



The Upside—Growth, Potential, and the Future of Fairfield County, Connecticut

Executive Summary

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Historical and systemic discrimination in the United States has deeply entrenched racial and ethnic inequities¹ across critical areas, such as wealth accumulation, education, and homeownership. Although individual experiences vary, when considered collectively, data consistently reveal significant disparities in outcomes between racial and ethnic groups at the aggregate level.

Increasing racial equity, however, need not be a zero-sum game. Research shows that increases in equity have the potential to increase the gross domestic product (GDP) by trillions of dollars nationally, enhance educational attainment for both Black people and white people, and reduce homicide rates (Acs et al. 2017; Buckman et al. 2021; PolicyLink 2017). In fact, increases in equity for women and Black men between 1960 and 2010 contributed to roughly two-fifths of the growth in GDP during that period (Hsieh et al. 2019).

Connecticut's Fairfield County area² stands out as having some of the greatest income inequality in the United States, presenting a significant opportunity to advance equity and unlock broader socioeconomic benefits.³ Inequities in the Fairfield County area are apparent in income, education, and housing, where white⁴ households earn \$89,000 more, on average, than Black⁵ households and approximately \$90,000 more than Latino⁶ households; 58 percent of white adults have bachelor's degrees compared with only 30 percent and 21 percent of Black and Latino adults, respectively; and across all levels of income, white-led households are more likely to own their homes than Black- or Latino-led households, with 78 percent of white-led households owning their homes compared with 44 percent and 42 percent of Black- and Latino-led households, respectively.⁷ In addition, home values for

white-led households are more than \$100,000 higher than home values for Black- and Latino-led households.

In this report, we describe the potential economic benefits of closing Black and Latino racial gaps in income, education, and housing in the Fairfield County area (Figure ES1).⁸ We find the following:

- If Black and Latino adults in the Fairfield County area had incomes equivalent to their white counterparts, the Fairfield County area's GDP could increase by \$15.6 billion.
- If Black or Latino people then had the tenure and educational attainment of their white counterparts, there could be 33,000 more homeowners and 84,000 more people with college degrees.
- These improvements could lead to the following:
 - » \$36.6 billion more in home values
 - » \$603 million more in local revenue from property taxes
 - » \$1.2 billion more in state revenue from income taxes
- Increased state income tax revenues could then be used to hire additional teachers, increase current teachers' salaries, or support tax cuts, infrastructure projects, housing assistance for essential workers, or enhanced mass transit.
- Local property tax revenues could be used to improve road safety, undertake main-street development efforts, fund high-quality summer programs, reduce property taxes (especially for seniors), or support small business development.

FIGURE ES1

Potential Benefits from Increased Equity for Black and Latino People in the Fairfield County Area

If residents who are Black and Latino in Fairfield County, Connecticut, had the **same opportunities** as their white neighbors, there would be



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Sources: Authors' calculations from American Community Survey 2018–22 Public Use Microdata Samples; Bureau of Economic Analysis data on county income and GDP in 2022, 2021 and 2022; and personal income tax totals in Connecticut Open Data's Personal Income Tax Summary ("2021 and 2022 Personal Income Tax Totals," Connecticut Open Data, accessed September 5, 2024, <https://data.ct.gov/Tax-and-Revenue/2021-and-2022-Personal-Income-Tax-Totals/ryyz-k64m/data>); the 2020–2021 Annual Report by the State of Connecticut Department of Revenue Services ("Annual Report Fiscal Year 2020–2021," State of Connecticut Department of Revenue Services, accessed September 5, 2024, <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/drs/research/annualreport/drs-fy21-annual-report.pdf>); and sources of state aid to towns in fiscal years 2021–25 according to the Connecticut General Assembly's Office of Fiscal Analysis ("Major Sources of State Aid to Towns," Connecticut General Assembly Office of Fiscal Analysis, accessed September 5, 2024, <https://cga.ct.gov/ofa/municipalinfo.asp>).

Note: *As estimated by the change in county gross domestic product.

To conduct this research, Fairfield County's Community Foundation, Urban Institute, and DataHaven collaborated with an Equity Research Advisory Panel to design and implement a data-driven analysis to estimate the benefits—or "upside"—to the entire community if equity gaps in income, education, and housing were closed. Specifically, we use data from the American Community Survey to estimate incomes, education rates, homeownership status, and home values for Black and Latino adults if they had the same values as their white peers. We then estimate how these higher incomes and property values could affect overall economic activity and tax revenue.

This analysis focuses almost exclusively on the large, well-documented inequities between Black, Latino, and white people, who together constitute nearly 90 percent of the Fairfield County area

population.⁹ Most of the analysis therefore does not include the 5 percent of people in the Fairfield County area¹⁰ that identify as Asian or the 5 percent of people that identify as another race or ethnicity. While many people within Asian, Pacific Islander, and American Indian and Alaska Native communities also face great disparities, small sample sizes prevent us from accurately measuring their inequities and making statements grounded in evidence and data.

