

April 2022

2021 Cook County Equity Fund Report



Toni Preckwinkle
Toni Preckwinkle
Cook County Board President

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Letter from the President



To the residents of Cook County:

Throughout my administration, Cook County Offices Under the President (OUP) has worked hard to advance equity for all residents in Cook County because we firmly believe all residents deserve supportive, accessible government services and thriving communities. We formalized that commitment in our 2018 strategic plan, the [Cook County Policy Roadmap: Five-Year Strategic Plan for Offices Under the President](#), which outlined concrete steps to continue building the foundation for our racial equity work, including:

- Joining the [Government Alliance for Race & Equity](#) (GARE);
- Creating a Racial Equity Leadership Council, including a Core Team and working groups focused on community engagement, data and reporting, disability inclusion, and training;
- Aligning with recommendations from the [Cook County Committee on Addressing Bias, Equity, and Cultural Competency](#); and
- Hiring an inaugural Director of Equity and Inclusion in the Office of the President.

Through our equity work, we seek to address and eradicate institutional and structural barriers to racial equity that exist in Cook County government's operations, policies, and practices. We are committed to continuing to build this infrastructure to create and sustain equitable service delivery for all Cook County residents.

Building on this work, my administration created the Cook County Equity Fund and formed the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce to demonstrate that equity is more than an aspirational goal. We are investing in the Equity Fund, we are putting it into action, and we are committed to working with the more than 35 partner organizations that serve on the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce to ensure that those investments are inclusive, sustainable, and impactful.

This 2021 Cook County Equity Fund Report, the first of its kind for Cook County, is just the beginning. My administration will not rest until all residents, in all our communities, have the opportunity to thrive, regardless of race, zip code, or immigration status. I am grateful for the dedication and partnership of each Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce member, and I look forward to working together to put these recommendations into action, and build a better, stronger Cook County—for all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Toni Preckwinkle".

Toni Preckwinkle
Cook County Board President

Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce Opening Statement

The Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce supports Cook County's work to intentionally re-align government policies, practices, and resource allocation to advance racial equity and ensure all Cook County residents can live healthy, prosperous lives. Creating the Cook County Equity Fund and the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce operationalizes Cook County's commitment to racial equity. We recognize this commitment and provide our recommendations to elevate additional ways for Cook County government to address the numerous structural barriers that prevent the meaningful advancement of equity across Cook County and to ensure Cook County provides equitable, excellent service to all residents (see [Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce Recommendations](#)). To guide our work, the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce established the following collective definition of equity, vision, and guiding principles:

Definition of Equity

Equity is achieved by intentionally, deliberately eliminating disparities that adversely impact marginalized people. Equity is achieved when people have the opportunity to reach their full potential, regardless of their race, gender identity, sex, ability, documentation status, economic position, or other socio-economic determinants. Equity is an answer to the historical and contemporary injustices experienced by people in a marginalized, disadvantaged position.

Racial equity would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicts one's success. Racial equity is quantifiable and measurable. To advance racial equity, government must reckon with how public policies and practices created inequities and currently sustain them. Government must intentionally center community voice and direct resources to address and repair the ramifications and consequences of policies that have harmed Black, Indigenous, and People of Color residents and communities.

Vision

To create safe, healthy, and thriving communities in Cook County by reimagining and transforming systems around justice, public safety, health, housing, economic opportunity, community development, and social services to benefit Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities and proactively invest resources in solutions and supports to achieve equitable outcomes.

Guiding Principles

- Align with the Cook County Policy Roadmap to promote coordination and ease of implementation;
- Center equity to address the structural barriers, systems, policies, and practices that harm Cook County's most marginalized residents;
- Advance a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to government resource allocation;
- Avoid duplication of resources and leverage existing efforts and infrastructure where possible; and
- Allocate future savings generated from policy changes and operational reforms back to community investments.

Executive Summary

With the support of the Cook County Board of Commissioners, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle established the Cook County Equity Fund as part of Cook County's fiscal year 2021 budget. The Offices Under the President (OUP) formalized the accounting structure for this work in the Equity Fund Special Purpose Fund as part of Cook County's fiscal year 2022 budget. Based on the work of OUP and the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce, this 2021 Cook County Equity Fund Report explains why the Office of the President created the Cook County Equity Fund, outlines financial and legislative reporting and accounting commitments for the Cook County Equity Fund Special Purpose Fund, and details the role of the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce. This Report also includes the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce's recommendations on actions Cook County government should take to address structural barriers that prevent the meaningful advancement of equity across Cook County. Finally, this Report concludes with how Cook County government and the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce will continue this essential work to make government more responsive and equitable to best serve Cook County residents.

Explanation of Language

The Cook County Offices Under the President and the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce recognize the importance of using clear, specific language to refer to groups and communities, especially when those groups and communities have experienced and continue to experience marginalization, exclusion, and harm by government and broader society. Based on the feedback and experiences of the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce, throughout this Report we use:

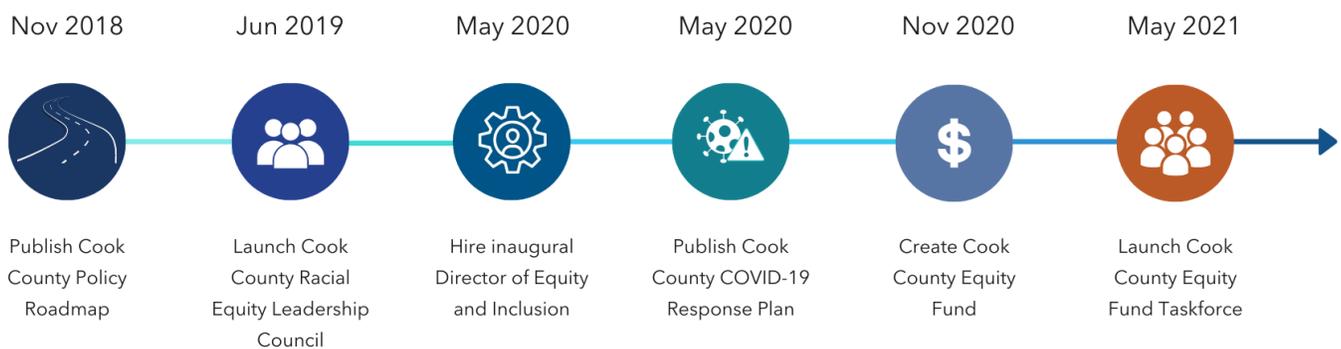
- **Black** to refer to people born throughout the African diaspora who are now in the United States faced with racialized treatment and exclusion, primarily but not limited to Black people born in the United States and
- **Latine** as a gender-neutral term to refer to people born of Latin American descent.

We prioritize using specific language when appropriate. When referencing broader groups than the terms defined above, we use **Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)** to explicitly call attention to groups most affected by the inequities the Cook County Equity Fund was created to address. We will continue to evolve, learn, and grow to ensure our language honors the lived experience of Cook County residents and actively furthers our work to advance racial equity.

Cook County Offices Under the President Policy Overview

Under the guidance and oversight of Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle, the Cook County Offices Under the President (OUP) serves all Cook County residents by supporting the day-to-day functions and operations of Cook County agencies and advancing the President’s policy agenda.

Policy Overview and Equity Fund Taskforce Timeline



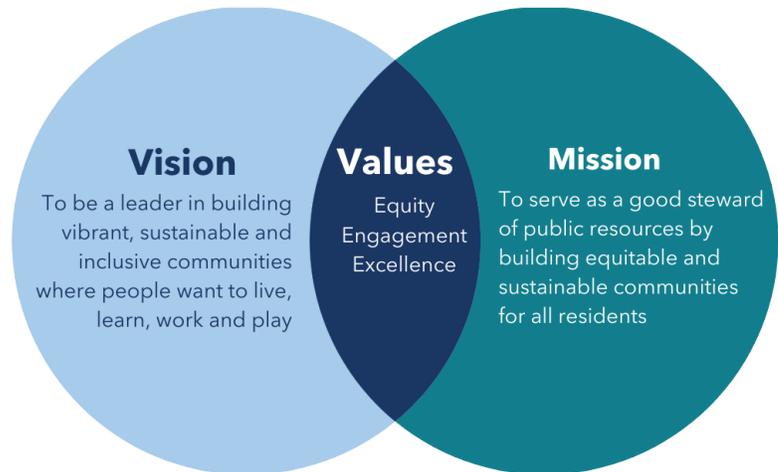
In November 2018, OUP released the [Cook County Policy Roadmap: Five-Year Strategic Plan for Offices Under the President](#), after embarking on a year-long strategic planning process. In the Cook County Policy Roadmap, OUP committed to ensuring Cook County is a welcoming community that serves all of its residents, including those who are often marginalized and excluded from decision-making, and identified six policy priorities around which to concentrate its efforts:

- Healthy Communities
- Vital Communities
- Safe and Thriving Communities
- Sustainable Communities
- Smart Communities
- Open Communities

Cook County Offices Under the President Policy Overview

In the Cook County Policy Roadmap, OUP also established its mission, vision, and values.

After publishing the [Cook County Policy Roadmap](#), OUP began implementing its commitment to advancing racial equity by designing and launching the Cook County Racial Equity Leadership Council and hiring an inaugural Director of Equity and Inclusion in the Office of the President. As a result of this work, OUP published the [Cook County Offices Under the President Language Access Policy](#) in May 2021 to formalize OUP’s commitment to providing accessible and responsive services and adopted the [Cook County Racial Equity Action Plan \(2021 - 2023\)](#) in September 2021 to codify OUP’s ongoing racial equity efforts.



