

116TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 2704

To amend the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 to establish the Rural Innovation and Partnership Administration and to amend the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act to establish the Rural Future Partnership Fund to invest in the rural areas of the United States to achieve their preferred future while maximizing their contribution to the well-being of the United States, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER 24, 2019

Mrs. GILLIBRAND (for herself, Ms. SMITH, and Mr. DURBIN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry

A BILL

To amend the Department of Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 to establish the Rural Innovation and Partnership Administration and to amend the Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act to establish the Rural Future Partnership Fund to invest in the rural areas of the United States to achieve their preferred future while maximizing their contribution to the well-being of the United States, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

1 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

2 This Act may be cited as the “Rebuild Rural America
3 Act of 2019”.

4 **SEC. 2. PURPOSES.**

5 The purposes of this Act are—

6 (1) to create the scale and capacity that enables
7 rural areas to achieve their preferred future while
8 maximizing their contribution to the well-being of
9 the United States;

10 (2) to recognize the significant contributions of
11 rural areas of the United States to the success of
12 the United States, including the leading role that
13 the rural areas play in addressing the critical threat
14 of climate change and building a resilient United
15 States;

16 (3) to make a national commitment to the rural
17 communities and regions of the United States to en-
18 sure that the rural United States benefits from and
19 contributes to the prosperity of the United States;

20 (4) to establish a partnership with rural areas
21 of the United States that provides flexible, long-
22 term, and annual Federal investment for comprehen-
23 sive, collaborative, and locally driven community and
24 economic development that improves quality of life
25 and economic competitiveness;

1 (5) to strengthen rural population centers
2 through collaboration with neighboring rural areas
3 that ensures economic integration and regional de-
4 velopment;

5 (6) to strengthen connections between rural and
6 urban areas of the United States for mutual success
7 and for the benefit of the economy of the United
8 States and the quality of life of the people of the
9 United States;

10 (7) to support asset-based development, maxi-
11 mizing the cost-effectiveness of existing infrastruc-
12 ture;

13 (8) to ensure economic opportunities that create
14 pathways to high-quality, family-sustaining jobs for
15 all individuals in rural areas of the United States,
16 including efforts to address population loss, to pro-
17 mote the use of cooperatives and other forms of pub-
18 lic and employee ownership, and to expand and im-
19 prove access to training, infrastructure, and invest-
20 ment to adapt to technological change, such as auto-
21 mation, for success in the digital economy;

22 (9) to provide for the evolution and expansion
23 of the role of the Department of Agriculture in en-
24 suring that rural communities have a dedicated
25 agency and a new delivery system for Federal assist-

1 ance for disaster recovery and proactive mitigation
2 and resiliency efforts;

3 (10) to rebuild and modernize infrastructure
4 and expand investment to support local and regional
5 food systems, sustainable agriculture production,
6 and value added agricultural industries;

7 (11) to support infill development, preserve un-
8 developed land, and remediate brownfields and other
9 contaminated properties for re-use; and

10 (12) to support public health and improve qual-
11 ity of life in rural communities by delivering—

12 (A) universal access to clean air and water;

13 (B) healthy foods available through local
14 and regional food systems;

15 (C) quality, affordable, and accessible
16 health care services in the rural communities,
17 including access to primary and emergency
18 medical services, mental health care, and treat-
19 ment for substance abuse;

20 (D) affordable and reliable clean energy
21 systems; and

22 (E) quality, affordable, and energy-effi-
23 cient housing choices in the rural communities.

1 **SEC. 3. ESTABLISHMENT OF RURAL INNOVATION AND**
2 **PARTNERSHIP ADMINISTRATION.**

3 (a) IN GENERAL.—Subtitle C of the Department of
4 Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C. 6941
5 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end the following:

6 **“SEC. 237. RURAL INNOVATION AND PARTNERSHIP ADMIN-**
7 **ISTRATION.**

8 “(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary shall estab-
9 lish in the Department a Rural Innovation and Partner-
10 ship Administration (referred to in this section as the ‘Ad-
11 ministration’).

12 “(b) ADMINISTRATOR.—

13 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Administration shall
14 be headed by an Administrator of Rural Innovation
15 and Partnerships (referred to in this section as the
16 ‘Administrator’), who shall be appointed by the Sec-
17 retary.

18 “(2) REPORTING TO UNDER SECRETARY.—The
19 Administrator shall report to the Under Secretary
20 for Rural Development.

21 “(c) FUNCTIONS.—The Secretary shall carry out
22 through the Administration the functions of the Rural Fu-
23 ture Partnership Fund established under subtitle I of the
24 Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act.

25 “(d) REQUIREMENT FOR STATE OFFICES.—In car-
26 rying out the functions of the Administration, the Sec-

1 retary shall ensure that each State office of the rural de-
2 velopment mission area is staffed with not less than 3 new
3 employees to implement the Rural Future Partnership
4 Fund established under subtitle I of the Consolidated
5 Farm and Rural Development Act, including providing—

6 “(1) technical assistance;

7 “(2) support for capacity building;

8 “(3) financial controls; and

9 “(4) performance oversight.

10 “(e) COORDINATION WITH COUNCIL ON RURAL COM-
11 MUNITY INNOVATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.—

12 In carrying out the functions of the Administration, the
13 Administrator shall coordinate with the Council on Rural
14 Community Innovation and Economic Development estab-
15 lished by section 6306 of the Agriculture Improvement Act
16 of 2018 (7 U.S.C. 2204b–3).”.

