

Regional Solutions for Rural and Urban Challenges

Insights #4

**Recommendations for Regional Development Organizations
and Local Governments**

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.

Through their national organizations – the National Association of Counties (NACo), the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO), and the National Association of Regional Councils (NARC) regional development organizations and local governments should, with the intention of making specific recommendations to Congress and state legislatures, instigate a two-pronged review of:

1. Current statutory and administrative requirements for relevant Federal planning processes to identify changes that would improve the ability of local governments and regional development organizations to:
 - Enhance their analytical capabilities to map and analyze needs and opportunities
 - Conduct planning processes that are inclusive (geographically, racially, economically) and adopt accepted community engagement practices
 - Prioritize investments that better align with the needs and interests of rural communities and economies, and facilitate positive interactions between rural and urban parts of their regions
 - Focus on creating regional ecosystems in collaboration with a broad array of other public, private, philanthropic, nonprofit, and educational institutions with regional missions and agendas

At a minimum, the scope of the review should include: the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS); the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Regional Transportation Plans and Transportation Improvement Plans; U.S. Department of Housing & Urban Development’s Consolidated Plan. This review could be conducted in partnership with relevant federal agencies; the Interagency Partnership for Sustainable Communities could prove a useful model.

2. The need for additional financial or other resources for regional development organizations to fully assume and deliver on their responsibilities for planning, coordination, analysis, and collaboration at the regional level. The review should consider how the needs of regions may vary. Thus, recommendations for both policy change and resources can be expected to be different for, for example, low capacity rural regional organizations in low-wealth, low-tax base areas.

Beyond this review of federal policy and resource needs, these national organizations should support statewide and multi-state efforts to create joint urban-rural policy agendas in community and economic development through information sharing, peer-to-peer convenings and creating venues where such policy agenda building can happen.

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.

When citing this work, please use the following: *Dabson, B., Okagaki, A., Markley, D., Green, T., Ferguson, K., Danis, C., & Lampkin, T. (2020), Regional Solutions for Rural and Urban Challenges. Richmond, VA: LOCUS Impact Investing, www.locusimpactinvesting.org.* The materials on this site may be downloaded and shared to advance policy, research, and practice only. Any other uses of the materials require permission from LOCUS Impact Investing.



Regional Solutions to Rural-Urban Challenges was a project of LOCUS Impact Investing, guided by a project team of experienced economic development practitioners, researchers and policy makers. This work was funded through a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, whose support is gratefully acknowledged.