The [Cook County Policy Roadmap](#) and OUP’s racial equity work were crucial to driving equitable change and accountability in Cook County government operations, and became even more essential as Cook County began preparing for and responding to the global outbreak of a novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in early 2020. As the virus upended residents’ lives and disrupted our economy, it became Cook County government’s central focus. In Cook County, Black and Latine residents have been disproportionately impacted by both the health and economic impacts of the pandemic, and OUP is committed to structuring our response to acknowledge the pain our Black and Latine communities experience and to addressing the conditions that contributed to this disproportionate spread.

In May 2020, OUP released the [Cook County COVID-19 Response Plan: From Rapid Response to Equitable Recovery](#), which outlined initial plans for a comprehensive and coordinated response to the coronavirus pandemic using \$429 million from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. In March 2021, Cook County received more than \$1 billion through the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), kicking off a robust process to develop a responsible, comprehensive, and equitable spending plan to use ARPA resources to support both immediate recovery needs and long-term transformative initiatives. In February 2022, OUP released an updated version of the [Cook County American Rescue Plan Act \(ARPA\) At A Glance](#) to document how Cook County intends to allocate the \$1 billion across the six policy pillars outlined in the [Cook County Policy Roadmap](#) over three fiscal years.

Cook County Equity Fund

Under the leadership of Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle and in alignment with the Cook County Policy Roadmap, the Office of the President created the Cook County Equity Fund and seeded it with an initial allocation of \$40 million in Cook County's Fiscal Year 2021 (FY21) Budget.[1] Through the Cook County Equity Fund, the Office of the President aims to intentionally invest government resources to address historical and continued disparities and disinvestment, particularly in Black and Latine communities, and to bring advocates, service providers, and other partners to the table as thought partners and decision-makers.

The creation of the Cook County Equity Fund arose out of the Preckwinkle administration's commitment to racial equity and its work to build organizational capacity and operationalize equity in government. Specifically, Cook County was working to implement justice reinvestment, or the practice of shifting operational savings that result from policy reforms into increased community investments. This shift, while gradual, has come on the heels of a decade of criminal justice reform efforts resulting in a coordinating governance structure among criminal justice agencies, bail reform implementation, and a continued decline in the population of people detained in the Cook County Jail. While this important work laid the foundation for the Cook County Equity Fund, its creation was expedited by both the pandemic's disproportionate impact on Black and Latine communities in Cook County and the historic protests demanding a re-imagining of public safety systems that harm these same communities, especially Black communities, following the murder of George Floyd by police in May 2020.

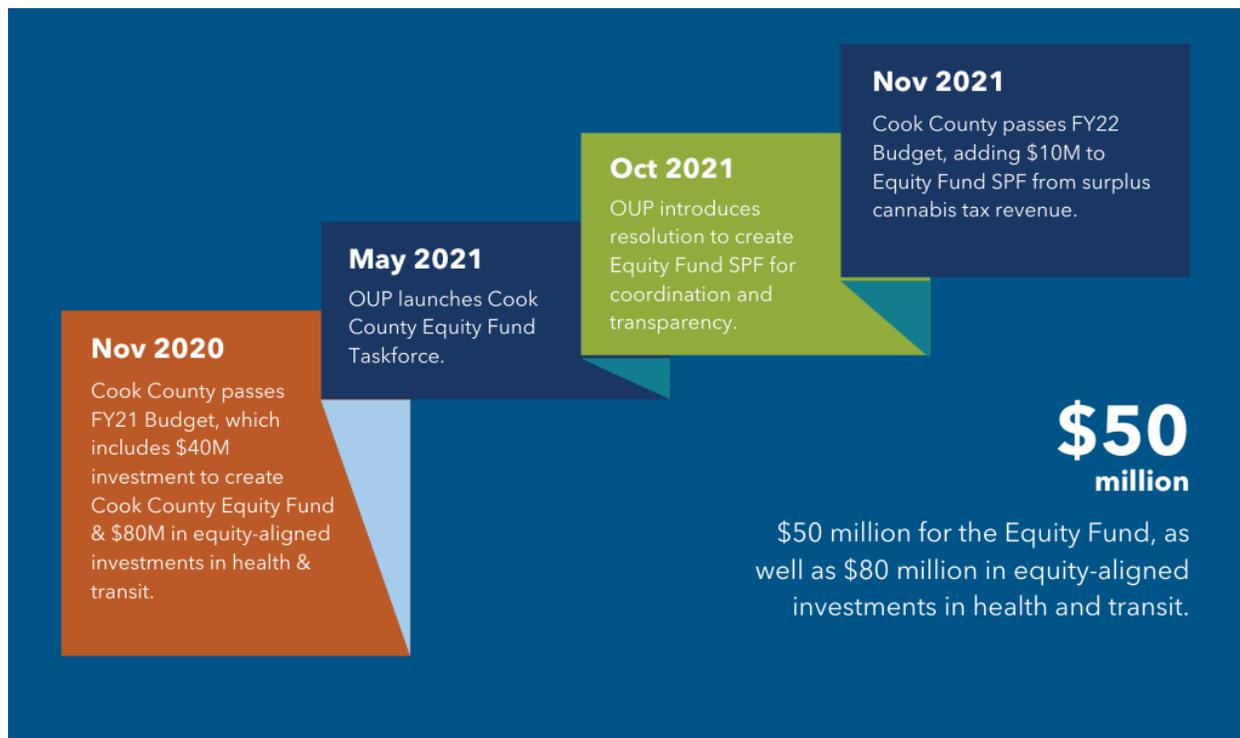
Through the Equity Fund, the Office of the President aims to:

- Address historic and continued disinvestment and resulting inequities that have negatively impacted BIPOC residents;
- Fundamentally shift how Cook County uses grantmaking; and
- Incorporate service providers, advocates, and residents in resource allocation.



¹ Cook County's fiscal year runs from the beginning of December to the end of November. Therefore, Cook County's FY21 budget covers December 1, 2020 through November 30, 2021.

Accounting and Reporting



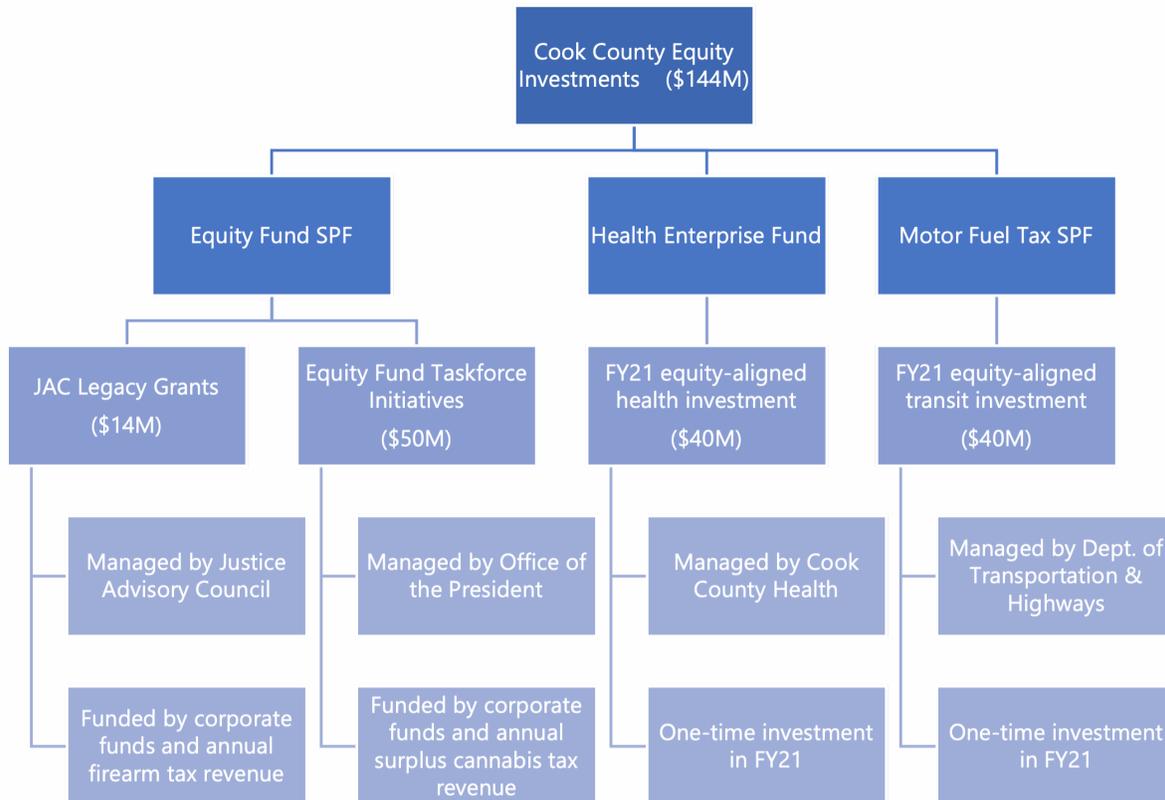
As mentioned, the Office of the President established the Cook County Equity Fund and seeded it with \$40 million in unrestricted County funds as part of Cook County's FY21 Budget passed in November 2020. In addition, Cook County committed \$80 million to equity-related investments in health and transit in its FY21 Budget.

In November 2021, the Cook County Board of Commissioners approved a resolution to create the Equity Fund Special Purpose Fund (SPF) to increase transparency in financial reporting.[2] In Cook County's Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) Budget, Cook County incorporated the initial \$40 million investment into the Equity Fund Special Purpose Fund.[3] Cook County will also transfer an additional \$10 million from the County's surplus fund balance from the end of FY21 to the Equity Fund Special Purpose Fund. Cook County refers to this \$50 million balance as the Equity Fund Taskforce Initiative, and will dedicate these funds to support programs and policies aligned with the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce's recommendations (see [Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce Recommendations](#)).

2 Special purpose funds are enabled through State statutes and County ordinances and have defined sources of revenue and uses for expenditures.