17 (b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—

18 (1) Section 296(b) of the Department of Agri-
19 culture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C.
20 7014(b)) is amended by adding at the end the fol-
21 lowing:

22 “(11) The authority of the Secretary to estab-
23 lish and maintain in the Department the Rural In-
24 novation and Partnership Administration under sec-
25 tion 237.”.

1 (2) Section 6306(f) of the Agriculture Improve-
 2 ment Act of 2018 (7 U.S.C. 2204b–3(f)) is amend-
 3 ed—

4 (A) in paragraph (4), by striking “and” at
 5 the end;

6 (B) in paragraph (5)(B), by striking the
 7 period at the end and inserting “; and”; and

8 (C) by adding at the end the following:

9 “(6) give priority to coordinating with the Ad-
 10 ministrator of Rural Innovation and Partnerships in
 11 carrying out the Rural Future Partnership Fund es-
 12 tablished under subtitle I of the Consolidated Farm
 13 and Rural Development Act.”.

14 **SEC. 4. RURAL FUTURE PARTNERSHIP FUND.**

15 The Consolidated Farm and Rural Development Act
 16 (7 U.S.C. 1921 et seq.) is amended by adding at the end
 17 the following:

18 **“Subtitle I—Rural Future**
 19 **Partnership Fund**

20 **“SEC. 385A. DEFINITIONS.**

21 “In this subtitle:

22 “(1) COUNCIL.—The term ‘Council’ means a
 23 rural partnership council established under para-
 24 graph (1)(A)(i), (2)(A)(i), or (3)(A)(i), as applicable,
 25 of section 385C(a).

1 “(2) ELIGIBLE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PRO-
2 VIDER.—The term ‘eligible technical assistance pro-
3 vider’ means an entity—

4 “(A) with a demonstrated national or re-
5 gional structure or capacity to deliver and sup-
6 port multiple rural planning activities across
7 the United States or within a region of the
8 United States; and

9 “(B) that is—

10 “(i) a federally recognized Indian
11 Tribe;

12 “(ii) an institution of higher edu-
13 cation;

14 “(iii) a nonprofit organization; or

15 “(iv) a private organization.

16 “(3) FUND.—The term ‘Fund’ means the Rural
17 Future Partnership Fund established under section
18 385B.

19 “(4) INSTITUTION OF HIGHER EDUCATION.—

20 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The term ‘institution
21 of higher education’ has the meaning given the
22 term in section 101 of the Higher Education
23 Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1001)).

24 “(B) INCLUSIONS.—The term ‘institution
25 of higher education’ includes—

1 “(i) land-grant colleges and univer-
2 sities (as defined in section 1404 of the
3 National Agricultural Research, Extension,
4 and Teaching Policy Act of 1977 (7 U.S.C.
5 3103)); and

6 “(ii) associated cooperative extension
7 services.

8 “(5) PLAN.—The term ‘Plan’ means a rural
9 partnership plan established under section 385E(a).

10 “(6) RESERVATION.—

11 “(A) IN GENERAL.—The term ‘reservation’
12 has the meaning given the term ‘Indian coun-
13 try’ in section 1151 of title 18, United States
14 Code.

15 “(B) INCLUSION.—The term ‘reservation’
16 includes land held by a Native group, a Re-
17 gional Corporation, or a Village Corporation (as
18 those terms are defined in section 3 of the Alas-
19 ka Native Claims Settlement Act (43 U.S.C.
20 1602)).

21 “(7) RURAL PARTNERSHIP BLOCK GRANT.—
22 The term ‘rural partnership block grant’ means a
23 rural partnership block grant awarded under this
24 subtitle.

1 “(8) SECRETARY.—The term ‘Secretary’ means
2 the Secretary, acting through the Administrator of
3 Rural Innovation and Partnerships.

4 “(9) WORKFORCE HOUSING.—The term ‘work-
5 force housing’ means, with respect to housing for a
6 family, housing the cost of which does not exceed 30
7 percent of—

8 “(A) subject to subparagraph (B), 120
9 percent of the median income in the area in
10 which the family lives, as determined by the
11 Secretary, with appropriate adjustments for the
12 size of the family; or

13 “(B) if the Secretary determines that there
14 are unusually high or low family incomes in the
15 area in which the family lives, such other per-
16 centage, as the Secretary determines to be ap-
17 propriate, of the median income in the area in
18 which the family lives.

19 **“SEC. 385B. ESTABLISHMENT.**

20 “The Secretary shall establish a program, to be
21 known as the ‘Rural Future Partnership Fund’, under
22 which the Secretary shall award rural partnership block
23 grants in accordance with this subtitle.

24 **“SEC. 385C. ELIGIBILITY.**

25 “(a) IN GENERAL.—

1 “(1) MICROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREAS.—

2 “(A) IN GENERAL.—To be eligible to re-
3 ceive a rural partnership block grant—

4 “(i) one or more units of local govern-
5 ment that govern a micropolitan statistical
6 area, as defined by the Director of the Of-
7 fice of Management and Budget, shall es-
8 tablish a rural partnership council in ac-
9 cordance with subsection (b); and

10 “(ii) that Council shall submit an ap-
11 plication to—

12 “(I) not later than 180 days
13 after the date of enactment of the Re-
14 build Rural America Act of 2019—

15 “(aa)(AA) the applicable
16 State; or

17 “(BB) the applicable States,
18 if the micropolitan statistical
19 area spans more than 1 State;
20 and

21 “(bb) the applicable State
22 offices of the rural development
23 mission area; or

24 “(II) after the date described in
25 subclause (I), the Secretary.

