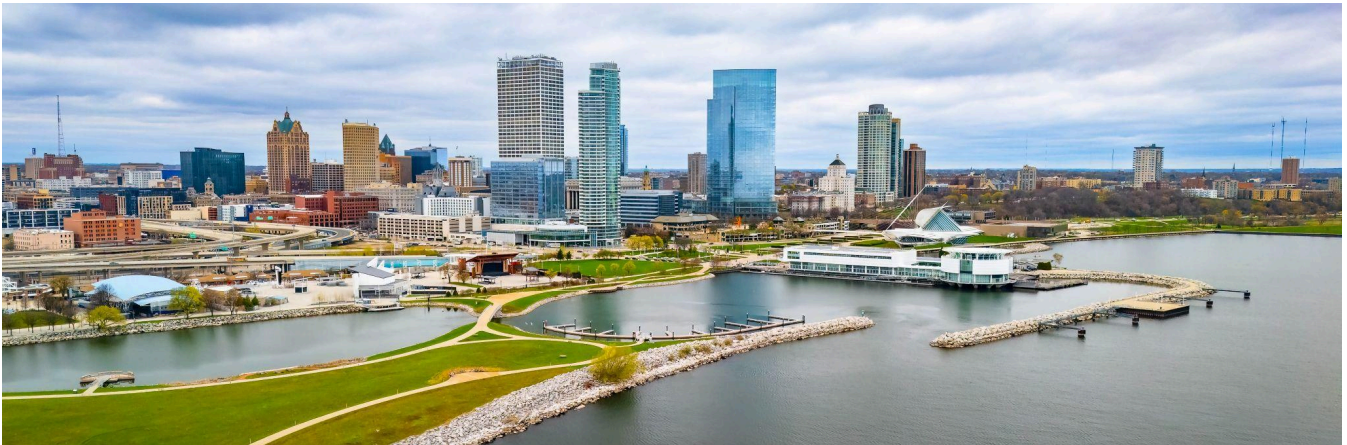


# The Great Lakes Receiving Network

A Resilient Future, Imagined Together



Source: GummyBone / Getty Images

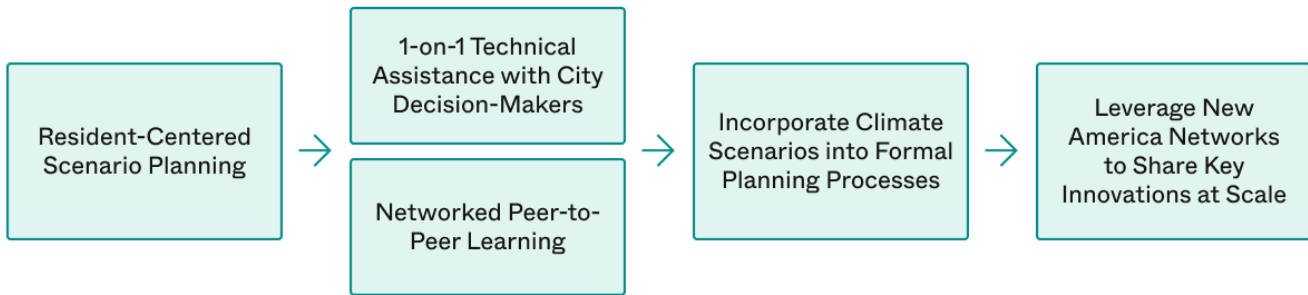
## Executive Summary

Climate impacts such as extreme temperatures, sea-level rise, and natural disasters are prompting Americans to relocate—millions more will move from the coasts and the Sun Belt towards cities across the Great Lakes region in the coming decades. For these receiving cities, the presence of abundant and affordable homes is key to attracting and absorbing population inflows without displacing existing residents.

The Great Lakes Receiving Network is a first-of-its-kind initiative to empower five anticipated receiving cities across the Midwest to envision, plan, and build more resilient housing in preparation for future climate migration, for both existing residents and new arrivals. New America brings together key actors within and across cities to accelerate the pace of planning and innovation, so no city has to innovate alone. After a successful three years, network partners will have:

- Incorporated climate migration projections and related housing needs into municipal, county, and/or regional planning processes;
- Taken concrete policy, budgeting, and other actions to boost housing supply ahead of U.S. climate migration;
- Engaged consistently and meaningfully with local residents around the needs and opportunities related to climate migration inflows.

