

ACCELERATING & COORDINATING THE NATIONAL EQUITABLE ECONOMIC TRANSITION

Coal workers and their communities helped to power one of the greatest economic expansions the United States has ever seen. But today, the changing coal economy has created a profound crisis for these workers and communities. As the industry shrinks, workers are losing their jobs, businesses are closing, and schools and vital public services are facing significant cuts. COVID-19 has exacerbated all of these pre-existing stressors and has made economic conditions in coal communities much worse—especially for historically marginalized groups, including low-income people, Native/Indigenous people, Black people, and People of Color. The workers and communities that fueled our country for generations *must* be a central part of the new, clean economy.

THE NATIONAL ECONOMIC TRANSITION PLATFORM

In response to the coal transition's impacts, the Just Transition Fund and a diverse planning team of representatives from coal communities across the country released the [National Economic Transition \(NET\) Platform](#) in June 2020. The platform ensures that local economic leaders—who have developed effective and innovative workforce and economic development solutions—inform national coal transition solutions. Building on this local innovation, the platform asks the federal government to:

1. Invest in **local leaders** and long-term economic development planning
2. Expand new sectors, like clean energy, to help communities **diversify economies**
3. Provide workers with bridge support and pathways to new economy, **family-sustaining jobs**
4. **Reclaim and repurpose** coal sites to create jobs while cleaning up the environment
5. Improve inadequate technology (broadband), physical (electricity, roads, wastewater) and social (education, health) **infrastructure**
6. Address the impact of coal company **bankruptcies** on workers and for reclamation
7. **Coordinate across programs** and priorities to ensure communities have access to resources

The energy transition is quickly presenting economic challenges, and they're being accelerated by the pandemic's economic impacts, condensing a community's timeline to prepare and plan. Given this urgency, the federal government must act quickly. But the comprehensive nature of transition solutions—ranging from economic and workforce development to mine reclamation and bankruptcy—also necessitates a durable, longer-term response that matches the magnitude of communities' needs and builds on local solutions.

OUR REQUEST

We recommend the immediate creation of a White House Office of Economic Transition, accompanied by increased funding for transition programs in the short term and a more robust entity to build community capacity in the long term. These actions would fulfill and build on President Biden's [campaign promise](#) to create a task force on coal and power plant communities, as well as [recommendations](#) of the Biden-Sanders Unity Task Force.

Current federal transition programs are housed across numerous departments and agencies, inhibiting their ability to form an adequate, coherent response to the nation's energy and economic transition. Too often, resource-constrained communities and supporting nonprofits lack the capacity to respond to the economic challenges. Coal communities need direct and immediate investments to build the capacity to plan and respond; navigate and access the complex federal landscape of available resources; and coordinate across the public and private sectors in order to scale solutions. And workers need wage support, guaranteed benefits, and training and relocation assistance as they prepare for new, good jobs.



To ensure affected communities and workers have the resources they need, the incoming administration should **immediately**:

1. Create a White House Office of Coal Community Economic Transition.

The President should issue an Executive Order that establishes an Office of Coal Community Economic Transition. We believe the Office should be housed at the White House, which is best suited to oversee and coordinate efforts across different agencies and programs. Building on the Obama-Biden POWER Initiative, the Office should coordinate an interagency initiative to leverage both new and existing funding programs across federal agencies. Relevant agencies include—but are not necessarily limited to—the ARC, EDA, DOI, BIA, DOL, EPA, USDA, and DOE. In tandem with this initiative, the Office should also be tasked with developing a National Community Transition Action Plan informed by the recommendations of an inclusive coal community task force that includes affected communities, workers, and other stakeholders. Created within a one-year period, this Action Plan should make recommendations for a path to helping communities and dislocated workers thrive in the transition to a clean energy economy by ensuring the creation of quality, family-sustaining jobs and offering a broad system of support for affected workers.

2. Substantially increase investment in federal programs that support transitioning coal communities.

The President should immediately direct existing resources to federal programs that fund community transition planning, economic and workforce development, infrastructure construction, and mine reclamation in coal-impacted communities. These immediate investments will help communities address the economic challenges already underway. This approach, which does not require Congressional approval, was utilized by the Obama-Biden POWER Initiative in 2015. To ensure longer-term funding solutions that match the scale of the crisis, the President should also include a set of funding initiatives—aligned with the needs identified in each pillar of the NET Platform—in his first presidential budget

request. New funding levels should surpass historical funding levels. For example, the roughly \$100 million allocated to the POWER Initiative each year has been nowhere near sufficient to meet the range and depth of challenges faced by communities and workers. For perspective, the European Union is making a multi-billion euro commitment in the coming years to assist those impacted by its own energy transition.

And in the **long-term**:

3. Create a robust and durable structure to comprehensively respond to the needs of affected communities and workers.

In the long-term, Congress should create a more robust entity to respond to these challenges. Building on the experiences and recommendations of the White House Office of Economic Transition, this new organization should administer grant programs that build community capacity, support economic and workforce development initiatives, and help communities leverage resources from both the public and private sectors to scale. The entity should also provide direct technical assistance and operating grants to build the capacity of effective local organizations, and foster innovation throughout affected communities. This programming should be informed by and responsive to the National Community Transition Action Plan created by the White House Office of Economic Transition and coal community task force. The entity should be designed to survive shifting political winds, remain consistent across political administrations, and directly respond to communities most affected by the economic transition.

Based on our decades of work creating and implementing solutions to coal communities' challenges, we know the most effective solutions are community-driven and built from the ground up. Recognizing this, both the short-term White House Office of Economic Transition and the longer-term entity must be informed by local leaders. An equitable, inclusive, and sustainable response will engage all affected stakeholders, invest in place-based economic strategies that build on local assets, and be transparent and accountable to local communities.

A BLUEPRINT FOR THE FUTURE

While the transition away from coal started years ago, communities affected by other fossil fuel closures are already experiencing similar economic challenges. As a comprehensive solution set for coal transition, we believe the NET framework can serve as a blueprint for transitioning oil and gas communities as we work to reach net zero emissions by midcentury. By investing at scale with these future trends in mind, we can build inclusive, equitable, sustainable, and resilient communities for our children, working families, and future generations.

Learn more at NatiOnalEconomicTransition.org



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