1 “(B) REGIONAL COLLABORATION.—

2 “(i) IN GENERAL.—On receipt of an
3 application under subparagraph (A)(ii)(I),
4 the one or more States, in coordination
5 with the applicable State offices of the
6 rural development mission area, shall ad-
7 vise the applicant on the inclusion in the
8 Council, if practicable, of one or more con-
9 tiguous census tracts or counties that—

10 “(I) fall outside of a micropolitan
11 or metropolitan statistical area; and

12 “(II) demonstrate evidence of
13 economic, social, and cultural coopera-
14 tion that enhances the potential for
15 comprehensive, asset-based regional
16 development.

17 “(ii) DECISION.—After receipt of ad-
18 vice under clause (i), the applicant shall—

19 “(I) decide whether to include
20 one or more of the applicable contig-
21 uous census tracts or counties in the
22 Council; and

23 “(II) modify the application, as
24 appropriate.

25 “(C) APPROVAL.—

1 “(i) STATES.—The one or more
2 States that receive an application under
3 subparagraph (A)(ii)(I)(aa), in coordina-
4 tion with the applicable State offices of the
5 rural development mission area, shall ap-
6 prove the Council as eligible to receive a
7 rural partnership block grant if the re-
8 quirements under subsection (b) for the
9 composition of the membership of a Coun-
10 cil are satisfied.

11 “(ii) SECRETARY.—Not less fre-
12 quently than once each year, the Secretary,
13 in coordination with the applicable State
14 offices of the rural development mission
15 area, may approve applications received
16 under subparagraph (A)(ii)(II) if the re-
17 quirements under subsection (b) for the
18 composition of the membership of a Coun-
19 cil are satisfied.

20 “(2) AREAS OUTSIDE OF MICROPOLITAN AND
21 METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREAS.—

22 “(A) IN GENERAL.—To be eligible to re-
23 ceive a rural partnership block grant—

24 “(i) one or more entities described in
25 subsection (b)(1) that are located in, or

1 represent, two or more contiguous census
2 tracts or counties in an area that is not
3 within a micropolitan statistical area or a
4 metropolitan statistical area, as defined by
5 the Director of the Office of Management
6 and Budget, and are not represented by a
7 Council established under paragraph
8 (1)(A)(i) or (3)(A)(i), shall establish a
9 rural partnership council in accordance
10 with subsection (b); and

11 “(ii) that Council shall submit an ap-
12 plication to—

13 “(I) not later than 180 days
14 after the date of enactment of the Re-
15 build Rural America Act of 2019—

16 “(aa) the one or more appli-
17 cable States; and

18 “(bb) the applicable State
19 offices of the rural development
20 mission area; or

21 “(II) after the date described in
22 subclause (I), the Secretary.

23 “(B) APPROVAL.—

24 “(i) STATES.—The one or more
25 States that receive an application under

1 subparagraph (A)(ii)(I)(aa), in coordina-
2 tion with the applicable State offices of the
3 rural development mission area, shall ap-
4 prove the Council as eligible to receive a
5 rural partnership block grant if—

6 “(I) the requirements under sub-
7 section (b) for the composition of the
8 membership of a Council are satisfied;
9 and

10 “(II) the area to be represented
11 by the Council—

12 “(aa) is of practicable geo-
13 graphic size; and

14 “(bb) demonstrates evidence
15 of economic, social, and cultural
16 cooperation that enhances the po-
17 tential for comprehensive, asset-
18 based regional development.

19 “(ii) SECRETARY.—Not less fre-
20 quently than once each year, the Secretary,
21 in coordination with the applicable State
22 offices of the rural development mission
23 area, may approve applications received
24 under subparagraph (A)(ii)(II) if the re-

1 requirements described in clause (i) are sat-
2 isfied.

3 “(3) INDIAN RESERVATIONS.—

4 “(A) IN GENERAL.—To be eligible to re-
5 ceive a rural partnership block grant—

6 “(i) an Indian Tribe that has jurisdic-
7 tion over a reservation shall establish a
8 rural partnership council in accordance
9 with subsection (b); and

10 “(ii) that Council shall submit an ap-
11 plication to the Secretary.

12 “(B) APPROVAL.—

13 “(i) IN GENERAL.—On receipt of an
14 application that was submitted under sub-
15 paragraph (A)(ii) not later than 180 days
16 after the date of enactment of the Rebuild
17 Rural America Act of 2019, the Secretary,
18 in coordination with the applicable State
19 offices of the rural development mission
20 area, shall approve the Council as eligible
21 to receive a rural partnership block grant
22 if the requirements under subsection (b)
23 for the composition of the membership of
24 a Council are satisfied.

1 “(ii) SUBSEQUENT APPLICATIONS.—
2 Not less frequently than once each year,
3 the Secretary, in coordination with the ap-
4 plicable State offices of the rural develop-
5 ment mission area, may approve applica-
6 tions submitted under subparagraph (A)(ii)
7 later than 180 days after the date of en-
8 actment of the Rebuild Rural America Act
9 of 2019 if the requirements under sub-
10 section (b) for the composition of the mem-
11 bership of a Council are satisfied.

