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March 12, 2021

The Honorable Gina M. Raimondo  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Raimondo:

On behalf of the Western Governors' Association (WGA), we are writing to congratulate you on your confirmation to serve as the Secretary of Commerce. We look forward to working with you in your new capacity as the chief economic growth officer of the United States.

WGA represents the Governors of the 22 westernmost states and U.S. territories. The association is an instrument of the Governors for bipartisan policy development, information exchange and collective action on issues of critical importance to the western United States.

WGA is deeply interested in, and has adopted substantive and detailed policies regarding, activities within the jurisdiction of the Department of Commerce. The purpose of this communication is to introduce you to those policies and to encourage a close and productive working relationship. Western states are eager to work closely with you as authentic partners in the design and execution of programs and policies that affect our constituents and implicate state authority.

The work of your Department intersects with the interests of Western Governors on many levels. The Department's economic development activities are important elements of promoting job growth and economic opportunity in western states. The Economic Development Administration has been a valuable contributor to two recent WGA Chair initiatives, the *Workforce Development* initiative of former South Dakota Governor Dennis Daugaard and the *Reimagining the Rural West* initiative of North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum.

The Department is also a key leader in the design and implementation of the Federal Data Strategy and has a significant role in the implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Pub. L. 115-435). The Census Bureau and the Bureau of Economic Analysis are critical agencies in the execution of these efforts. WGA Policy Resolution 2021-02, *Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making* (attached), contains Western Governors' policy on federal decisions should be informed by state data and that federal agencies should recognize and engage with states as sovereignties and genuine partners in the implementation of federal data programs.

Data produced by the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration informs drought analysis and helps states with water management decisions. The National Weather Service, in addition to its weather forecasting responsibilities, serves a significant role in predicting landslide and flooding potential in wildfire-affected areas, a major concern in our western states. The National Marine Fisheries Service, along with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, administers the Endangered Species Act, which can significantly affect land use.

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An attachment to this letter presents a high-level summary of select gubernatorial priorities within your jurisdiction. We hope you will take time to review this information and remember that Western Governors are enthusiastic partners with respect to these and other issues. Moreover, we expect to be consulted throughout the decision making and rulemaking processes of the Department.

One of Western Governors' foundational policy statements is WGA Policy Resolution 2021-01, *Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship* (attached). The resolution notes that "[e]ach Executive department and agency should have a clear and accountable process to provide each state – through its Governor or their designees – with *early, meaningful, substantive, and ongoing consultation* in the development of federal policies that affect states." (emphasis added). We submit that such consultation should commence immediately, both with respect to departmental policies under review and those under development.

Congratulations again on your appointment. We look forward to working with you to realign the state-federal relationship to better serve our common constituencies.

Sincerely,



Kate Brown  
Governor of Oregon  
Chair, WGA



Brad Little  
Governor of Idaho  
Vice Chair, WGA

Attachments



## Department of Commerce Summary of Priorities

This document outlines Western Governors' priorities for the Department of Commerce. It is comprised of positions adopted by Western Governors in WGA policy resolutions.

Priority	Governors' Policy
<b>State-Federal Relationship</b>	
<p><b>States are Sovereigns</b></p> <p>Ensure that states are not treated as equivalent to stakeholders, interested parties, public or private organizations, industry, or the public by federal agencies. Rather, states should be treated as sovereign entities and engaged in a government-to-government manner.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p>
<p><b>Preemption</b></p> <p>Explicitly state that preemption is disfavored and require agencies to specify where preemption is warranted. In such cases, agencies must provide affected states notice and an opportunity to participate in proceedings at which the agency must demonstrate the preemption of state authority is needed to accomplish a national purpose.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p>
<p><b>Consultation</b></p> <p>Seek opportunities for more meaningful consultation through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• agency-specific processes;</li> <li>• Executive Branch cross-cutting regulatory efforts; and</li> <li>• administrative reorganization.</li> </ul> <p>Require federal agencies to consult with states on agency reorganization and regulatory reform.</p> <p>Consult with states on a regular basis: as a predicate to federal action; through the pre-publication stage of rulemaking; after publication and before adoption of rules and regulations; and on an ongoing basis throughout implementation.</p> <p>Define "consultation" to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include early, meaningful, substantive, ongoing, government-to-government communication and exchange with states through Governors or their designees.</li> <li>• Require procedures separate from and beyond the stakeholder or public process.</li> </ul> <p>Clarify that notice and comment rulemaking procedures do not satisfy agencies' requirements to consult with states where required by law.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p> <p>June 19, 2020 <a href="#">comments</a> to EPA: Proposed Rule Governing Administrative Procedures for Issuance of Agency Guidance Documents</p>

