



1999 Broadway, Suite #600 • Denver, CO 80202

April 26, 2023

Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Emhoff,

The [Colorado Blueprint To End Hunger](#) and our statewide network of partners want to thank you for the Biden-Harris Administration's recent announcement of 141 new bold commitments from stakeholders across the nation as part of the Call to Action for White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. These investments now total \$9.7 billion, between two rounds of commitments. This collective effort to combat hunger and promote healthy communities signals a new era in the fight to end hunger in the United States.

As this ambitious vision moves forward, we would like you to consider the unique needs of rural micro-communities that exist throughout the US. [The US Census Bureau](#) notes that nearly a quarter of all counties across the US have populations of less than 10,000 and another quarter of counties have populations under 25,000. This means that for almost 50% of US counties, the experience of accessing federal money pales to that of the larger other half of the United States. Barriers for these smaller counties include:

- issues of capacity due to the smallness of frontier county populations;
- limited access to resources, which are often insufficient for county and non-profit infrastructure;
- competing against counties that have substantially larger budgets and devoted grant writing and researching departments;
- the numbers served make spending money in these regions unattractive to grantors; and
- geographic isolation, which makes partnering across regions difficult.

The hurdles can be insurmountable to accessing federal money for rural, frontier, and micro- communities. With their unique challenges and disparities, often these tiny communities are on the outskirts of national initiatives, which contributes to their ongoing marginalization in broader discussions on hunger and health. As a result, their voices are often unheard, and their specific needs are overlooked in policy decisions and resource allocations.

As part of the [National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#) the Colorado Blueprint to End Hunger urges The White House to consider how local, regional and state-level programs and policies can support the White Houses' ambitious agenda and challenge the traditional siloed thinking of how funding does or does not reach these communities. An example of how to re-envision addressing equity, capacity, and building strong healthy rural communities could include the following:

- connect with US Senators to identify regions in their state that are under-resourced through federal initiatives and direct federal agencies like the USDA to provide technical assistance to those states and regions;
- expand the USDA People's Garden Initiative to focus on these underserved rural communities in Colorado and other states by creating a rolling deadline grant process that specifically includes grants for creation of gardens, garden jobs, food rescue, food distribution, and greenhouse building;
- partner with the Congressionally Directed Spending process in each state for grant matching for larger collaborative high-impact regional projects in areas such as the San Luis Valley of Colorado;



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- direct USDA funds to the Agricultural Extension Service to create USDA-paid positions to embed resources and capacity within existing local governments for municipalities and non-profit organizations in rural, micro- communities for counties with populations of less than 10,000 that would support and facilitate: administration, distribution, tracking, and project management of awarded grant funds for county and regional projects;
- develop with Americorp paid county-focused work crews to support grant awarded projects from conception through completion;
- distribute funding as block grants in the range of \$750,000 to \$1,500,000 in regions across rural America; and
- support organizations like the Colorado Blueprint To End Hunger to implement community-participatory grantmaking when awarding federal funding by using models like that of Colorado's Food Pantry Assistance Grant Program, which gives autonomy to communities receiving the funding to decide where and how to spend it in order to revitalize local economies.

President Biden signed the [Executive Order On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government](#) on January 20, 2021, which defines rural populations as underserved and (in Section 3) plans to:

...remove systemic barriers to and provide equal access to opportunities and benefits, identify communities the Federal Government has underserved, and develop policies designed to advance equity for those communities.

And yet our rural communities continue to be underserved and underrepresented in national initiatives such as the National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition and Health. **For Colorado, none of the organizations listed in the 141 commitments are directly serving rural, frontier, or micro- communities.**

The tenants of President Biden's [second Executive Order](#) in February 2023 that extended the original, have yet to be actualized. Rural micro-communities in Colorado cannot wait for equitable inclusion into Federal Government programs. The focus on rural and small-town communities must be rooted in the core of these national initiatives, reflecting a commitment to equity and inclusivity across all sectors of society. By acknowledging and addressing the unique obstacles faced by rural communities—we can ensure that the benefits of these commitments reach every corner of our nation, leaving no community behind.

Federal agencies must provide clarity on how these commitments for the Challenge to End Hunger and Build Healthy Communities will be tailored to meet the distinct challenges faced by rural communities, and allocate resources to effectively address rural needs in micro-communities across the country. As stakeholders across the nation come together to address hunger and health disparities, it is imperative that efforts are transparent, accountable, and holistic in their approach towards supporting rural communities.

By prioritizing rural inclusion, the Biden-Harris Administration and the United States can build a more resilient and equitable food system that uplifts all Americans and paves the way for a healthier, more nourished future for every community across America.

Sincerely,

Colorado Blueprint To End Hunger