BOX ES1

Key Terms

Definitions of key terms used throughout this report include the following:

- **equity:** acknowledgement of disparities in access and outcomes and elimination of systemic barriers to achieving a more just society where everyone thrives (defined by the Equity Research Advisory Panel)
- **evidence-based:** based on credible, well-established research and data
- **gross domestic product:** total value of goods and services produced within a geography (defined by the Bureau of Economic Analysis)¹¹

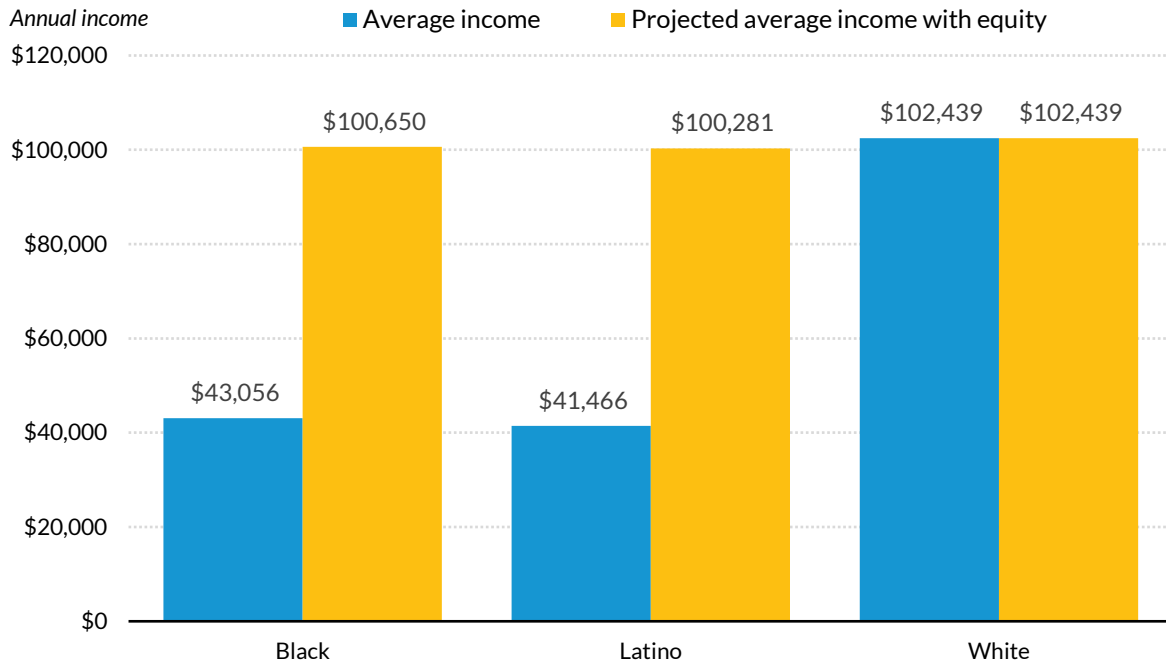
Findings: Economic Gains from Increasing Racial Equity in the Fairfield County Area

We find that increasing racial equity in the Fairfield County area could generate substantial economic gains for the entire region. If Black residents and Latino residents had incomes equivalent to their white counterparts, the collective aggregate incomes could increase by approximately \$13.3 billion (\$4.6 billion for Black residents and \$8.7 billion for Latino residents; figure ES2). Even if income gaps were only partially narrowed to match those of Middlesex County, New Jersey—a comparable county with lower inequities that has similar demographics in terms of total population, Black population, Latino population, and median household income—total incomes in the Fairfield County area could rise by \$5.8 billion, with approximately \$2.9 billion in increases each for Black and Latino residents.

FIGURE ES2

Black and Latino Adults in the Fairfield County Area Could Earn an Average of \$57,594 and \$58,815 More in Annual Incomes, Respectively, if Racial Gaps Were Closed

Average annual incomes for Black and Latino adults compared with those in a more equitable Fairfield County area, 2018–22



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Source: Authors' calculations using American Community Survey 2018–22 Public Use Microdata Samples.

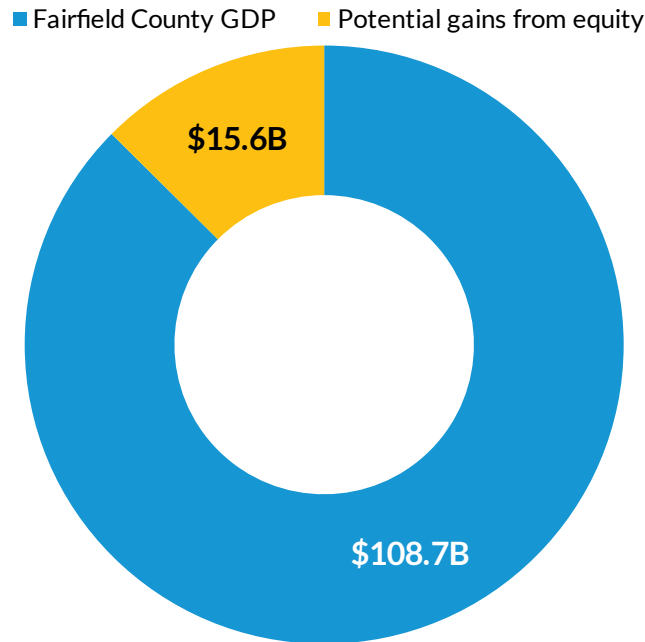
Note: Incomes have been inflation-adjusted to 2023 dollars. We did not model changes for other racial/ethnic groups.