3 Cook County's fiscal year runs from the beginning of December to the end of November. Therefore, Cook County's FY22 budget covers December 1, 2021 through November 30, 2022.

Moving forward, each year the Offices Under the President will allocate all surplus revenue received from Cook County’s cannabis tax to support the Equity Fund Taskforce Initiative within the Equity Fund Special Purpose Fund.[4] This is a significant commitment and represents a shift from previous practices of directing such revenue to support the internal operational costs of the criminal justice agencies. Cook County will also consider additional investments to the Equity Fund Taskforce Initiative when possible.



For transparency, the Equity Fund Special Purpose Fund includes the Equity Fund Taskforce Initiative and existing legacy grants from the Justice Advisory Council (JAC). While JAC will still operate their legacy grants separately from the Equity Fund Taskforce Initiative, Cook County moved these funds into the Equity Fund Special Purpose Fund from the County’s fixed charges to allow for more transparent budgetary and report tracking.[5] Cook County will continue to fund JAC legacy grants, including grants to fund gun violence prevention programs aimed at reducing gun violence, with both general County funds and firearm and ammunition tax revenue.

4 Cook County will calculate this surplus revenue using the following formula: Actual Cannabis Tax Revenue - Projected Cannabis Tax Revenue = Surplus Cannabis Tax Revenue.

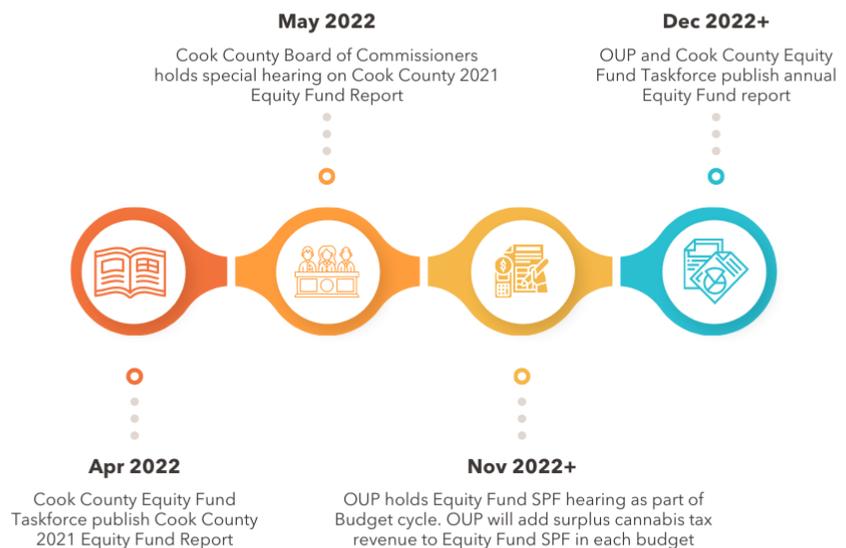
5 Fixed charges is defined as any fixed expense that recurs on a regular basis.

As part of the federal government’s response to the coronavirus pandemic, Cook County received an influx of federal resources through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act passed in 2020 and the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA). Given the time limits associated with these pieces of legislation, Cook County focused on allocating these resources before allocating resources from the Equity Fund Taskforce Initiative and thus has not spent any money from the Equity Fund Taskforce Initiative as of March 2022.

OUP is committed to managing the Equity Fund Special Purpose Fund transparently and in a way that is informative and digestible for both the Cook County Board of Commissioners and the broader public. In May 2022, the Cook County Board of Commissioners will hold a special hearing to discuss this 2021 Cook County Equity Fund Report and the proposed investment recommendations.

Beginning in fall 2022, the Cook County Board of Commissioners will hold an Equity Fund Special Purpose Fund hearing as part of each Cook County budget cycle and the Office of the President will publish an updated Equity Fund Report each December. Additionally, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer includes financial information about the Equity Fund Special Purpose Fund in the Revenue and Expense reports produced for the Cook County Board of Commissioners and made publicly available each month. All spending from the Equity Fund Taskforce Initiative and the Equity Fund Special Purpose Fund will follow Cook County’s Procurement Code as applicable.

The Continuing the Work section of this Report includes an initial budget breakdown for the existing Equity Fund Taskforce Initiative funds. The Offices Under the President anticipate expending these funds in fiscal years 2022 and 2023 based on program design and implementation timing and will maintain transparency and accountability through regular fiscal reporting to the Cook County Board of Commissioners and the public.[6]



6 Cook County’s fiscal year runs from the beginning of December to the end of November. Therefore, Cook County’s FY23 budget covers December 1, 2022 through November 30, 2023.

Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce

Overview

When creating the Cook County Equity Fund, the Office of the President recognized the need to incorporate voices and viewpoints beyond Cook County government in determining how to structure and allocate these resources. A long-term goal of the Preckwinkle administration is to move toward a more collaborative, equitable budgeting process, and the Cook County Equity Fund marked an important opportunity to begin implementing this work. The Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce provides an exciting model for how Cook County government can bring additional voices into resource allocation. Members of the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce have played a significant role in shaping the Taskforce's scope, vision, and priorities, and have expressed that this level of collaboration with government around resource allocation holds great promise for advancing our collective work to serve the residents of Cook County and advance equity.

To create a participatory process and incorporate service providers, advocates, and other partners in resource allocation, the Office of the President launched the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce in May 2021. Convened by the Chief of Staff and the Director of Policy and staffed by leadership from across the Offices Under the President, the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce is composed of 89 members representing 37 partner organizations and 8 Cook County government offices or agencies (see Acknowledgements). From May 2021 through December 2021, the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce met twice a month, with additional meetings scheduled as needed by Taskforce members. Beginning in January 2022, the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce shifted to meeting every other month, with additional meetings scheduled at the direction of Taskforce members.

The Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce began their work by discussing and adopting a collective definition of equity and vision for the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce.

Definition of Equity

Equity is achieved by intentionally, deliberately eliminating disparities that adversely impact marginalized people. Equity is achieved when people have the opportunity to reach their full potential, regardless of their race, gender identity, sex, ability, documentation status, economic position, or other socio-economic determinants. Equity is an answer to the historical and contemporary injustices experienced by people in a marginalized, disadvantaged position.

Racial equity would be achieved if one's racial identity no longer predicts one's success. Racial equity is quantifiable and measurable. To advance racial equity, government must reckon with how public policies and practices created inequities and currently sustain them. Government must intentionally center community voice and direct resources to address and repair the ramifications and consequences of policies that have harmed Black, Indigenous, and People of Color residents and communities.

Equity Fund Vision

To create safe, healthy, and thriving communities in Cook County by reimagining and transforming systems around justice, public safety, health, housing, economic opportunity, community development, and social services to benefit Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities and proactively invest resources in solutions and supports to achieve equitable outcomes.

During summer and fall 2021, Cook County government focused both on the historic nature of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) and on operationalizing the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce Initiative. To support these priorities, the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce embarked on three goals during its first year:

- Outline priority uses for the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce Initiative;
- Provide input on near-term funding needs Cook County could support with its ARPA allocation; and
- Recommend policies and structural changes Cook County government could pursue to address systemic racism and persistent disparities.

The Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce also established the following guiding principles:

- Align with the [Cook County Policy Roadmap](#) - to promote coordination and ease of implementation;
- Center equity to address the structural barriers, systems, policies, and practices that harm Cook County's most marginalized residents;
- Advance a more comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to government resource allocation;
- Avoid duplication of resources and leverage existing efforts and infrastructure where possible; and
- Allocate future savings generated from policy changes and operational reforms back to community investments.

Cook County Equity Fund Priorities

Based on the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce's discussions and the Preckwinkle administration's policy priorities, the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce has outlined the following as priority uses for the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce Initiative:

- Demonstration projects to test the efficacy of a new program or change in policy, practice, or system shifts;
- Equity-centered grantmaking, which may include grants focused on either specific programs and services or on more general capacity-building and collective impact work to support Black- and Latine-led organizations as well as organizations led by people of other marginalized identities on the ground;
- Planning and implementation funds to support Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce recommendations;
- Research and evaluation, including disparity studies, landscape analyses, and evaluations of specific initiatives;
- Technology and data projects that promote collaboration across various policy domains and partners and improve public access to information and services; and
- Support for Cook County's continued racial equity capacity-building and community engagement efforts.

Cook County American Rescue Plan Act Spending Plan Input

To guide its American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Spending Plan, the Offices Under the President (OUP) leveraged the [Cook County Policy Roadmap](#) and referenced [PolicyLink's For Love of Country: A Path for the Federal Government to Advance Racial Equity](#). Cook County used the socio-economic outcomes to advance racial equity outlined in For Love of Country as an aspirational guide for setting a vision for addressing systemic barriers and reducing racial inequity. As Cook County developed its ARPA Spending Plan, documented in [ARPA At A Glance](#), the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce provided input on key funding needs. Additionally, some members of the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce submitted independent ARPA proposals or advised OUP bureaus and departments on ARPA proposal development. Importantly, the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce intentionally linked ARPA Spending Plan input to recommendations related to structural and systemic transformation. By recommending ARPA initiatives provide seed funding for planning and program design, the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce could focus policy recommendations on sustaining the positive outcomes of these programs. The emphasis on aligning Cook County's ARPA Spending Plan and the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce's recommendations is documented in Appendix B: Alignment with Cook County's ARPA Spending Plan.

Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce Recommendations

After providing input on Cook County's American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Spending Plan, the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce focused on creating recommendations for actions Cook County government should take to address structural barriers that prevent the meaningful advancement of equity across Cook County and ensure Cook County provides equitable, excellent service to all residents. The Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce organized these recommendations by subgroup in alignment with the [Cook County Policy Roadmap](#).

