



# COVID-19 Equitable Relief and Recovery Series

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WEBINAR 4 SUMMARY:

Equitable Recovery: What Will Urban America  
Look Like Post-COVID?

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# Urban America Forward: COVID-19 Equitable Relief and Recovery Series

The Urban America Forward: COVID-19 Equitable Relief and Recovery Series provides a learning exchange among practitioners and public-private partners who are advancing economic relief and equitable recovery in cities in response to the coronavirus pandemic. While no community has been spared by this public health crisis, COVID-19 has hit African American and Latinx communities most acutely. This unprecedented time demands that practitioners harness their collective power and share what is working to provide essential relief while envisioning and engineering tools to build a more inclusive economy and equitable future.

The Urban America Forward: COVID-19 Equitable Relief and Recovery Series offers a platform for practitioners to share promising practices, new collaborations, and emerging learnings to support our most vulnerable communities and ensure equitable recovery in places where the COVID-19 pandemic is causing disproportionate harm. The series highlights practitioner responses to the pandemic in eight U.S. cities: Atlanta, Baltimore, Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis, Minneapolis, New Orleans, and Washington, DC.

The Urban America Forward: COVID-19 Equitable Relief and Recovery Series was made possible with the generous support of [New America Local](#), the [Annie E. Casey Foundation](#), and the [Kresge Foundation](#).

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*Instead of having the same stimulus packages we've had since the depression, we need to call the question about how the system functions and move into how to mitigate the issues that it has created over time, eliminate those hurdles, and make sure that people can function in an economy that promotes people living out lives that aren't full of struggle and strife.”*

**Ryan Albright**

Senior Planner/Project Manager, Civix

## About Urban America Forward

Launched in 2015 by the University of Chicago Office of Civic Engagement, the Urban America Forward program convenes nonprofit, private, public, and philanthropic sector leaders as well as urban researchers and social scientists who are committed to furthering equity in urban America.

The Urban America Forward program is grounded in two fundamental principles: (1) racial equity is achievable through systems change, and (2) practitioners' efforts are bolstered by engaging in a space where they can share approaches taken to disrupting systems that create and reinforce segregation, economic oppression, and racially disparate life outcomes.

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*The challenge for state and local governments in maintaining adequate services, especially to the vulnerable populations including communities of color, is that unlike the federal government, they must balance their budgets at the end of the year. If state and local governments are forced to raise taxes and fees to balance their budgets, that will have severe equity implications and consequential effects on low-income people. If state and local governments decide to reduce services to balance their budgets, it will have distributional effects on vulnerable populations.”*

**Michael Pagano**

Dean of the College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs, University of Illinois at Chicago

## WEBINAR 4:

# Equitable Recovery: What Will Urban America Look Like Post-COVID?

While there is still a great need for immediate COVID-19 relief, it is clear that the pandemic and its subsequent economic and social ripple effects will be felt for years to come. At some point, however, practitioners and city leaders will need to shift from addressing current needs to planning for long-term recovery. This will not be easy. Communities of color are grappling with reimagining systems of government, resource allocation, health care delivery, employment, housing, education, and safety to address not only the public health crisis of the pandemic, but also the existing structural racism that existed prior to COVID-19. This is taking place against a backdrop of shifting demographics and migration out of cities; the pandemic's disruption of industries, which in turn affects employment and income streams; and severe local and state budget shortages that threaten the ability of cities to meet the needs of residents.

The path to recovery from COVID-19 includes addressing the impact of the pandemic while creating more equitable systems across the board. Practitioners and city leaders recognize the importance of this moment to reach beyond where we were before the pandemic to build solutions that center community and equity and enable every community to reach its full potential.

Participants in "Equitable Recovery: What will Urban America look like post-COVID?" had the following goals:

- » **Share common questions** for developing long-term COVID-19 response and recovery plans that center equity.
- » **Explore mitigation strategies** to address the migration of companies and people out of the urban core and the resulting loss of city revenue and resources.



