensuring facilities are

located outside flood zones, away from wildfire-prone areas, and other high-risk locations. NARC supports adopting FEMA's Consensus-Based Codes, Specifications, and Standards for Public Assistance policy to guide these efforts.

- Authorize and increase funding of the Community Development Block Grant Disaster Recovery Program (CDBG-DR) and Community Development Block Grant Mitigation Program (CDBG-MIT).

DISASTER PLANNING AND COORDINATION

NARC supports the vital role regional councils play as coordinating bodies during major disasters, helping cities and counties plan, mitigate, and respond effectively. NARC also advocates for federal recognition and support of the critical contributions that regional councils make to disaster planning and emergency preparedness.

Disaster Planning and Coordination Recommendations

- Formally recognize that regional councils serve an important role in disaster response and should make funds available to regional councils that are responsible for local government coordination.
- Establish a competitive grant program for regional planning organizations to enhance emergency planning and response at the regional level.
- Prioritize grant funding based on regional or multi-jurisdictional planning and collaborative efforts.
- Support the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) grant program, which establishes a strategic direction for the enhancement of regional response capabilities and capacities.
- Streamline federal homeland security grant application and planning requirements.
- Include public safety and emergency preparedness as key elements of resilient communities.
- Encourage and provide funding for regional data collection, greater use of GIS and the use of regional scenario planning tools when planning for disasters.

NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM

NARC supports the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). The National Flood Insurance Program was created in 1968 to make affordable flood insurance available to homeowners, renters, and business owners. This insurance was developed in conjunction

with flood insurance rate maps for floodplain management by participating communities in order to help local communities mitigate flooding and reduce the liability borne by local governments and elected officials. Because there is still no viable private market for homeowners and businesses to acquire sufficient flood insurance coverage it is incumbent on the federal government to maintain this program to ensure that property owners and renters have access to viable insurance.

National Flood Insurance Program Recommendations

- Immediately update and maintain Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) generated and specified Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRMS) to ensure accuracy and transparency for floodplain management by participating communities and disaster response efforts. Current discrepancies in flood maps—such as excluding at-risk buildings to lower insurance costs—have led to deadly consequences, as seen in the 2025 Texas floods.
- Invest in research, funding, and a transparent process to update flood maps regularly. Updated maps should reflect real flood risks, including emerging threats from changing atmospheric and weather trends. Accurate maps are critical for public safety, search and rescue operations, and determining eligibility for mitigation grants and insurance programs.
- Reauthorize the NFIP and keep flood insurance rates affordable for primary, non-primary and business properties while balancing the fiscal solvency of the program.
- Work with states, regions and localities to develop an incentive-based disaster insurance and mitigation system that would incentivize property owners to retrofit existing structures to reduce future losses from natural disasters.
- Expand the National Flood Insurance Program to cover wildfires, earthquakes and other natural disasters for which there is no available private sector insurance.

EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS AND INTEROPERABILITY

NARC believes that a reliable, robust, and interoperable communications system—including the 9-1-1 public emergency call system—is essential for municipalities, counties, and regions to communicate effectively during natural or man-made disasters. To ensure these systems work seamlessly across city and county boundaries, NARC advocates for strong federal support for state, regional, and local efforts to maintain and improve emergency communications infrastructure.