## Network Model



## Climate Migration: An Opportunity for Resilient and Equitable Growth in the Great Lakes

The scorching heat and devastating storms increasingly common across the Sun Belt are already pushing Americans toward more geographically-resilient cities in the Great Lakes region. Early signals, such as research that finds demographic growth across the Sun Belt is slowing down and even starting to reverse, suggest that U.S. climate migration is only beginning. By 2050, millions of Americans could relocate to prospective receiving cities such as Chicago, Minneapolis, and Cincinnati. Whether these moves result in broad-based economic growth and revitalization or trigger displacement and affordability crises, depends in large part on whether receiving cities possess the housing to attract and absorb climate migrants without displacing existing residents.

Indeed, research finds that during the 20th century, the U.S. South boomed on the back of abundant and affordable homes: Housing supply was equally important as economic productivity in driving Sun Belt growth. Today, housing availability is a key site selection criterion for large employers. In other words, adequate housing supply helps to set in motion a self-reinforcing economic cycle. Employers need employees, and employees need homes. These workers spend their wages at local businesses and contribute to the municipal tax base, which encourages further growth.

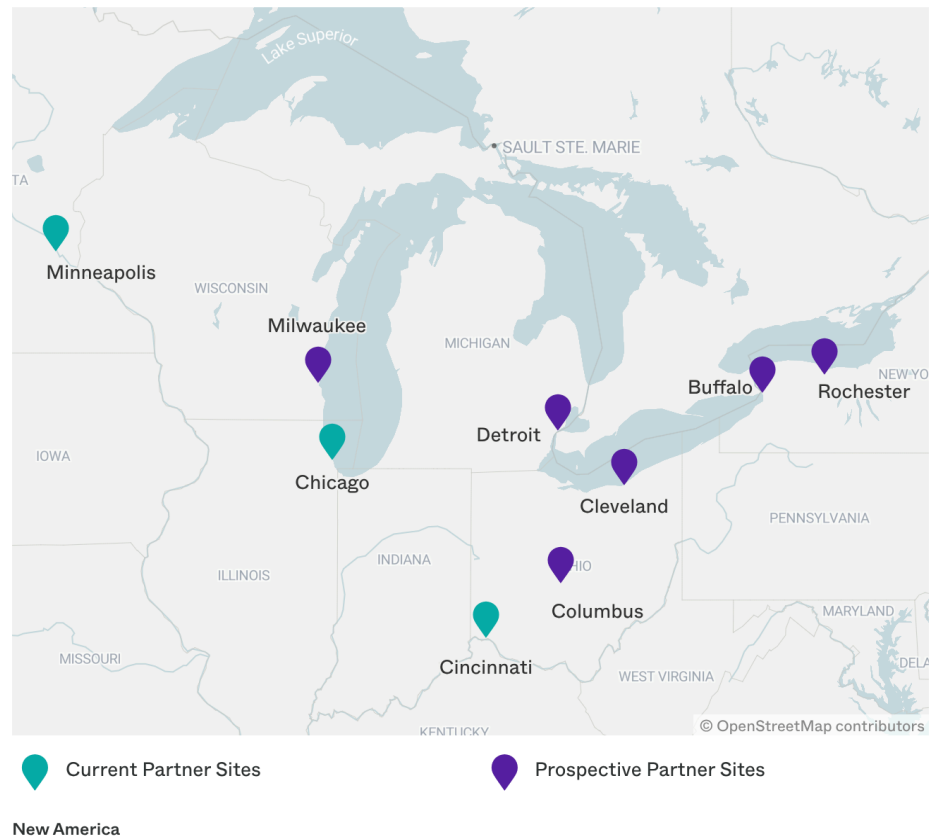
Any economic growth in future receiving cities must also benefit existing residents, however, most critically the low-income and minority communities that will be disproportionately impacted by climate migration. Without deliberate action, rapid population inflows can overwhelm a local housing sector, exacerbate unaffordability, displacement, and homelessness, and strain rental and homeowner assistance programs, legal aid clinics, and other services. In addition, a significant amount of existing homes in Great Lakes cities are currently in need of repair, weatherization, and energy efficiency upgrades in order to withstand more direct climate-related impacts such as temperature extremes.

The window for communities to prepare is narrow, as climate impacts become more frequent and severe across vulnerable regions, and positive growth is not guaranteed. Cities that fail to plan in the long-term risk chaotic expansion or missing out entirely. The housing policy and programming decisions that anticipated receiving cities make today can unlock equitable economic growth, just and sustainable development patterns, and thriving communities tomorrow both for longtime residents and new arrivals.