12 “(b) MEMBERSHIP.—Each Council—

13 “(1) shall include one or more representatives
14 of—

15 “(A) a District Organization (as defined in
16 section 300.3 of title 13, Code of Federal Regu-
17 lations (or successor regulations)) or a com-
18 parable regional planning organization if there
19 is no applicable District Organization;

20 “(B) one or more units of local govern-
21 ment, or one or more entities designated by a
22 unit of local government, within the applicable
23 area; and

24 “(C) a public or nonprofit organization;

1 “(2) may include one or more representatives
2 of—

3 “(A) an economic development or other
4 community or labor organization;

5 “(B) a financial institution, including a
6 community development financial institution (as
7 defined in section 103 of the Community Devel-
8 opment Banking and Financial Institutions Act
9 of 1994 (12 U.S.C. 4702));

10 “(C) a philanthropic organization;

11 “(D) a rural cooperative;

12 “(E) an entity with experience in the de-
13 velopment of cooperatives;

14 “(F) an institution of higher education;

15 “(G) elementary or secondary education;

16 “(H) a private entity;

17 “(I) a Tribal organization;

18 “(J) a metropolitan planning organization
19 (as defined in section 134(b) of title 23, United
20 States Code);

21 “(K) any other regional planning organiza-
22 tion; or

23 “(L) any other entity, as determined to be
24 appropriate by the Council; and

1 “(3) shall be composed of an odd number of
2 members.

3 “(c) REVISIONS.—

4 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Not more frequently than
5 once every 5 years, a Council may submit to the one
6 or more applicable States, or to the Secretary in the
7 case of a Council established by an Indian Tribe, an
8 application to revise the geographic boundary of the
9 applicable area represented by the Council.

10 “(2) FINAL APPROVAL BY SECRETARY.—An ap-
11 plication submitted to one or more States under
12 paragraph (1) shall be subject to final approval by
13 the Secretary.

14 **“SEC. 385D. RURAL PARTNERSHIP BLOCK GRANTS.**

15 “(a) ALLOCATION OF FUNDS.—

16 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in para-
17 graph (2), the Secretary shall allocate rural partner-
18 ship block grant funds to Councils proportionately
19 based on the population of each area represented by
20 a Council.

21 “(2) HIGH POVERTY RATES.—The Secretary
22 shall allocate to a Council an amount equal to 3
23 times the applicable amount under paragraph (1)
24 with respect to each individual residing in a census
25 tract, or a group of contiguous census tracts, that—

1 “(A) has a poverty rate of 20 percent or
2 greater; and

3 “(B) is within or comprises the applicable
4 area.

5 “(b) DISTRIBUTION.—The Secretary shall distribute
6 rural partnership block grant funds annually to each
7 Council during the term of the rural partnership block
8 grant.

9 “(c) TERM.—A rural partnership block grant—

10 “(1) shall be for a term of 5 years; and

11 “(2) may be renewed.

12 “(d) GRANT AGREEMENTS.—

13 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Each Council shall enter
14 into an agreement with the Secretary, under which
15 the Council, in coordination with the Secretary, shall
16 establish performance measures and reporting re-
17 quirements that shall be met by the end of each year
18 for which the Council receives funds under the
19 Fund.

20 “(2) VIOLATIONS.—If the Secretary determines
21 that a Council has failed to meet any requirements
22 of the applicable agreement under paragraph (1), is
23 not making reasonable progress towards meeting
24 that requirement, or is otherwise in violation of that
25 agreement, the Secretary may—

1 “(A) withhold funds under the Fund until
2 the Council remedies the applicable violation; or

3 “(B) terminate the agreement.

4 **“SEC. 385E. RURAL PARTNERSHIP PLANS.**

5 “(a) ESTABLISHMENT.—Each Council shall estab-
6 lish, maintain, evaluate, and report to the Secretary
7 progress on a rural partnership plan in accordance with
8 this section.

9 “(b) COORDINATION WITH OTHER PLANS.—

10 “(1) IN GENERAL.—In developing a Plan under
11 this section, a Council is encouraged to utilize exist-
12 ing Federal plans, and existing State, regional, or
13 Tribal plans, so as to reduce duplicative efforts and
14 align Federal investment.

15 “(2) FEDERAL PLANS.—Existing Federal plans
16 referred to in paragraph (1) include—

17 “(A) the Comprehensive Economic Devel-
18 opment Strategy of the Economic Development
19 Administration;

20 “(B) a local plan, as defined in section 3
21 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity
22 Act (29 U.S.C. 3102);

23 “(C) the Consolidated Plan of the Depart-
24 ment of Housing and Urban Development;

1 “(D) plans developed by metropolitan plan-
2 ning organizations under section 134 of title
3 23, United States Code;

4 “(E) plans developed by regional transpor-
5 tation planning organizations designated under
6 section 135(m) of title 23, United States Code,
7 or section 5304(l) of title 49, United States
8 Code (commonly known as a ‘rural transpor-
9 tation planning organization’);

10 “(F) emergency preparedness and hazard
11 mitigation plans required by the Federal Emer-
12 gency Management Agency;

13 “(G) the Drinking Water Action Plan of
14 the Environmental Protection Agency;

15 “(H) a good neighbor agreement (as de-
16 fined in section 8206(a) of the Agricultural Act
17 of 2014 (16 U.S.C. 2113a(a))); and

