

Policy Priorities

2021–2022

Capacity Building,
Leadership, and Innovation

Economic Development

Education

Family Income
and Wealth Building

Health

Housing

Safety and Justice

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LISC's Policy Priorities

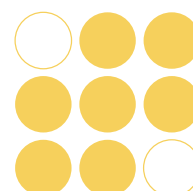
Executive Summary

LISC's 40-year history as a community development organization has taught us that people thrive when their communities are supplied with a set of interconnected physical, social, and economic assets. Our approach is comprehensive, embracing affordable housing development and workforce training, initiatives for better health, safer public spaces, and much more. Last year alone LISC invested \$1.8 billion in hundreds of historically underserved communities across the United States.

Working closely with 2,500 local partner organizations—nonprofits with deep roots in their distinctive communities—LISC brings resources and technical assistance to city neighborhoods and rural counties that too often have been isolated from American opportunities. Working in partnership with mission-aligned for profit and nonprofit entities, we bridge the gap to equip community groups with the resources that allow them to do their best work. Our initiatives focus first and foremost on equity and inclusion, which we know are the basis for a prospering, resilient nation.

Our efforts are enhanced through federal commitments—both in the form of policy development that helps set the agenda for revitalizing disinvested communities, and funding that puts that agenda in motion. Federal commitments are the linchpin of LISC's public-private partnership investment model, helping us attract billions of dollars of private capital each year to places it wouldn't otherwise go.

We care deeply about the fine points of federal programs and appropriations; we've seen the difference they make. Here we advance LISC's policy priorities for federal action. They cover seven areas of community development across 17 separate federal agencies, as summarized below. We are committed not just to pursuing action on the items highlighted in this document, but also on identifying additional opportunities for policy development and advocacy in the coming months and years.



Capacity Building, Leadership and Innovation

Community development relies on the knowledge and hard work of change agents at the local level. We must invest directly in these organizations to support their capacity to deliver critical services, and to help them develop innovative approaches that can be replicated in other communities.

We advocate for federal policies that:

- Support **capacity building and technical assistance**, in particular through increased funding of programs at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) that build the capacity of community development corporations in urban and rural communities, and through provision of technical assistance to small local governments under HUD's Community Compass initiative.
- Make **fostering innovation** a priority, for example by supporting federal evidence-based practices, expanding cross-agency demonstrations, and financing "Pay for Success" initiatives.
- Promote **national service** by passing the Cultivating Opportunity and Response to the Pandemic through Service (CORPS) Act, which would double AmeriCorps service positions and boost benefits for service members, and by providing funding for the Economic Mobility Corps, which places AmeriCorps members at certified community development financial institutions (CDFIs).

Economic Development

Investing in inclusive economic development initiatives ensures that low-income individuals and families can fully participate in the economic growth of their region and build wealth within their communities.

We support federal initiatives that:

- Enhance critical **community development** programs at Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Endowment for the Arts.
- Strengthen **public-private partnerships** by making New Markets Tax Credits permanent, adding accountability measures and community-benefit incentives to the Opportunity Zones initiative, and modernizing the Community Reinvestment Act to ensure beneficial community outcomes.
- Boost **investments in CDFIs** via, for instance, a new tax credit for investors in CDFIs, a new CDFI direct loan product, and substantial new funding for the U.S. Treasury Department's CDFI Fund.
- Broaden access to **small business lending** for very small businesses, minority-owned enterprises, and others underserved by traditional lenders by strengthening the Small Business Administration's capital-access and technical-assistance programs, permanently authorizing and robustly funding the Minority Business Development Agency, and providing funding for states and localities to support small business lending to underbanked borrowers.
- Promote equitable **transit-oriented development**, including by establishing a federal loan fund for CDFIs that would allow these lenders to finance affordable housing and other community-benefiting projects near transit hubs.

Education

Education is a sound predictor of well-being and economic stability. That's why the crux of LISC's education agenda is to promote educational opportunity in neighborhoods across the country.

