

Deploy a Recovery Authority Model Befitting the Needs of Los Angeles

"Successful recoveries share a common feature. The recovery is either led by a strong leader or is guided by an independent authority. I haven't seen another model that works." **Roy Wright, IBHS**

As articulated in the landmark report by the Los Angeles County Blue Ribbon on Climate Action and Fire-Site Recovery, a local authority could help "streamline complex recovery efforts, prioritize and support the return of residents and businesses, and enable rebuilding by displaced owners of homes and rental and commercial properties."

An approach used in the aftermath of many US disasters, including Hurricane Katrina in 2005 and Sandy in 2011, a recovery authority centralizes recovery functions to streamline processes, policies, and finances. Built on collaboration across all levels of government, as well as with non-profits and private sector partners, they integrate county and municipal governments across the region, regional planning agencies, community-based organizations representing affected populations, utility providers and critical infrastructure operators, insurance and financial sector partners, and philanthropies.

Recovery authorities serve as a strategic coordination hub to more effectively mobilize resources, facilitate investment and innovation, and ensure community integration and accountability. Recovery authorities are helpful in complex jurisdictional landscapes because they provide centralized coordination and streamlined processes, ensuring that different levels of government, agencies, and organizations work together effectively.

Recommended Action

We recommend establishing three geographically distinct authorities. This approach differs from that of the Blue Ribbon Commission, which proposed one authority for the whole region. We feel it politically unfeasible to link the City of Los Angeles with other jurisdictions. One authority could cover the area directly affected by the Eaton Fire. The second would cover the City of Los Angeles as affected by the Palisades Fire. And the third would cover the westside areas of unincorporated Los Angeles County and City of Malibu.

Each authority would be governed by a board consisting largely of local residents, appointed by local and state officials, and funded by state and philanthropic dollars. An explicit goal of the authority would be to help displaced residents return to their neighborhoods. The authority would be empowered to purchase and sell land, to aggregate properties, negotiate with builders, and through economies of scale, reduce the cost of rebuilding.

The authorities could also coordinate other rebuilding efforts, assisting with the logistics of truck deliveries and workforce housing. The authorities could also issue bonds backed by tax increment financing to underwrite improvement to local infrastructure.

Starter Authorities

To spur the establishment of the authorities, philanthropy can immediately establish “starter authorities.” The starter authorities would model the functions of a full-fledged authority. The starter authorities pursue state approval, navigating local government politics to establish a full-fledged authority. The starter authorities would fund feasibility studies and governance structure development, supporting legal and policy analysis for authority creation, convene multi-jurisdictional partners to develop shared vision and operating framework, provide seed funding for initial operations before public revenue streams are established. Several core functions are also viable for philanthropic support.

Expected Impact

Create a durable coordinating body that can drive systemic change beyond traditional grant cycles. The authority becomes a vehicle for sustained collaboration, leveraging foundation resources to catalyze public investment, innovation, and community-centered action. Ultimately, each authority would aim to lower costs, speed recovery, protect assets, and drive market-wide shifts toward proactive risk reduction while ensuring equitable outcomes. Funding would go to organizations as determined by the Department of Angels Organization.

Timeline

Funding can begin as early as February 2026. Los Angeles County’s County Counsel is returning to the board with recommendations with findings related to a recovery district in January 2026. It is our view that it’s best to wait for the County Counsel determination before funding the project.

Notional Budget

Estimated total budget: $1,860,000

- $500,000 per each starter authority, estimating 3 staff per authority
- $60,000 for legal assistance to incorporate the authorities, assuming synergies in this space across all three authorities
- $300,000 to a nonprofit to manage the effort, assuming a two year commitment to project manage the launch of the authorities and hold the center across all three as they are established to ensure long-term institutionalization

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Evidence from Reports

The concept of coordination through the deployment of recovery authorities receives strong support across multiple reports:

- The Blue Ribbon Commission explicitly recommends establishing "a Region-Wide Resilient Rebuilding Authority for the Eaton and Palisades Burn Areas" to streamline complex recovery efforts and enable rebuilding by displaced owners
- ULI advocates for creating "a single agency with comprehensive authority to complete all aspects of the reconstruction" with full legal authority to perform all functions required to rebuild infrastructure and handle all permitting functions
- The Eaton Fire Collaborative stresses "survivor-government dialogue infrastructure" through survivor advisory councils and regular listening sessions to ensure community integration
- CAFWD highlights the importance of "strengthening local capacity for project design and delivery" through designated lead entities such as regional agencies or joint powers authorities to coordinate pipeline development and manage pre-development activities

