



Government Recommendations

Federal Government

These recommendations apply to federal government entities across the executive and legislative branches. Examples: Congress members and staffers, departments (e.g., Department of Agriculture, Department of Energy), and agencies (e.g., Economic Development Administration, Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Indian Health Service).

Stay connected to rural

- Let community needs drive funding opportunities—support on-the-ground and bottom-up approaches.
- Keep open lines of communication and engagement with communities
- Participate in rural events and convenings.

Be strategic and collaborate

- Create a national rural development strategy that allows for place-based approaches and investments.
- Communicate how rural communities, our national economy, and our security are interconnected and depend on successful rural development.
- Expand the concept used for coal community rapid response: direct access to inter-agency sessions through liaisons and advocates.
- Establish public-private partnerships between government agencies, philanthropy, and the private sector.
- Work with Regional Development Hubs on regulatory reform.

Redesign systems

- Be bold—do new things rather than adding another layer to previous work.
- Build a new funding system to replace competitive grants—start with impact on capacity and readiness and work from there.
- Streamline rural development funding systems (see the [Brookings Institution "spaghetti graph"](#)).
- Establish programs that provide multi-year, significant operating and capacity building funding, focusing on rural development outcomes rather than specific, limited projects.

Fix barriers

- Honor contractual commitments; change should only be forward-looking.
- Do not require a match for Tribes, economically distressed areas, and areas of environmental concern.
- Move away from reimbursable grants, which are unworkable for many community-based organizations.
- Support robust third-party evaluation to capture lessons learned, best practices, and pitfalls.

Recognize the importance of regional Rural Development Hubs

- Educate agency staff on working with Hubs.
- Consult Hubs and involve them in program design, not just roll-out and utilization.
- Require grantees to engage in collaboration and other key Hub work.

Fund rural needs

- Rural communities are not just agriculture: distinguish rural development community funding from other priorities in the Farm Bill.
- Appropriate funding for service programs that provide essential capacity building for rural.
- Appropriate funding for comprehensive rural-focused grants that build capacity.
- Recognize and support anchor employers of all types in rural regions.

"In grant reports, nobody is incentivized to really talk about the mixed bag that results from doing a project. And that takes away from innovation and a risk-taking mentality. Public money should encourage trying new things and being real with evaluation."



Colby Hall

Shaping Our Appalachian Region,
Kentucky

"Traditional metrics don't work, and part of that is because we're playing the long game. Partnership building, trust building, and all those aspects make it pretty difficult to bundle community change within a one-year grant report."



Stacy Caldwell

Tahoe Truckee Community Foundation, California



Recommendations for the US Department of Agriculture (USDA)

- Support navigators to ensure access to opportunities, technical assistance, and coordination.
- Create an office of small farms within USDA.
- Expand and reform capacity-building funding (e.g., Rural Community Development Initiative (RCDI), the proposed Rural Partners Program).
- Support state office infrastructure.
- Collaborate across state lines for efficiency.
- Coordinate with BIA to make sure Tribes have access to development loans.



Recommendations for the Department of the Interior, the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), and the Indian Health Service

- Be more flexible and responsive—less one size fits all.
- Remove unrealistic reporting and match requirements.
- Support navigators and cross-agency working groups to help Tribes access funding.
- Coordinate with USDA to make sure Tribes have access to development loans
- Invest in pilot programs to see what works.
- Revisit policy on the length of trust land leases (99 years does not provide intergenerational stability).
- Learn about and support Native nation building.
- Ground the work in the treaties and the trust obligation that the federal government has to federally recognized tribes.



State Government

These recommendations apply to state government entities across executive and legislative branches. Examples: state legislators and staffers, departments (e.g., Department of Health, Department of Labor), offices (e.g., Office of Rural Prosperity), and boards and commissions (e.g., Board of Education)

Create and sustain structures to support rural

- Establish and/or support statewide offices of rural prosperity.
- Provide permanent funds from extractive industry severance taxes.
- Design state rural development strategies that center regionally-led, place-based approaches.
- Create carve-outs for rural communities in state funding based on percent-change metrics rather than overall volume.
- Ensure equitable distribution of federal funds among urban and rural communities based on capacity, readiness, and best practices.

Build a strong staff that understands rural

- Hire adequate legislative and agency staff, including those from rural regions.
- Pay staff a living wage.
- Educate staff on rural and Indigenous issues.
- Address problems related to high turnover and lack of institutional memory.

Engage with rural

- Encourage staff to engage with communities (visit, meet, attend events) to stay informed about what is happening on the ground.
- Publicize funding opportunities widely.
- Expand networks and contacts in communities across the state instead of always going to the same partners.

Respect and work with Native nations

- Maintain strong Tribal government relationships and alliances.
- Partner and coordinate with Tribes on projects and funding.
- Take Tribal consultation seriously: educate state leaders on the process, and do it properly.

Partner with Rural Development Hubs

- Learn about the social sector and its role as extension and connection.
- Fund and support Hubs and partner organizations.
- Support the development of Hubs, but avoid mandates relating to them—Communities and regions should drive Hubs.
- Use language specific to Rural Development Hubs in SOPs and plans (e.g., “we will work with Rural Development Hubs to...”).

