



County Policy Playbook for an Equitable Economic Recovery

Executive Summary



About the National Association of Counties

The National Association of Counties (NACo) strengthens America's counties, serving nearly 40,000 county elected officials and 3.6 million county employees. Founded in 1935, NACo unites county officials to:

- Advocate county priorities in federal policymaking
- Promote exemplary county policies and practices
- Nurture leadership skills and expand knowledge networks
- Optimize county and taxpayer resources and cost savings, and
- Enrich the public understanding of county government.

NACo's Vision

Healthy, safe and vibrant counties across America.

Acknowledgments

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Local Leadership Ensures an Equitable Economic Recovery for All Communities

Years after the first U.S. case of COVID-19 was confirmed in King County, Wash. in January 2020, counties and communities across the country continue to grapple with the fallout from the coronavirus pandemic. The onset of the pandemic required counties to act nimbly and shift the full weight of county government behind the singular issue: supporting residents by responding to community health, safety and county financial needs.

As the pandemic enters an endemic phase and immediate community needs shift towards longer-term priorities, local leaders are reflecting on the lessons learned and how to strategically position counties to rebuild for an equitable, sustainable future. With unprecedented access to federal funding - from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and several others - counties have the opportunity to make investments that support

communities in an equitable recovery and establish foundations that foster future economic well-being for all residents.

In July of 2021, NACo, with the generous support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, provided eight counties with funding to support capacity building efforts for an equitable economic recovery. Applicants to the cohort were asked to identify a specific area of need in which additional capacity could act as a catalyst for county recovery efforts.

This report draws on the learnings from these eight counties as the program implementation leads worked to navigate recovery efforts. While each county's approach to recovery is different, four key pillars emerged as the foundational elements of an equitable economic recovery.

FOUR PILLARS OF EQUITABLE ECONOMIC RECOVERY



Enact Policies and Systems that Support Communities



Nurture Existing Partnerships and Cultivate New Ones



Align Resources to Appropriately Build Capacity



Leverage Data for Decisions and Benchmarking



Enact Policies and Systems That Support Communities

The COVID-19 pandemic required counties to respond quickly and comprehensively to community needs. Counties operate many services, including public health, safety and human services. Because of the complexity of managing a wide breadth of services and programs, leaders should enact policies that ensure county employees and partners can act with efficiency and agility to foster local recovery.

Palm Beach County, Fla. hosted an economic mobility summit to examine the current service administration and help guide county funding priorities based on feedback from residents. Similarly, Multnomah County, Ore. established a new common application that connects residents to more than ten different public benefit programs through one portal. The county plans to erect a physical resilience hub in an underserved community to provide in-person support as well.

Questions to consider when enacting policies and systems intended to support communities:

- How will this policy/system address the unique needs and challenges of our specific community?
- What are the potential unintended consequences of implementing this policy/system, and how can we mitigate them?
- What steps can we take to ensure transparency and accountability in the implementation and management of this policy/system?
- Are there any existing resources or partnerships that can be leveraged to support the implementation of this policy/system?
- How will this policy/system promote equity within the community?



Nurture Existing Partnerships and Cultivate New Ones

A core tenet of county governments is the unique ability to bring stakeholders together to collaborate on plans and implementation. Though counties must operate within the parameters of state laws and ordinances, county partnerships with other intergovernmental and community-based partners can expand reach and capacity. In developing and executing recovery plans, some of the most critical components are those performed through public and private partners.

Erie County, Pa. worked with neighboring counties and municipalities on an economic playbook to examine the regional employer base, conduct asset mapping and identify areas of cross-jurisdictional coordination to improve service to isolated and disadvantaged communities. Kittitas County, Wash. partnered with the City of Ellensburg to establish a joint economic recovery plan, including outlining specific roles and responsibilities each entity will manage.

Questions to consider regarding county partnerships for an equitable recovery:

- What skills for achieving an equitable economic recovery does the partner provide?
- Which communities does the partner serve and are they a trusted partner in these communities?
- What does the partner need to be successful?
- Does the partner share our strategic goals and vision for an equitable economic recovery?
- Which partner is missing from the conversation or which voices are not represented?



Align Resources to Appropriately Build Capacity

Counties have four primary resources when working to implement a project or achieve a goal: public policy, county investments, program administration and staff capacity. To achieve the goals outlined in the public policy and recovery plan, counties should ensure all of these resources are aligned.