Healthy Communities



The Healthy Communities subgroup of the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce recommends Cook County:

1.1 Adopt a Health Equity in All Policies (HEiAP) approach in policymaking to ensure Cook County government factors health considerations into its implementation of policies and programs and identifies gaps to improve health outcomes for all residents and communities.

The coronavirus pandemic highlighted the links between well-being, health, and the economy. Taking a Health Equity in All Policies (HEiAP) approach will support inclusive and sustainable recovery from the pandemic.[7] HEiAP integrates health equity considerations into non-health sector policies, systems, and environmental changes to address the many interrelated factors that advance equity and improve health for Cook County residents and communities. Under the leadership of the Office of the President and with support and technical assistance from the Cook County Department of Public Health (CCDPH), all Cook County agencies should conduct an initial health equity assessment and commit to periodic health equity reviews of policies and programs to determine how they eliminate or perpetuate inequities and change these initiatives accordingly. CCDPH will provide training, technical assistance, and resources to build HEiAP capacity in municipalities within suburban Cook County and to strengthen community-based organizations' and residents' capacity to evaluate and respond to public programs and policies with an HEiAP lens. This recommendation builds on best practices and aligns with the Offices Under the President's ongoing work to integrate racial equity assessment criteria in its budgeting process.

7 For more information on Health Equity in All Policies, please see the following resources: [ChangeLabSolutions Health in All Policies](#), [ChangeLabSolutions Health in All Policies for a Stronger Recovery](#), and [Public Health Institute's Health in All Policies: A Guide for State and Local Government](#).

Healthy Communities, cont'd.

- Cook County should continue using Dr. Camara Phyllis Jones' definition of health equity to support the implementation of this recommendation: "Healthequity is assurance of the conditions for optimal health for all people. Achieving health equity requires valuing all individuals and populations equally, recognizing and rectifying historical injustices, and providing resources according to need."
- The subgroup recommends exploring models of Health Equity in All Policies initiatives from the City of Chicago (Illinois); the City of Richmond (California); the State of California, other jurisdictions and can support Cook County by compiling and vetting these background materials. Cook County's HEiAP efforts should align with similar initiatives underway in the City of Chicago.

1.2 Create a behavioral health authority to coordinate a comprehensive, accessible, and culturally responsive continuum of behavioral health services for suburban Cook County, including preventative services, that recognizes the intersections between health, housing, and justice involvement.

Behavioral health services are often inaccessible, fragmented, and disconnected from other social service needs, especially in suburban Cook County. In response, Cook County Health (CCH) recently announced transformative plans to create a Department of Mental Health, supported by American Rescue Plan Act funds. To ensure this work meets residents' needs, CCH should conduct a comprehensive behavioral health needs assessment of suburban Cook County and produce a data-driven regional plan for addressing gaps through the Department of Mental Health. The Department of Mental Health must take a comprehensive approach to the health of the whole person. These services should be accessible via telehealth. The Department of Mental Health should also support the work of CCDPH and public health organizations to address population health and use trauma-informed public health approaches to prevention and upstream interventions that contribute to health and prevent illness, such as housing, employment, and education. The leadership of the Department of Mental Health must include public health professionals as well as clinical service representation.

- CCH and its partners should invest in developing the pipeline of future behavioral health practitioners in communities of color and increase investments in community-based clinics with behavioral health professionals closer to where residents live to build capacity for culturally responsive behavioral health providers.

Healthy Communities, cont'd.

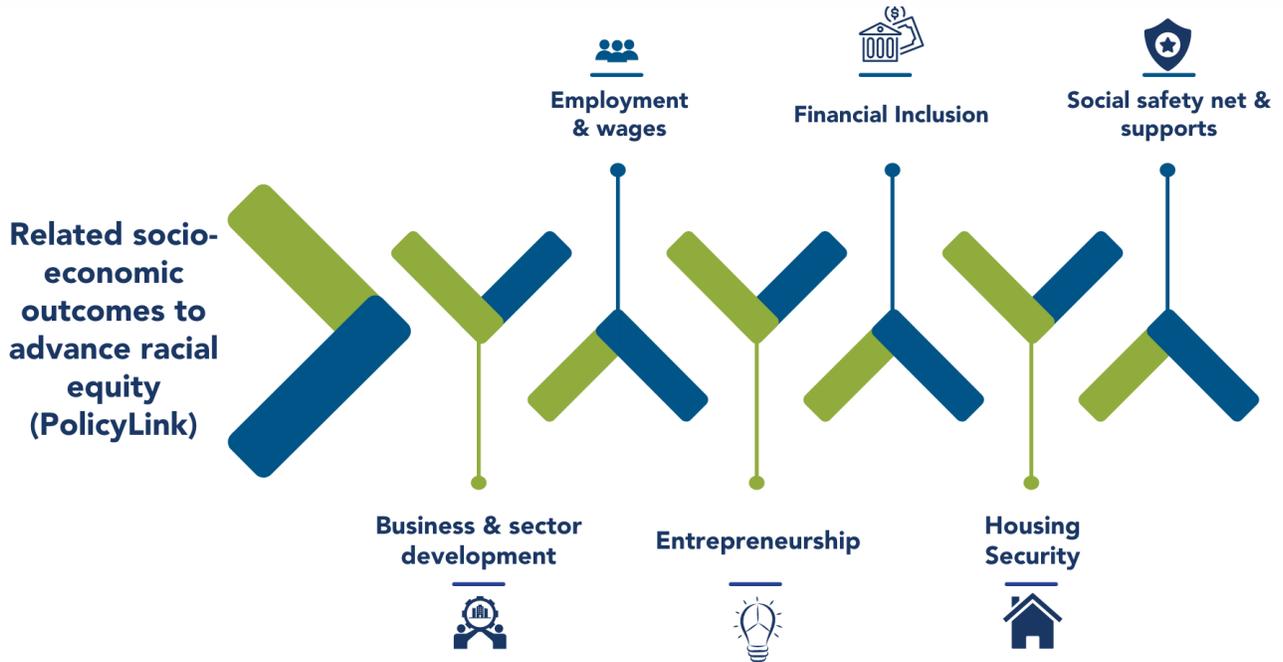
- The subgroup's input influenced Cook County's allocation of aligned ARPA investments (see Appendix B): Additional Health Personnel and Support at Existing Clinics (CCH), Behavioral Health Expansion (CCDPH), Behavioral Healthcare Specialists at HACC (HACC), Cook County Behavioral Health Services (CCH), and Sustaining Mental Health Hotline for Suburban Residents (CCDPH).

1.3 Develop a countywide Community Information Exchange System to holistically address social drivers of health outcomes, deliver whole person care, and better inform and drive more equitable allocation of resources to residents across Cook County.

Cook County should support the development of a community information exchange (CIE) system similar to those in San Diego County, California and King County, Washington, with technical assistance for municipalities and community partners to support adoption. Implementing a CIE will allow service providers and partners from across disciplines and expertise to use shared language, a shared resource database, and an integrated technology platform to deliver more enhanced and holistic person-centered care to residents. By enabling individuals to receive the whole person care they need to be healthy and thrive, a CIE will reduce health disparities, promote racial equity, and improve health and social outcomes for people in Cook County. The development of such a system advances true collaboration and enables person-centered interventions and interactions across health and human services. This recommendation builds on Cook County's leadership and commitment to developing a regional 2-1-1 system to enhance service coordination and resident experience across Chicago's metropolitan region, in partnership with United Way of Metro Chicago and the City of Chicago.

- Cook County should support learning cohorts with municipalities and community partners once the CIE is developed to foster strong adoption of this important resource.
- The subgroup's input influenced Cook County's allocation of aligned ARPA investments (see Appendix B): Community Information Exchange (BED).

Vital Communities



The Vital Communities subgroup of the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce recommends Cook County:

2.1 Support collaborative efforts to reform Cook County's property assessment and taxation system to promote equity and fairness and reduce the racial wealth gap.

Studies have found property assessment practices across the United States place a disproportionately high tax burden on lower-value properties while undervaluing high-value properties. This tax burden shift to Black and Latine communities prevents residents from building home equity and pursuing financial security through stable home ownership. To address the inequities harming Black and Latine communities, Cook County is convening a Property Assessment and Taxation Working Group to collaboratively advance efforts to ensure the property assessment and taxation system produces fair and equitable results. Comprised of the property assessment and taxation system's separately elected offices, the Working Group focuses on identifying and addressing the system's inequities through a transparent, comprehensive, collaborative, and data-driven approach. In addition, the Working Group is exploring how Cook County can use the property tax incentives system more effectively and efficiently to encourage commercial development in Black and Latine communities that have experienced disinvestment for decades.

Vital Communities, cont'd.

2.2 Increase Cook County's capacity to enforce Cook County's fair housing laws to reduce unlawful housing discrimination and affirmatively further fair housing.

Often, the same structural barriers and social inequities that create income insecurity prevent people from being able to afford or access basic housing. Cook County has taken important steps to promote and protect fair housing, including passing the [Just Housing Amendment](#) in 2019 and the [Residential Tenant Landlord Ordinance](#) in 2020. However, laws are only as good as the enforcement and education components built around them. In alignment with the Budget for Black Lives Coalition's previous recommendations, the Cook County Department of Human Rights and Ethics should hire dedicated staff to coordinate enforcement efforts on the Just Housing Amendment and other fair housing laws, fund more investigators, and allocate funding for outreach, testing, and education to ensure tenants and landlords are aware of these laws and enforcement mechanisms.

2.3 Build a more resilient housing and shelter system to provide dignified and reliable support to people experiencing homelessness in suburban Cook County, with the goal of achieving functional zero homelessness.