Priority	Governors' Policy
<p>Require all federal departments and agencies, including independent regulatory agencies, to codify in regulation a clear, consistent, and accountable process for state consultation on policies with federalism implications. Such processes should include a remedy for states where agencies fail to do so.</p> <p>These regulations should also require:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Federal agencies to provide written notification to and an invitation to consult with Governors of all potentially affected states (or their designees) of policies with federalism implications within the area affected by the proposed federal action.</li> <li>• Federal agencies to provide procedures for written response to Governors' or their designees' input prior to a final federal decision.</li> <li>• Federal agency decision-makers to hold regular, ongoing consultation meetings with Governors or their designees regarding policies with federalism implications.</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Cooperating Agency Status</b></p> <p>Better define "cooperating agency" under NEPA processes.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2018-15</a>, Modernizing Western Infrastructure</p>
<p><b>Rulemaking</b></p> <p>Prior to promulgation of a rule with federalism implications, require federal agencies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensure that new funds sufficient to pay the direct costs incurred by the state in complying with the regulation are provided by the federal government; and</li> <li>• provide OMB with a description of the extent of agency's consultation with states, a summary of their input, the agency's response to that input, and any written communications submitted by states.</li> </ul> <p>Provide an opportunity for Governors or their designees to review agencies' regulatory agendas.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p>
<p><b>Non-legislative Rulemaking/Guidance</b></p> <p>Require agencies to consult with affected states prior to issuing guidance documents with federalism implications – including memoranda, directives, notices, bulletins, manuals, handbooks, opinions, and letters.</p> <p>Require agencies to develop a transparent and accountable process for determining whether a proposed agency action requires notice-and-comment rulemaking procedures prescribed under Section 553 of the Administrative Procedures Act.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p>

Priority	Governors' Policy
<p>Require agencies to publish all existing guidance documents at a single location on their agency's website and publish new and rescissions of guidance documents at the same location on the date they are issued.</p>	
<p><b>Consistency and Avoidance of Conflicts</b></p> <p>Require federal agencies to make all reasonable efforts to achieve consistency and avoid conflicts between federal and state objectives, plans, policies, and programs; and address and resolve all issues and concerns raised by states, unless precluded by federal law.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p>
<p><b>State Data</b></p> <p>Require agencies to incorporate state and local data and expertise, subject to existing state requirements for data protection and transparency, into their decisions. This data should include scientific, technical, economic, social, and other information on the issue the agency is trying to address.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-02</a>, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making</p>
<p><b>Settlement Negotiations</b></p> <p>In settlement negotiations impacting policies with federalism implications, require federal agencies to provide notice of the action to affected states, consult with affected states on any negotiations, and seek state concurrence regarding the settlement.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p>
<p><b>Perceived Barriers to the State-Federal Relationship</b></p> <p>Require agencies to revise or establish their <i>ex parte</i> rules or policies in accordance with current case law, which permits these communications in informal rulemaking proceedings; and/or exempt communications with states and state officials from the definition of <i>ex parte</i> communications.</p> <p>Exempt all meetings held exclusively between federal personnel and non-federal elected officials (or their designees) acting in their official capacities or in areas of shared intergovernmental responsibilities or administration from FACA.</p> <p>Create statutory exceptions to FOIA disclosure for state data and analysis in instances where publication of state data provided to federal agencies would be violation of existing state statutes.</p> <p>Investigate and develop solutions for other barriers to state-federal communication presented by FOIA.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-02</a>, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making</p>
<p><b>Unfunded Mandates Reform Act</b></p> <p>Eliminate the \$100 million threshold for the application of the UMRA to federal intergovernmental mandates.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p>

Priority	Governors' Policy
<p>Require agencies to incorporate state government input and data, including social and economic data, in their qualitative and quantitative assessment of anticipated costs and benefits of qualifying rules under the UMRA.</p> <p>Strengthen the consultation requirements for federal intergovernmental mandates.</p> <p>Authorize a court to compel substantive, meaningful consultation with elected officers of state governments if an agency fails to develop or implement the effective process under the UMRA.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-02</a>, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making</p>
<p><b>State Participation on Federal Boards</b></p> <p>Require agencies to assure state participation in relevant federal science boards by requiring the selection of state scientists to serve on science-based groups informing federal regulation.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p>
<p><b>Settlement Negotiations</b></p> <p>Where their roles and responsibilities are impacted, states should be meaningfully consulted during settlement negotiations, including negotiations aimed at avoiding, rather than resolving, litigation.</p> <p>Provide notice to affected Governors' offices and give co-regulating states opportunities to participate in the proceedings.</p> <p>Where legally permissible, that right should extend to federal agencies' settlement negotiations impacting state environmental and natural resource management prerogatives.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p>
<p><b>Cost/Benefit Analyses</b></p> <p>Seek mandatory use of a refined model for federal land management agencies' economic impact and cost/benefit analyses designed in conjunction with affected states and counties.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-02</a>, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making</p>
<p><b>Preemption</b></p> <p>Require agencies to develop step-by-step internal guidelines on compliance with the preemption provisions of Executive Order 13123.</p> <p>Require internal oversight procedure by which agency scrutinizes potential preemptions of state authority.</p> <p>Improve preemption and federalism review requirements in OIRA's "A-4 Circular" checklist.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p>