We project a subsequent increase in the Fairfield County area's GDP by \$15.6 billion using a full-gap closure or \$6.8 billion using a partial closure (figure ES3) if these income gains were realized. This relationship exists because higher incomes typically lead to greater disposable income, which encourages increased spending on goods and services. This economic activity then contributes to the overall economic output measured by GDP. In addition, rising consumer demand driven by higher incomes can incentivize businesses to expand production, further enhancing GDP growth. Because of this, one of the main components of the calculation for GDP is the sum of wages and salaries.

FIGURE ES3

Fairfield County Area Gross Domestic Product (GDP) Could Increase by \$15.6 Billion if Racial Equity Gaps Were Closed

Fairfield County area GDP and projected GDP gains in an equitable Fairfield County area, 2022



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Source: Authors' analysis of Bureau of Economic Analysis data on county income and GDP in 2022 and US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018–22 Public Use Microdata Samples.

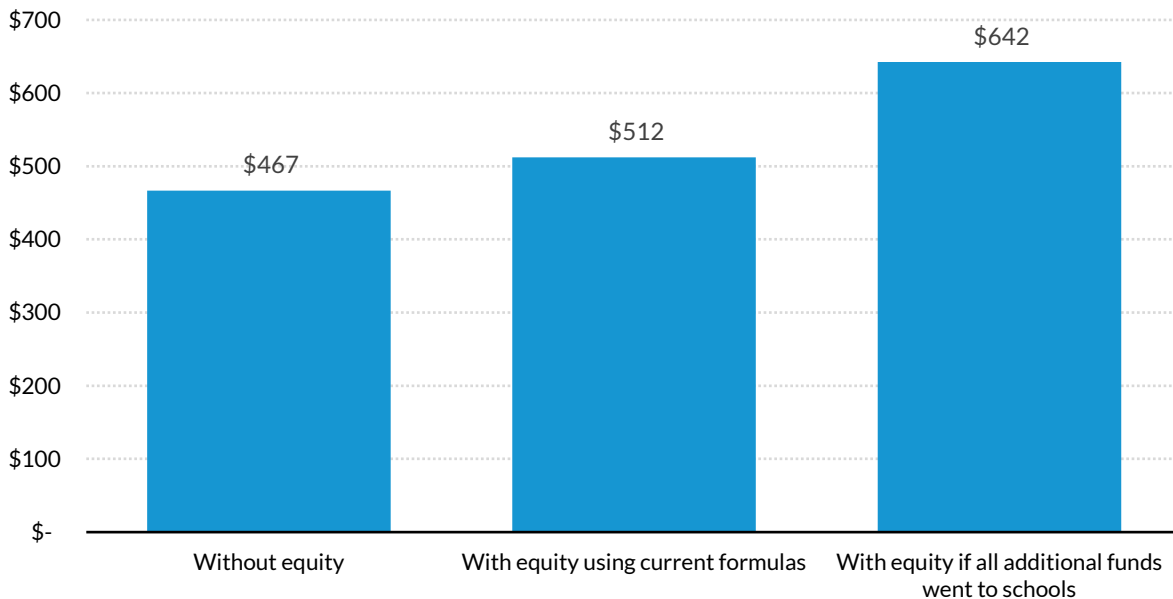
Note: B = billion. Figure represents 2022 GDP inflation-adjusted to 2023 dollars.

In addition to GDP growth, closing the income and educational attainment gaps in the Fairfield County area could significantly boost state income tax revenue, generating an estimated \$1.2 billion. If revenue were shared at current rates, the cities and towns of the Fairfield County area¹² could receive \$47 million, with \$37 million allocated to schools (figure ES4).¹³ For context, the increased funding could translate to the hiring of 277 additional teachers or increase salaries for existing teachers by \$3,701. Alternatively, if all additional revenue were directed to schools, it could yield \$184 million for the Fairfield County area, enabling the hiring of 1,382 teachers or salary increases of \$14,398 per teacher. School funding is just one example of potential revenue allocation. The funds also could support tax cuts, infrastructure projects, housing assistance for essential workers, or enhanced mass transit.

FIGURE ES4

State Aid to the Fairfield County Area Could Increase by \$47 Million Using Current Formulas and \$184 Million if All Additional Revenue Went to Schools throughout the State if Racial Gaps Were Closed

State transfers compared with those in an equitable Fairfield County area (millions of dollars), 2018–22



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Source: Authors’ calculations from 2021 and 2022 personal income tax totals in Connecticut Open Data’s Personal Income Tax Summary (“2021 and 2022 Personal Income Tax Totals,” Connecticut Open Data, accessed September 5, 2024, <https://data.ct.gov/Tax-and-Revenue/2021-and-2022-Personal-Income-Tax-Totals/ryyz-k64m/data>); 2020–21 Annual Report by the State of Connecticut Department of Revenue Services (“Annual Report—Fiscal Year 2020–2021,” State of Connecticut Department of Revenue Services, accessed September 5, 2024, <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/drs/research/annualreport/drs-fy21-annual-report.pdf>); and sources of state aid to towns in fiscal years 2021–25 according to the Connecticut General Assembly’s Office of Fiscal Analysis (“Major Sources of State Aid to Towns,” Connecticut General Assembly Office of Fiscal Analysis, accessed September 5, 2024, <https://cga.ct.gov/ofa/municipalinfo.asp>).

