


FACT SHEET OCT 6, 2022


President Joe Biden’s Historic Infrastructure and Climate Investments Will Require Building Rural Capacity

Federal wildfire and flood resilience dollars are not reaching the rural communities most vulnerable to climate risk and least able to prepare.


AUTHORS




Sofia Garcia George



Kevin Manuele




Mark Haggerty





Nicole Gentile


Tackling Climate Change and Environmental Injustice


Climate Change, Environmental and Climate Justice













A man walks through a flooded street in a rural part of Naples, Florida, the morning after Hurricane Irma swept through the area on September 11, 2017. (Getty/Spencer Platt)

Over the past year, Congress has delivered on President Joe Biden’s vision, making potentially transformational investments in America’s workforce, energy systems,

infrastructure, competitiveness, and community resilience. However, passing legislation and appropriating dollars is only a beginning. States, local governments, and rural leaders will have to prepare plans, apply for funding, and manage complex construction and restoration projects. All of this requires capacity—the staff, expertise, financial resources, and networks, including political influence—necessary to follow through on funding opportunities.

Rural places are often stretched thin. A natural disaster can easily overwhelm a small town's capacity to respond. Infrastructure in rural areas is often already in relatively poor condition, and rural places have fewer assets and resources to deploy before or after a natural disaster.¹

The Center for American Progress recently released two reports that assess the ways in which missed opportunities in implementing federal resilience programs exemplify the challenges facing rural communities. Through interviews with various experts and federal, state, and local officials, the reports explore how resilience funding in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act of 2021—also known as the bipartisan infrastructure law—can better serve rural areas facing significant climate risk. While this research is based on case studies of specific programs, the reports also offer broadly applicable recommendations for decision-makers as they design and implement programs to include rural communities in efforts to adapt to and recover from the effects of climate change.

READ THE REPORTS IN THIS SERIES



REPORT

How To Improve Community Wildfire Defense Grants To Build Rural Resilience

Oct 6, 2022

Sofia Garcia George, [Mark Haggerty](#)



REPORT

How FEMA Can Build Rural Resilience Through Disaster Preparedness

Oct 6, 2022

Kevin Manuele, [Mark Haggerty](#)

Some initial solutions may include:

Capacity

- Invest up to 20 percent of grants in building lasting capacity, such as hiring local and long-term staff; providing technical and leadership training; and sustaining planning, outreach, and peer networks so rural communities are not isolated.
- Target more noncompetitive project funding to low-capacity rural communities using metrics that measure physical and social vulnerability and capacity.
- Increase rural competitiveness for national grants by making small and appropriately designed projects eligible; enabling nongovernmental organizations

to apply on behalf of communities and to coordinate regional projects; allow states to opt out of program implementation; and waive requirements that are barriers for underresourced places, such as matching funds, benefit-cost analyses, and certain mandates.

Coordination and alignment

- Align grant eligibility criteria and application requirements among federal agencies and programs. Move toward a single federal application, kept on file, to streamline the application process and eliminate duplication of effort.
- Coordinate and package federal resilience and rural development grants to leverage the economic benefits of climate and conservation investments.
- Shift the burden from communities to agencies to complete some application tasks such as compiling necessary data to determine eligibility and reviewing compliance with federal rules.

Technical assistance and guidance

- Provide agency assistance to help rural communities navigate the complex process of securing federal grants.
- Use different eligibility and reporting metrics that capture vulnerability and capacity, such as demographic and local capacity.
- Build capacity in agencies and regional hubs to better assess needs and help communities access appropriate resources; the Rural Partners Network at the U.S. Department of Agriculture is a good example.²

The opportunity provided by recent federal investments should not be understated: These resources will inspire and finance the very best climate resilience projects across the country to prepare communities for disasters before they strike. The bipartisan infrastructure law also prioritizes equity in grant-making, makes investments in the rural workforce, and includes programs and resources to build capacity. The recommendations offered here can improve implementation of these historic investments by ensuring federal assistance reaches communities most susceptible to natural disasters and least able to prepare for and respond to them—communities with limited capacity.

Endnotes

Expand ▾

- ¹ Caitlin Cain, “Developing Climatic Capacity in Rural Places,” in Daniel Davis and Andrew Dumont, eds., *Investing in Rural Prosperity* (Washington: Federal Reserve Board of Governors, 2021), available at <https://www.stlouisfed.org/-/media/project/frbstl/stlouisfed/files/pdfs/community-development/investing-rural/chapters/chapter33.pdf>.
- ² U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development, “Rural Partners Network: Building Stronger Futures Together” (Washington: 2022), available at https://www.rural.gov/sites/default/files/2022-08/508_RD_FS_RuralPartnersNetwork.pdf.

The positions of American Progress, and our policy experts, are independent, and the findings and conclusions presented are those of American Progress alone. A full list of supporters is available [here](#). American Progress would like to acknowledge the many generous supporters who make our work possible.

AUTHORS

Sofia Garcia George

Former Intern, Energy and Environment



Kevin Manuele

Former Intern, Energy and Environment



Mark Haggerty

Senior Fellow, Energy and Environment



Nicole Gentile

Senior Director, Public Lands

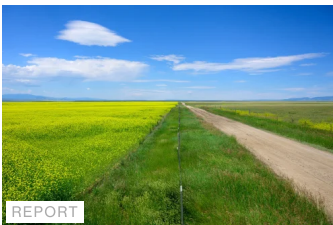


YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE



How To Improve Community Wildfire Defense Grants To Build Rural Resilience

Oct 6, 2022
Sofia Garcia George, [Mark Haggerty](#)



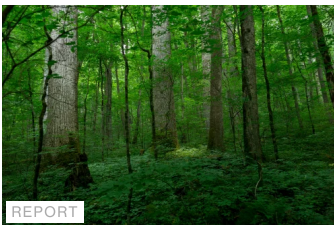
Quitting Fossil Fuels and Reviving Rural America

Sep 1, 2022
[Mark Haggerty](#), [Nicole Gentile](#)



Fight for Our Future: Activists Demand Action on Climate and Justice

Apr 27, 2022
[Hannah Malus](#), [Margaret Cooney](#), [Caroline Alt](#)



How the United States Can Fulfill Its Critical Forest Pledges

Feb 9, 2022
[Anne Christianson](#)

ALSO FROM CAP



**Social Media and the 2022
Midterm Elections: Anticipating
Online Threats to Democratic
Legitimacy**

Nov 3, 2022
Erin Simpson, Adam Conner, Ashleigh Maciolek



**Without Congressional Action,
Puerto Rico Faces Severe
Medicaid Funding Cuts**

Nov 3, 2022
Nicole Rapfogel



**Abortion Bans Will Result in More
Women Dying**

Nov 2, 2022
Elyssa Spitzer, Tracy Weitz, Maggie Jo Buchanan



**The Opioid Epidemic Demands
Public Health Solutions, Not
False Claims About Immigration**

Oct 31, 2022
Trinh Q. Truong, Debu Gandhi



The Center for American Progress is an independent nonpartisan policy institute that is dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans through bold, progressive ideas, as well as strong leadership and concerted action. Our aim is not just to change the conversation, but to change the country.



Learn about our sister organization, the [Center for American Progress Action Fund](#), an advocacy organization dedicated to improving the lives of all Americans.

©2022 Center for American Progress

[Terms of Use](#)
[Privacy Policy](#)
[CAP - En Español](#)
[Our Supporters](#)

Could not connect to the reCAPTCHA service. Please check your internet connection and reload to get a reCAPTCHA challenge.
Could not connect to the reCAPTCHA service. Please check your internet connection and reload to get a reCAPTCHA challenge.