Priority	Governors' Policy
<b>Broadband Connectivity</b>	
<p><b>Broadband</b></p> <p>Recognize that the current definition of broadband – 25/3 Mbps – does not correspond with the requisite download and upload speeds necessary to support many business, education and health care applications that promote economic and community prosperity. Support efforts to adopt a higher, scalable standard that more accurately reflects modern innovations and bandwidth demands.</p> <p>The FCC, USDA and other federal agencies involved in broadband deployment should pursue strong partnerships with Governors and state agencies. Improved coordination related to broadband coverage data collection and verification and public investment can help ensure that public funds are directed to areas in most need of assistance.</p> <p>BLM, BIA and USFS should pursue strategies to prioritize reviews for broadband infrastructure permits on federal lands. Support efforts to improve permitting timelines for broadband infrastructure co-located with existing structures and other linear infrastructure, such as roads, transmission lines and pipelines. Encourage improved planning and permitting coordination between public lands management agencies, as telecommunications projects in western states can cross multiple federal lands jurisdictions.</p> <p>Address application barriers for businesses, local governments, cooperatives, Tribes and other entities involved with broadband deployment in rural communities.</p> <p>Encourage the FCC and USDA to engage with Governors’ offices, state broadband representatives and state departments of agriculture as they pursue policy and program initiatives to support advanced agriculture technology development and adoption.</p> <p>Allocate adequate wireless spectrum to support advanced and emerging agricultural technologies.</p> <p>Promote investment in rural IXPs via applicable broadband deployment programs.</p> <p>Continue expanding the eligibility of electric and telephone cooperatives to pursue USDA and FCC broadband deployment program support, as cooperatives’ existing infrastructure and access to rights-of-way can help promote low-cost connectivity solutions for rural communities.</p> <p>Pursue policy, programmatic and fiscal opportunities to improve broadband connectivity on Tribal lands. This includes designing federal programs in a way that promotes partnerships between Tribes, states and various broadband providers. We recommend that federal broadband programs allocate a designated portion of their available funding to supporting projects on Tribal lands.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2020-08</a>, Broadband Connectivity</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-02</a>, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2020-06</a>, Western Agriculture</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2020-07</a>, Rural Development</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2020-05</a>, Physical and Behavioral Health Care in Western States</p> <p>October 25, 2019 <a href="#">comments</a> to USDA: ReConnect Program eligibility criteria</p>

Priority	Governors' Policy
<p>Leverage community anchor institutions in rural communities to spur connectivity to surrounding areas. Support efforts to advance “to and through” policies that provide flexibility to incentivize additional private or public broadband infrastructure investment beyond connected community anchor institutions.</p> <p>Encourage USDA to address the ReConnect Program eligibility criteria related to areas designated to receive satellite support through the FCC’s CAF-II auction. This will enable many communities to pursue ReConnect connectivity solutions that will support increased data transmission needs into the future.</p> <p>Request that FCC, USDA and other federal entities prioritize scalable broadband infrastructure investments that meet communities’ increased bandwidth demands into the future.</p> <p>Support efforts to promote flexibility within the FCC’s E-Rate Program in order to deliver home connectivity solutions for unserved and underserved students, and respond to connectivity issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. Encourage the FCC to support bus wi-fi and other creative efforts that seek to address the homework gap.</p>	
<b>Cybersecurity</b>	
<p><b>Coordination and Consultation</b></p> <p>Clarify the roles and responsibilities of federal agencies in preventing, preparing for, and responding to cyberattacks, including by providing centralized authority, points of contact, and formalized communication pathways at each level within government and other organizations.</p> <p>Establish a working group with representatives from states and federal agencies to harmonize disparate agency regulations.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2019-02</a>, Cybersecurity</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p>
<p><b>Information Sharing</b></p> <p>Emphasize the benefits of information-sharing, while alleviating private sector concerns with this essential communication.</p> <p>Investigate liability protections, such as safe harbor provisions, for entities that report cyber intrusions.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2019-02</a>, Cybersecurity</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-02</a>, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making</p>
<b>Species Conservation</b>	
<p><b>State Authority / State Wildlife Data</b></p> <p>Promote early, meaningful consultation with states in the promulgation or development of any rules, regulations, directives, or agency action that affects or influences states' management of fish, wildlife and habitat under their management jurisdiction.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-04</a>, Species Conservation and the Endangered Species Act</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-02</a>, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making</p>



Priority	Governors' Policy
	WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a> , Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship
<p><b>State Authority / ESA</b></p> <p>Given the effect ESA listing decisions have on vital state interests, states should be viewed as full partners in all ESA decisions, but particularly when reviewing and considering the challenges that could be faced by species in the future.</p> <p>States should be full partners in listing, critical habitat designations, recovery planning, recovery efforts, and delisting decisions.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-04</a>, Species Conservation and the Endangered Species Act</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-02</a>, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making</p>
<p><b>Petitions</b></p> <p>Governors support legislative initiatives, court rulings, petitions or regulatory measures which allow local, state, federal and private conservation efforts adequate time to be implemented and demonstrate their efficacy.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-04</a>, Species Conservation and the Endangered Species Act</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p>
<p><b>Recovery</b></p> <p>Western Governors believe states should be full partners in listing, critical habitat designations, recovery planning, recovery efforts, and delisting decisions. The Services, working with the states, should establish consistent criteria to assess modeling related to projected scientific information.</p> <p>All listing, recovery and delisting decisions made by the federal government should recognize, consult, and employ the vast number of available state resources and utilize objective, peer-reviewed scientific literature, and scientific observations.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-04</a>, Species Conservation and the Endangered Species Act</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-02</a>, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making</p>
<p><b>Critical Habitat Designations</b></p> <p>Critical habitat designations should be based on analysis that includes data and scientific information from states included in proposed critical habitat.</p> <p>Use scientific information and analysis from states to inform critical habitat designations.</p> <p>Engage states as full partners in critical habitat designation, especially when federal agencies intend using long-term modeling and forecasting.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-04</a>, Species Conservation and the Endangered Species Act</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-02</a>, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p> <p>October 8, 2020 <a href="#">comments</a> to FWS: Western Governors seek larger role in proposed rule on</p>