18 “(I) strategic plans developed by Federal
19 regional commissions, including—

20 “(i) the Appalachian Regional Com-
21 mission established by section 14301(a) of
22 title 40, United States Code;

23 “(ii) the Delta Regional Authority es-
24 tablished under subtitle F of the Consoli-

1 dated Farm and Rural Development Act (7
2 U.S.C. 2009aa et seq.);

3 “(iii) the Denali Commission estab-
4 lished under the Denali Commission Act of
5 1998 (42 U.S.C. 3121 note; title III of di-
6 vision C of Public Law 105–277);

7 “(iv) the Northern Border Regional
8 Commission established by section
9 15301(a)(3) of title 40, United States
10 Code;

11 “(v) the Northern Great Plains Re-
12 gional Authority established under subtitle
13 G of the Consolidated Farm and Rural De-
14 velopment Act (7 U.S.C. 2009bb et seq.);

15 “(vi) the Southeast Crescent Regional
16 Commission established by section
17 15301(a)(1) of title 40, United States
18 Code; and

19 “(vii) the Southwest Border Regional
20 Commission established by section
21 15301(a)(2) of title 40, United States
22 Code.

23 “(c) CONTENTS.—To the maximum extent prac-
24 ticable, a Plan shall include—

1 “(1) a plan to coordinate and build capacity
2 across jurisdictions in the applicable area to develop
3 and implement the Plan, including by targeting as-
4 sistance to high-poverty and other struggling areas
5 within that region;

6 “(2) a plan that outlines feasible steps and
7 achievable goals, timelines, and strategies for imple-
8 menting the Plan, including making interjurisdic-
9 tional agreements that provide for cooperative and
10 coordinated approaches to achieving the goals of the
11 Plan;

12 “(3) a prioritization of projects for funding and
13 implementation, when practicable, including by pro-
14 viding—

15 “(A) a description of each prioritized
16 project proposed to be carried out; and

17 “(B) a budget for each project described in
18 subparagraph (A) that includes—

19 “(i) preliminary actions that have
20 been or must be taken at the local or re-
21 gional level to implement the project;

22 “(ii) the anticipated Federal share of
23 the cost of the project; and

1 “(iii) a description of the source of
2 the non-Federal share of funds or in-kind
3 contributions for the project;

4 “(4) an assessment of current and future
5 trends in the applicable area, which may include—

6 “(A) population growth or loss, and demo-
7 graphic changes, in the region;

8 “(B) accessibility of job centers within the
9 region to public transportation facilities and
10 housing;

11 “(C) infrastructure needs in the region, in-
12 cluding—

13 “(i) projected water needs and
14 sources;

15 “(ii) any need for sewer infrastruc-
16 ture;

17 “(iii) the existence of flood plains;

18 “(iv) the needs of local and regional
19 food systems, agricultural producers, and
20 value-added agricultural industries; and

21 “(v) any need for affordable, high-
22 speed internet, including new technologies
23 for mobile internet services and for afford-
24 able, reliable cellular phone coverage;

1 “(D) challenges in basic services within the
2 region, including pressing health challenges;

3 “(E) skills and education for in-demand,
4 quality jobs and for regional economic develop-
5 ment, which may include retraining and edu-
6 cation of incumbent or displaced workers; and

7 “(F) access to private debt and investment
8 capital;

9 “(5) a plan to develop opportunities for eco-
10 nomic diversification and innovation within the ap-
11 plicable area, with particular attention to—

12 “(A) agricultural diversification and supply
13 chain development;

14 “(B) the conversion of existing businesses
15 to employee or local ownership, such as a coop-
16 erative;

17 “(C) entrepreneurial support;

18 “(D) clean energy;

19 “(E) manufacturing; and

20 “(F) technological innovation;

21 “(6) a plan for improving environmental resil-
22 iency, efficient land use, remediation of brownfields
23 and other contaminated properties for re-use, mixed-
24 use development, and the preservation of agricul-
25 tural, green, and open space, including—

1 “(A) an assessment of projected loss of ag-
2 ricultural and rural land and other green space
3 to development; and

4 “(B) a description of methods to minimize
5 loss described in subparagraph (A);

6 “(7) a plan for ensuring that no community or
7 county in the applicable area is excluded from re-
8 ceiving assistance through the rural partnership
9 block grant, including timelines and goals for tar-
10 geting assistance to high-poverty census tracts in-
11 cluded in the area;

12 “(8) a plan for building greater collaboration
13 between—

14 “(A) rural population centers and neigh-
15 boring rural areas of the applicable area; and

16 “(B) the applicable area and neighboring
17 urban areas;

18 “(9) a plan for the creation and preservation of
19 workforce housing and affordable, energy-efficient
20 housing for all ages, incomes, races, and ethnicities,
21 including—

22 “(A) cooperative housing; and

23 “(B) limited equity cooperative housing;

24 “(10) a plan to develop opportunities to revi-
25 talize existing communities, including infill develop-

1 ment and utilizing existing assets, such as natural
2 assets and public infrastructure; and

3 “(11) such other information or plans as a
4 Council or the Secretary determines to be appro-
5 priate.

6 “(d) APPROVAL.—

7 “(1) IN GENERAL.—Not less frequently than
8 annually, each Council shall approve a Plan by a
9 majority vote of the members of the Council for sub-
10 mission to the Secretary for final approval under
11 paragraph (2).