Emergency Communications and Interoperability Recommendations

- Preserve the local government and regional council role in public safety communications systems so that local governments may take advantage of technological innovation and result in improved communications efforts and practices within localities and across regions.
 - Support interoperability as it is necessary to ensure that first responders throughout a region are able to communicate with one another during public emergencies.
 - Transmit vital information to emergency response personnel among all levels of government without interference and delay is key to communications for public safety.
 - Promote interagency sharing of information and equipment during emergencies among all levels of government including regions is critical if localities and regions are going to be able to address public safety concerns during emergencies.
 - Enable local governments to improve public safety services will always be a key component to reducing crime, planning for and predicting disasters, and responding to emergencies.
 - Allocate sufficient communications spectrum to municipalities for public safety use in order to enhance interoperable communications among public safety and service agencies, and to ensure the ability of local governments to meet their responsibilities for public safety and emergency services both within their localities and across regions.
- Involve cities, counties and regions as it develops standards for the delivery of emergency information on communications systems.
- Take immediate action to provide local governments with the broadcast channels needed to enhance their communications capabilities.
 - Ensure that public safety training programs provide a level of consistency among all agencies, which are essential to implement mutual aid and regional cooperation agreements.
 - Support funding for the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) created under the Middle-Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012.
- Encourage efforts by FirstNet to work with state, local, and regional organizations, as well as the first responder community, to ensure that funding, coverage, and use are addressed in all FirstNet initiatives.

EMERGENCY PLANNING AND COORDINATION

NARC believes that emergency management decisions should be made through a consensus-based, inclusive process involving all stakeholders. Regional councils play an important role in coordinating emergency management practices and decisions. Federal, state, and local governments should include regions in their work to develop comprehensive emergency management systems that include preparedness, response, mitigation, and recovery activities to minimize the destructive impact of all types of disasters.

Emergency Planning and Coordination Recommendations

- Continue to provide leadership in the development of coordinated emergency management systems by offering cities, counties and regions financial support for and technical assistance when developing such plans.
- Recognize all stakeholders – local and state governments, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations – are included when developing these systems and that regional councils provide an important and necessary coordination function.
- Adopt legislation that formalizes the role of regional planning organizations in emergency preparedness and response similar to that of metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) in transportation planning, implementation, and capacity building.
- Provide and allow flexibility at the local and regional levels so that local governments have the authority to provide and maintain communications before, during, and after a disaster or emergency.
- Maintain federal investments in resources critical to enabling local law enforcement to adequately provide for public safety during emergencies.
- Fully fund the Byrne/Justice Assistance Grants (JAG) program, the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program, the Staffing for Adequate Fire and Emergency Response (SAFER), the Assistance to Firefighters grant programs and for disaster preparedness, prevention, recovery, and response for all-hazard threats.
- Train and equip first responders and the public and private medical community, requiring federal agencies to develop and coordinate pre- and post-disaster mitigation programs for the types of emergencies they manage, and allow maximum flexibility at the local and regional level.

CYBERSECURITY

The National Association of Regional Councils calls on the federal government to provide support and resources for localities with cybersecurity work to secure public data, infrastructure, and assets. Cyberattacks attacks on local and regional networks are a growing and increasingly serious economic and national security threat. These attacks have already targeted critical systems like the electric grid, water and sewer services, and other critical infrastructure. Data breaches have exposed large amounts of personal information, and some attacks have left behind harmful software that could be used to disrupt local systems. Localities and regions that manage critical infrastructure such as utilities, transit systems, and sensitive databases on individuals, public works, and industries face significant risk and need support to defend against these threats.

Cybersecurity Recommendations

- Disseminate cyber intrusion detection and prevention tools to intergovernmental partners, and be permitted, when requested, to provide assistance to localities and other entities in addressing and repairing damages from a major cyber-attack and for advice on building better defenses.
- Extend services offered by the National Cybersecurity and Communications Integration Center to state and local governments and establish a new federal grant program designed to assist state and local governments in protecting our digital assets against the threat of cyber-attacks or data breaches.

Environment & Energy Committee Policies & Priorities

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) believes that advancing energy development, managing natural resources, and protecting the natural environment require coordination at all levels of government and is best achieved through a holistic and regional approach.

Regional councils operate across a wide range of energy and environmental issues, planning for future energy needs, implementing energy programs, serving as designated water quality management agencies, designated air-quality planning agencies, solid waste management districts, brownfields coalition organizers and conducting a range of other energy and environmental planning and programming activities.