*Pre-COVID, when we thought about economic inclusion in major cities, we almost had two parallel approaches. One approach was for people who were living in poverty and who were underemployed, underskilled, undereducated. And then we had a whole economic strategy based on growth, based on a regional approach for the entire region to grow and connect with the national economy. The two were completely disconnected."*

**Anika Goss-Foster,**  
Executive Director,  
Detroit Future City

- » **Equip practitioners** with policy approaches and practices to address workforce development, investing in emerging industries, small business supports, and other long-term strategies to foster equitable recovery.
- » **Discuss metrics** to gauge successful COVID-19 responses that prioritize racial equity.

## National Overview

The pandemic decimated the economy and severely damaged state and local government revenue streams. The financial foundations of municipalities vary in their reliance on property, sales, and income tax. For example, a little more than half of America's municipalities have access to sales tax, and about 11% have access to an income tax. COVID-19 has jeopardized those revenue streams by precipitating depression-level unemployment and business closures. Although the CARES Act provided some relief so that states, cities, counties, and schools could continue providing some level of services, six months into the COVID recession, they are each in a position of reducing services, cutting personnel, postponing projects, and doing more with less.

It took cities over a decade to recover from the Great Recession. If past is prologue, the road to economic recovery, at minimum, will be slow. However, practitioners are interrogating the role of federal, state, and local government as well as private and philanthropic investments to address needs in place and to meet the potential of all people. How do we leverage this era of crisis to build anew with equity embedded in all facets of our institutions, organizations, and resource allocation?

## Panel Discussion Themes

The “Equitable Recovery: What will Urban America look like post-COVID?” webinar focused on how practitioners and city leaders should construct long-term economic relief that puts equity at the center for communities of color and low-income communities.

## Key Takeaways

- » **Local spending priorities**, which have historically funneled resources to wealthier, white communities, have left communities of color even further behind in the pandemic. Additionally, discriminatory lending

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*Businesses leaders ... are seeing that low-wage jobs means a low-wage community. [W]e need to rethink how we remove barriers to access, growth, and careers so that people know no matter where they start on the income ladder, and no matter which zip code they start in, [they] have a true opportunity to be able to grow their wage and earning capacity.”*

**Doug Hooker,**  
*Executive Director,  
Atlanta Regional  
Commission*

practices have made capital inaccessible to small business owners of color even before the pandemic; consequently, business owners of color have been forced to shutter their businesses at an alarming rate.

- » **Equitable relief** requires cities to restructure existing systems of capital delivery and tax structures and address the root causes of systemic racism.
- » To truly center communities of color in COVID-19 relief, communities of color and affected **community members must be granted the power** and provided the resources to make decisions.

The hospitality and tourism industries continue to bear much of the economic weight of the pandemic, and staggering unemployment rates persist in low-income communities. Relief must include investments in workforce development, emerging industries, and equitable public transportation to address unemployment and underemployment. These investments will foster equitable long-term recovery, strengthen the labor ecosystem, and cultivate high-quality jobs and skill development.

The federal government has a critical role to play in providing stimulus funding and revising funding requirements to ensure that states and localities, which are facing sizable budget deficits, can qualify for necessary resources. Direct and long-term resources for low-income families, who have been left to manage dire housing and food insecurity with little federal support in place, are greatly needed.

## City Models and Transferable Learnings

### ■ ATLANTA

**Atlanta Regional Commission.** The Atlanta Regional Commission (ARC) is the planning and intergovernmental coordination agency for the 10-county Atlanta region. Because most cities in Georgia are largely property tax based, they have not seen a huge impact in property tax loss yet. However, ARC expects to see a change in revenue next year after property tax values begin to decline. Atlanta has received its hardest hit in the private sector, hospitality and tourism industries, and other low-wage jobs. Through September 2020, Atlanta had a net loss of over 126,000 jobs, including 40,000 in the hospitality and service industry, which is 50% workers of color. ARC predicts that the economy in the mid-Atlanta region is going to bounce back to pre-pandemic employment within four to five years at best, except in hospitality and

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*There is something about our structures that we need to interrogate. ... We sometimes think about inviting others to the table as doing the work as opposed to thinking about the tables we are not going to because we already have our tables set. Where are those communities who have been convening, who have been doing the work, where we need to cede power in order to see humanity quite a bit differently? The solutions exist in Black and indigenous communities of color.”*