Create links between urban and rural

- Use local Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) and state, city, and county agencies to help understand urban/rural differences and interconnections.
- Create intentional collaborations between urban and rural communities within regions.

Embrace the role of intermediary between communities and the federal government

- Advocate for rural issues and programs at the federal level.
- Fill gaps related to federal changes and cuts where possible.
- Be strategic, not just tactical.

Use equitable, asset-based approaches to funding and rural development

- Do not require a match for Tribes, economically distressed areas, and areas of environmental concern.
- Provide grant funding up front, not through reimbursement.
- Fulfill payment obligations and timelines.
- Measure percentage change rather than volume numbers (see [Measure Up: A Call to Action](#) from Aspen CSG).
- Avoid competing with community groups for federal funding.

“If you want a community to speak, you have to make sure enough people from that community are in the room. When only one person is at the table, it’s hard for them to speak comfortably or openly.”



Jennie Stephens

Center for Heirs Property Preservation,
South Carolina

“Jobs should really be a trailing indicator, trailing the fact that we are building dynamism in our communities from which things can grow.”



Patty Cantrell

New Growth CDC, Missouri



Stay accessible

- Be curious—stay open to new ideas and don't be afraid of conflict.
- Engage the community before and during decision-making.
- Promote system change and build engagement by involving as many people as possible in local master planning.
- Host welcoming community meetings and events: schedule them at times accessible for community members, provide opportunities for virtual viewing, have reliable audio/visual equipment, and provide childcare to support the attendance of parents/caregivers with young children.

Build your own capacity

- Invest in leadership development for electeds and staff (e.g., adaptive leadership training).
- Train staff in meaningful, effective community engagement.
- Access technical support when needed.
- Encourage a new generation of leaders.

Establish respectful working relationships with Tribal governments

- Honor tribal sovereignty.
- Collaborate with Tribal governments.
- Support Tribal housing and development of properties on trust land.

Build strong partnerships

- Embrace being a node within the regional ecosystem, in deep relationship with others in the ecosystem (other local governments, Hubs, etc.).
- Get to know your Rural Development Hubs and keep them "on speed dial".
- Send representatives to county meetings and gatherings hosted by other governments and organizations.
- Meet regularly with local partners.
- Ask partners to help you engage the community.

Support Rural Development Hubs

- Learn about the Hub model.
- Support adoption of the Hub model and Hub-like approaches where appropriate.
- Support Hubs with resources (e.g., funding, property).

Support important local work

- Fund local and regional ecosystem builders.
- Encourage community benefit agreements.
- Contract with local vendors whenever possible.
- Encourage local development (e.g., reduce parking requirements for downtown buildings).

Stay practical

- Govern within your authority and limitations—focus on solutions.
- Pay attention to budget restraints and changing circumstances.
- Maintain consistent policies around local taxes.
- Keep a long view, beyond the current fiscal year or term.

"Local government can play a role in systems-level change by making sure that as many people in the community as possible are involved in their planning processes."



Julianna Dodson
Hannah Grimes Center,
New Hampshire

"For local government, I say focus on solutions rather than the problems, and who's doing the work."



Alissa Benoist
Four Bands Community Fund,
South Dakota



TRIBAL GOVERNMENT

- Lead with honoring Tribal sovereignty when dealing with all other governmental entities.
- Include diverse Tribal voices in the decision-making process to increase impact.
- Leverage the power of intertribal working groups to shape and advance change.
- Facilitate conversations that identify common ground.
- Support and strengthen Rural Development Hubs for holistic regional development.
- Engage philanthropic and governmental partners to deepen their understanding of the complex legal, economic, health, and structural realities that Tribes must work within for community well-being.

"Bringing Tribal partners together around shared priorities strengthens our collective voice."



Olivia Sloan

Anchorum Health Foundation,
New Mexico

"There's another layer of opportunity for local and Tribal governments to partner."



Jessica Stago

ChangeLabs,
Navajo Nation/Arizona

When Native Nations Thrive, Regions Thrive

When Native nations thrive, they lift the regions around them. Through Native nation building, many Tribes have once again become key anchors in rural areas, fostering community well-being, cultural resilience, and local development. They generate significant local jobs, spending, and tax revenue.

Tribes are essential partners whose knowledge, leadership, and perspectives are critical; building strong, respectful partnerships ensures solutions are effective, equitable, and lasting.

Because rural regions and Native nations often share geography, Native prosperity benefits surrounding communities. Tribal citizens live and work in nearby rural areas, and projects focused on environmental stewardship, health, and public safety offer important opportunities for regional collaboration.

Insights for this section were generous provided by:

Leona Antoine, NACDC Financial Services, Inc., Montana

Alissa Benoit, Four Bands Community Fund, South Dakota

Olivia Sloan, Anchorum Health Foundation, New Mexico

Jessica Stago, Change Labs, Navajo Nation/Arizona

Dave Castillo, Native Community Capital, New Mexico

Angie Main, NACDC Financial Services, Fort Belknap Gros Ventre

Jacqueline Shirley, RCAC, New Mexico

Erik Stegman, Native Americans In Philanthropy, DC