Federal support and resources strengthen the work regional councils do to plan for energy needs, manage natural resources, and cultivate vibrant communities.

ENERGY

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports local and regional programs that plan for and implement a diverse, sustainable, and secure energy future. Regional councils play a key role in putting national energy policies and technologies into practice at the local level, and vice versa—their programs inform an integrated national energy policy vision. Through long-range planning, public-private partnerships, and the development of locally-grown solutions, regional councils can help transform markets and set the nation on a path for a more robust, energy-abundant future.

Energy Recommendations

- Incentivize the generation of electricity and connections to the grid, with a preference for energy sources that can be deployed sooner, in order to address the demand for data centers and the needs of modern communities and residents.
- Provide funding for grid resiliency programs, such as the Grid Resilience and Innovation Partnerships, to improve resource adequacy, operation reliability, and resiliency of the electrical grid.
- Preserve and expand tax credits for generating new energy from diverse, technology-neutral alternative and emerging energy sources to generate electricity in an “all of the above” energy approach.

- Preserve funding for the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program to provide funding to cities, counties, and states to develop energy efficiency and renewable energy projects.
 - Increase finance opportunities for energy efficiency upgrades, including green banks and Local Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) financing.
 - Support enhanced energy transmission and “smart” grid technologies and programs.
 - Encourage the integration of energy into plans that build livable/sustainable communities.
 - Support local and regional efforts to develop plans and strategies to mitigate potential negative consequences of new energy resource facilities.
 - Support state, regional and local programs aimed at reducing high energy costs.
 - Support local and regional involvement in the development of energy efficient building standards.
- Promote efforts that improve energy efficiency and conservation in the transportation and building sectors, and provide funding directly to local and regional governments, such as through USDOT’s LoNo Program and EPA’s Clean School Bus Program.
- Promote the use of lower pollution vehicles, such as alternative fuel vehicles, hybrids, and high efficiency vehicles and support the development of fueling infrastructure for alternative fuel vehicles.

WASTEWATER

NARC advocates for providing regions with the resources they need to meet current and future wastewater and stormwater challenges. Much of the nation’s aging water infrastructure is in need of repair or replacement. The 2017 American Society of Civil Engineers Infrastructure Report Card estimates that 56 million new users will connect to centralized treatment systems over the next 20 years, requiring \$271 billion in investment. Inland waterways, which received a D grade, are also impacted by stormwater quality. Effective stormwater management is essential to improving local waterways and meeting water quality standards. Significant federal investment, distributed to the local level, is critical to ensure functional, resilient water systems.

Wastewater Recommendations

- Promote, incentivize, and fund strategies that reduce water usage by data centers and/or recycle water.

- Authorize and increase funding for the Clean and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds, to ensure adequate resources for wastewater storage and treatment facilities in both urban and rural regions.
- Provide grants for lead pipe replacement.
- Remove volume caps on private activity bonds for water infrastructure.
- Authorize and increase funding for the Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Reuse Municipal Grant program.
- Support integrated watershed planning as part of a low-cost water quality treatment plan.
- Expand opportunities for intermunicipal agencies and interstate agencies to participate in C/DWSRF lending, including supporting pass-through arrangements like sub-state revolving funds and interstate lending.
- Authorize and increase funding for the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (WIFIA) program and increase flexibility for WIFIA funding.
- Reaffirm a commitment to, and fund, the Clean Water Act Section 208 Areawide Water Quality Management Plans, which promote efficient and comprehensive programs for controlling water pollution from point and nonpoint sources.
- Explore the creation of a Water Trust Fund (WTF) to provide dedicated and sustainable funding for water resources and infrastructure (both drinking and waste water) with an emphasis on aging infrastructure.
- Support the “One Water” principle by applying a holistic, integrated planning approach to all Safe Drinking Water Act and Clean Water Act permitting (drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, combined sewer overflow) so that maximum flexibility and cost effectiveness is built into the decision-making process.
- Incentivize coordination by local governments to develop regional wastewater treatment plants and other infrastructure that serves multiple jurisdictions.
- Ensure that national standards protect the safety of America’s water infrastructure systems, without hindering local activities.
- Support and incentivize the development of regional stormwater management plans and programs for local governments that are consistent with state stormwater program goals and EPA guidelines.
- Support regional efforts to coordinate above-ground transportation infrastructure improvements with underground water infrastructure improvements for efficiency and cost-savings.
- Authorize and increase funding for the federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.
- Increase the federal government’s research and development programs to aid the efforts of local and state governments in the control of non-point sources of water pollution and contaminated sediments.