**Tawanna Black,**  
Founder &  
Chief Executive  
Officer, Center  
for Economic  
Inclusion

tourism. Fortunately, the logistics and transportation industry has begun to see a pickup in employment. Amazon, UPS, and Google also have strong presence in the region. A week before the pandemic hit, the ARC in partnership with several major community institutions—the Metro Atlanta Chamber, the United Way for Greater Atlanta, the Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta, and the Arthur M. Blank Foundation—launched an initiative called Equity at Work. The effort focuses on strengthening Atlanta’s workforce ecosystem by training and transitioning workers of color into higher-wage jobs. Equity at Work will dedicate resources to help hospitality and tourism workers get a skill set that will enable them to move into more stable industries.

## ■ BALTIMORE

***Baltimore Metropolitan Council.*** The Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC) is a nonprofit organization that works collaboratively with the chief elected officials in the region to create initiatives to improve quality of life and economic vitality. Income tax revenues for the state of Maryland were 6% higher for the period of March through August due to the funding provided by the CARES Act. However, once the funds run out, Baltimore will begin to see the ripple effects throughout the city government. Additionally, the loss of revenue in the tourism and hospitality industries is greatly affecting the local economy. Currently, the city’s hotels that were able to open are operating at 20% capacity. Furthermore, COVID-19 has shown how essential public transportation is to the economy. Prior to the pandemic, 80% of job growth was taking place more than 10 miles away from downtown Baltimore. However, due to the pandemic, the Maryland Transit Administration proposed deep cuts to the bus network. Through an outpouring of advocacy from grassroots and businesses, the transit agency decided to reverse those cuts. Nonetheless, it has failed to address future challenges. BMC believes that while access to public transportation should remain a priority, Baltimore must also think about ways to connect citizens to job opportunities through the internet.

## ■ CHICAGO

***Metropolitan Planning Council.*** The Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) is dedicated to shaping a more equitable, sustainable, and prosperous greater Chicago region. The Chicago region has witnessed an outsized impact of COVID-19 on its Black, Latinx, and essential workers. To move forward, Chicago is pushing the reset button and recognizing

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*The rebound is not going to be quick. It’s not going to be immediate. We are in for the hardest part of [the] COVID recession over the next year or two; a lot of this will depend on if there is state and local relief from Washington [DC].”*

***Michael Pagano,***  
*Dean of the  
College of Urban  
Planning and  
Public Affairs,  
University of  
Illinois at Chicago*

that there is no straight-line recovery. Three years ago, MPC partnered with the Urban Institute and multiple local partners to produce a study of the costs of segregation. The study's main takeaway was that the city has to embed equity in all policies and in every institution. To do that, the city is embarking on its first comprehensive plan since the 1960s, dubbed "We Will Chicago." This is an historic near-term opportunity with extremely long-term potential to reset the narrative and the reality for communities of color. If local voices are centered, future investments, federal and local policies, and decision-making can all be redesigned to produce the outcomes people deserve. MPC is assisting the Chicago Department of Planning and Development by hosting workshops with cross-sector leaders from other U.S. cities to exchange tactics on how to build a better, bolder, more equitable future for everyone. Moreover, as Chicago grapples with budget free falls, it must prioritize and target public, philanthropic, and private funding to prioritize equitable investment in its most vulnerable neighborhoods. That means building new structures for sharing power and upending traditional decision-making that devalues community voices.

## ■ DETROIT

**Detroit Future City.** Detroit Future City (DFC) is a nonprofit charged with catalyzing implementation of a 50-year vision for the City of Detroit developed with input from more than 100,000 Detroiters. Detroit had been out of bankruptcy for five years when the pandemic hit; at that point recovery became everyone's problem. Public-private partnerships stepped in to help businesses apply for the Paycheck Protection Program, and the city did what it could to prevent foreclosures. Despite all of these efforts, Detroit remains concerned about its fragile economy and increased need for resources. Unlike in 2008, housing prices continue to rise while the city is experiencing an influx of people moving in; at the same time, residents are losing their jobs and businesses. As Detroit continues to organize its resources, the city has to look at the disparity between minority-owned businesses and white-owned businesses to determine who is poised to receive these resources. DFC hopes the city distributes its resources in an equitable way. DFC also believes that Detroit needs to change its approach to how it deals with the economy and inclusion. Before COVID, there was one approach to address people living in poverty and a separate regional approach to economic growth. Because COVID has become an equalizer, Detroit has the opportunity to ensure everyone is included in a regional economic development strategy.

