

**To:** Secretary-Designee Raimondo, U.S. Department of Commerce  
**From:** National League of Cities  
**Re:** Policy Areas of Importance to Cities, Towns and Villages  
**Date:** January 27, 2020

As the voice of America's cities, towns and villages, representing more than 200 million people across the country, the National League of Cities (NLC) looks forward to working with the Biden-Harris Administration and with the team at the Department of Commerce. Local leaders are key partners across Commerce's scope of duties, from completion of the decennial census process, to local economic recovery from the COVID-19 recession, to building a future-proof broadband network that can withstand future disasters.

As cities look to partner with the Administration in the first 100 days and beyond, we hope that the following areas will be taken into consideration:

### **Direct Fiscal Relief to Cities, Towns and Villages**

Cities are the engine of our nation's economy and essential to America's economic recovery. Health and the economy perhaps have never been more closely aligned than now - as the urgency to address public health to ensure a strong economy is vital. With so many city leaders and essential workers on the front lines risking their health and safety, navigating expanding needs for health and mental health services, support and relief is needed more than ever. America's communities are hurting. As the findings of NLC's 2020 [City Fiscal Conditions report](#) reveals, America's cities are experiencing the fiscal consequences of the coronavirus pandemic-downturn at an unprecedented speed – and like recent recessions, it will take years for municipal budgets to recover from the impact of COVID-19. This effects health and well-being in communities in the long-term as well. Cities, towns and villages across our country need direct fiscal relief to communities of all sizes to ensure that essential city services and important community-anchoring programs can remain in operation.

### **Regular Communication with Stakeholders**

Local leaders are committed to intergovernmental partnership, through federalism, requiring a cooperative partnership among local, state and federal governments that must be strengthened through all levels of government. Local leaders look forward to working collaboratively with the Biden-Harris Administration and in a manner that recognizes the importance of a federal-local partnership. As such, we hope that Commerce and its bureaus will institute regular intergovernmental briefings, as well as ensure that local governments are at the table when rules and resources are being crafted to provide an important perspective on ensuring that they are effective, implementable, offer local flexibility, avoid a "one-size-fits-all" approach and avoid an unfunded mandate.

### **Commitment to Racial Equity**

The coronavirus pandemic [exposed the inequities](#) that long existed in communities, particularly evident in Black, Indigenous, Latin/Hispanic and other communities of color. As local leaders look to reimagine government policies, procedures and processes to build more equitable communities, NLC's [Race, Equity And Leadership \(REAL\)](#) department helps city, town and village leaders strengthen their knowledge and capacity to learn about the impact of historical inequities and design programs that dismantle structural and system racism. NLC aims to achieve this goal by centering racial equity in our all

our work including our direct technical assistance and research. NLC calls on the federal government to prioritize federal investments in communities that have been left behind, specifically our BIPOC communities, which have been disproportionately impacted by the effects of COVID-19, historical policies and under-investment.

### **Economic Development Administration**

NLC works closely with other local government and development associations as part of the EDA Stakeholders Coalition. Partners include [NLC](#), [NACo](#), [RCAP](#), [NARC](#), [NADO](#), [IEDC](#), and others. The following policy recommendations have been developed in concert with the EDA Stakeholders Coalition. The Economic Development Administration should be elevated and enhanced to provide fiscal aid, technical assistance, and communications certainty to every local government requesting assistance. To achieve those objectives, NLC urges enactment of the following policy recommendations:

- Enhance EDA's role in capacity building by improving EDA Partnership Planning. As communities continue to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, they will need to reevaluate and revise their existing regional development plans and Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDs). Congress should significantly increase EDA funding for planning assistance for communities as they endeavor to build back stronger and more resilient economies.
- Increase EDA funding for Research and National Technical Assistance (RNTA); and Public Works. EDA technical assistance is an irreplaceable resource for communities with limited capacity that reaches far too few communities in need. The Administration should support enhancing EDA's role and increasing funding for technical assistance to support the implementation of projects that are outlined in CEDs, and/or to support new projects that are needed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Support the creation of a new EDA Capacity-Building Grant Program that would assist economic development entities or local governments with large-scale economic development planning and implementation efforts. This grant program should support the use of professional services and consulting firms devoted to helping grantees conduct activities including developing regional plans; conducting robust stakeholder input processes; and utilizing a variety of state and federal economic development programs.

### **National Institute for Standards and Technology**

NLC appreciates NIST's ongoing partnership, research, and assistance on rapidly-evolving issues that impact communities and local governance, including climate change and smart city technologies.

Local leaders are on the front lines of the effects of climate change. Federal tools, research, data and financial and technical assistance are critical to supporting local climate mitigation, adaptation and resilience efforts. We encourage NIST to continue to provide this type of information to local leaders in a way that is understandable, accessible and actionable.

NIST also has a critical and growing role to play in the evolution of smart city technology and its implementation in communities. Programs such as the Global Cities Teams Challenge have provided a valuable forum for compiling and disseminating information, connecting peer communities, and giving local leaders the tools and knowledge they need to make wise investments and decisions in technology for government operations, infrastructure, public safety and more.

**National Telecommunications and Information Administration**

Closing the nation's digital divide has become more urgent than ever before. We encourage NTIA to continue and grow its body of resources and technical assistance on broadband planning, infrastructure development, and digital equity for local officials. We encourage NTIA to partner directly with local governments as it establishes its Office of Minority Broadband Initiatives and Office of Internet Connectivity and Growth in the coming months. The work of BroadbandUSA to assist communities in conducting needs assessments, develop broadband and digital equity plans, and locate federal funding and resources has been critical and should not be dropped as the organization evolves.

**U.S. Census Bureau**

The U.S. needs to be a complete count of all people in the U.S. We are heartened by the Executive Order signed by Joseph R. Biden's Administration to ensure that all people regardless of immigration status are counted in the 2020 decennial census. NLC understands that the Bureau worked in unprecedented conditions in 2020, facing hurricanes, wildfires, and the pandemic achieve an accurate count. Cities rely on accurate counts for billions of dollars in federal funding. Thus, NLC wants to be a resource for the Bureau in any way possible to help as you move forward in producing your base level numbers and apportionment umbers.