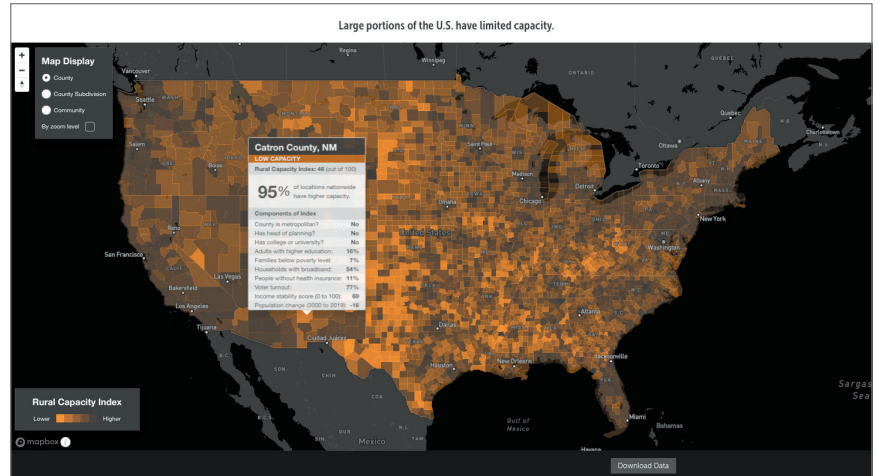


The Rural Capacity Index

A free online map and data tool to help identify communities where investments in staffing and expertise are needed to support infrastructure and climate resilience projects.

headwaterseconomics.org/ruralcapacitymap



How the Index Works

The Index measures capacity, which is the level of staffing, resources, and expertise a community needs to successfully apply for funding, manage complex grant processes, and plan and maintain infrastructure improvements.

The Index ranges from 0 (low capacity) to 100 (high capacity) for every U.S. county, county subdivision, and community. In addition to the Index score, the national rank is presented.

The Index is comprised of 10 indicators that help answer questions about:



1) Local government capacity,
including whether there are planning staff.



2) Institutional capacity,
including the presence of a college or university.



3) Economic opportunity,
including income stability and poverty prevalence.



4) Education and engagement,
including voting and education rates.



Who Uses the Index

- + Community leaders who want to advocate for resources
- + Funders and foundations looking for communities in need
- + Federal and state agencies dispersing resources
- + Wildfire and flood mitigation, response, and recovery teams
- + Land use and emergency planners
- + Grant writers
- + Researchers
- + Reporters

The Rural Capacity Index provides an important step forward in understanding the challenges that must be overcome by rural communities for implementing policy and accessing resources.”

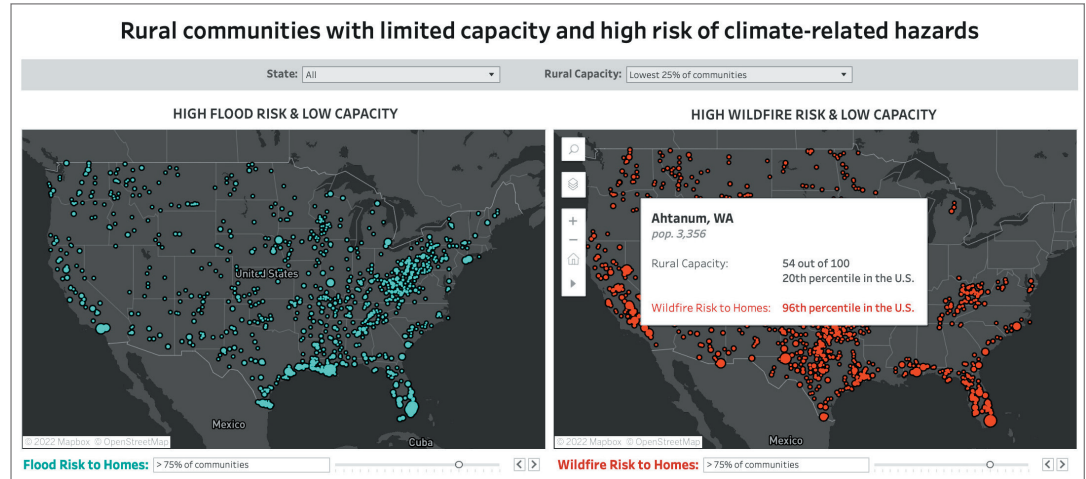
—Sarah Lucas,
Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development,
Office of Rural Development



Using the Rural Capacity Index

The Index can highlight places that need help the most, especially when paired with maps of climate risks, social vulnerability, or other variables.

For example, these maps show places with low capacity that also face high flood or wildfire risk. These are the places that clearly need more financial or technical support to prepare for climate-related threats.



The Rural Capacity Index can be used by federal, state, and local leaders to direct resources and build capacity.



Grantmakers can use the Index to:

- ☐ Identify communities where direct funding or match waivers are needed.
- ☐ Build grant eligibility and scoring criteria that enable rural places to qualify and compete.
- ☐ Create technical assistance centers to support clusters of low-capacity communities.



State & community leaders can use the Index to:

- ☐ Advocate for increased funding, staffing, and expertise.
- ☐ Identify potential partners to leverage regional strengths.
- ☐ Uncover the root causes of capacity challenges and target programs to overcome capacity gaps.

Advantages

- + Free, easy-to-use interactive tool, with access to downloadable data.
- + Consistent nationwide data at the county, county subdivision, and community scale.
- + A vital snapshot of the places that need help preparing for wildfire and flooding, and can be used to target other infrastructure investments like transportation, outdoor recreation, internet access, education, and climate resilience.

Limitations

- + Some indicators of capacity are not easily measured, such as the strength of relationships within a community.
- + Data are missing for some communities and counties.
- + Data quality for socioeconomic indicators can be worse for rural communities.

What's Next

Through a partnership with NOAA, Headwaters Economics is continuing to refine the Rural Capacity Index. Feedback is welcome at <https://headwaterseconomics.org/contact/>.