Aligning the Use of Recovery Funds with Community Goals in Rochester, New York
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To ensure federal funds to Rochester promote an inclusive recovery, resident input and community goals must be prioritized when making decisions.

Several community-based equity initiatives have been launched in the Rochester area; these share overlapping priority areas such as housing, economic growth, and community development.

City, school district, and county agencies have started planning for recovery spending. Although community engagement has helped shape these initial plans, resident input should continue to be gathered throughout the process.

Rochester's recovery plans broadly align with the community priority areas of housing, economic growth, and community development, but they do not reflect other key community priorities regarding equity oversight boards, capital access for BIPOC-owned businesses, and support for neighborhood groups.

As exceptional amounts of federal funds flow to Rochester and other cities to spur recovery from the COVID-19 crisis, city leaders must invest in community equity goals in order to achieve an inclusive recovery. The City of Rochester is receiving $234 million in flexible funding through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, and the American Rescue Plan Act that could be used for inclusive recovery. Monroe County will receive $312 million, and the Rochester City School District will receive $296 million. More funds are expected from the federal infrastructure package and potential reconciliation bill. How these funds are invested can ameliorate or reinforce historical inequity. To promote a truly inclusive recovery and identify where these funds can be spent to best promote an inclusive recovery, the voices of those who have been most harmed by historic patterns of inequity and exclusion, as well as by the recent crisis, must be heard. Urban's research has identified the following building blocks for an inclusive recovery:

1. **Create jobs** for residents hardest hit by the pandemic or who face the greatest barriers to employment;
2. **Connect residents to jobs and economic opportunities**, including through workforce development, child care, transportation, or broadband;
3. **Reinvest in disinvested communities** and address long-standing disparities in access to education, capital, economic opportunities, and climate resilience;
4. **Stabilize housing and expand affordable housing** options for low-income households and housing-insecure renters; and
5. **Create opportunities for low-wealth households to build wealth.**

**ROCHESTER'S PREPANDEMIC EQUITY INITIATIVES**
Several community equity initiatives in Rochester developed before the COVID-19 pandemic have laid the groundwork for an inclusive recovery. The Rochester34 Comprehensive Plan, the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity report, and the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative policy agenda were informed by resident engagement such as surveys, public hearings, and meetings with community stakeholders. Syntheses of these initiatives reveal shared priority areas that overlap with the building blocks for inclusive recovery, including housing, economic growth, and community development. Although the policies within these priority areas differ among initiatives, their basis in community input and their...
strong correlation to the building blocks of inclusive recovery lay important groundwork for identifying potential uses of incoming recovery funds.

**WHAT PLANS FOR FEDERAL FUNDS ARE IN PLACE?**

Plans are under way for the City of Rochester, the Rochester City School District, and Monroe County to allocate their shares of recovery funding. The *Strategic Equity and Recovery Plan*, released by the mayor’s office, based its recommendations for spending recovery funds on the priorities set by the Rochester34 plan. The Rochester City Council recently appropriated funds for several of the plan’s priority areas, most notably $14.5 million for workforce development. After gathering initial feedback from community members and stakeholders, the school district released a *preliminary outline* of programs to be prioritized for recovery spending. Monroe County is conducting a period of community engagement that will last until the end of 2021 to determine spending plans for the *Bring Monroe Back* initiative, which features public forums, a countywide survey, and testimonials from community organizations. Initial priority areas were identified for Bring Monroe Back based on the synthesis of existing equity initiatives, including the Commission on Racial and Structural Equity and the Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative.

**TABLE 1**

Community-Informed Equity Plans in the Rochester Area

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy areas</th>
<th>Rochester34</th>
<th>RASE</th>
<th>RMAPI</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>Make the strongest market areas more inclusive, strengthen middle market areas, and stabilize weaker market areas</td>
<td>Increase the supply of quality affordable housing for BIPOC individuals</td>
<td>Fund legal services providers to represent tenants in cases of discrimination</td>
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<tr>
<td>Economic growth</td>
<td>(1) Revitalize key neighborhood business corridors and (2) support the development of nontraditional businesses</td>
<td>Create a new Capital Access Program targeted to local BIPOC-owned businesses</td>
<td>Commit to achieving universal access to quality, affordable child care by 2025</td>
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<tr>
<td>Community development</td>
<td>Support neighborhood groups with resources or technical assistance to help them engage and represent the people and areas they serve</td>
<td>Create county accountability committees or boards to monitor equity initiatives</td>
<td>Develop flexible funding streams to pursue creative solutions to community problems</td>
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*Note: RASE = Commission on Racial and Structural Equity; RMAPI = Rochester-Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative.*

**HOW DO THE SPENDING PLANS ALIGN WITH COMMUNITY PRIORITIES?**

Many of the goals outlined in the community initiatives are represented in the initial recovery plans. Housing, economic growth, and community development are key themes of the city and county’s plans, and although the school district’s plan more heavily emphasizes class curricula and school infrastructure, elements of these themes are also present. The city and county’s use of existing equity initiatives to outline their priorities sets a promising foundation, but critical policies from these equity initiatives are unrepresented in the current plans for recovery funds. Three significant recommendations from the community equity plans have not been identified in the current recovery allocations: (1) developing accountability boards to monitor equity initiatives, (2) creating capital access programs for BIPOC-owned businesses, and (3) supporting neighborhood groups with resources or technical assistance to help them better engage and represent the people and areas they serve. Leaders in the city, county, and school board should consider using future funds, such as those from the infrastructure package and potential reconciliation bill, to fill these gaps.

Local leaders should continue to engage community members at every step as programs and activities are identified for funding. Although community engagement has played a role in defining the contours of the plans in place, the city, county, and school district must maintain efforts to gather resident feedback as they finalize how these dollars will be spent, particularly because priorities may have shifted since before the pandemic. This will be important not only
as recovery fund dollars are spent but also as infrastructure and potential reconciliation dollars begin to be allocated. Community advisory boards, data walks, and focus groups are powerful community-engaged methods that the city, county, or school district could use. Fostering the inclusion of community members in decisions at a scale commensurate with that of the incoming federal funds is critical to meeting this moment in history. Through thoughtful and diligent community engagement, the leaders of Rochester have a historic opportunity to build power among historically excluded residents and rectify centuries-old legacies of inequity.

FIGURE 1
How Do City, County, and School District Recovery Plans Overlap with Community Priorities?

The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity lists Six Principles of Equitable and Inclusive Civic Engagement:

1. Leverage the wealth of social capital that comes from bringing residents with diverse backgrounds together.
2. Realize the role of race, power, and injustice and the ways that patterns of inequity have shaped the current context.
3. Cultivate a sense of belonging through radical hospitality for those who have been historically excluded from decisionmaking processes.
4. Build trust between public institutions and the people they serve through shared leadership and mutual accountability.
5. Honor dissent and embrace protest, creating an environment where residents can voice concerns and difficult discussions can be had.
6. Adapt to community change by allowing the community engagement environment to be flexible.