

National Rural Economic Developers Association (NREDA)
Rural Issues Committee
2021 NREDA Issues Paper

1. 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.

2. NREDA Supports Critical Needs for Communities and Businesses

NREDA encourages a continued focus on strengthening systems that support rural areas in a post-pandemic world. Rural America makes important contributions to our economy. Rural economies need healthy communities to ensure services and resources are available to meet the needs of rural businesses. NREDA supports investment and technical support for continued innovation to improve supply and security of rural and agriculture-based economies. NREDA encourages an increased focus on rural community and economic development programs that support and include, but are not limited to:

- Infrastructure, including broadband, energy, and transportation facilities necessary to compete in a global marketplace
- Training and workforce development to support evolving and innovative next-generation opportunities in agriculture technology, telemedicine, and remote work opportunities
Housing, health care and early-childhood/K-12 education
- Investments to sustain and grow commercial and industrial activity, including redevelopment of downtown and manufacturing centers

3. NREDA supports United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development's Rural Economic Development Loan and Grant (REDLG) program.

The REDLG program is a vital financial tool for rural communities to overcome the challenges of rural locations and spur local business expansions, community development projects and economic development projects. REDLG provides zero-interest loan and grant funds to rural electric and communications providers that, in turn, pass through funds to local community projects and businesses and create revolving loan funds. The resulting locally-based financial tools help increase sustainability in rural areas as well as create and retain jobs in our communities. Increased funding for the REDLG program, or at a minimum maintaining the existing level of funding, would ensure financial resources are available for rural economic and community development projects.

REDLG has had tremendous tangible impacts to rural America. Funding through FY 2018 has leveraged over \$4.2 billion in private investment resulted in over 95,000 jobs being created and retained. With local matching funds, REDLG has created local revolving loan funds of over \$237 million which will continue to be used to spur business and community development in rural communities.

4. NREDA supports increased funding for transportation infrastructure.

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.

5. NREDA supports continued federal investment in broadband-capable infrastructure.

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, including but not limited to universal service funding to build, maintain, and advance services in high-cost areas. The availability of quality broadband is essential for the future of rural

economic development, according to site selector data. Where possible, collaboration between the electric cooperatives, rural telecommunications companies, telephone (broadband) cooperatives and the communities is encouraged to maximize resources and geographic coverage.

6. NREDA encourages the involvement of utilities in rural economic development efforts.

NREDA recognizes that rural utilities aid economic development via public/private partnerships across numerous channels to enhance prosperity and quality of life. NREDA supports utility infrastructure enhancements that are critical to the attraction of commercial and industrial development that support the overall well-being of rural communities. Rural water/wastewater utilities are in critical need of additional tools to support expansions that are looked upon as vital to the development of agriculture, data storage, and advanced manufacturing facilities. Direct pay incentives for not-for-profit electric utilities would enable investments in advanced energy technologies such as renewable energy production, storage, and electric vehicle deployment. Lastly, NREDA supports expanding efforts to modernize and secure the electrical grid to further the reliability and resiliency of the United States electric infrastructure to improve quality of life and growth in rural America.

7. Rural Workforce Housing

NREDA supports the ongoing need for workforce housing in rural America. NREDA recognizes that the term, “Workforce Housing” refers to housing that is affordable to working households that do not qualify for publicly subsidized housing, yet cannot afford appropriate market-rate housing in their community. Simply put, workforce housing includes all levels of a rural community’s working population. Teachers, Manufacturer’s, recent College graduates, Farmers, business owners, and Executives, etc., all make up the “workforce housing” demographic for rural America. NREDA believes in the need for all Rural communities to have the ability to maintain housing that meets the needs of working families and is attractive to new residents locating in a rural community. This makes the availability and affordability key for rural communities to continue to recruit, retain, and expand, it’s people, future, and opportunities. NREDA understands that one key component to a viable and sustainable rural community is the opportunity and availability of housing options for the rural workforce. When there is synergy between business recruitment, expansion, placemaking, and workforce housing, rural communities have an opportunity thrive for years to come.