12 “(2) APPROVAL BY SECRETARY.—On receipt of
13 a Plan under paragraph (1), the Secretary may ap-
14 prove or disapprove the Plan.

15 **“SEC. 385F. USE OF GRANT FUNDS.**

16 “(a) PLANNING.—During the first 2 years of the
17 term of a rural partnership block grant, a Council may
18 use the funds for comprehensive planning and capacity
19 building to implement a Plan.

20 “(b) IMPLEMENTATION.—

21 “(1) IN GENERAL.—A Council shall use funds
22 under a rural partnership block grant to implement
23 a Plan.

1 “(2) PERMISSIBLE USES.—In using funds to
2 implement a Plan under paragraph (1), a Council
3 may use the funds—

4 “(A) to support the development of critical
5 infrastructure necessary to facilitate economic
6 development in the applicable area, including
7 high-speed internet, including new technologies
8 for mobile internet services and for affordable,
9 reliable cellular phone coverage;

10 “(B) to support activities to achieve great-
11 er economic and environmental resiliency, in-
12 cluding for emergency preparedness, disaster
13 recovery, and hazard mitigation;

14 “(C) to provide assistance to entities with-
15 in the applicable area that provide basic public
16 services, such as—

17 “(i) child care centers;

18 “(ii) nonprofit health care, including
19 community health centers, primary and
20 emergency medical care, mental health,
21 and substance abuse treatment providers;

22 “(iii) public libraries;

23 “(iv) community centers;

24 “(v) public schools; and

1 “(vi) nonprofit technology centers, in-
2 cluding business incubators and business
3 accelerators;

4 “(D) to provide assistance with education,
5 job training, workforce development, or other
6 needs relating to the development and mainte-
7 nance of a strong workforce and support of
8 youth, unemployed, underemployed, dislocated,
9 disabled, adult, and incumbent workers and in-
10 dividuals with a barrier to employment;

11 “(E) to provide assistance in the develop-
12 ment of innovative collaborations that link pub-
13 lic, private, and philanthropic resources to
14 achieve collaboratively designed regional ad-
15 vancement;

16 “(F) to promote and use employee owner-
17 ship, cooperatives, and local ownership in the
18 development of infrastructure, businesses, and
19 community services;

20 “(G) to acquire, or demolish improvements
21 on, real property;

22 “(H) to construct or rehabilitate residen-
23 tial or nonresidential structures;

1 “(I) to develop new affordable low-income
2 and workforce housing options that ensure
3 mixed-income development;

4 “(J) to construct public facilities and im-
5 provements, such as water and sewer facilities,
6 streets, community centers, and the conversion
7 of school buildings for other purposes that are
8 eligible for funding under this subsection;

9 “(K) to establish new connections between
10 rural population centers and neighboring rural
11 areas within the applicable area, and between
12 the applicable area and urban areas, relating to
13 systems such as the supply of clean energy,
14 workforce sheds, food systems, supply chains,
15 commuting patterns, and outdoor recreation;

16 “(L) to carry out activities relating to—

17 “(i) energy conservation;

18 “(ii) the development, storage, and
19 use of clean energy resources; and

20 “(iii) bio-based manufacturing;

21 “(M) to rebuild and modernize infrastruc-
22 ture and expand investment to support agricul-
23 tural diversification and supply chain develop-
24 ment;

1 “(N) to promote integrated transportation,
2 housing, energy, and economic development ac-
3 tivities carried out across policy areas and gov-
4 ernmental jurisdictions;

5 “(O) to coordinate business development,
6 land use, housing, transportation, and infra-
7 structure planning processes across jurisdictions
8 and agencies;

9 “(P) to address public health needs, in-
10 cluding—

11 “(i) access to mental health and sub-
12 stance abuse services; and

13 “(ii) access to healthy, locally, and re-
14 gionally grown foods;

15 “(Q) to encourage entrepreneurship and
16 the scale-up of existing business operations
17 by—

18 “(i) improving access to capital, in-
19 cluding market-based financing, such as
20 angel, venture, equity, and equity-like cap-
21 ital;

22 “(ii) facilitating collaboration between
23 entrepreneurs and institutions of higher
24 education and applied research institutions
25 for the purposes of commercialization of

1 research or adoption of technology or proc-
2 esses;

3 “(iii) assisting with integration into a
4 supply chain; and

5 “(iv) providing mentor, networking,
6 and support services for entrepreneurs, in-
7 cluding establishing business incubators or
8 accelerators;

9 “(R) to develop innovative public and pri-
10 vate collaborations for investments in the appli-
11 cable area;

12 “(S) to use arts and culture for improve-
13 ments in economic development, education,
14 training, and quality of life;

15 “(T) to revitalize downtown corridors and
16 other community centers to create vibrant,
17 mixed-use neighborhoods;

18 “(U) to expand access to domestic and
19 international markets for businesses and agri-
20 cultural producers;

21 “(V) to lead development programming for
22 organizations or cohorts of organizations in-
23 cluded in the Plan;

24 “(W) to provide matching funds for other
25 Federal funding if that other Federal funding is

1 for a project that is in accordance with the
2 goals of the Plan;

3 “(X) to promote the use of energy effi-
4 ciency in applicable projects; and

5 “(Y) to provide technical assistance for co-
6 operative conversions, startups, and expansions,
7 including education on cooperative governance.