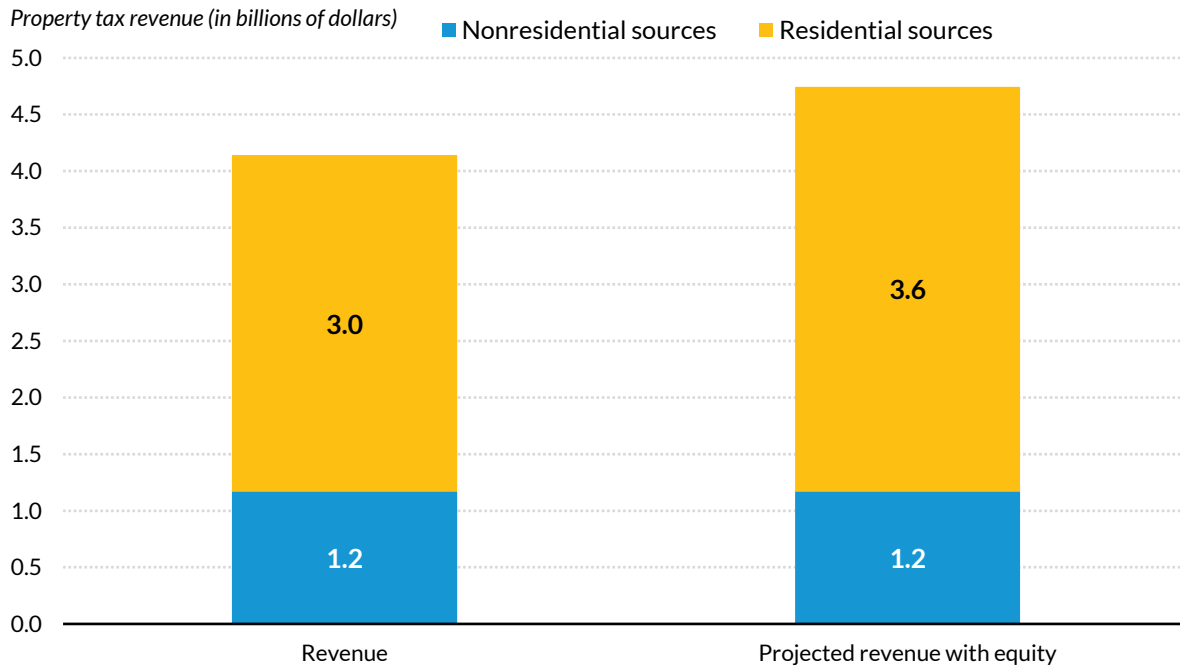
Note: Numbers are in 2023 dollars, assuming 4 percent revenue growth between 2022 and 2023.

In addition to having more equitable incomes, if Black and Latino residents had the educational attainment levels and homeownership rates of their white counterparts, there could be 84,000 more people with college degrees and 33,000 more homeowners. Rising home values under equity could increase property tax revenues by \$603 million (figure ES5). This equates to a 20 percent increase in aggregate residential property tax revenue.

FIGURE ES5

An Equitable Housing Market Could Generate More Property Tax Revenue

Property tax revenue (in billions of dollars) for cities and towns in the Fairfield County area, currently and with equity, 2018–22



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Sources: Authors' calculations from American Community Survey 2018–22 Public Use Microdata Samples and Connecticut Open Data Portal data.

Note: Property tax revenues have been inflation-adjusted to 2023 dollars.

These property tax funds then could be reinvested in programs that benefit the community as a whole, supporting projects and services such as libraries, parks, emergency services, police, transit, and other services. During the project, the Equity Research Advisory Panel members identified and prioritized potential reinvestments to be considered, including the following:

- improved road safety
- more frequent street cleaning
- main street development efforts
- funds for high-quality summer programs
- reduced property taxes (especially for seniors)
- elimination of the motor vehicle tax¹⁴
- tax relief for seniors

- small business development
- green spaces and community gardens
- environmental sustainability efforts
- housing down payment assistance

A summary of the potential benefits of increasing racial equity in the Fairfield County area is shown in figure ES1.

How Do We Get There?

Connecticut already has taken steps to increase equity within its borders, such as reopening the Time to Own program, which provides homebuyer assistance to low- and moderate-income first-time homeowners,¹⁵ and CT Baby Bonds, the nation’s first statewide baby bond initiative, which was established in 2023. This program sets aside \$3,200 for every baby whose birth is covered by HUSKY Health, Connecticut’s Medicaid program, which later can be accessed for purposes such as funding higher education, buying homes, starting businesses, or saving for retirement.

Business leaders, policymakers, practitioners, nonprofits, and philanthropies can work together to reduce inequities by identifying and eliminating practices that perpetuate racism, repairing past harms, and investing in policies and programs that enable communities of color to live in high-opportunity neighborhoods and build intergenerational wealth. To address the structural inequities inherent in our society, these groups must transfer power to communities of color through reforming hiring practices, board memberships, community engagement, and decisionmaking counsels.