The City and County of Honolulu, Hawaii surveyed its staff to identify its workforce demographic composition. Based on survey results, the city and county team is creating a strategy to recruit and train new staff from the community to fill underrepresented groups. Led by the University of Texas at El Paso, El Paso County joined the City of El Paso and other coalition partners to successfully secure a \$40 million federal U.S. Economic Development Administration Build Back Better Regional Challenge grant to establish an advanced aerospace and defense industry manufacturing cluster, providing workforce development training, employment opportunities, small business supply chain and other economic opportunities to residents.

Questions to consider when aligning resources to build capacity:

- Are we equipped with the resources, knowledge and experience to enact the policies and provisions as directed by the county leadership?
- Do we have adequate staffing or investment levels to respond to community needs?
- Are there any tools we can invest in that support the county's ability to respond and build capacity?
- Are there areas in which resources can be reallocated to better support the county priorities?
- What external resources exist that can support or bolster the capacity to reach stated goals?



Leverage Data for Decisions and Benchmarking

Data-driven decision making is an essential facet of good governance and can be a powerful tool when used correctly. Reliable data helps counties share the county story, make critical investment decisions and track metrics to ensure programs and services are achieving their intended goals.

Hennepin County, Minn. leveraged data to target its recovery funding by conducting an in-depth analysis of employment statistics with a focus on the varied impacts of the pandemic on businesses, by size and industry. The county is also identifying and developing metrics to track economic recovery, focusing on benchmarks that reflect prosperity, inclusion and resiliency. Coconino County, Ariz. developed a dashboard to illustrate the impacts of the county's recovery efforts. The dashboard is available for both internal and external use.

Questions to consider when collecting and analyzing data to measure and inform decision making for an equitable economic recovery:

- Is the community accurately represented within the sample?
- Are there any biases built into the research question or sample dataset that could impact the final analytics?
- How was the data collected and how can we correct for missing or incomplete data?
- What statistical methods will be used to analyze the data and how could they potentially inject bias into the results?
- What other variables need to be considered in the analysis?

The Four Pillars of an Equitable Economic Recovery Plan

To enact a whole-of-government response and recovery effort, counties need a clear direction and framework for action. Building on thoughtful public policy, counties can leverage internal and external partnerships to design equitable recovery plans informed by data to develop tangible steps to achieve an equitable recovery.

Policy and system solutions create the framework to accomplish the goals outlined in the recovery plan. Partnerships help county leaders and staff effectively implement the programs outlined within the recovery plan and ensure that underserved communities are being reached appropriately. Aligning staff capacity ensures that goals can be met in a timely manner, residents needs are addressed efficiently, county investments make the most impact and county staff's mental health and wellbeing

are protected. Finally, data used throughout the process help to track the progress towards achieving the goals so that leaders can adapt and adjust throughout the project cycle. Data also allow county leaders to communicate with the public on the county's recovery activities and results and effectively tell the county story at the local, regional and national levels.

From broadband access in rural communities to addressing longstanding racial disparities, counties are centering equity in economic recovery plans. By prioritizing equity and ensuring conversations about equitable outcomes are at the forefront of recovery planning, counties can address systemic barriers and create opportunities for all residents within the community to thrive.

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PUBLIC POLICY TO SUPPORT COMMUNITIES



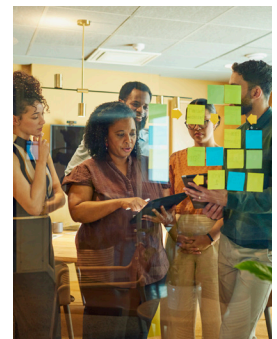
DATA-INFORMED DECISION MAKING



THRIVING THROUGH RESOURCE ALIGNMENT



THRIVING THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS



About NACo's Equitable Economic Recovery Project

In July of 2021, NACo's Economic Mobility Leadership Network (EMLN), with the support of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, launched a small sub-cohort within the EMLN to focus on developing equitable economic recovery initiatives that ensure short- and long-term recovery and sustainability. Participating counties received customized technical assistance and seed funding to build internal planning capacity and execute elements of their customized plans. This project is based on NACo's research on counties' needs and challenges as they work to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. This report was informed by NACo's nationwide county member survey, 15 one-on-one interviews and two virtual focus groups with nine participating counties each.

NACo would like to thank the counties and staff for their commitment to the project and ongoing work to foster stronger counties and a stronger America.

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*Scan here for more on
county strategies for
equitable investments.*



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