8 **“SEC. 385G. ACCESS TO FEDERAL PROGRAMS.**

9 “(a) DEFINITION OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PRO-
10 GRAM.—In this section, the term ‘rural development pro-
11 gram’ means—

12 “(1) community facility direct and guaranteed
13 loans under section 306(a);

14 “(2) water or waste disposal grants or direct or
15 guaranteed loans under paragraph (1) or (2) of sec-
16 tion 306(a);

17 “(3) community facility grants under paragraph
18 (19), (20), or (21) of section 306(a);

19 “(4) the rural cooperative development grant
20 program established under section 310B(e);

21 “(5) business and industry guaranteed loans
22 under section 310B(g);

23 “(6) the rural microentrepreneur assistance
24 program established under section 379E;

1 “(7) the rural broadband access program estab-
2 lished under title VI of the Rural Electrification Act
3 of 1936 (7 U.S.C. 950bb et seq.);

4 “(8) value-added producer grants under section
5 210A(d)(5) of the Agricultural Marketing Act of
6 1946 (7 U.S.C. 1627c(d)(5));

7 “(9) the Healthy Food Financing Initiative es-
8 tablished under section 243 of the Department of
9 Agriculture Reorganization Act of 1994 (7 U.S.C.
10 6953);

11 “(10) the Rural Energy for America Program
12 established under section 9007 of the Farm Security
13 and Rural Investment Act of 2002 (7 U.S.C. 8107);

14 “(11) the rural energy savings program under
15 section 6407 of the Farm Security and Rural Invest-
16 ment Act of 2002 (7 U.S.C. 8107a);

17 “(12) rural rental housing direct loans under
18 section 515 of the Housing Act of 1949 (42 U.S.C.
19 1485);

20 “(13) the housing preservation grant program
21 under section 533 of the Housing Act of 1949 (42
22 U.S.C. 1490m);

23 “(14) loan guarantees for multifamily rental
24 housing in rural areas under section 538 of the
25 Housing Act of 1949 (42 U.S.C. 1490p-2);

1 “(15) housing preservation and revitalization
2 demonstration loans and grants provided by the
3 Rural Housing Service; and

4 “(16) multifamily housing transfer and prepay-
5 ment technical assistance grants provided by the
6 Rural Housing Service.

7 “(b) WAIVER OF MATCHING FUNDS REQUIRE-
8 MENTS.—The Secretary shall waive any matching funds
9 requirement under a rural development program for a
10 project that is carried out in an applicable area that is
11 within or comprises a census tract, or a group of contig-
12 uous census tracts, that has a poverty rate of 20 percent
13 or greater.

14 “(c) PRIORITY CONSIDERATION FOR OTHER RURAL
15 DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS.—The Secretary shall give pri-
16 ority under a rural development program for an applica-
17 tion for a project that—

18 “(1) is included in and supports a Plan;

19 “(2) is eligible for the applicable program from
20 which the funds were set aside; and

21 “(3) is carried out in the applicable area cov-
22 ered by the Plan.

23 “(d) OTHER FEDERAL AGENCIES.—The Secretary of
24 Agriculture, acting as the Chair of the Council on Rural
25 Community Innovation and Economic Development estab-

1 lished by section 6306 of the Agriculture Improvement Act
2 of 2018 (7 U.S.C. 2204b–3), may invite a member of that
3 Council to give priority under the programs carried out
4 by the member for a project that satisfies the criteria de-
5 scribed in paragraphs (1) through (3) of subsection (c).

6 **“SEC. 385H. CAPACITY BUILDING AND TECHNICAL ASSIST-**
7 **ANCE PARTNERS.**

8 “(a) CAPACITY BUILDING.—

9 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall provide
10 to a Council training, education, support, and advice
11 to enhance the technical assistance, research, organi-
12 zational, and other capacities of the Council in car-
13 rying out activities under the Fund.

14 “(2) ACTIVITIES.—In carrying out paragraph
15 (1), the Secretary, in coordination with the Rural
16 Development Innovation Center established by the
17 Secretary of Agriculture or through a contract for
18 services entered into with an eligible technical assist-
19 ance provider, may provide training, education, sup-
20 port, and advice that addresses—

21 “(A) emergent innovative opportunities
22 that are not covered by an existing Plan;

23 “(B) entrepreneurial opportunities to ad-
24 vance the goals of the Fund;

1 “(C) opportunities to advance a more inte-
2 grative rural policy framework for the United
3 States, including building regional connections
4 between urban areas and rural areas;

5 “(D) with support from the Chief Informa-
6 tion Officer of the Department of Agriculture,
7 the tracking, collection, and analysis of data
8 and measurements for assessing the progress of
9 Plans; and

10 “(E) best practices based on—

11 “(i) the experiences of Councils; and

12 “(ii) domestic and international rural
13 development practices.

14 “(b) RURAL FUTURE LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE.—

15 “(1) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall estab-
16 lish a Rural Future Leadership Institute (referred to
17 in this subsection as the ‘Institute’).

18 “(2) SELECTION OF ENTITIES.—

19 “(A) IN GENERAL.—Under the Institute,
20 each year the Secretary shall select individuals
21 to participate in the Institute.

22 “(B) PREFERENCE.—In selecting individ-
23 uals to participate in the Institute under sub-
24 paragraph (A), the Secretary shall give pref-

1 erence to an individual residing in, or directly
2 assisting, an area represented by a Council.