With input from the community members and nonprofit professionals on the Equity Research Advisory Panel, the following additional actions, by topic area, were highlighted as those that could be considered by leaders from the business, public, philanthropic, and other sectors in Connecticut if they wanted to further increase equity. These recommendations were selected based on input from the Equity Research Advisory Panel, whether they had a strong evidence base to show that they can lead to increased equity, and guidance from experts in each topic area. Additional details about each recommendation can be found in the recommendations section of this report.

EDUCATION

- **Fund targeted universal preschool.** Research suggests that targeted universal preschool—wherein resources including teachers, classroom space, and materials are allocated progressively depending on family income—can generate large improvements in academic outcomes that then reemerge later in life as benefits to academic and nonacademic outcomes (Bruhn and Emick 2023).
- **Improve the quality of K–12 education for Black and Latino students.** Despite recent improvements to the state equalization methods, substantial disparities between affluent and low-income districts still exist. If state leaders are interested in increasing equity, they should

consider alternative formulas that are based on the difference between a district's education cost and revenue capacity, similar to the one proposed by Zhao (2021). Other efforts that can help reduce K–12 equity gaps include increasing funding for school-based meal programs, expanding access to universal free meals, providing high-dosage tutoring for students who are behind, and funding free after-school programming for students based on need.

- **Provide targeted college subsidies.** Since Black and Latino families are five times less likely than white families to receive large gifts or inheritances that can be used for higher education, investing in targeted college and trade school subsidies is another way to close education gaps (McKernan and Ratcliffe 2013). Targeted college subsidies such as College Promise programs or local versions of college tuition grants¹⁶ can help, as can means-tested state grant programs or reduced tuition prices for all students who attend Connecticut's public schools. If possible, tailoring these programs to families based on their wealth in addition to their income can help further close intergenerational wealth gaps.

WORKFORCE AND SMALL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

- **Offer registered apprenticeships.** Business leaders can help close racial income gaps by offering registered apprenticeships or structured training programs that combine on-the-job training with classroom instruction. To start an apprenticeship, a business can reach out to the Connecticut Office of Apprenticeship Training through the Connecticut State Department of Labor to learn about the requirements for registering an apprenticeship program.
- **Tighten job descriptions to include only the essential criteria, and employ other equitable hiring practices.** To increase equity, businesses can examine their job descriptions and remove any requirements that are not essential to the job, such as college degrees, which could prevent Black or Latino people from qualifying due to discrimination in the education system or other social systems. Other steps employers can take include requiring that a certain percentage of candidates and interviewers be Black or Latino, keeping job postings open for an extended period of time to prevent fielding only candidates with advance knowledge of the position, and designating a “neutral challenger” who inquires objectively about all potential candidates.¹⁷
- **Offer accessible financing to small businesses.** To increase equity, local banks can offer small business loans, lines of credit, or microfinancing with zero interest or reduced interest rates and flexible repayment terms. Support of microbusinesses (those with 10 or fewer employees) is particularly crucial for people of color, who are less likely to secure traditional small business loans or receive substantial financial gifts from family members (McKernan and Ratcliffe 2013). Other recommendations to help support small businesses from Theodos, McManus, and Rajninger (2024b) include the following:
 - » Banks can reduce requirements based on financial history, offer revenue-based financing, and increase opportunities for capital.
 - » Local governments can underwrite or provide loan guarantees to high-risk small businesses.

- » Philanthropic organizations can pool resources to make grant funding more readily and consistently available to small businesses.
- » A coordinating actor, such as a local government, can serve as a facilitator to gather and share information about the existing products available for nontraditional financing.
- **Reform procurement practices to help increase contracts with Black- and Latino-owned businesses.** State and local governments spend approximately \$1.3 trillion each year through public procurement (Baldus and Hatton 2020), which historically has been awarded inequitably along racial lines (Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab 2022). As recommended in Theodos, McManus, and Rajninger (2024a), some ways in which these patterns can be broken include the following:
 - » Forecast upcoming procurements to give firms more time to prepare
 - » Bolster outreach and offer technical assistance and capacity building to small businesses navigating the contracting process
 - » Streamline certification processes
 - » Create smaller contracting opportunities
 - » Establish small purchase methods
 - » Remove requirements that could present potential barriers
 - » Adopt best-value rather than lowest-bid award criteria
 - » Develop data systems, and track vendors by type of firm and owner attribute
 - » Provide adequate support to firms after they win contracts, especially if they are new to public contracting
 - » Pay vendors in a timely manner