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*How do we get unstuck? We are stuck in some patterns and frameworks that are not that promising and that have been disproven in the past. How do you break rules? How do you create new rules?”*

**Maria Rosario Jackson,**  
*Senior Advisor,  
The Kresge  
Foundation;  
Institute Professor,  
Herberger Institute  
for Design and  
the Arts and  
Watts College  
of Public Service  
and Community  
Solutions, Arizona  
State University*

## ■ MINNEAPOLIS

**Center for Economic Inclusion.** The Center for Economic Inclusion is a cross-sector organization committed to strengthening the Minneapolis–St. Paul region’s civic infrastructure and collective capacity to disrupt systems and influence market forces to catalyze shared prosperity and advance an inclusive economy. The center believes that racial equity should be at the center of any recovery plans. A few years ago, the center had the opportunity to support cities in the region in developing comprehensive plans for the year 2040 to ensure that the plans were rooted in racial equity and that measurable goals and policies were embedded in everything: planning, land use, development, business attraction, retention and growth, housing, and workforce development. To achieve competitiveness and growth, those comprehensive plans had to be broken down into annual plans. Racial equity can’t be one chapter in recovery plans, but it must be centered in those plans as a strategy not only to mitigate the harms but also to drive growth. As long as the nation doesn’t understand why systemic racism is still embedded in employers, in companies, and in the public sector, nothing will change. To have the post-COVID America that many aspire to, the Center for Economic Inclusion believes that we must change how we operate, change how we relate to one another, and create real places and spaces of racial inclusion.

## ■ NEW ORLEANS

**Ryan Albright, Senior Planner/Project Manager at Civix.** Prior to the pandemic, tourism was one of the top revenue generators in New Orleans as it employed more than 20% of the city’s residents. The city is seeing an unemployment rate of 12.7% as of August 2020 and a \$120 million deficit for 2020 alone. Additionally, the potential loss of revenue from property and sales taxes threatens to worsen the city’s economy and its ability to meet debt obligations. The ramifications from these deficits range from not being able to provide basic services to not having the funds to comply with local match requirements for federal grant dollars. To mitigate some of the negative effects, many entities are stepping up to help their neighbors. For example, restaurants continue to serve thousands of to-go meals to their employees and families while community-driven efforts like Mutual Aid are providing financial assistance to struggling families in order to address basic needs. While the community continues to provide support where it can, it is simply not enough. Given the unemployment rate along with the possibility

of a protracted economic downturn, it is critical to ensure an equitable recovery through policy and to set budget priorities regarding food access, shelter, and safety for all residents.

## Conclusion

Despite hardship caused by COVID-19, there is a vital short-term opportunity to create long-term change. Practitioners are committed to a reset that reimagines our institutions, policies, and metrics of success in order to ensure the quality of life and outcomes our communities deserve. We would like to thank our speakers, Michael Pagano, Dean of the College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs, University of Illinois at Chicago; Tawanna Black, Founder & Chief Executive Officer, Center for Economic Inclusion; Ryan Albright, Senior Planner/Project Manager, Civix; Anika Goss-Foster, Executive Director, Detroit Future City; Michael B. Kelly, Executive Director, Baltimore Metropolitan Council; Doug Hooker, Executive Director, Atlanta Regional Commission; and MarySue Barrett, President, Metropolitan Planning Council; our respondent, Maria Rosario Jackson, Senior Advisor, The Kresge Foundation, and Institute Professor, Herberger Institute for Design and the Arts and Watts College of Public Service and Community Solutions, Arizona State University; our partners, New America Indianapolis and the National Urban League; and our sponsors, the Kresge Foundation and Annie E. Casey Foundation, for allowing us to share learnings from across the country in this timely webinar series.