Priority	Governors' Policy
	excluding areas of critical habitat under ESA
<p><b>Mitigation Policy</b></p> <p>Develop mitigation requirements and processes that may affect state and private land in coordination with Governors in whose states DOI lands are situated.</p> <p>Where state compensatory mitigation programs or standards exist, federal agencies should adopt and implement state-supported compensatory mitigation programs and policies.</p> <p>Ensure that federal mitigation policy or programs are consistent with existing state mitigation programs or standards where they are in place.</p> <p>Federal agencies should consult with states to provide consistency in the use of and improve assessment criteria for mitigation goals. Further, mitigation goals should establish clear expectations backed by effective assessment criteria.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2019-03</a>, Compensatory Mitigation</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-04</a>, Species Conservation and the Endangered Species Act</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p>
<p><b>Voluntary Conservation</b></p> <p>Incentivize voluntary conservation actions to preclude the need to list species under the ESA.</p> <p>Support the provision of economic incentives for landowners to participate in voluntary conservation efforts.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-04</a>, Species Conservation and the Endangered Species Act</p>
<p><b>State Data and Expertise</b></p> <p>FWS should utilize data and expertise provided by states in conducting status reviews and 12-month findings on petitions for ESA listings.</p> <p>Leverage the use of state, tribal, and local expertise and science in federal environmental review, consultation, and permitting.</p> <p>Recognize that state agencies often have the best available science on species and retain primary management jurisdiction over most wildlife on Federal, State and private lands and require that federal agencies utilize state data and analyses as a principal source in developing and analyzing science serving as the basis of a regulatory action.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-04</a>, Species Conservation and the Endangered Species Act</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-02</a>, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p>
<b>Water Management</b>	
<p><b>Management of Water Resources</b></p> <p>Expressly, unambiguously, and conspicuously recognize states' primary authority over water management and allocation decisions in all new federal laws, rules, regulations, and guidance documents.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2018-08</a>, Water Resource Management in the West</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2018-12</a>, Water Quality in the West</p>

Priority	Governors' Policy
<p>Respect limits set by Congress and the U.S. Supreme Court for any definition of "Waters of the United States" in the Clean Water Act and recognize the authority of states to manage water within their boundaries.</p> <p>Recognize states' exclusive authority over the allocation and administration of rights to develop groundwater resources and expressly preclude federal agencies from usurping such authority through rulemakings, regulations, guidance documents, or agency directives.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p> <p>February 20, 2019 group <a href="#">letter</a> to EPA and USACE: coalition process reforms to improve CWA Section 401 permitting processes</p>
<p><b>Drought Forecasting</b></p> <p>Work with states and resource managers to improve predictive and adaptive capabilities for extreme weather variability and related impacts, with a priority on improving sub-seasonal and seasonal precipitation forecasting capabilities to support water management decision-making.</p> <p>Pass legislation to reauthorize the National Integrated Drought Information (NIDIS) program under the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2018-08</a>, Water Resource Management in the West</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-02</a>, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making</p>
<p><b>Federal Water Data Programs</b></p> <p>Work with states and resource managers to improve predictive and adaptive capabilities for extreme weather variability and related impacts, with a priority on improving sub-seasonal and seasonal precipitation forecasting capabilities to support water management decision making.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2018-08</a>, Water Resource Management in the West</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-02</a>, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making</p>
<b>Workforce Development / Economic Development</b>	
<p><b>Rural Development</b></p> <p>Evaluate rural development and distressed community program requirements to identify barriers for rural applicants and revise onerous requirements.</p> <p>Use state data for program eligibility determinations when requested by states.</p> <p>Examine how emergency business stabilization funds are distributed by the Small Business Administration (SBA), U.S. Department of Agriculture Rural Development (USDA RD), and the Economic Development Administration (EDA) to ensure that adequate systems are in place to handle demand during widespread emergencies.</p> <p>Ensure that rural communities and tribes are served during disasters by setting aside emergency relief funds for small lenders and considering program requirements that allow those entities to participate through a streamlined process to rapidly distribute resources while maintaining fiscal accountability.</p>	<p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2020-07</a>, Rural Development</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2018-03</a>, Federal Disaster Recovery Assistance for Communities in the West</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-02</a>, Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making</p> <p>WGA Policy Resolution <a href="#">2021-01</a>, Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship</p>