HOUSING

- **Provide down payment assistance for first-generation homebuyers and financial coaching/homebuyer education.** There are programs in the Fairfield County area and in Connecticut more broadly, such as Time to Own, that support first-time homebuyers.¹⁸ However, many of these buyers may benefit from generations of wealth built from their parents and grandparents owning homes. Programs that target first-generation homebuyers, or those whose parents do not own homes, can more effectively close the racial homeownership gap.¹⁹ In addition, financial coaching, a method of financial education that involves regular one-on-one sessions in which clients and coaches set goals and plan concrete steps to meet and manage those goals over time in an attempt to change client behavior, has been found to be an effective method of improving financial health and supporting homeownership (Theodos, Stacy, and Daniels 2018).
- **Provide funding for employer-assisted housing, with a focus on equity.** Employers can offer direct assistance with housing costs to attract and retain talent, such as through down payment assistance, rental subsidies, and even direct investment in the construction of housing.²⁰ Foundations and local governments can help support employer-assisted housing through matched contributions; for example, with the City of Baltimore’s Live Near Your Work

program,²¹ the city matches employers' contributions between \$1,000 and \$2,500 in the form of a grant. Employers can also offer employee housing supports to their employees directly, such as how the Washington, DC, government offers city employees a deferred, zero percent interest loan and matching-funds grant for down payment and closing costs to purchase their first single family home, condominium, or cooperative unit in the District.²² These programs can address the high cost of housing. If designed with an equity lens, they could also address racial inequities in housing cost burdens and gaps in homeownership rates.

- **Expand access to mortgages and lower costs.** Historic policies and practices, including redlining and single-family zoning, have prevented households of color from building wealth, increasing their credit scores, and accessing mortgages at the same rate as their white counterparts (Zinn and Reynolds 2022). Ways to address this inequity include the following:
 - » Allow positive rental payments to be included as a component of assessing potential borrowers' ability to pay, since research shows that including rental payment history in mortgage underwriting could benefit Black and Latino households (Choi et al. 2022).
 - » Eliminate risk-based pricing (the practice of offering less favorable terms to people considered higher risk) and instead pool the risk across all borrowers. Banks also can account for the fact that white borrowers are more likely to refinance their mortgages in their risk assessments (Ratcliffe 2023).
 - » Reduce barriers to refinancing so creditworthy Black and Latino borrowers are able to access the same lower rates as those accessed by their white counterparts (Alexandrov, Goodman, and Tozer 2022).
- **Reduce barriers to new housing supply.** Policymakers can address housing affordability challenges by reducing barriers to development, which can help to increase supply, bring housing costs into alignment with demand, and lower costs. This can be done by reducing parking requirements for new developments, increasing the permitting speed for new developments (particularly affordable housing developments), and reforming land use regulations to allow for a more diverse mix of housing, particularly near transit (Lo et al. 2020).

WEALTH BUILDING

- **Increase investments in baby bonds.** Through providing children with government-funded savings accounts to support their future economic prosperity, baby bonds can increase generational wealth in communities of color. The CT Baby Bonds initiative, which launched in 2023 and automatically invests \$3,200 for each child born into poverty, is currently set up to fund investments for just the next 12 years.²³ Additional investments could be made into this initiative to fund larger investments per child and sustain the program beyond 12 years.
- **Offer matched savings programs to boost emergency savings.** Past discriminatory policies and a lack of access to capital have made Black and Latino families less likely than white families to have emergency savings.²⁴ Philanthropies, private employers, and local governments can assist families in generating emergency savings by matching deposits of liquid savings.

- **Implement reparations.**²⁵ Residents in the Fairfield County area who are the direct descendants of people who were the subjects of racist policies and practices, such as housing discrimination, could receive direct payments, housing benefits, or tax deductions that increase their access to capital and ability to build wealth and assets into the future (Stacy, Lo, and Fung 2023). Providing reparations to residents of the Fairfield County area who have been harmed by past discriminatory policies could help them overcome some of the persistent, intergenerational effects of human trafficking and bondage and other racially discriminatory policies (e.g., redlining, racial covenants, and racist lending practices) that have hindered wealth building (Darity and Mullen 2020).

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

- **Expand mental health care for communities of color.** This can include increasing funding for culturally tailored treatments, enacting loan repayment programs for mental health professionals, supporting nontraditional professionals and programs to expand the reach of community-based resources, offering expanded telehealth services, improving geographic access, ensuring language access, and integrating mental health into primary care (Last et al. 2024; Olfson 2016; Zabelski, Hollander, and Alexander 2024).
- **Undertake criminal justice reforms.** Black, Hispanic, and American Indian/Alaska Native populations are overrepresented in US prisons, which can affect the health of communities of color by limiting access to housing, employment, and job-related health benefits and worsening chronic and acute medical conditions, mental health outcomes, and preventable deaths (Iguchi et al. 2005; Sundaresh et al. 2020).²⁶ One way to prevent these negative impacts is by divesting in punitive actions and investing in prevention and community-based alternative systems that ensure people have jobs, food, and housing.²⁷ Efforts to reduce criminal justice disparities also can include increasing opportunities for people who have interacted with the justice system, for example, through expungement of criminal records.
- **Improve employer-sponsored health supports.** Ways to do this specifically to reduce racial gaps in health care access include removing copays for emergency room visits, covering 100 percent of costs for preventive screenings and vaccines, reducing the cost of medications, offering free or deeply subsidized primary care and mental health access, covering costs for virtual care, expanding health care–community partnerships, and making benefits and health care access easier to navigate.²⁸
- **Promote preventive care and fund education and outreach programs that overcome persistent health disparities.** Business leaders and state and local governments can encourage preventive care to help prevent deaths in the United States (Farley et al. 2010). While governments can offer free health clinics, business leaders can seek out health insurance providers that implement preventive measures, including care reminders via mobile phone messaging, screenings for asymptomatic diseases, preventive vaccines, and general lifestyle advice (Reuben 2012; Vodopivec-Jamsek et al. 2012).