We encourage the federal government to adopt policies that:

- Support **early childhood facilities** through, for example, legislation that would create a competitive grant program to enable facility renovations, and the establishment of a dedicated technical-assistance funding stream for small business supports tailored to the needs of child care business operators, the majority of whom are women and/or minorities.
- Assist with **charter school financing**, in particular by increasing funding for and improving the U.S. Department of Education's Credit Enhancement for Charter Schools Program.
- Increase **postsecondary education** opportunities for low-income families by expanding Pell Grant eligibility, investing in community colleges and Historically Black Colleges and Universities, and promoting partnerships between community colleges and local industries.

Family Income and Wealth Building

In an era marked by growing economic inequality, we must work to expand opportunities for all families, especially those in marginalized communities, to build income and wealth.

We endorse federal initiatives that:

- Improve opportunities to build **credit and savings** by, for instance, enhancing protections against predatory lending and providing funding for federal programs that help low-wealth families save for education, homeownership, or starting a small business.
- Support **financial coaching** and tax preparation services, by incentivizing workforce development programs to incorporate financial coaching, using the resources of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to support financial coaching, and making sure the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) program of the Internal Revenue Service is made permanent and fully funded.
- Strengthen the **income supports** so vital to our social safety net by, among other things, increasing funding for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Employment and Training (SNAP E&T) initiative, and expanding and improving the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit.
- Promote **digital inclusion**, for instance by subsidizing broadband services for low-income families through the Federal Communications Commission's Lifeline program, and adopting legislation establishing grants for local digital equity projects.
- Invest in **workforce development**, for example by passing the Relaunching America's Workforce Act (RAWA), which would dedicate an additional \$15.6 billion for worker training, apprenticeships, and adult learning.

Health

Disparities in health and longevity are tightly linked to physical, social, and economic conditions. Reducing these disparities is a cornerstone of LISC’s holistic strategy to improve health and well-being in underserved places.

We support federal policies that:

- Address **social determinants of health**, for example by leveraging the infrastructure of the medical system, including Medicaid funding streams and nonprofit hospitals’ Community Health Needs Assessments (CHNAs), to support investments that will create healthier environments.
- Improve the **provision of health care** in underserved communities through, among other things, substantial long-term funding commitments for Federally Qualified Health Centers and permanent adoption of COVID-19-related changes in federal policy that make it easier for people to receive telehealth services.
- Ensure all people have access to **healthy food**, including by robustly funding food-access projects through the USDA and the CDFI Fund.
- Increase opportunities for **community recreation**, in particular by fully funding the National Park Service’s Land and Water Conservation Fund, which provides grants to states to acquire land and develop outdoor recreation spaces.

Housing

Access to safe, decent, and affordable housing is essential for the health and economic well-being of every family—and to the viability of every community.

We support federal strategies that:

- Develop, preserve, and widen access to **affordable rental housing**, for example by expanding the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program, and making Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers available to all income-eligible families.
- Fight **homelessness** by increasing HUD resources for homeless assistance and expanding veterans’ eligibility for supportive housing and clinical services.
- Restore robust **fair housing** policy, focusing on the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) and Disparate Impact rules that have allowed local communities to actively address housing policies that are discriminatory in intent or effect.
- Promote **homeownership** for low- and moderate-income people by, for instance, sufficiently funding HUD’s down payment assistance programs and passing legislation to scale the land-bank sector and to create incentives to develop and rehabilitate homes in distressed communities.

Safety and Justice

For 25 years LISC has been operating a dedicated safety and justice program. We spearhead initiatives that allow local people to work together to reduce crime, support formerly incarcerated individuals as they return to community life, and strengthen understanding between police and the people they serve.

LISC endorses federal actions that:

- Promote collaborative approaches to **community safety**, for example by reauthorizing the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation (BCJI) program at the U.S. Department of Justice, and by establishing a federal framework that brings police and community groups together to plan for and respond to major incidents.
- Uphold **justice**—for every individual and all communities—by dedicating substantial funds for programs that prevent violence and victimization in schools, and by funding pre-entry and re-entry programs that help dismantle pipelines to prison and support formerly incarcerated persons to reintegrate successfully into their communities.