Priority	Governors' Policy
<p>Increase flexibility in the use of federal economic development resources (particularly EDA funds) to facilitate investments in quality of life and amenities in rural communities.</p> <p>Increase water infrastructure funding for communities not served by traditional water systems.</p> <p>Increase training opportunities for certified water system operators through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Labor and college and university programs.</p>	



## Policy Resolution 2021-01

### Strengthening the State-Federal Relationship

#### A. **BACKGROUND**

1. Western Governors are proud of their unique role in governing and serving the citizens of this great nation. As the chief elected officials of sovereign states, they bear enormous responsibility and have tremendous opportunity. Moreover, the faithful discharge of their obligations is central to the success of the Great American Experiment.
2. It was the states that confederated to form a more perfect union by creating a national government with specific responsibilities for common interests. In this union, the states retained their sovereignty and much of their authority.<sup>1</sup>
3. Under the American version of federalism, the powers of the federal government are narrow, enumerated and defined. The powers of the states, on the other hand, are vast and indefinite and encompass all powers of governance not specifically bestowed to the federal government by the U.S. Constitution. This principle is memorialized in the Tenth Amendment, which states: “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”
4. This reservation of power to the states respects the differences between regions and peoples, recognizes a right to self-determination at a local level, and provides for flexible, tailored solutions to policy challenges. It also requires the federal government to engage with states – our nation’s dynamic laboratories of democracy – on a government-to-government basis befitting their co-sovereign status.
5. In addition to states’ reserved sovereign authorities, Congress has recognized state authority in federal statute by: (1) directing the federal government to defer to state authority, including such authority over land and water use, education, domestic relations, criminal law, property law, local government, taxation, and fish and wildlife; and (2) delegating federal authority to states, including the regulation of water quality, air quality, and solid and hazardous waste.
6. [Executive Order 13132](#), Federalism, reinforces these constitutional, statutory, and judicial principles and directs federal agencies to have an accountable process to ensure meaningful and timely input from state officials in developing policies with federalism implications.
7. The relationship between state and federal authority is complex and multi-dimensional. There are various contexts in which these authorities manifest and intersect:

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S. Supreme Court has confirmed that, “[d]ual sovereignty is a defining feature of our Nation’s constitutional blueprint” and “States entered the Union with their sovereignty intact.” *See, e.g., Sossamon v. Texas*, 563 U.S. 277, 283 (2011).

- a) **State Primacy** – All powers not specifically delegated to the federal government in the Constitution. In the absence of Constitutional delegation of authority to the federal government, state authority should be presumed sovereign. *Examples: groundwater, wildlife management (outside of the Endangered Species Act), natural resources management, electric transmission siting.*
  - b) **Shared State-Federal Authority** – Fact patterns in which federal authority and state primacy intersect. *Examples: wild horses and burros on federal lands, interstate water compacts.*
  - c) **Federal Authority Delegated to States** – Federal authority that Congress has delegated to states by statute. Many such statutes require federal agencies to set federal standards (and ensure those standards are met) but authorize states to implement those standards. *Examples: water and air quality, solid and hazardous waste.*
  - d) **Federal Statutory or Other Obligations to States** – Where the federal government has a statutory, historical, or moral obligation to states. *Examples: Payments in Lieu of Taxes; Secure Rural Schools Act; shared mineral royalties; agreements to clean up radioactive waste that was generated by federal nuclear weapons production.*
  - e) **Exclusive Federal Authority** – Powers enumerated in the Constitution as exclusive powers of the federal government. In areas of exclusive federal authority, state law can be preempted if Congress clearly and unambiguously articulates an intent to occupy a given field or to the extent it conflicts with state law. *Examples: national defense, production of money.*
8. In contravention of the Founders’ design, the balance of power has shifted toward the federal government and away from the states. Increasingly prescriptive regulations tie the hands of states and local governments, dampen innovation, and impair on-the-ground problem-solving. Failures of the federal government to consult with states reflect insufficient appreciation for local knowledge, preferences, and competencies. In many cases, these federal actions encroach on state legal prerogatives, neglect state expertise, and/or infringe on state authority.
  9. The federal government often requires states to execute policy initiatives without providing the funding necessary for their implementation. State governments cannot function as full partners if the federal government requires them to devote their limited resources to compliance with unfunded federal mandates.
  10. State authority and autonomy is also eroded when prescribed federal policies become effectively mandatory through the contingency of federal funding streams that states depend on to deliver critical services.
  11. Too often, federal agencies: solicit input from states after a decision is already made or a public process is started; ask states to provide feedback on a proposed action without providing details or documents regarding what the agency is proposing; or do not respond to state input or incorporate feedback from states into their decisions. This does not afford states with the respect and communication required by law, and states currently have no

recourse for an agency's failure to consult except for litigation on the merits of a federal decision.

