

# Data Sources for Rural Development Priorities

This document supplements information found on the USDA Rural Development priorities web page, available at this link: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/priority-points>. While not intended to replace formal program application materials, our goal is to help Rural Development customers better understand the RD application process. Additional questions can be addressed by state-based program staff (a list of state offices is available at this link: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/about-rd/state-offices>). If you have questions about the data used in determining Rural Development priority points, please email [USDA.RD.DATA@usda.gov](mailto:USDA.RD.DATA@usda.gov)

## Creating More and Better Markets

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Uses the Distressed Communities Index (DCI):

- The DCI is taken from the Economic Innovation Group, but the Innovation Center has adapted to ensure that rural communities are not excluded which is the case with EIG's measure.
- The DCI is comprised of seven publicly-available metrics that evaluate a number of socioeconomic measures of a community's economic well-being:
  - No high school diploma:** Percentage of the 25-years-and-older population without a high school diploma or equivalent
  - Housing vacancy rate:** Percentage of habitable, unoccupied housing, excluding seasonal, recreational, or occasional-use housing
  - Adults not working:** Percentage of the ages 25 – 54 population (considered "prime age") not currently employed
  - Poverty rate:** Percentage of the population living below the poverty line
  - Median income ratio:** Depicts the median household income as a percent of the metro area median household income (or statewide, in nonmetropolitan areas)
  - Change in employment:** Percentage of change in the number of jobs in a specific range of years (for instance, from 2016 – 2020)
  - Change in establishments:** Percentage of change in the number of businesses in a specific range of years (for instance, from 2016 – 2020)
- Zip codes are ranked on each of these measures. Then, an overall score averaging the individual rankings is calculated. The specific cut-off for a community to be considered distressed is usually a DCI score of 80 (out of 100).
- You can learn more about DCI methodology at this link: <https://eig.org/distressed-communities/2022-dci-methodology/>

### Geography level: Zipcode

**Note:** U.S. Territories can obtain points by using **local data** regarding economic conditions of the proposed project area.

## Advancing Racial Justice, Place-Based Equity, and Opportunity

Uses the CDC Social Vulnerability Index (SVI):

[https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/placeandhealth/svi/fact\\_sheet/fact\\_sheet.html](https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/placeandhealth/svi/fact_sheet/fact_sheet.html)

The SVI helps identify communities vulnerable to inequity. The degree to which a community exhibits certain social conditions – such as high poverty, low percentage of vehicle access, or crowded households – may affect that community’s ability to prevent human suffering and financial loss in the event of disaster. These factors describe a community’s social vulnerability.

Together, these factors describe a community’s social vulnerability. The SVI ranks each census tract on 16 social factors and groups them into four related themes. These themes include:

- Socioeconomic Status: Population below 150% poverty, housing cost burden, population with no high school diploma and population with no health insurance
- Household Characteristics: Population ages 65 or older, ages 17 or younger, residents with a disability, single-parent households, and English language proficiency
- Racial and Ethnic Minority Status: Hispanic or Latino (of any race); Black and African American, Not Hispanic or Latino; American Indian and Alaska Native, Not Hispanic or Latino; Asian, Not Hispanic or Latino; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, Not Hispanic or Latino; Two or More Races, Not Hispanic or Latino; Other Races, Not Hispanic or Latino
- Housing Type and Transportation: Multiunit structures, mobile homes, overcrowded housing, no access to a vehicle, and institutional group quarters

Census tract rankings are based on percentiles. Percentile ranking values range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater vulnerability. Census tracts with a score of .75 or higher are considered vulnerable. The higher the score, the more vulnerable the community. Using the SVI as the sole measure for this priority is appropriate, as it gives priority to communities vulnerable to inequity anywhere within RD’s areas of eligibility.

### **Geography level: Census Tract**

**Note:** U.S. Territories can obtain points by using **local data** to demonstrate the social vulnerability of the proposed project area.

## Addressing Climate Change and Environmental Justice

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Two metrics: Disadvantaged Community status or Energy Community status

Uses the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) to identify *Disadvantaged Communities*:

- CEJST: <https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/#3/33.47/-97.5>
- CEJST is a tool to help federal agencies identify disadvantaged communities that will benefit from programs included in the Justice40 initiative. CEJST's eight (8) categories of burden: Climate, Energy, Health, Housing, Legacy Pollution, Transportation, Water and Wastewater, or Workforce Development.
- A census tract is considered disadvantaged if it:
  - Meets the thresholds for at least one of the categories of burden or
  - Is located on land within the boundaries of federally recognized Tribes or
  - Is surrounded by disadvantaged communities and is at or above the 50th percentile for low income

### Geography levels: Census Tract

Uses definition from Inflation Reduction Act to identify *Energy Communities*, which are:

- A "brownfield site" (as defined in certain subparagraphs of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980 (CERCLA))
- A "metropolitan statistical area" or "non-metropolitan statistical area" that has (or had at any time after 2009) 0.17% or greater direct employment or 25% or greater local tax revenues related to the extraction, processing, transport, or storage of coal, oil, or natural gas; and has an unemployment rate at or above the national average unemployment rate for the previous year
- A census tract (or directly adjoining census tract) in which a coal mine has closed after 1999; or in which a coal-fired electric generating unit has been retired after 2009
- You can learn more about IRA Energy Communities at this link - <https://energycommunities.gov/energy-community-tax-credit-bonus/>

**Note:** U.S. Territories can obtain points for the quantitative factor by using local data to demonstrate that the proposed project area has a high concentration of fossil fuel-employment.

For additional information, please refer to Rural Development Priorities resources available online at this link: <https://www.rd.usda.gov/priority-points> or contact the Rural Development Innovation Center Data Analytics team at [USDA.RD.DATA@usda.Ugov](mailto:USDA.RD.DATA@usda.Ugov).

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