In suburban Cook County, people who identify as Black or African American make up 60 percent of emergency shelter guests but are just 18 percent of the population (Alliance to End Homelessness in Suburban Cook County) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Cook County is committed to ending homelessness and addressing the significant racial disparities in the County's unhoused population to create a community where everyone has a safe and stable home. Cook County aims to achieve functional zero homelessness, meaning Cook County's homeless system prevents homelessness wherever possible and ensure homelessness is rare, brief, and one-time if it does occur. Led by the Cook County Bureau of Economic Development (BED), Cook County should enhance its partnerships and coordination with organizations serving people experiencing homelessness to expand access to crisis shelters. Cook County should fully fund permanent supportive housing and a network of emergency shelter beds, and ensure the system meets the needs of returning residents.

- Cook County should create a Landlord Incentive & Mitigation Fund to encourage landlords to rent to residents who may have a previous eviction on their record.
- The subgroup's input influenced Cook County's allocation of aligned ARPA investments (see Appendix B): Cook County Legal Aid for Housing and Debt, Emergency Mortgage Assistance (BED), Emergency Rental Assistance (BED), Fixed-Site Emergency Shelter for People Experiencing Homelessness (BED), Hotel-Based Sheltering (BED), and Permanent Supportive Housing for People Experiencing Homelessness (BED).

Vital Communities, cont'd.

2.4 Increase Cook County resources to create new units of affordable housing across Cook County to promote housing stability and affordability.

Affordable housing creation and preservation is essential to housing stability in Cook County. Nationally, Black and Latina women renters are most likely to experience housing cost burden, where more than 30 percent of income goes toward housing costs. In Cook County, 57 percent of Black households and 51 percent of Latine households are housing cost-burdened, compared to 41 percent of White households (National Equity Atlas, 2019). Cook County has supported affordable housing initiatives through the Housing Authority of Cook County, the Cook County Land Bank Authority, and BED, typically with funds provided by the federal government. To expand this commitment, Cook County must invest County resources to create new units of affordable housing to meet the needs of Cook County residents and prevent continued displacement of Black and Latine residents from Cook County. Cook County must use a clear racial equity lens in planning for these units.

2.5 Provide direct financial assistance to residents to sustain and preserve homeownership to address the racial wealth gap and prevent continued displacement.

Home ownership is a key avenue for residents to build wealth over time. However, historic and continued disparities have left Black and Latine residents and other residents of Cook County with marginalized identities unable to purchase a home or build long-term home equity. In Cook County, the home ownership rate for Black residents is 41 percent compared to 66 percent for White residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).

- BED should create a program to provide funding for deferred maintenance grants, mortgage and property tax assistance, and home modifications for people with disabilities to help low- and moderate-income residents stay in their homes and build long-term home equity.
- The subgroup's input influenced Cook County's allocation of aligned ARPA investments (see Appendix B): Cook County Water Affordability Program (BED), Cook County Residential Water Conservation and Energy Efficiency Program (BED), Emergency Mortgage Assistance (BED), Healthy Homes and Deep Energy Retrofit Residential Properties (DES), Residential Renewable Energy Subsidy (DES), and Supporting Apprenticeships in Cook County (BED).

Vital Communities, cont'd.

2.6 Continue championing government's role in launching programs and policies that support residents' economic security and increase economic mobility.

Cook County should continue exploring and championing policies that provide direct financial support to residents living in poverty. Motivated by racist stereotypes, past government policies have created large administrative barriers for residents to access services and placed significant restrictions on how residents can use public assistance. Alleviating poverty requires reframing government's approach by centering racial equity and economic justice. This recommendation builds on President Preckwinkle's national leadership supporting publicly funded guaranteed income programs and other policy changes at the local, state, and federal level. Cook County government's recent announcement that it will launch one of the largest publicly funded guaranteed income programs in the country and President Preckwinkle's commitment to making this a permanent program serve as a model for the innovative policymaking needed to improve economic mobility and equity for low- and moderate-income residents. Cook County has also committed to providing direct, flexible financial assistance to residents by launching an emergency relief fund and encouraging workforce providers to leverage existing Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) barrier reduction funds to support jobseekers with transit, childcare, and other needs so they can access and stay in jobs.

- Building on the success of its Resident Cash Assistance program funded by CARES, Cook County should establish a rapid response fund to provide more flexible, real-time support to residents experiencing financial hardship.
- The subgroup's input influenced Cook County's allocation of aligned ARPA investments (see Appendix B): Guaranteed Income Program (BED) and Abolish Medical Debt (OOP).

2.7 Align Cook County's workforce investments intentionally and strategically to support high quality jobs that promote residents' economic mobility and equity.

To achieve the goal of creating economic security and promoting economic mobility, workforce investments must provide high quality jobs for Cook County residents. In Cook County, Black residents experience unemployment at twice the rate of White residents, with 2020 unemployment at 14 percent for Black residents and 7 percent for White residents (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Cook County should ensure its workforce investments advance equity by aggressively enforcing Cook County's Minimum Wage and Living Wage provisions and supporting sectors that pay living wages, provide good benefits, create potentials for career pathways, and reduce precarious work environments.

Vital Communities, cont'd.

As Cook County and the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership increasingly use a sector-driven approach to workforce and economic development, targeted sectors and businesses should be encouraged to do the same to ensure these efforts produce high quality jobs. In its work with the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership, Cook County should also define and publicly report equity goals for workforce investments and connect these goals to its support of specific sectors.

- Cook County should investigate the feasibility of developing policies and mechanisms to ensure that businesses that work with Cook County are held to high standards for public accountability and promote equitable employment outcomes. Receiving public funds should be contingent on following the County's living wage and earned sick leave policies, regardless of the standards set by the municipalities in which those businesses are located. Participating businesses should be subject to an annual audit by the Cook County Commission on Human Rights to ensure compliance.
- The subgroup's input influenced Cook County's allocation of aligned ARPA investments (see Appendix B): Businesses Reducing Impact on the Environment (BRITE) Fund (DES), Community Conservation Corps (BED), Investing in Families and Youth (BED), Suburban Cook County Worker Protection Program (CCDPH), and Supporting Apprenticeships in Cook County (BED).

2.8 Develop the small business and entrepreneurship ecosystem, especially for Black and Latine residents, to reduce the racial wealth gap.

Cook County should continue supporting women and minority owned-small businesses through the small business grant and technical assistance programs created in response to the coronavirus pandemic. Cook County should also support entrepreneurship programs for Black and Latine residents. Black and Latine business owners and entrepreneurs face significant disparities in access to capital at every stage, from early business development to expansion to emergency needs. This limits the survival and growth rate of these companies and limits wealth building in Black and Latine communities. Cook County should strategically target this support to suburban Cook County communities, which lack the existing private and nonprofit assistance available in the City of Chicago.

- The subgroup's input influenced Cook County's allocation of aligned ARPA investments (see Appendix B): Small Business Assistance Program & One Stop Shop (BED), Small Business Grant Program (BED), and Veteran Grant Program (Department of Veterans Affairs).

Vital Communities, cont'd.

2.9 Pursue place-based investment through a community-centered approach to support a deeper and more sustainable commitment to implementing locally-desired community and economic development.

Cook County should work with the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce to identify high vulnerability communities and pilot a process to meet community-defined needs for economic development, community building, community safety, public health, education or social services, in alignment with the Transforming Places ARPA initiative. Supporting these communities over a sustained period can ensure strong implementation and capacity-building, as well as help attract additional public, private, and philanthropic resources. This place-based approach will be a paradigm shift for the County and will be community-driven and community-led. Place-based investment presents the exciting opportunity to create longer-term, sustainable investments with a shared design, shared stewardship, and shared accountability for outcomes and impact. To support economic equity, criteria for determining partner communities should include both race and income to avoid the unintentional consequence of exacerbating economic inequity within communities.

- Cook County should use data, including the Cook County Social Vulnerability Index and the U.S. Census, to define “place” by either community, municipality, or zip code and transparently identify places to pilot this approach.
- The subgroup’s input influenced Cook County’s allocation of aligned ARPA investments (see Appendix B): Transforming Places (BED).

2.10 Develop innovative programs to assist communities and residents that have been hard-hit by predatory lending.

Predatory lenders have drained billions of dollars from predominantly Black, Latine, and lower-income communities since extremely high-cost lending was legalized in Illinois in 1985. For 2019 - 2020 in the Chicago metropolitan area, the prevalence of payday lending in Black communities was nearly six times the prevalence of payday lending in White communities.[8] The average annual percentage rate (APR) on a payday loan in Illinois was 297 percent in 2020 (Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, 2021). The Illinois Legislative Black Caucus spearheaded, and Governor J.B. Pritzker signed, the Predatory Loan Prevention Act in 2021, which caps APRs at 36 percent.

8 This information comes from a Woodstock Institute Freedom of Information Act request to the Illinois Department of Financial & Professional Regulation for Data Registered to the Illinois Payday Loan Reform Act Consumer Reporting Service (commonly referred to as the Illinois Payday Loan Database).

Vital Communities, cont'd.

Since then, predatory lenders like payday and auto title lenders have mostly left Illinois, leaving boarded-up storefronts in their wake. At the same time, unscrupulous online lenders based out-of-state are trying to fill the void left by the payday and auto title lenders. Cook County should work in partnership with the State of Illinois and City of Chicago to develop programs targeted at the communities ravaged the most by predatory loans to encourage businesses to open in boarded-up predatory loan stores, assist consumers with short-term cash needs, and help consumers who became ensnared in the predatory loan debt trap before the rate cap took effect.

2.11 Strengthen and enforce Cook County's worker protection laws to ensure all workers receive fair compensation and protection from violations.