- Increase funding for the EPA Clean Water Act Section 319(h) grant program and reduce the 40 percent local match of the Non-Point Source Grants Program which has been a burden on the communities the funding would be intended to benefit.
- Continue to fund Clean Water Act Section 604 (b) grant programs that help regions address important non-point source water quality challenges and assist with water quality planning initiatives. Fund integrated planning (IP) legislation and the new U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of the Municipal Ombudsman. Provide assistance for local governments and regional councils for public education and communication on water infrastructure, conservation and sustainability issues. Provide federal matching funds for local governments to develop projects that reduce flood damage risks and accomplish other goals under the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). Provide sufficient funds to reduce the backlog of projects authorized under WRDA.
- Provide funding to support local, regional and state water quality monitoring programs.

DRINKING WATER

Congress should invest in state, local, and regional government infrastructure to maintain a clean and safe supply of drinking water. In addition, Congress should recognize the work of regional councils in their efforts to assist local governments in addressing quality and supply issues by increasing the amount of funds available for planning, technical assistance, and response to emerging water issues.

Drinking Water Recommendations

- Increase funding to regional councils and facilitate regional drinking water plans and programs.
- Authorize and increase funding for the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund to ensure adequate resources for drinking water storage and treatment facilities in both urban and rural regions.
- Using the “polluter pay” principle under Superfund, it is critical that federal agencies hold those accountable for PFAS contamination and funding settlements be directed to the states to minimize public health and environmental contamination.
- Encourage EPA to strengthen federal regulations on PFAS by establishing drinking water standards.

- Provide funding to support water and wastewater treatment plant upgrades to handle emerging contaminants in source water in addition to those waste streams generated from those treatment processes.
- Adopt consistent messaging regarding lead and copper recognizing that reducing the public health risk associated with lead is a shared responsibility and requires a collaborative effort by public health agencies, water supply agencies, code officials and federal, state and local agencies.
- Lead abatement must be addressed comprehensively and in alignment with the Federal Action Plan to Reduce Childhood Lead Exposure. The Department of Health and Human Services needs to account for lead elsewhere in the homes, such as internal plumbing, paint and dust.
- Incorporate lead service line replacements as part of a community's asset management program.
- Encourage EPA to allow flexibility in the types of corrosion control treatments that also consider potential water quality impacts to receiving streams and water bodies.
- Support the development of innovative new drinking water systems, including desalination.

PFAS

To protect public health and ensure communities have the tools they need to address the growing challenges posed by PFAS contamination, federal policymakers must prioritize strong regulations, accountability measures, and targeted investments. These actions are essential to help local governments safeguard drinking water, manage contamination risks, and support long-term solutions that prevent future exposure.

PFAS Recommendations:

- Support efforts to reduce the potential of per-and polyfluoroalkyl substance (PFAS) contamination in drinking water and provide federal funding for researching, testing and remediation of contamination caused by PFAS substances.
- Hold polluters—not local governments—accountable under CERCLA to ensure cleanup costs are borne by those responsible for contamination.
- Provide dedicated grants for testing, treatment, and public education to help communities identify PFAS contamination and protect public health.
- Fund research into safer PFAS alternatives and the long-term health impacts of exposure to these chemicals to guide future regulations and innovation.