# The Great Lakes Receiving Network

The Great Lakes Receiving Network is a first-of-its-kind initiative to empower anticipated receiving cities across the Midwest to envision, plan, and build resilient housing in preparation of future climate migration, both for existing residents and for new arrivals. The network begins with resident-centered scenario planning, and then proceeds to public planning and budgeting, policy analysis, community engagement, narrative change, and coalition building.

Current and Prospective Partner Sites



## Part 1 (2026): Resident-Centered Scenario Planning

New America engagement with each city under consideration for the Great Lakes Receiving Network starts with a resident-centered scenario planning event that explores how the future receiving city can better prepare its housing for anticipated climate migration, and also leverage population inflows for equitable economic growth. New America is currently implementing scenario planning events in Chicago, Minneapolis, and Cincinnati.

Our CivicSpace methodology brings residents together with community leaders, local policymakers, philanthropy, nonprofits, and the private sector, to create space for communities to engage in hopeful, forward-looking conversations around housing and climate migration. The scenario planning events prioritize the perceptions of low-income, Black, and Latino communities to provide these groups with increased agency in climate adaptation planning processes and to ensure that resident preferences provide scaffolding for New America and its partners to develop

innovative housing policy and programming recommendations.



*New America hosted an experimental resident-centered scenario planning event in South Side Chicago in 2025.*

Source: Joshua Jackson / 720 Films

Concurrently, and pending additional resources, New America will evaluate two other cities for the Great Lakes Receiving Network, and conduct resident-centered scenario planning in these cities. The scenario planning events will also provide New America with the opportunity to assess the feasibility of including each city in GLRN.

## **Part II (2027-2029): Networked Technical Assistance and Community Planning**

For cities selected to join the Great Lakes Receiving Network, New America will build on our initial scenario planning engagement to provide one-on-one support to vision, plan for, and ultimately implement the housing solutions that will allow their communities to thrive amid projected climate migration. Support will include continued community engagement,

housing needs assessments, budget and policy analyses, narrative change, and coalition building.

In addition to dedicated technical assistance, New America will steward GLRN to provide cross-learning and collaboration opportunities as members navigate this emerging issue area together. As part of network management, we will leverage learnings to produce a suite of widely applicable playbooks, templates, and other resources that benefit receiving cities outside of the network. New America will also utilize its national network and platforms to spotlight innovative solutions around housing affordability and climate migration, and accelerate adoption and scale.

After three years, decision-makers in GLRN cities will have incorporated climate migration projections and related housing needs into municipal, county, and/or regional planning processes. This planning will translate into concrete policy, budgeting, and other actions that boost housing access and affordability ahead of anticipated population inflows. At the same time, network participants will have engaged consistently and meaningfully with local residents around the needs and opportunities that climate migration presents for their cities and the region.

More broadly, the Great Lakes Receiving Network will benefit the larger climate migration space by building a case for planning processes, developing generalizable tools, and refining a narrative around the opportunities for revitalization presented by climate migration.

## Why New America?

New America is a non-partisan think tank based in Washington, DC. We envision an America that represents and serves the public, where institutions work for all Americans, where workers, families, and communities can thrive, and where people are secure from existential threats.

New America's [Future of Land and Housing program](#) is a team of policy entrepreneurs who break down silos and find overlooked, high-leverage solutions to housing affordability and stability challenges in the United States. We regularly publish research reports, white papers, and articles around the nexus of housing and climate change, including for the [Federation of American Scientists](#) and the [Milken Institute](#). Our research and thinking has been featured in *Politico*, the *New York Times*, CNN, *Slate*, *Bloomberg CityLab*, and *Grist*, among other publications.

[New America Chicago](#), launched in 2016, is a community-based policy lab focused on helping low-income Americans thrive financially. Based at The Chicago Community Trust, we work with community members to design government policies and programs that better meet community needs. New America Chicago has published a [number of papers](#) on wealth building in low-income Chicago communities, including on addressing the [racial homeownership gap](#). [CivicSpace](#), a signature initiative of New America Chicago, brings together residents, nonprofit organizations, and policymakers across political, racial, and geographic divisions to design and implement equitable solutions to local challenges.

## Our Funders

The Great Lakes Receiving Network is generously supported by the [U.S. Bank Foundation](#) and the [Walder Foundation](#).

## Become a Sponsor

Help us shape the future of affordable housing in the Great Lakes region ahead of climate migration. Your support will enable us to engage additional communities, policymakers, and other key stakeholders in vital conversations and planning. By sponsoring the Great Lakes Receiving Network, you will contribute to creating actionable housing solutions that prioritize equity, sustainability, and long-term prosperity.

## Contact Us

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