Employers steal an estimated \$7.3 million from workers in owed wages each week in Cook County (Bernhardt, et al., 2009). Immigrant workers are 1.5 times more likely than their U.S.-born counterparts to experience a minimum wage violation (Theodore, Auer, Hollon, & Morales-Mirque, 2010). Among U.S.-born workers, Black workers are 27 times more likely than their White counterparts to experience a minimum wage violation (Theodore, Auer, Hollon, & Morales-Mirque, 2010). The pandemic has highlighted the critical importance of workers being able to take paid sick time when needed and has shown that paid sick leave policy is a health equity and racial equity issue. The Cook County Department of Human Rights and Ethics should fund more investigators to investigate violations, audit current contracts to ensure compliance with the Living Wage, and fund outreach and education to ensure workers and employers are aware of the minimum wage and earned sick leave ordinance and enforcement mechanisms. Cook County should amend the existing minimum wage and earned sick leave ordinances to eliminate the ability for municipalities to "opt out" of them. In line with the County's health equity approach to all policies, these two ordinances should be reframed as public health ordinances in order to provide the County with that legal authority.

Safe and Thriving Communities



The Safe and Thriving Communities subgroup of the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce recommends Cook County:

3.1 Improve interagency data-sharing and public access to deidentified and disaggregated criminal legal system data to increase transparency and usefulness, with specific attention on data that identifies racial and ethnic disparities and operational challenges that contribute to barriers and collateral consequences for those impacted by the criminal legal system.

Improved quality, availability, and transparency of criminal legal system data would empower County agencies and the public to identify and measurably address disparities exacerbated by the criminal legal system. While Cook County has made significant progress to increase the availability and transparency of criminal legal system data, the collection, management, and publication of data remains inconsistent across agencies. Cook County should incentivize all County criminal legal system agencies to enhance data collection, standardize data collection and management practices across agencies, update data management systems, and develop formal research bodies to advance data-driven, community-informed decision-making. Cook County agencies should intentionally receive input from practitioners who work with people most impacted by the criminal legal system to ensure that publicly available data meets their needs. Coupled with a commitment and plan for public accessibility and engagement, these improvements would further promote data-driven decision-making, create the infrastructure necessary to improve criminal justice outcomes, help stakeholders, service providers and the public better engage with Cook County's criminal legal system data, develop meaningful tools for understanding the geographic impact of the criminal legal system, and reduce operational costs that can be reinvested in preventative measures that break cycles of mass detention and incarceration in Cook County.

Safe and Thriving Communities, cont'd.

3.2 Develop a comprehensive and coordinated countywide re-entry plan that works to support residents returning to their communities from detention, jail, and prison by removing structural barriers to housing, economic security, and opportunity, including the negative impacts of criminal and juvenile records.

Cook County's residents who return to their communities from detention, jail, or prison face increased barriers to basic needs and opportunities. They often return to communities with the greatest history of disinvestment and persistent inequity. Supporting returning residents' success and stability builds stronger, safer communities. Cook County should partner with the State of Illinois, City of Chicago, expert stakeholders, and individuals with lived experience to develop a state and local continuum of coordinated re-entry services. This coordinated approach should include a foundation of equitably meeting returning residents' health, employment, housing, and social service needs. At the Cook County Jail, Cook County agencies should begin program coordination at the time of individual's admission to jail, to ensure a plan is in place upon release, regardless of their length of time in custody. Cook County should leverage its existing resources across all County agencies and networks to expand housing options, access to healthcare, and public benefits for returning residents.

- The subgroup's input influenced Cook County's allocation of aligned ARPA investments (see Appendix B): Behavioral Health Expansion (CCDPH), Community Information Exchange (BED), Emergency Reentry Vouchers (JAC), Justice Reinvestment Plan (JAC), and Reentry Housing Resources (JAC).

3.3 Support community-informed alternatives to policing in suburban Cook County to minimize harmful interactions between police and residents, especially Black residents, and promote community safety.

Suburban Cook County includes communities with long histories of disinvestment, persistent inequity, and limited resources, resulting in numerous barriers to accessing physical and mental health services that could prevent emergency calls to 911. Instead, in moments of crisis residents often resort to calling 911, which responds with law enforcement officers rather than behavioral health specialists. These encounters have been known to result in negative and sometimes deadly interactions and residents' involvement in the justice system where White communities may have avoided such outcomes. Cook County should strategically invest in alternatives to 911 responses to behavioral health crises and should continue community engagement to develop alternatives to police response in emergency situations that best serve the most affected communities and align with their needs and priorities.

- The subgroup's input influenced Cook County's allocation of aligned ARPA investments (see Appendix B): Crisis Intervention Pilot Program for Cook County (Cook County Health) and 911 Alternative Model Study and Strategic Plan (JAC).

Smart Communities



The Smart Communities and Sustainable Communities subgroup of the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce recommends Cook County:

4.1 Increase access to and availability and affordability of public transportation to connect communities and ensure transit equity.

Residents of the South Side of Chicago and near-in south suburbs have some of the longest commutes in the Chicago metropolitan area, with travelers often making multiple transit connections to reach a job. Commuting and traveling via public transportation can be expensive, with many households paying an outsized amount of their monthly income toward transportation. Further, those who are most reliant on public transportation - Black and Latine communities, low-income residents, and people with disabilities - often find the transit system does not serve them well. Service may be too infrequent to be convenient, a bus may have stopped running by the time the late shift ends, a key station might not have elevators for a person in a wheelchair, and fare rules may make it prohibitively expensive to transfer between services offered by different agencies. Cook County should partner with transit service providers and center equity at the heart of all policy and programmatic decisions.

- Cook County should expand direct investment in public transportation and continue its commitment to the Fair Transit model to increase transit affordability and enhance service. Cook County should partner with the transit agencies to implement key projects that improve transportation options for transit-reliant communities, including better bus service, improved stations, and safer routes to access transit.
- The transit system faces financial challenges because of decreased ridership and decreased revenue during the pandemic. In response, Cook County should champion policies, such as revising the required farebox recovery ratio or encouraging employer support for transit, that would place the transit system on firmer financial footing.

Smart Communities, cont'd.

- Cook County should partner with the Regional Transportation Authority and transit service boards to help implement full fare integration to allow for discounted transfers between services offered by different agencies, which would create a more affordable and convenient transit system.
- Cook County should make its building assets as transit friendly as possible and prioritize housing and other economic development investments that are located near accessible transit.
- Cook County should adopt and publish equity metrics in County-funded transportation projects.
- Cook County should factor equity into Cook County appointments to transit service boards.
- The subgroup's input influenced Cook County's allocation of aligned ARPA investments (see Appendix B): Electric Vehicle Charging Stations (DES) and Invest in Cook Expansion (DOTH).

4.2 Increase digital connectivity and access to broadband infrastructure and digital devices for residents, particularly in communities of color.

The pandemic has exposed how essential digital connectivity is for accessing critical government services, participating in the workforce, and staying connected to loved ones. However, County residents have disparate access to internet and technological devices. 6.5 percent of Black and Latine households in the County lack a computer, and 15.3 percent of County households lack internet access (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). Cook County should adopt a regional approach to increasing digital access and partner with high vulnerability municipalities to develop a regional Digital Action Plan and provide technical assistance to expand their broadband internet infrastructure. Cook County should also provide financial assistance for internet service and digital devices to support households in those impacted communities.

- The subgroup's input influenced Cook County's allocation of aligned ARPA investments (see Appendix B): Broadband Expansion at HACC Properties (HACC), Chicago Southland Fiber Network Expansion (BOT), and Digital Equity Planning (BED).

Sustainable Communities



The Smart Communities and Sustainable Communities subgroup of the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce recommends Cook County:

5.1 Invest in climate-resilient infrastructure to address decades of disinvestment in Black and Latine communities.

The Chicagoland area is already experiencing impacts of climate change. Due to segregation and disinvestment, Black, Latine, and low-income communities will experience these impacts first and worst. As it prepares for continued impacts of climate change, Cook County must prioritize equity in planning and investing, to ensure all communities are prepared.

- Cook County should evaluate flood risk with other government partners in coordination with Cook County’s Hazard Mitigation Plan to inform future investments in both infrastructure, such as large sewers and flood control structures, and nature-based solutions that store water while providing amenities such as parks and trees. Cook County should support communities in building resiliency through technical assistance in planning and grants to support infrastructure, renewable energy, and hazard preparation.
- The subgroup’s input influenced Cook County’s allocating ARPA investments in alignment with this recommendation (see Appendix B): Climate Resiliency Plan Development (DES), Neighborhood Revitalization Brownfield Remediation (DES), Rain Ready Plan Implementation (DES), Residential Renewable Energy Subsidy (DES); Resilience Hubs (DEMRS and DES), and Stormwater Management Project Implementation (DOTH).

Sustainable Communities, cont'd.

5.2 Establish a Cook County Environmental Justice Policy to incorporate environmental and equity impacts in policy and program decision-making.

Cook County's environmental justice policy must incorporate the input and knowledge of communities disproportionately affected by climate change and over-burdened by pollution. Cook County should invest in environmental justice organizations working directly with impacted communities through grantmaking, data sharing, and technical assistance. Given the strong links between environmental justice and population health, this recommendation should be closely aligned with the recommendation to adopt a Health Equity in All Policies (HEiAP) approach.

5.3 Support actions that improve both public health and environmental health for the overall well-being of residents, particularly in Black, Latine, and low-income communities.

Cook County can remedy the harmful impacts of historical locations of polluting industries near low-income communities and Black and Latine communities by improving environmental conditions in those areas, targeting the economic benefits of the new clean economy to those residents, and increasing public participation in economic decisions that have environmental impacts. Cook County should partner with municipalities to provide technical assistance to conduct evaluations of lead services lines. Cook County should also provide opportunities for residents to address immediate health and safety needs within their homes. Cook County should support business and community-level investments that reduce pollution and improve air quality.