- Protect farmers and local governments from liability related to biosolids and firefighting foam, ensuring they are not unfairly penalized for practices driven by past federal guidance.

FLOOD AND DROUGHT

To strengthen community resilience and ensure local governments have the tools they need to prepare for increasing flood risks, federal policymakers should prioritize investments and policies that support long-term planning, mitigation, and data-driven decision-making. The following recommendations outline key actions that can help communities address inland and coastal flooding, adapt to changing climate conditions, and protect lives, property, and essential infrastructure.

Flood and Drought Recommendations

- Provide federal planning funds to help local communities prepare for and address inland and coastal flooding risks, including flood mapping, data collection, risk assessment and future rainfall analyses.
- Identify performance standards governing increased and consistent frequency for comprehensive flood map revisions or updates based on magnitudes of flood risk, changing weather patterns, and/or urban development growth rates.
- Include flexibility and opportunities in Federal funds to allow proactive approaches to mitigate stormwater run-off and minimize flood risk, including allowing for purchase of open space, implementation of nature-based infrastructure, and conducting comprehensive planning approaches and updates to maps upstream of urbanizing areas and within urban areas.
- Invest in watershed planning, wetlands restoration, and voluntary water-quality trading programs to strengthen resilience and improve water management.
- Fund coastal resilience and shoreline protection projects to safeguard communities from rising seas and storm surges.
- Create a State Flood Mitigation Revolving Fund program to use federal funding to capitalize state revolving funds that would support local and regional efforts to reduce flood risk.
- Provide funding and resources to regional councils to assist their member cities and counties to adopt higher standards for watershed management for new development.
- Provide funding and resources to regional councils to engage in preventative floodplain management through effective control measures.

- Support dam safety and flood control through targeted grants and cost-sharing programs to protect lives and property.

HAZARDOUS WASTE AND BROWNFIELDS

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports federal funding to redevelop abandoned and under-utilized sites which have been contaminated or are believed to have been contaminated through previous industrial or commercial activities. Regional councils often play a key role in the development of brownfields projects, particularly as members and coordinators of brownfields coalitions.

Hazardous Waste and Brownfields Recommendations

- Fully fund appropriations for the EPA Brownfields program at \$200 million for competitive grants and \$50 million for state and tribal formula grants per year.
- Increase the total program funding and award ceiling for Brownfield Assessment Grants, including Community-wide and Assessment Coalition Grants.
- Increase flexibility for local and regional governments so that they can adapt the use of awarded brownfields funding to respond to marketplace developments.
- Create a contamination waiver, limitation, or elimination of liability for non-contributing current or future owners, developers, lenders, operators and tenants of previously contaminated sites which have been certified as “clean.”

SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) recognizes that waste management is a serious national issue with significant environmental and public health effects. Local and regional governments play an integral role in waste management, particularly regarding waste reduction, recycling, and education.

Solid Waste Management Recommendations

- Establish federal information resources, training, and technical assistance for local municipal waste operators to better address the growing threat of fires caused due to lithium-ion batteries in the waste management stream.
- Support regional involvement in solid waste planning and management to ensure adequate landfill capacity for growing regions and encourage sustainable materials management into the future.

- Fund local and regional public education programs that promote participation in activities that lower the volume of household hazardous waste and reduce illegal dumping.
- Fund local and regional public education programs to facilitate long-term increases in source reduction, reuse, and recycling and reduce the volume of contaminated recycling materials.
- Fund local and regional programs to expand reuse and recycling of construction and demolition materials.
- Address recycling market challenges and support local and regional governments facing the financial impacts of market challenges.
- Promote innovative approaches to establish new product markets through development of technologies and processes that maximize waste value and create economic opportunity
- Support innovative reuse of landfill and waste disposal sites including energy recovery, renewable energy, renewable natural gas, and redevelopment opportunities.