- Research has shown that progress can be made with regard to racial disparities around kidney disease and transplants, which disproportionately affect Black people in the United States. Business leaders as well as local governments can offer programs that deepen knowledge about the kidney transplant process. Education programs, community-based workshops, and media campaigns have been shown to increase the rate of living-donor kidney transplant (Wesselman et al. 2021).

Figure ES6 highlights examples of specific actions that various actors in the county and state can take to increase racial equity in the Fairfield County area. These recommendations do not encompass all actors or actions. For instance, local nonprofit organizations could assume a service provider role for most of the key actions attributed to philanthropic organizations and state and local government. In addition to performing each of the direct actions listed in the figure, each type of actor can advocate for the state and local policy and practice changes that are listed as well as any federal actions that can be taken to achieve the recommendations listed above.

FIGURE ES6

Actor-Specific Actions That Could Help Close Racial Equity Gaps in the Fairfield County Area

| |  Business leader |  Philanthropic organizations |  General public |  Local government |  State government |
|--|---|--|--|---|---|
| Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fund after-school programs ▪ Support College Promise programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fund after-school programs ▪ Support College Promise programs ▪ Fund/support targeted universal preschool | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage inclusive practices within schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fund targeted universal preschool | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adjust funding to prioritize high-need schools ▪ Offer means-tested college grant programs |
| Workforce and small business development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Offer registered apprenticeships ▪ Tighten job descriptions ▪ Offer small business loans and microfinancing with zero or reduced interest | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Pool resources to make grant funding available to small businesses ▪ Facilitate knowledge sharing about nontraditional financing for small businesses | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Purchase from Black- and Latino-owned businesses ▪ Patronize businesses that support the practices to the left of this column | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Underwrite or provide loan guarantees to high-risk small businesses ▪ Forecast upcoming procurements ▪ Improve small business lending supports | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support registered apprenticeships ▪ Forecast upcoming procurements ▪ Improve small business lending supports |
| Housing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support zoning reforms ▪ Offer employee housing subsidies ▪ Eliminate risk-based pricing for mortgages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Offer down payment assistance for first-generation homebuyers ▪ Support shared equity homeownership models ▪ Fund subsidized housing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advocate for housing development locally, particularly affordable housing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reduce barriers to housing development by reducing fees, timelines, parking requirements, and exclusionary zoning practices and supporting transit-oriented development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Require local governments to relax zoning regulations ▪ Offer down payment assistance for first-generation homebuyers |
| Wealth building | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Offer matched savings programs ▪ Offer reparations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Offer matched savings programs ▪ Offer reparations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Financially support and advocate for local reparations initiatives | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Offer matched savings programs ▪ Offer reparations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase investments in baby bonds ▪ Offer reparations for past discriminatory actions |
| Health and well-being | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Offer culturally tailored mental health care ▪ Expand access to paid sick leave and paid family and medical leave ▪ Improve health insurance coverage | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase funding for culturally tailored mental health care treatments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Donate to community health centers | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support nontraditional health care professionals and programs ▪ Divest in punitive policing and invest in community supports | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase funding for culturally tailored mental healthcare treatments |
| Across all areas | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advocate for the state and local policies to the right of this column | | |

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Source: Framework developed by the authors. See detailed sources in the recommendations section.

Note: This figure does not encompass all possible actions that could increase racial equity in the Fairfield County area.

While some of these initiatives would require substantial investment, the long-term benefits—including increased consumer spending, tax revenues, and entrepreneurship—could foster a more prosperous and inclusive Fairfield County area and help to recoup the costs of the equity investments. Increasing equity is achievable not only through substantial investments but also through restructuring of institutions, changing of policies, and challenging of unconscious biases. These actions can create positive cycles that can continue to increase equity into the future.

None of these actors can tackle inequity on their own. Instead, they must collaboratively prioritize equity and enact meaningful systems change by committing to new and ongoing efforts aimed at promoting fairness, justice, and inclusivity in the Fairfield County area and in Connecticut. Lasting change demands a collaborative effort from all sectors, targeting root causes of inequities rather than temporary solutions. By prioritizing structural reforms, the Fairfield County area can create a more equitable future, benefiting both the community and the economy.

Notes

¹ Throughout the remainder of this document, for brevity, we refer to racial and ethnic equity as “racial equity.”

² Fairfield County, while historically recognized as a county, no longer functions as an official governmental entity and has been reclassified as a geographic region. We use three methods to define the Fairfield County area, depending on data source and year of the data. We use the term “traditional Fairfield County” to refer to the 23 towns that made up Fairfield County and were used in the census definition through 2021. Beginning in 2022, the census began reporting county-equivalent data for Connecticut planning regions rather than for the traditional counties. We refer to the combined area made up of the Greater Bridgeport and Western planning regions as the “planning regions in the Fairfield County area.” In contrast with traditional Fairfield County, this geography excludes Shelton and includes Bridgewater and New Milford. Much of the analysis in this report includes data from 2018 to 2022, combining the American Community Survey (ACS) microdata sample from traditional Fairfield County from 2018 to 2021 with Greater Bridgeport and Western planning regions in 2022. We use the term “Fairfield County area” when discussing findings drawn from these data.