12. Congress and Executive Order 13132 currently require federal agencies to document the effects of their actions on states in certain circumstances. In practice, federal agencies rarely prepare these prescribed federalism assessments or statements. Even when federal agencies prepare such documents, they are not ordinarily informed by input from affected states. In addition, these documentation requirements only apply at the end of the rulemaking process and cannot substitute for early and meaningful consultation with states.
13. Federal agencies have suggested to states that there are legal or other barriers to state consultation, such as: federal agency policies restricting ex parte communications; concerns about the applicability of Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) procedures to meetings between state and federal officials; and issues with sharing information that would otherwise be exempt from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).
14. Federal agencies do not adequately incorporate state data and expertise into their decisions. This can result in duplication, inefficiency, and federal decisions that do not reflect on-the-ground conditions. Consideration and incorporation of state, tribal, and local data and analysis will result in federal actions that are better-informed, more effectively coordinated among all levels of government, and tailored to the communities they affect.
15. Many of these issues stem from a profound misunderstanding throughout the federal government regarding the role and legal status of states. Over the past several years, Western Governors have worked to improve the federal government's understanding of state sovereignty, authority, and state-federal consultation; meaningful structural change, however, has yet to occur.

## **B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT**

1. A good faith partnership between states and the federal government will result in more efficient, economic, effective, and durable policy, benefiting the Governors' and the federal government's shared constituents and resulting in a nation that is stronger, more resilient, and more united.
2. Improving state-federal communication and coordination is a goal that transcends party lines, and it is among the Governors' highest priorities. The Governors urge Congress and the Executive Branch to make fundamental changes to realign and improve the state-federal paradigm.

### ***State Sovereignty and Authority***

3. States are co-sovereigns with the federal government pursuant to the Tenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and other federal law. Congress and federal agencies must recognize state sovereignty and must not conflate states with other entities or units of government. States should not be treated as stakeholders or members of the public.
4. State authority is presumed sovereign in the absence of Constitutional delegation of authority to the federal government.

- a) Federal legislative and regulatory actions should be limited to issues of national significance or scope, pursuant to federal constitutional authority. Preemption of state laws should be limited to instances of necessity.
  - b) Where Congress preempts state law (acting pursuant to federal constitutional authority), federal law should accommodate state laws, regulations, and policies before its enactment and permit states that have developed alternate standards to continue to enforce and adhere to them.
  - c) Federal agencies should construe federal law to preempt state law only when a statute contains an express preemption provision or there is some other compelling evidence that Congress intended to preempt state law.
5. Congress and federal agencies should respect the authority of states to determine the allocation of state administrative and financial responsibilities in accordance with state constitutions and statutes. It should further:
- a) Ensure that federal government monitoring is outcome-oriented;
  - b) Minimize federal reporting requirements; and
  - c) Refrain from dictating state or local government organization.
6. When a state is meeting the requirements of a delegated program, the role of a federal agency should be limited to the provision of funding, technical assistance and research support. States should have the maximum discretion to develop implementation and enforcement approaches within their jurisdiction without federal intervention. Federal agencies should recognize and credit states' proactive actions.
7. Congress and federal agencies should avoid imposing unfunded federal mandates on states. In addition:
- a) Federal assistance funds, including funds that will be passed through to local governments, should flow through states according to state laws and procedures;
  - b) States should have the flexibility to transfer a limited amount of funds from one grant program to another and to coordinate the administration of related grants;
  - c) Federal funds should provide maximum state flexibility without specific set-asides; and
  - d) Governors should have the authority to require coordination among state executive branch agencies, or between levels or units of government, as a condition of the allocation or pass-through of funds.
8. Congress and the Executive Branch should create or re-establish entities to discuss and act on federalism issues, such as the Speaker's Task Force on Intergovernmental Affairs, the U.S. Advisory Committee on Intergovernmental Relations, the Subcommittee on Intergovernmental Affairs, or a federalism office within the White House. These entities should have the ability and resources to make recommendations to improve the state-



federal relationship and include states in their membership or actively involve states in their discussions.

### ***State-Federal Consultation***

9. Federal agencies must engage in consultation with states on a government-to-government basis in accordance with states' legal status. Congress should clarify and promote the need for state-federal consultation.
10. Improving state-federal consultation will result in more effective, efficient, and long-lasting federal policy for the following reasons:
  - a) Governors have specialized knowledge of their states' environments, resources, laws, cultures, and economies that is essential to informed federal decision-making;
  - b) Federal agencies can reduce duplication through the use and incorporation of state expertise, data and documentation;
  - c) Authentic communication and information exchange will help federal agencies determine whether an issue is best addressed at the federal level; and
  - d) Through meaningful dialogues with affected states, federal agencies can also avoid unintended consequences and address or resolve state concerns.
11. Each Executive department and agency should have a clear and accountable process to provide each state – through its Governor or their designees – with early, meaningful, substantive, and ongoing consultation in the development of federal policies that affect states. The extent of the consultation process should be determined by engaging with affected states. At a minimum, this process must involve:
  - a) Conducting consultation through federal representatives who can speak or act on behalf of an agency;
  - b) Inviting states to provide input outside of a public process and before proposals are finalized;
  - c) Enabling states to engage with federal agencies on an ongoing basis to seek refinements to proposed federal actions prior to finalization;
  - d) Providing robust information and documents (including non-final, non-public, draft, and supporting documents) about potential federal actions, including proposed rules, to Governors or their designees;
  - e) Addressing or resolving, where possible, state issues, concerns, or other input unless precluded by law;
  - f) Documenting how state concerns were resolved or why they were unable to be resolved in final decisions; and

