



Regional Solutions for Rural and Urban Challenges

Insights #6

Recommendations to the Federal Government

This *Insights* brief is one of a series produced as part of the *Regional Solutions for Rural and Urban Challenges* project led by LOCUS Impact Investing with funding support from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The project explores the possibility that regional collaboration and solution-seeking can be an effective way of improving social and economic opportunity and health for all people and places within a region. We asked this question: Under what conditions are regional collaboration and solution-seeking approaches most effective in improving social and economic outcomes? We saw this as a counterpoint to the prevailing narrative of growing divisions between rural and urban populations along economic, social, cultural, and political lines.

To advance and support effective regional collaboration, the Federal Government should:

1. Build upon programs such as Stronger Economies Together¹, the POWER Initiative² and the Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership³ to prompt agencies to create incentives and support for collaboration across jurisdictions and sectors. The aim should be to realign existing programs that promote regional collaboration in ways that are comprehensive, sustainable, and consider practitioner and community feedback on barriers to collaboration and on what worked and did not in previous federal initiatives.
2. Create a program within US Department of Agriculture Rural Development dedicated to expanding the capacity of rural and regional intermediaries (including rural development hubs). This should provide funding for building strong local institutions essential to ensuring that investments in water, housing, and other infrastructure are smart, strategic, coordinated, and aligned with long-term community and regional needs. This should be multi-year and focused on organizational

¹ **Stronger Economies Together (SET)** enables communities and counties in rural America to work together in developing and implementing an economic development blueprint for their multi-county region that strategically builds on the current and emerging economic strengths of that region. Launched in 2010 by USDA Rural Development and the four Regional Rural Development Centers and their land-grant university partners, this initiative is now in place in more than 94 regions in 32 states.

² **The POWER Initiative** – Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization – is a Congressionally-funded initiative through the Appalachian Regional Commission to help communities and regions affected by job losses in coal mining, coal power plant operations and coal-related supply chain industries due to the changing economic of America's energy production. Projects are intended to be regional, strategic, and transformational in their approach to the economic revitalization of coal-impacted communities.

³ **Investing in Manufacturing Communities Partnership** encourages communities to develop comprehensive economic development strategies that will strengthen their competitive edge for attracting global manufacturer and supply chain investments. Through IMCP, federal aid is coordinated to support communities' strong development plans and synchronize grant programs across multiple departments and agencies.

development, financial sustainability, and organizational reach, rather than specific project outcomes.

3. Review and reorient the US Economic Development Administration's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)⁴ program, coupled with enhanced funding for planning grants to economic development districts and Tribes. The aim should be both to enhance the capacity of regional development intermediaries and to provide the framework for effective regional collaboration based on principles outlined in *Insights #1*.
4. Review and expand the requirements for Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) to encourage them to integrate rural-urban connections and regional equity considerations into their planning and programming. The US Department of Transportation and other relevant agencies should promote the development and adoption of predictive analytical tools to harness data on land use, natural resources, sustainability, value chains and economic linkages to inform land-use decisions and to better understand the importance of rural-urban connections.

Please visit <https://locusimpactinvesting.org/what-we-do/rural-work/regional-solutions/introduction/regional-solutions.html> to see all the materials produced for the *Regional Solutions for Rural and Urban Challenges* project.

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⁴ **Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)** aims to promote effective economic development in America's communities and regions through a locally-based, regionally-driven economic development planning process. It serves to engage community leaders, leverage the involvement of the private sector, and establish a strategic blueprint for regional collaboration. CEDS provides a vehicle for individuals, organizations, local governments, institutes of learning, and private industry to engage in a meaningful conversation and debate about what capacity building efforts would best serve economic development in their region.

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