AIR QUALITY

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports federal funding to incorporate and encourage regional councils and MPOs to achieve comprehensive air quality improvement through reductions in criteria pollutants and/or greenhouse gases. Since the passage of the Clean Air Act (42 U.S.C.), regional councils have played a critical role in the nation's efforts to ensure clean air through short and long-term planning and program implementation. NARC is committed to ensuring regional councils have the tools and resources they need to address greenhouse gas and/or air quality concerns.

Air Quality Recommendations

- Adopt flexible policies to aid in the reduction of air pollutants, recognizing that there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution for air quality improvement and greenhouse gas reduction, and allow flexibility for local government implementation.
- Coordinate federal agencies regulating air quality to avoid conflicting regulations and/or actions.
- Provide states, local governments and regional councils the funding and incentives for State Improvement Plans and regional air quality planning to meet federal goals in air quality.
- Allow states, local governments, and regions to establish flexible mechanisms to achieve federal standards for air quality improvement, and set stricter standards than federal minimums to address locally-specific persistent air quality problems.

- Enhance support for the Clean Cities and Communities network of local coalitions by providing more federal resources such as technical assistance, information resources, online training, and an array of data and analysis tools.
- Regularly evaluate the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) to ensure they are necessary and attainable and ensure NAAQS standards are accompanied by proven technologies and sufficient time to assist in implementation.
- Support state, regional and local efforts to work towards attainment and encourage EPA to recognize the role of international emissions transport, especially as it affects ozone nonattainment areas.
- Include opportunities for Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and regional councils to incorporate sustainability practices (e.g. linking transportation and land use planning) in their plans to reduce criteria pollutants.
- Encourage educational efforts in communities that show not only does air quality impact our environment, but also has an effect on our public health and regional economies.
- Authorize and increase funding for the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program (CMAQ) with priority to nonattainment areas.
- Increase the flexibility of Buy-America requirements for CMAQ program investments so that local governments can continue their efforts to transition to alternative-fuel fleets and ensure that the projects which are most cost-effective in improving air quality can be funded.

RESILIENCY

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) recognizes the importance of developing community resilience to natural disasters and the impacts of atmospheric and extreme weather changes. Federal support and funding for local and regional involvement in resilience efforts is critical.

Resiliency Recommendations

- Increase coordination between the multiple federal agencies conducting resilience work, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Economic Development Administration (EDA), and other agencies whose involvement can improve community resilience.
- Develop more pro-active approaches to mitigation for future disasters.

- Increase flexibility for mitigation funding from HUD, particularly to update hazard mitigation plans that smaller communities may not have otherwise had the resources to complete.
- Support regional resilience data collection and analysis, modelling, and mapping projects.
- Promote nature-based solutions to reduce vulnerability.
- Restore funding to and permanently authorize the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Program to help communities reduce their risk hazards, saving communities money, resources, and lives.
- Direct funding to regional councils to evaluate, plan, and prepare for the impacts of sea-level rise, rising water levels and flooding across inland areas, particularly the Great Lakes region.
- Direct funding to regional councils to evaluate, plan, and prepare for the impacts of urban heat island effects.

PARKS & NATURAL AREAS

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports local and regional programs to plan for and develop parks, recreation areas, and recreation and activity programs. Through planning, programming, and the development of local public and private partnerships, regional organizations can help create and improve spaces and programs that increase the livability of areas the health and wellness of residents and the resilience of communities to natural disasters and extreme weather impacts.

Parks and Natural Areas Recommendations

- Support regional planning projects to develop quality parks, open spaces, trails, and recreational and education programs.
- Fully fund the U.S. Forest Service's Urban and Community Forestry Program.
- Provide surplus federal property to local governments for parks and recreational purposes at no cost or reduced costs.
- Fully fund the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to ensure continued protection of natural resources and expansion of public access to parks, trails, and green spaces. Invest in outdoor recreation projects that create jobs and drive local economic development, while improving quality of life, promoting tourism, and supporting healthy, active communities.
- Maintain "State Side" funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) for matching grants to states and local governments for the acquisition of

park lands and other open space to be developed into public outdoor recreation areas and facilities.

