

Last week, on a warm December evening in Los Angeles, my husband and I were tidying our backyard after hosting a holiday lunch when our street's palm trees began listing in a strong wind. I felt a chill run down my spine then, the same chill I felt the next day when I smelled smoke in the air while picking my child up from an after-school playdate at a friend's home in the hills above Brentwood Village. In my bones I felt transported back to that terrible week in January when it seemed like everything was burning.

We're about to be inundated, I'm sure, with news coverage about Los Angeles a year after the devastating fires that ripped through many communities, most prominently those in Altadena and the Palisades. It's already starting. And almost a year on, as I've watched the city I love stagger towards recovery, hindered by forces both external and internal, I pray that in the next year we do better.

As part of a [UCLA research team](#) that spent countless hours providing academic research support to the [Blue Ribbon Commission on Climate Action and Fire-Safe Recovery](#), convened by Los Angeles County Supervisor Lindsey Horvath in the wake of the fires, I spent much of my professional life in 2025 thinking about what it would mean for our region to recover quickly, cost-effectively, safely, and resiliently from what happened in January—and how to prepare for the inevitability of future disaster events. As an Angeleno, I spent much of my personal life frustrated: with the unprecedented lack of assistance from the federal government; with the social media influencersphere that [tanked meaningful progress](#) to help impacted communities, especially those in diverse Altadena; with the diffusion of recovery efforts that meant no one was really responsible. Left primarily to their own devices in rebuilding, the fire-impacted communities are moving forward, but predictably, the [outcomes look much different](#) depending on individual survivors' access to resources.

It didn't—and doesn't—have to be this way. As the Blue Ribbon Commission's [final report](#) recommended, and as past disaster recovery experience has shown, a centralized hub to coordinate recovery produces the best results, because it creates efficiencies, but also, in no small part, because it establishes a clear accountability structure. The recovery authority concept the Commission recommended would be an ideal way to achieve this, and there's still a chance to create that kind of structure moving forward: California legislators have until late February to introduce bills this session. When this concept was first introduced last year, concerns arose about the timing of the bill and the fact that it was a gut-and-amend, but with a new session and a clean slate, legislators can work through the policy process from the

start. They should try. As our region continues to push for more financial resources to recover, from all levels of government and from philanthropy, it's imperative that we have a structure set up to effectively and wisely marshal those resources.

In the absence of this kind of accountable recovery hub, some of the financing district options being explored at the local level could go at least part of the way toward facilitating recovery more effectively. For example, State Senator Sasha Pérez's SB 782, signed into law this fall, can be utilized to set up enhanced infrastructure financing districts to help rebuild. Local officials, [including at the County](#), are, and should continue to be, thinking about how to leverage these and other local mechanisms as a next best option. Something is better than nothing.

We live at a time of extreme distrust of government. I know some will meet the suggestion that we create another governance structure to manage recovery with skepticism, to say the least. But no accountability is not working and this recovery is too big for individuals to go it alone. Government needs to help, and we need to set it up to be responsive to the recovering communities. Pushing aside the possibility of an effective coordinating hub under the auspices of "local control" isn't delivering better results for local communities. It's leaving individuals to fend for themselves and shattering any hope of the kind of neighborhood-scale rebuilding that would keep this kind of disaster from happening again. And we are running out of time: to get survivors back to their communities, before the Olympics come to Los Angeles, before the Santa Anas start blowing on a warm January day again.