- g) Making reasonable efforts to achieve consistency and avoid conflicts between federal and state objectives, plans, policies, and programs.
12. Governors affirm their reciprocal role in advancing a clear, predictable, timely, and accountable consultation process. Governors or their designees must continue to provide clear expectations for the appropriate scope and scale of consultation and must work with federal agencies to make consultation processes as efficient as practicable. As chief executives, Governors must also ensure the views of the state are clearly and consistently conveyed throughout the consultation process by prioritizing significant issues and resolving competing viewpoints across state government.
13. In many cases, federal agencies are required – whether by statute, executive order, regulation, policy, or other mandate – to consult, cooperate, and coordinate with states before taking action. However, due to states’ unique legal status, the need for federal-state engagement is not limited to express directives and should extend to any federal actions that may have direct effects on states, on the relationship between the federal government and states, or on the distribution of power or responsibilities among the various levels of government. Federal agencies should consult with states regarding what types of agency actions typically affect states and the extent of consultation required for these types of actions.
- a) These actions include the implementation of federal statutes and the development, prioritization, and implementation of agency policies, rules, programs, reviews (e.g., Governor’s Consistency Reviews), plans (e.g., resource management plans), budget proposals and processes, strategic planning efforts (e.g., reorganization), and federal litigation or adjudication that affects states.
  - b) When a federal agency proposes to enter into any agreement or settlement that affects states, the agency should provide all affected Governors or their designees with notice of the proposal and consult with, and seek the concurrence of, Governors or their designees who respond to the notice.
14. Congress and the Executive Branch should require federal agencies to promulgate regulations in consultation with Governors, setting forth their procedures to ensure meaningful, substantive consultation with states on federal actions that affect states. This direction should also clarify that, for rulemakings affecting states:
- a) An agency’s satisfaction of rulemaking requirements under the Administrative Procedure Act (including the solicitation of public comments) does not satisfy an agency’s obligation to consult with states; and
  - b) Consultation should occur before publication of a notice of proposed rulemaking or before an advanced notice of proposed rulemaking is submitted to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).
15. Congress and the Executive Branch should consider the following additional accountability measures:

- a) Requiring the designation of a federalism official with the responsibility for implementing state-federal consultation and publish this official's name, title, and contact information on the agency's website;
  - b) Requiring OMB to regularly submit a report to Congress and Governors on state-federal consultation and implementation of agency consultation rules;
  - c) Requiring federal agencies to provide a summary of their efforts to consult with states, including a discussion of state input and how that input was considered or addressed, in any proposed and final rules;
  - d) Creating a process where Governors can notify OMB of an agency's failure to consult or comply with their consultation procedures; and
  - e) Providing an opportunity for Governors or their designees to seek judicial review of an agency's failure to consult.
16. Congress and the Executive Branch could make federalism reviews more effective by:
- a) Working with Governors to develop specific criteria and consultation processes for initiating and performing these reviews.
  - b) Providing Governors with an opportunity to comment on federalism assessments before any covered federal action is submitted to OMB for approval.
17. Congress and federal agencies should take the following actions to clarify that *ex parte* policies, FACA, and FOIA are not barriers to consultation:
- a) Federal agencies should (and Congress should require them to) clearly identify and provide rationale for any perceived barriers to consultation;
  - b) Federal agencies should clarify that consultation with state officials does not qualify as *ex parte* communications and that *ex parte* communications are not prohibited at any point during an informal rulemaking process;
  - c) Congress should clarify that meetings held exclusively between federal personnel and state elected officials or their designees acting in their official capacities or in areas of shared responsibilities or administration (and not for the purpose of obtaining collective advice) do not qualify as requiring compliance with FACA procedures; and
  - d) Congress should clarify that FOIA's exemptions apply to federal records shared or exchanged with states (as if those records were shared, exchanged, or created solely within the federal government) and create a statutory exemption to FOIA disclosure for state records in instances where publication of state records provided to federal agencies would violate existing state law.

### ***State Data and Expertise***

18. Federal agencies should utilize state data, expertise, and science in the development of federal actions that affect states.
19. Congress and the Executive Branch should, subject to existing state requirements for data protection and transparency, require agencies to incorporate state and local data and expertise into their decisions. This data should include scientific, technical, economic, social, and other information on the issue the agency is trying to address.
20. States merit greater representation on all relevant committees and panels advising federal agencies on scientific, technological, social, and economic issues that inform federal regulatory processes.

