

CENTERING COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

Fostering Rural and Indigenous Community Well-Being with Asset-Based Development

A CALL TO ACTION

Why You Matter

Federal and state agencies have the opportunity to address systemic disparities and build resilience in rural and Indigenous communities. To be effective, solutions must **center local leadership**, **invest in capacity**, and **measure success by community well-being**, not just dollars spent or jobs created.

Core Insight

Health, economic development, and community well-being are inseparable. Sustainable outcomes require **trusted intermediaries**, **flexible funding mechanisms**, and **inclusive engagement strategies**.

Key Government Recommendations

Fund and Scale Rural Development Hubs

- Provide **flexible, operational funding** to [Rural Development Hubs](#) to coordinate local, regional, and cross-sector efforts.
- Support the position of Hubs as key equity, health, and resilience infrastructure within governmental networks.

Build Leadership and Organizational Capacity

- Invest in **staffing, training**, and **coalition building** across rural and Indigenous communities.
- Support **technical assistance** to help communities access, manage, and maximize federal funds.

Incentivize Regional, Cross-Sector Collaboration

- Encourage a culture of collaboration among State and Federal Agencies that allows regional design and implementation.
- Design funding programs that **reward collaboration** between counties, State Agencies, Federal Agencies, Tribes (where applicable), nonprofits, and economic development actors.
- Promote shared metrics of well-being, beyond transactional outputs.

Support Local Wealth Building

- Invest in systems for **small business development**, **shared ownership**, and **asset acquisition**.
- Enable tools like matched savings programs or community land trusts.

Elevate Community-Defined Metrics and Impact

- **Co-develop performance measures** with communities at the outset.
- Accept **qualitative metrics** and storytelling as valid indicators of success.
- Remove reporting burdens that do not serve program learning or outcomes.

Key Takeaway

Government programs can be more effective when they support trusted, local infrastructure, fund leadership and capacity, and evaluate success through community-defined well-being.

Support the infrastructure behind the outcomes.
Collaborate with us and learn how to invest in Rural Development Hubs.

Insight from Report Participant



Vanessa Roanhorse,
Roanhorse Consulting,
New Mexico

"Practitioners, government, and philanthropy should challenge the traditional concepts of economic development. We need an ecosystem approach, not siloing issues because they are all interconnected."

Community Change Grants

The EPA Environmental and Climate Justice Program's Community Change Grants are designed to support disadvantaged communities in addressing environmental and climate justice challenges, including building community capacity for sustained engagement with environmental and climate justice issues.

In a notable shift, the EPA has prioritized funding community-based organizations (CBOs) over traditional recipients like government agencies or large nonprofits. Recognizing that many CBOs lack the resources or expertise to navigate complex federal grant processes, the EPA is investing heavily in technical assistance (TA) to ensure more equitable access to funding opportunities.

Through the Inflation Reduction Act, the EPA received \$200 million specifically for TA initiatives. A portion of this funding was allocated to EnDyna, a firm contracted to provide comprehensive support for potential grantees. The goal is to empower community organizations by equipping them with the skills and tools needed to apply for and manage federal funding.

By embedding TA into the grantmaking process, the EPA is addressing systemic inequities in access to federal funding. This model facilitates broader participation from underrepresented communities and builds long-term capacity for local leadership and resilience.

This initiative exemplifies how government agencies can reimagine traditional funding processes to align more closely with the needs of historically marginalized communities.

This is an Executive Summary of Aspen CSG's report, *Fostering Rural and Indigenous Community Well-Being with Asset-Based Development*. See the report for nuance and additional insights.

Community 
Strategies Group

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About Aspen CSG

Since 1985, the Aspen Institute Community Strategies Group has worked toward equitable rural prosperity. We support communities and Native nations to become healthy places where each and every person belongs, lives with dignity, and thrives.

As a national hub, Aspen CSG connects rural leaders, practitioners, and policymakers to share ideas, strengthen networks, and advance solutions grounded in the Thrive Rural Framework.

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Writing led by Melissa Levy, Aspen CSG consultant.

Learn more: www.AspenCSG.org