3 “(3) ACTIVITIES.—The Secretary shall provide
4 to each individual that is selected to participate in
5 the Institute under paragraph (2) year-long pro-
6 gramming such as—

7 “(A) skill-building seminars;

8 “(B) best practice reviews;

9 “(C) site visits;

10 “(D) performance measurement and data
11 analytics; and

12 “(E) other training and capacity building
13 activities.

14 “(4) PEER EXCHANGE PROGRAM.—In carrying
15 out the Institute, the Secretary shall establish a peer
16 exchange program within and across areas rep-
17 resented by Councils to promote industry-leading
18 practices, innovations relating to the organizational
19 development, program delivery, and regional initia-
20 tives of the Councils, and opportunities to build col-
21 laborative relationships between urban leaders and
22 rural leaders.

23 “(c) RURAL FUTURE CORPS.—

24 “(1) DEFINITION OF AMERICORPS PARTICI-
25 PANT.—In this subsection, the term ‘AmeriCorps

1 participant' means a participant under subtitle C of
2 title I of the National and Community Service Act
3 of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12571 et seq.) who received an
4 approved national service position provided under
5 section 121(b) of that Act (42 U.S.C. 12571(b)).

6 “(2) ESTABLISHMENT.—The Secretary shall
7 enter into an agreement with the Corporation for
8 National and Community Service under section
9 121(b) of the National and Community Service Act
10 of 1990 (42 U.S.C. 12571(b)) to establish a Rural
11 Future Corps in which AmeriCorps participants
12 shall serve in areas represented by Councils, to im-
13 plement the Plans of the Councils, including serving
14 through—

15 “(A) expansion of critical services such as
16 child care, health, nutrition assistance, edu-
17 cation, and job training; and

18 “(B) strengthening the capacity of units of
19 local government and economic, community,
20 and cooperative development organizations to
21 implement community and economic develop-
22 ment activities.

23 “(3) RETENTION.—On completion of service of
24 an AmeriCorps participant in the Rural Future
25 Corps, the Secretary shall encourage the retention of

1 the participant in the applicable area in which the
2 participant served.

3 “(4) RELATIONSHIP TO NATIONAL SERVICE
4 PROGRAMS.—Notwithstanding section 122(a) of the
5 National and Community Service Act of 1990 (42
6 U.S.C. 12752(a)), for purposes of that Act, the ap-
7 proved national service positions provided under the
8 agreement for the Rural Future Corps program will
9 be considered to be used to support a national serv-
10 ice program under section 122(b) of that Act (42
11 U.S.C. 12572(b)).

12 “(d) MAP.—The Secretary, in coordination with the
13 Chief Information Officer of the Department of Agri-
14 culture, shall make publicly available on a website a map
15 of areas represented by Councils, including, with respect
16 to each area, the members of the Council.

17 “(e) TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PARTNERS.—The Sec-
18 retary may enter into a cooperative agreement under sec-
19 tion 607(b)(4) of the Rural Development Act of 1972 (7
20 U.S.C. 2204b(b)(4)) with an eligible technical assistance
21 provider to provide technical assistance to the Secretary
22 and Councils in carrying out the Fund.

1 **“SEC. 385I. EVALUATION AND REPORTING.**

2 “(a) **EVALUATIONS.**—Not later than the last day of
3 the fourth year of the first rural partnership block grant
4 awarded to a Council, and annually thereafter—

5 “(1) the Secretary shall evaluate the perform-
6 ance of the Council in carrying out the Plan of the
7 Council in relation to the benchmarks established
8 under subsection (b); and

9 “(2) the Council shall use the evaluation under
10 paragraph (1) in updating the Plan under section
11 385E(d)(1).

12 “(b) **REPORTING BENCHMARKS.**—

13 “(1) **IN GENERAL.**—The Secretary, in coordina-
14 tion with Councils and national providers of tech-
15 nical assistance under section 385H(e), shall estab-
16 lish annual reporting benchmarks relating to the
17 purposes of the Fund.

18 “(2) **EXISTING MEASURES.**—In establishing re-
19 porting benchmarks under paragraph (1), the Sec-
20 retary shall consider relevant existing performance
21 measures used in programs of the rural development
22 mission area—

23 “(A) to achieve alignment with those pro-
24 grams; and

1 “(B) to allow for opportunities for a part-
2 nership block grant to leverage other funding
3 provided under those programs.

4 “(c) REPORTS.—The Secretary shall—

5 “(1) not less frequently than annually, prepare
6 and submit to Congress a report describing—

7 “(A) the implementation of the Fund; and

8 “(B) an assessment of future goals for the
9 Fund; and

10 “(2) include the assessment described in para-
11 graph (1)(B) in the comprehensive rural develop-
12 ment strategy under section 607(c) of the Rural De-
13 velopment Act of 1972 (7 U.S.C. 2204b(c)).

14 **“SEC. 385J. AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.**

15 “There is authorized to be appropriated to carry out
16 the Fund \$10,000,000,000 for each of fiscal years 2020
17 through 2024, of which—

18 “(1) \$100,000,000 for each fiscal year shall be
19 used for administrative functions, including staff
20 and information technology infrastructure, of the
21 Rural Innovation and Partnership Administration;
22 and

23 “(2) \$40,000,000 for each fiscal year shall be
24 used to carry out section 385H.”.

○