- The subgroup's input influenced Cook County's allocating ARPA investments in alignment with this recommendation (see Appendix B): Building Healthy Communities Initiative (CCDPH), Businesses Reducing Impact on the Environment (BRITE) Fund (DES), Good Food Purchasing Program (CCDPH), Healthy Homes and Deep Energy Retrofit Residential Properties (DES), Implementing the Southeast Cook County Land Acquisition Plan (FPDCC), Electric Vehicle Charging Stations (DES), Lead, Leaking & Obsolete Service Line Replacement Pilot Program (BED), Lead Pipe Removal at Vera Yates Homes and Richard Flowers Home (HACC), Lead Poisoning Prevention Fund (CCDPH), Riparian Restoration (FPDCC), South Suburban Hazardous Household Waste Facility and Satellite Collection Locations (DES), and Urban Farming Gap Analysis (DES).

Open Communities



To best serve residents, the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce recommends Cook County:

6.1 Develop a comprehensive equity-centered grantmaking strategy to promote equitable access to resources and increase capacity to deliver services in partnership with smaller, grassroots, emerging, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color-led organizations anchored in marginalized communities.

Cook County relies on strong partnerships with community-based organizations to deliver many services to residents, particularly those in disinvested communities across Cook County. These community-based organizations are often BIPOC-led, smaller, grassroots, and emerging organizations that have far less access to financial resources compared with larger, mainstream, and White-led entities. They also lack the human capital infrastructure and supports needed to increase service delivery despite serving as trusted and credible sources within their communities. This misalignment of resources and infrastructure poses barriers to the long-term sustainability and impact of the County's increased investments through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) and the Equity Fund Taskforce Initiative. In developing an equity-centered grantmaking strategy, Cook County should both streamline its internal grantmaking processes across departments and bureaus and work with organizations to increase their access to funding and strengthen their internal capacity to improve and maximize service delivery.

- In advancing this work, Cook County should explore administering a uniform grant application to ease the application process for organizations, shift its grantmaking policy to allow for multi-year grants, implement an advance payment policy that allows Cook County to provide a percent of funds upfront to assist with launching initiatives where appropriate, and incorporate equity metrics and scoring into its grantmaking processes.

Open Communities, cont'd.

6.2 Establish flexible, accessible, and empowering pathways for residents of historically disinvested or marginalized communities to meaningfully participate in developing and implementing County policies and programs.

Cook County's efforts to repair the historic and persistent harms of racial discrimination, segregation, and systemic oppression must be informed by the needs and well-being of residents who have disproportionately experienced these harms. Without deliberate strategies to include residents with lived experience in decision-making processes, County policies and programs are likely to perpetuate the harms we seek to address, rather than eliminate them. To meaningfully center the perspectives of residents, decision-making spaces must change, physically and structurally. Cook County must hold meetings in the communities impacted by existing or proposed policies and programs outside of traditional business hours, so residents can reasonably attend. When engaging residents in policy and program development, Cook County should compensate residents for their time and subject matter expertise, commensurate to how the County engages professional consultants and values formal education and certifications. Through flexible, accessible, and empowering pathways for resident participation, government policies and practices become more community-led, are more responsive to the needs of their residents, are better positioned to adapt to changing needs and landscapes and have a better chance of overall success.

6.3 Implement countywide best practices to measure the impact of policies and programs on immigrant and refugee communities to ensure Cook County's work to reduce racial and ethnic inequities is inclusive and actively works to protect immigrants and refugees.

Over 21 percent of Cook County residents are immigrants (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). To meaningfully address racial and ethnic disparities, Cook County must create and implement intentional policies and practices for measuring impact, increasing access to programs and services, and reducing disparities for immigrant and refugee residents. Cook County should create best practices for explicitly considering these populations in County policies, programs, and services. Cook County must uplift and protect immigrant and refugee communities, ensure access to culturally responsive services that protect immigrant and refugee rights, help immigrants and refugees navigate systemic barriers to accessing State and County services, and increase opportunities to thrive.

- Cook County should create internal guidelines for collecting data and information that effectively measure impact on immigrant and refugee communities, while accounting for the privacy sensitivities these communities may face.
- Cook County should conduct equity audits across all County agencies, particularly public-facing services and programs, to identify and eliminate gaps in services and barriers that impede Cook County immigrants and refugees from fully accessing or using services.

Continuing the Work

Cook County government will begin exploring the feasibility of the above Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce recommendations, in close partnership with the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce. To support this work, Cook County will:

1. Leverage the recommendations above to inform its work to equitably distribute ARPA and other grant funding to organizations who are best positioned to work directly with their communities to solve problems;
2. Continue convening the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce every other month through 2022 to discuss recommendation feasibility and implementation and other relevant topics;
3. Hold a special hearing in May 2022 to bring awareness to the [2021 Cook County Equity Fund Report](#);
4. Hold a public hearing in fall 2022 on the Equity Fund Special Purpose Fund in alignment with the Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) budget cycle;^[9]
5. Publish the [2022 Cook County Equity Fund Report](#) in December 2022; and
6. Establish a Cannabis Business Development Fund to create a revolving fund to support cannabis-related businesses owned and operated by Social Equity Applicants who reside in Cook County, recognizing the link between the Equity Fund and cannabis tax revenue and the related history of incarceration and exclusion communities of color have faced.

In alignment with the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce, the Office of the President proposes the following initial spending plan for the \$50M existing Equity Fund Taskforce Initiative funds over FY22 and FY23:[MH(O1)]

⁹ Cook County's fiscal year runs from the beginning of December to the end of November. Therefore, Cook County's FY23 budget covers December 1, 2022 through November 30, 2023



Initial Spending Plan

\$50 Million over FY22 and FY23

Initiative

Transforming Places (place-based pilot)

In alignment with various Healthy, Vital, and Safe and Thriving Communities recommendations, Cook County will identify high vulnerability communities and co-design a process to meet community-defined needs for economic development, community building, community safety, public health, education or social services. Cook County will support participating communities over a sustained period to ensure implementation and capacity-building and help attract additional public, private, and philanthropic resources.

Cook County Lead: Bureau of Econ. Dev.

FY22-FY23 Budget: \$15 million

Add'l Funding Sources: \$500,000 (ARPA)

Initial Proposed Program Administration:

Equity Fund allocation will support partnering with United Way of Metro Chicago as Program Administrator and will fund work in 3-5 identified community areas.

Equity in Grantmaking

In alignment with the Open Communities recommendations, Cook County will develop a comprehensive equity-centered grantmaking strategy to promote equitable access to resources for community-based organizations and increase capacity to deliver services in partnership with smaller, grassroots, emerging, and BIPOC-led organizations anchored in marginalized communities.

Cook County Lead: Office of the President

FY22-FY23 Budget: \$15 million

Add'l Funding Sources: None at this time

Initial Proposed Program Administration:

Equity Fund allocation will cover a consultancy for planning and implementing best practices. The primary use of funds will be administered through a competitive grant process for eligible community-based organizations.

Community Information Exchange

In alignment with the Healthy Communities recommendations, Cook County will support the development of a Community Information Exchange (CIE) for suburban Cook County and the City of Chicago to enhance the 211 system already being collaboratively developed by Cook County, the City of Chicago and a range of partners.

Cook County Lead: Bureau of Econ. Dev.

FY22-FY23 Budget: \$10 million

Add'l Funding Sources: \$10 million (ARPA)

Initial Proposed Program Administration:

Equity Fund allocation will support the selection of a competitively bid vendor to serve as Program Administrator and the development of the selected technology platform.



Initial Spending Plan

\$50 Million over FY22 and FY23

Initiative

Cook County Land Bank Authority

In alignment with the Vital Communities recommendations, the Cook County Land Bank Authority will continue working to increase affordable housing stock and economic opportunity in systematically disadvantaged communities. This will be done through a three-pronged approach:

1. Propose legislative changes at the local and State level that will reduce the amount of time vacant property sits fallow in these areas.
2. Increase the efficiency of the property tax judicial process by reducing the amount of time a vacant property is in limbo without ownership and increase the volume of CCLBA work in this area to stabilize communities.

3. Strategically focus redevelopment efforts with community and municipal partners to leverage scarce resources through community planning and incentives. Over 20 landbanking agreements with various agencies are now underway.

Cook County Lead:
Cook County Land Bank Authority

FY22-FY23 Budget: \$5 million

Add'l Funding Sources: None at this time

Initial Proposed Program Administration:

Equity Fund allocation will go directly to the Cook County Land Bank Authority to support the administrative and operational costs of their work.

Cannabis Business Development Fund

The Cannabis Business Development Fund will be established to support cannabis-related businesses owned and operated by Social Equity applicants, residing in Cook County. The funds will be used to promote, facilitate, and assist social equity programs related to the cannabis industry, economic development, and restorative programs aimed at improving disproportionately impacted areas throughout Cook County.

Cook County Lead:
Bureau of Economic Development

FY22-FY23 Budget: \$2 million

Add'l Funding Sources: None at this time

Initial Proposed Program Administration:

Equity Fund allocation will support the administrative costs associated with establishing the Cannabis Business Development Fund. The remaining funds will be distributed through a competitive grant process for eligible social equity applicants.

Other Priority Uses as outlined in the 2021 Cook County Equity Fund Report:

Cook County may use the remaining reserve of the Equity Fund Taskforce Initiative to support other priorities outlined in this Report. The Offices Under the President will provide advance notice to the Cook County Board of Commissioners and the Bureau of Finance will continue to include expenditures in financial reporting.

Cook County Lead: Office of the President

FY22-FY23 Budget: To be determined

Add'l Funding Sources: None at this time

Initial Proposed Program Administration:

To be determined

Acknowledgements

This 2021 Cook County Equity Fund Report is the result of the expertise, insight, and commitment of over 80 members of the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce. Cook County extends our deepest gratitude to Taskforce members for their partnership and leadership.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce Compiled Recommendations

Policy Pillar: Healthy Communities

1.1) Adopt a Health Equity in All Policies (HEiAP) approach in policymaking to ensure Cook County government factors health considerations into its implementation of policies and programs and identifies gaps to improve health outcomes for all residents and communities.