### **C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE**

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

*This resolution will expire in December 2023. Western Governors enact new policy resolutions and amend existing resolutions on a semiannual basis. Please consult [westgov.org/resolutions](https://westgov.org/resolutions) for the most current copy of a resolution and a list of all current WGA policy resolutions.*



## Policy Resolution 2021-02

### Utilizing State Data in Federal Decision Making

#### A. **BACKGROUND**

1. State and federal agencies increasingly rely on quantitative and qualitative data to inform evidence-based policymaking, improve service delivery, more effectively manage resources, improve regulatory enforcement, and more accurately measure program performance and effectiveness.
2. States serve a critical function as a primary sources and stewards of economic, social, geospatial, scientific, technical, and other datasets that support a wide array of federal agencies and programs. State agencies often have the best available science, expertise, and other institutional data resources for purposes of federal decision-making processes.
3. States are both sovereignties and the primary administrators of numerous federal administrative and regulatory programs under a system of cooperative federalism, which distinguishes them from other non-federal sources of data.
4. State agencies also rely on timely access to current and accurate federal datasets to inform their own decision-making processes, develop more effective policy, improve service delivery and public communication, and to administer federally-delegated administrative programs.
5. In addition to federal laws and regulations, state agencies operate under their own privacy and data stewardship laws, regulations, and policies that protect personal and confidential information from public disclosure or other inappropriate use or disclosure. These protections help establish public trust that ultimately improves government effectiveness.
6. Public access to datasets that serve as the basis for federal agency actions promotes transparency and accountability in the decision-making process. Nevertheless, blanket requirements to make publicly available all data considered by federal agencies – particularly if this data consists of raw data provided by states – may infringe upon states' statutory imperatives to protect personally identifiable and otherwise sensitive information. It may also infringe upon fundamental privacy and data stewardship principles like purpose specification and data minimization. Even where there is no state legal barrier to disclosure of raw data, state agencies may maintain significant reservations about the public release of raw data.
7. The 2019 Federal Data Strategy directs federal agencies to “[e]ffectively, routinely, transparently, and appropriately use data in policy, planning, and operations to guide decision-making [and] share the data and analyses behind those decisions.” Additionally, agencies are directed to “[f]acilitate data sharing between state, local, and tribal governments and the Federal Government, where relevant and appropriate and with

proper protections, particularly for programs that are federally funded and locally administered, to enable richer analyses for more informed decision-making.”

8. Improvements in intergovernmental data sharing, stewardship, integration, protection, and utilization will require robust federal investments in a modern data infrastructure, technology, and training.

**B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT**

1. State data serves a critical role in the successful implementation of a variety of federal programs and in federal agencies' fulfillment of their statutory missions and directives.
2. Subject to state laws and other requirements for data protection and transparency, federal agencies should be required to incorporate state and local data and expertise into their analysis and decision-making processes. This data should include geospatial, scientific, technical, economic, social, and other information relevant to issues the agency is trying to address.
3. Congress and the Executive Branch should look to states and state agencies as partners – rather than ordinary stakeholders – in the collection, stewardship, analysis, and use of data to inform federal decision-making processes. Federal agencies should recognize the existence and limitations of state privacy and data stewardship laws, regulations, and policies and work with states to develop strategies that encourage effective state-federal data sharing while appropriately protecting data according to state law.
4. State data – particularly non-aggregated raw data – is subject to differing levels of protection under various state laws, regulations, and policies. Western Governors encourage Congress and federal agencies to recognize the limitations on complete transparency of state data in federal decision making and to work with states to identify ways in which protected data can inform federal decision-making processes without conflicting with applicable state laws, regulations, or policies.
5. Federal agencies should consult with states – on a government-to-government basis – in the development and implementation of policies, programs, and strategies to more effectively and consistently incorporate state data into federal decision making, including implementation of applicable federal statutes and programs, as well as the Federal Data Strategy and development of annual Federal Data Strategy Action Plans.
6. Federal agencies should also consult with states to ensure that state and local partners have access to timely and reliable federal datasets for purposes of informing state and local decision-making processes.
7. Congress and the Executive Branch should support, and work with state toward, the modernization of our nation's data infrastructure and intergovernmental data-sharing and analysis capabilities. Data infrastructure should be based on best practices for data stewardship and must properly protect personal and confidential information in accordance with state and federal law. Federal agencies should consult with states to develop guidelines for intergovernmental data-sharing agreements and other protocols that include commitments to fundamental privacy and data stewardship principles like purpose specification and data minimization.

8. Federal agencies should work with state and local partners to develop uniform data standards, where appropriate, to maximize data quality and facilitate intergovernmental data use, access, sharing, and interoperability.
9. Western Governors support congressional efforts to broaden statutory exemptions under the Freedom of Information Act to protect personally identifiable and sensitive state-shared data from disclosure.
10. Western Governors urge the Executive Branch to develop uniform privacy and data stewardship policies based on best practices and uniform interpretations of federal privacy and data stewardship laws, regulations, policies, and other directives applicable to data received from states, as well as other non-federal sources.

**C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE**

1. The Governors direct WGA staff to work with congressional committees of jurisdiction, the Executive Branch, and other entities, where appropriate, to achieve the objectives of this resolution.
2. Furthermore, the Governors direct WGA staff to consult with the Staff Advisory Council regarding its efforts to realize the objectives of this resolution and to keep the Governors apprised of its progress in this regard.

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