

National Rural Economic Development Association

Rural Issues Paper

Who We Are

NREDA is an individual-member, professional organization dedicated exclusively to the advancement of rural development, the development of member proficiency, and achievement of social and human service objectives in rural areas. NREDA's membership base is comprised primarily of, but not limited to: Electric Cooperative Related; Telephone Cooperative Related; Economic Development Organizations; Associations; Government Related; or Consultants.

As the only organization focusing exclusively on rural economic and community development, NREDA connects professionals in energy, telecommunications, water and sewer systems, transportation, housing, health care, education and financing.

Our Issues

NREDA is solutions-based. We aim to solve the challenges of rural economies across the United States by connecting the people tackling those challenges with the resources and expertise that can help. We believe these are the largest barriers to rural economic development:

- Diversity and Inclusion
- Workforce
- Housing & Community Services
- Infrastructure
- Financing

NREDA Supports Diversity and Inclusion.

Rural America is characterized by a dynamic mix of heroes from all walks of life. As economic developers fostering prosperity for our neighbors, the National Rural Economic Developers Association (NREDA) is committed to contributing to a more transparent, fair and accountable society. As a national organization NREDA believes that in order for us to reach our full potential as rural Americans, we must live together, build together, work together, and grow together.

NREDA represents the diverse and welcoming communities they serve. NREDA's mission as an organization continues to be the advancement of rural economic development through education and networking from those from all demographics of sustainable rural life, industries, and opportunities. NREDA leadership will continue to amplify the voices of an open and inclusive environment that supports the advancement of rural economic development and our hometowns.

NREDA believes workforce is the lifeblood of a thriving rural economy.

- Education: Education – both at the K-12 and secondary levels – is the basic building block of a functioning workforce that can meet the needs of tomorrow. NREDA supports an increased focus on developing educational programs that will create the workforce of tomorrow – a workforce educated in technology and innovation can usher in a clean energy transition, modernize farming and agricultural practices, and tackle the technological challenges coming our way.
- Diversity and Inclusion: NREDA believes that as we modernize our training and education programs, we must ensure that those programs are developed in a way that is accessible and beneficial to people of all walks of life. A diversified workforce is a healthier, more productive workforce. A healthy workforce leads to healthier rural communities – it is imperative that we build programs that encourage diversity.

NREDA encourages support for housing development.

No matter how diversified or well-trained the workforce is, a workforce is nothing without housing to live in. The lack of affordable, widely accessible housing in rural America truly represents a crisis, and it is one that must be solved if we want to solve any other major challenge. NREDA supports public policy that streamlines the home building process, trains and educates a workforce that has the capacity to tackle the housing challenges of today and the future, and that helps rural communities cover the costs of developing new housing.

Many rural communities have residentially-zoned property that has yet to see roads built to it, or homes built on it. There is a reason for this – it does not pencil out for small, private developers to cover the home building costs or pre-development charges associated with the necessary infrastructure. Without proper financing, none of these issues can be solved. NREDA supports the establishment of Revolving Loan Funds or similar funding mechanisms that mirror the USDA Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant Program to help demolish the pre-development cost barriers to infrastructure and housing development.

NREDA supports the modernization of rural infrastructure.

NREDA supports funding programs that equitably and inclusively target the below forms of infrastructure. Ensuring Americans from every corner of the country can fairly and equitably access the following forms of infrastructure is a key piece of growing and diversifying both our rural economies and communities.

- **Broadband**: NREDA strongly supports federal financing initiatives that will ensure that all Americans have access to affordable broadband services, rates and capabilities that are reasonably comparable to those in urban areas. This includes, but is not limited to, universal service funding to build, maintain, and advance services in high-cost areas. According to site selector data, the availability of quality broadband is essential for the future of rural economic development. Where possible, collaboration between the electric cooperatives, rural telecommunications companies, telephone (broadband) cooperatives and the communities is encouraged to maximize resources and geographic coverage.
- **Transportation**: Typically, development follows infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. Without adequate infrastructure, especially transportation infrastructure, development likely will not occur. At the federal level, funding by Congress has not kept up with the needs of the highways, waterways, airports and the air traffic control system. NREDA supports a permanent fix to funding for the highway trust fund, funding for improvements to the locks on the nation's waterways and funding for the next generation air traffic control system.
- **Energy**: At a time when the United States is rapidly transitioning to an electrified, clean energy economy, NREDA believes it is more important than ever to support and ensure reliable quantities of baseload power as the nation continues to make that transition. Power that is easy to access, reliable, affordable, and most importantly – safe – is a key component of the necessary infrastructure that will encourage economic development. NREDA supports maintaining existing hydropower, nuclear power, and natural gas and coal fired power as our baseload power while the nation transitions to cleaner sources of power - like solar and wind power.
- **Water & Wastewater**: As the United States quickly re-emerges as a land of opportunity for tech manufacturing there is a new complexion to the uses and requirements of water and wastewater resources. Communities will miss out on important development opportunities without access to funding that is essential to expanding their capacity to serve and sanitize large amounts of water and wastewater.

- Emergency Response: Too often we forget that infrastructure is not just roads and bridges, internet access, and energy. Emergency responders are a key component of the infrastructure that is necessary for economic growth and community health in rural communities. In fact, this may be the most important factor in the economic development equation – protecting and serving the community. Without critical facilities and functions like hospitals, health clinics, ambulance services, fire and rescue, or law enforcement our communities can't survive – and we can't recruit the workforce of tomorrow. NREDA supports a strong focus on ensuring rural communities can provide these services.

NREDA supports USDA's Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant (REDLG) Program as an essential component of rural financing.

The USDA REDLG program is a strong tool in the toolbox available to communities served by America's electric cooperatives. This program can help communities clear the funding hurdles that get in the way of workforce, housing, and infrastructure developments. NREDA supports the continued federal investment in programs like the United States Department of Agriculture's REDLG program and the Rural Energy Savings Programs (RESP). These programs are only growing in importance, and further investments into these projects in the future are necessary.

Final Thought

Finally, NREDA encourages continued involvement from rural utilities in the economic development process. NREDA encourages continued investments in grid reliability and security, broadband, and the modernization of water/wastewater facilities. Not-for-profit utilities play a key role in actually facilitating the economic development we are working towards by serving the most basic of needs for industrial parks, small businesses, agriculture, schools, hospitals, police departments, and public offices. Continued investment into and support of these utilities is critical.