- Provide funding for regional forestry initiatives including the development of urban forest master plans and the planting and maintenance of trees.
- Support local flexibility to create conservation corridors, develop conservation planning ordinances, and use funds to purchase land to use as open space.
- Support regional efforts to combat invasive species and increase coordination between agencies working on invasive species management.
- Carefully plan resource extraction and ensure communities are compensated.

REGULATORY REFORM

NARC supports reforms that make the permitting process more efficient while maintaining environmental protections. These changes to streamline permitting will help state, local, and regional governments deliver critical projects on time and within budget.

Regulatory Reform Recommendations

- Provide Categorical Exclusions for projects undertaken by state, local, and regional governmental entities for infrastructure projects under a certain small dollar de minimis amount.
- Implement procedures for concurrent, not sequential, federal agency reviews to speed up permitting processes.
- Set reasonable NEPA timelines for reviews.

Transportation

The National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) supports a multimodal federal transportation program that increases funding and authority for regional organizations and local governments.

SURFACE TRANSPORTATION

Regional councils, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), and Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) are central to planning and programming federal funds that support investments in the nation's extensive network of roadways, public transportation systems, bikeways, pedestrian facilities, and intercity passenger rail.

MPOs are doing more with less as infrastructure deteriorates and planning has grown more complex, with performance-based requirements, evolving vehicle technology, micromobility, and shifting employment patterns. Increased federal support for regional planning would strengthen MPO capacity, boost local economies through multimodal transportation, and promote livable communities by integrating transportation with housing, land use, and economic development.

Federal funding should also ensure that MPOs, RTPOs, and regional planning organizations have a meaningful seat at the table when it comes to the obligation of federal transportation funding, including the Surface Transportation Block Grant Program. Planning organizations such as MPOs and RTPOs produce robust, comprehensive Transportation Improvement Plans that fit within their Long-Range Plans. They know their communities best, and through their boards, they represent locally elected officials who know what projects are most pressing. Greater coordination and cooperation between state Departments of Transportation and MPOs, where the perspectives of MPOs are truly respected, is critical to ensuring that funding goes to projects that meet the needs of local communities.

The National Association of Regional Councils supports passage of a long-term surface transportation reauthorization bill that addresses the solvency of the Highway Trust Fund, bolsters regional planning, and increases funding for local transportation priorities.

Surface Transportation Recommendations

- **Increase and Enhance Metropolitan Planning (PL) Funding.** Congress should increase PL funding and ensure MPOs of all sizes are able to conduct critical planning activities. This includes reducing or eliminating local match requirements to ensure all communities can utilize planning resources. With increased PL funding, MPOs will be better able to support local communities and increase the efficacy of federal dollars through planning and project development.
- **Promote Non-Metropolitan Transportation Planning.** Congress should create a dedicated funding source for Regional Transportation Planning Organizations (RTPOs) to ensure rural transportation priorities are represented through regional and statewide planning. Funding for RTPOs will support transportation planning activities while enhancing the participation of rural local elected officials in regional and statewide decision-making processes.
- **Support Local Decision-Making Through Formula Programs.** Congress should continue and enhance the impact of the Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) program by increasing the amount of funding that is suballocated to local areas. STBG emphasizes the importance of the local-state-federal intergovernmental partnership by suballocating formula funding to support local decision-making and locally-owned infrastructure.
- **Preserve and Streamline Funding Opportunities.** Congress should streamline and simplify grant requirements to reduce administrative burdens and expedite project delivery. In any case where discretionary grant programs are eliminated or consolidated, Congress should ensure that equivalent or greater funding is reallocated through formula programs with expanded suballocation requirements, guaranteeing regional and local governments' access to critical federal funding.