³ DataHaven, “Fairfield County Community Wellbeing Index 2023 Report,” 2023, <https://fccfoundation.org/research-publications/cwi2023/>.

⁴ We use the term “white” to refer to people who identify as non-Hispanic white.

⁵ We use the term “Black” to refer to people who identify as Black or African American but not as Hispanic or Latino in the ACS. We acknowledge this language may not reflect how people describe themselves. We remain committed to employing respectful and inclusive language.

⁶ We use the term “Latino” to refer to people who identify as being of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin in the ACS. This includes people of any race group. We acknowledge this language may not reflect how people describe themselves. We remain committed to employing respectful and inclusive language.

⁷ Based on authors’ calculations from the US Census Bureau American Community Survey 2018–22 five-year estimates.

⁸ While we focus on the quantifiable benefits to those who might otherwise feel unaffected by systemic racism and discrimination, the changes in lived experiences of those directly experiencing inequities are of first-order importance to consider when designing policies and practices.

⁹ DataHaven, “Fairfield County Community Wellbeing Index 2023 Report,” 2023, <https://fccfoundation.org/research-publications/cwi2023/>.

¹⁰ Measured using the traditional Fairfield County definition.

- ¹¹ “Gross Domestic Product,” Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2024, <https://www.bea.gov/data/gdp/gross-domestic-product>.
- ¹² Measured using the traditional Fairfield County definition.
- ¹³ Connecticut allocates state education funding to public schools using a range of formulas and grants. At present, the state legislature employs 10 distinct funding formulas to determine the financial support each public school receives. “How Connecticut Funds Education,” School and State Finance Project, 2022, <https://schoolstatefinance.org/issues/how-ct-funds-education>.
- ¹⁴ While removal of the car property tax was a priority highlighted by the Equity Research Advisory Panel, it should be noted that this tax may have environmental benefits that would need to be offset if the tax were to be removed.
- ¹⁵ “Governor Lamont Announces ‘Time to Own’ First-Time Homebuyer Assistance Program Reopens with the Support of \$40 Million in Newly Released State Funding,” October 22, 2024, https://portal.ct.gov/governor/news/press-releases/2024/10-2024/governor-lamont-announces-time-to-own-first-time-homebuyer-assistance-program-reopens?language=en_US.
- ¹⁶ College Promise, accessed January 24, 2025, <https://www.collegepromise.org/>.
- ¹⁷ Elizabeth Derby, “What Organizations Can Do to Cultivate Equity,” 2020, <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/what-organizations-can-do-cultivate-equity-derby-she-her-hers-/>.
- ¹⁸ For example, the town of Fairfield has a first-time homebuyer program that provides down payment and closing cost assistance to first-time homebuyers who earn less than certain income limits. See “First Time Homebuyer Assistance Program,” Town of Fairfield, Connecticut, accessed September 5, 2024, https://www.fairfieldct.org/service/community__economic_development/community_development/homebuyer_assistance_program.php.
- ¹⁹ Aniket Mehrotra, Jung Hyun Choi, and Janneke Ratcliffe, “First-Generation Homebuyers Face Significant Obstacles to Homeownership. To Help, Programs Can Define What “First Generation” Means.” Urban Wire (blog), Urban Institute, November 17, 2023, <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/first-generation-homebuyers-face-significant-obstacles-homeownership-help-programs-can>.
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- ²⁴ Mingli Zhong, Apueela Wekulom, Michael Neal, Amalie Zinn, Damir Cosic, and Jeffrey Rohaly, “Nine Charts about Wealth Inequality in America,” Urban Institute, April 2024, <https://apps.urban.org/features/wealth-inequality-charts/>.
- ²⁵ We define reparations in this report as the process of repairing, healing, and restoring people who have been injured because of their group identity, in violation of their fundamental human rights, by a government, corporation, institution, or individual (defined by Ritchie et al. 2019). Reparations are not simply equity initiatives that invest in historically disadvantaged communities or that disproportionately benefit specific groups of residents writ large; they must provide specific types of repair to specific groups of people for specific harms they have experienced, such as descendants of residents who were harmed by a locality’s specific Jim Crow laws (Ritchie et al. 2019). For additional details about how the United Nations defines reparations, see “Basic Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Remedy and Reparation for Victims of Gross Violations of International Human Rights Law and Serious Violations of International Humanitarian Law,” United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, adopted December 15, 2005,

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Fairfield County's Community Foundation is partnering with our community to create a county where every person has an equitable opportunity to thrive. We work closely with community organizations, nonprofits, businesses, and philanthropists to address challenges and identify opportunities to create a stronger, more vibrant community. Informed by three decades of partnering with and serving our community, we have awarded more than \$400 million in grants to nonprofits in Fairfield County and beyond.

DataHaven

ABOUT DATAHAVEN

DataHaven is a nonprofit organization based in New Haven, Connecticut, whose mission is to empower people to create thriving communities by collecting and ensuring access to data on well-being, equity, and quality of life.

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