1.2) Create a behavioral health authority to coordinate a comprehensive, accessible, and culturally responsive continuum of behavioral health services for suburban Cook County, including preventative services, that recognizes the intersections between health, housing, and justice involvement.

1.3) Develop a countywide Community Information Exchange System to holistically address social drivers of health outcomes, deliver whole person care, and better inform and drive more equitable allocation of resources to residents across Cook County.

Policy Pillar: Vital Communities

2.1) Support collaborative efforts to reform Cook County's property assessment and taxation system to promote equity and fairness and reduce the racial wealth gap.

2.2) Increase Cook County's capacity to enforce Cook County's fair housing laws to reduce unlawful housing discrimination and affirmatively further fair housing.

2.3) Build a more resilient housing and shelter system to provide dignified and reliable support to people experiencing homelessness in suburban Cook County, with the goal of achieving functional zero homelessness.

2.4) Increase Cook County resources to create new units of affordable housing across Cook County to promote housing stability and affordability.

2.5) Provide direct financial assistance to residents to sustain and preserve homeownership to address the racial wealth gap and prevent continued displacement.

Appendix

Appendix A (cont'd): Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce Compiled Recommendations

Policy Pillar: Vital Communities

2.6) Continue championing government's role in launching programs and policies that support residents' economic security and increase economic mobility.

2.7) Align Cook County's workforce investments intentionally and strategically to support high quality jobs that promote residents' economic mobility and equity.

2.8) Develop the small business and entrepreneurship ecosystem, especially for Black and Latine residents, to reduce the racial wealth gap.

2.9) Pursue place-based investment through a community-centered approach to support a deeper and more sustainable commitment to implementing locally-desired community and economic development.

2.10) Develop innovative programs to assist communities and residents that have been hard-hit by predatory lending.

2.11) Strengthen and enforce Cook County's worker protection laws to ensure all workers receive fair compensation and protection from violations.

Policy Pillar: Safe and Thriving Communities

3.1) Improve interagency data-sharing and public access to deidentified and disaggregated criminal legal system data to increase transparency and usefulness, with specific attention on data that identifies racial and ethnic disparities and operational challenges that contribute to barriers and collateral consequences for those impacted by the criminal legal system.

3.2) Develop a comprehensive and coordinated countywide re-entry plan that works to support residents returning to their communities from detention, jail, and prison by removing structural barriers to housing, economic security, and opportunity, including the negative impacts of criminal and juvenile records.

Appendix

Appendix A (cont'd): Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce Compiled Recommendations

Policy Pillar: Safe and Thriving Communities

3.3) Support community-informed alternatives to policing in suburban Cook County to minimize harmful interactions between police and residents, especially Black residents, and promote community safety.

Policy Pillar: Smart Communities

4.1) Increase access to and availability and affordability of public transportation to connect communities and ensure transit equity.

4.2) Increase digital connectivity and access to broadband infrastructure and digital devices for residents, particularly in communities of color.

Policy Pillar: Sustainable Communities

5.1) Increase digital connectivity and access to broadband infrastructure and digital devices for residents, particularly in communities of color.

5.2) Establish a Cook County Environmental Justice Policy to incorporate environmental and equity impacts in policy and program decision-making.

5.3) Support actions that improve both public health and environmental health for the overall well-being of residents, particularly in Black, Latine, and low-income communities.

Appendix

Appendix A (cont'd): Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce Compiled Recommendations

Policy Pillar: Open Communities

6.1) Develop a comprehensive equity-centered grantmaking strategy to promote equitable access to resources and increase capacity to deliver services in partnership with smaller, grassroots, emerging, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color-led organizations anchored in marginalized communities.

6.2) Establish flexible, accessible, and empowering pathways for residents of historically disinvested or marginalized communities to meaningfully participate in developing and implementing County policies and programs.

6.3) Implement countywide best practices to measure the impact of policies and programs on immigrant and refugee communities to ensure Cook County's work to reduce racial and ethnic inequities is inclusive and actively works to protect immigrants and refugees.

Appendix B

Appendix B: Alignment with Cook County's ARPA Spending Plan

The following tables provide an overview of the links between the Cook County Policy Roadmap, Cook County's allocation of its American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, and the Cook County Equity Fund Taskforce's recommendations. For more information on Cook County's use of ARPA funds and descriptions of each initiative listed below, please see Cook County's American Rescue Plan Act At A Glance published in February 2022.

Lead agencies, bureaus, and departments are abbreviated in the chart below:

- BED: Bureau of Economic Development
- BOT: Bureau of Technology
- CCDPH: Cook County Department of Public Health
- CCH: Cook County Health
- DEMRS: Department of Emergency Management and Regional Security
- DES: Department of Environment and Sustainability
- FPDCC: Forest Preserve District of Cook County
- HACC: Housing Authority of Cook County
- JAC: Justice Advisory Council
- OCJ: Office of the Chief Judge
- OOP: Office of the President
- OUP: Offices Under the President
- PD: Public Defender's Office
- SAO: State's Attorney's Office

Appendix B

Policy Roadmap Pillar: Healthy Communities

**= planned spend in FY22 pending program rollout*

| ARPA Key Theme | Lead | ARPA Initiative | Equity Fund Taskforce Rec. |
|------------------------------------|-------|---|----------------------------|
| Food Security & Nutrition | CCDPH | Good Food Purchasing Program* | 5.3 |
| | CCH | Food as Medicine* | -- |
| | DES | Urban Farming Initiative Gap Analysis* | 5.3 |
| | BED | Capacity-Building Investments in Food Access Sites* | -- |
| Healthcare | CCH | Medical Respite Center* | -- |
| | | Vaccine Incentives Program* | -- |
| | CCDPH | Contact Tracing Initiative Continuation* | -- |
| | | Hyperlocal Vaccination Program | -- |
| Mental & Behavioral Health | CCH | Additional Behavioral Health Personnel and Support at Existing Clinics* | 1.2 |
| | | Cook County Behavioral Health Services* | 1.2 |
| | | Crisis Intervention Pilot Program for Cook County* | 3.3 |
| | CCDPH | Sustaining Mental Health Hotline for Suburban Residents* | 1.2 |
| | HACC | Behavioral Healthcare Specialists at HACC* | 1.2 |
| Public Health Education & Outreach | CCDPH | Building Healthy Communities Initiative | 5.3 |
| | | Community Health Worker Initiative | 2.7 |
| | | Lead Poisoning Prevention Fund | 5.3 |
| | | Opioid Overdose and Substance Use Prevention Initiative | |
| | | Public Health Emergency Preparedness Expansion* | |
| | | Suburban Cook County Worker Protection Program* | 2.7 |

Appendix B

Policy Roadmap Pillar: Vital Communities

*= planned spend in FY22 pending program rollout

| ARPA Key Theme | Lead | ARPA Initiative | Equity Fund Taskforce Rec. |
|--|------------------|---|----------------------------|
| Household Assistance & Social Services | Veterans Affairs | Veteran Grant Program* | 2.8 |
| | BED | Community Information Exchange* | 1.3, 3.2 |
| | | Cook County Legal Aid for Housing and Debt* | 2.3 |
| | | Cook County Residential Water Conservation and Energy Efficiency Program* | 2.5 |
| | | Guaranteed Income Program* | 2.6 |
| | | Transforming Places* | 2.9 |
| | | Abolish Medical Debt* | 2.6 |
| Housing | BED | Emergency Mortgage Assistance* | 2.3, 2.5 |
| | | Emergency Rental Assistance* | 2.3 |
| | | Fixed-Site Emergency Shelter for People Experiencing Homelessness* | 2.3 |
| | | Hotel-Based Sheltering* | 2.3 |
| | | Permanent Supportive Housing for People Experiencing Homelessness* | 2.3 |
| | | | |
| Sector Support & Regional Development | BED | Advancing Equitable Recovery in the Southland - Southland Metals Hub* | -- |
| | | Cook County Arts and Artists Program* | -- |
| | | Cook County Manufacturing Rebound and Recover Programming | -- |
| | | Suburban Cook County Travel, Tourism, and Hospitality Economic Recovery Initiative | -- |
| | | | |
| Small Business Agenda | BED | Advancing Equitable Recovery in the Southland - Building Capacity in the Southland* | -- |
| | | Small Business Assistance Program & One Stop Shop* | 2.8 |
| | | Small Business Grant Program* | 2.8 |
| Worker Support & Workforce Development | BED | Investing in Families and Youth* | 2.7 |
| | | Community Conservation Corps* | 2.7 |
| | | Supporting Apprenticeships in Suburban Cook* | 2.5, 2.7 |

Appendix B

Policy Roadmap Pillar: Safe and Thriving Communities

**= planned spend in FY22 pending program rollout*

| ARPA Key Theme | Lead | ARPA Initiative | Equity Fund Taskforce Rec. |
|--|-------|---|----------------------------|
| Alternatives to Incarceration & Policing | JAC | Justice Reinvestment Plan* | 3.2 |
| | | 9-1-1 Alternative Model Study and Strategic Plan* | 3.3 |
| Emergency Preparedness & Response | DEMRS | Supporting Suburban Cook County municipalities in developing, training, and operationalizing preparedness planning* | -- |
| Services to Justice-Involved Residents | JAC | Emergency Reentry Vouchers* | 3.2 |
| | | Reentry Housing Resources* | 3.2 |
| | OUP | Programs and Services for Domestic Violence Victims and Survivors* | -- |
| | PD | Public Defender Community Defense Center* | -- |
| Violence Prevention & Reduction | CCDPH | Behavioral Health Expansion* | 3.2 |
| | CCH | Healing Hurt People Chicago* | -- |
| | JAC | Supporting Education and Employment Development* | -- |
| | | Violence Prevention and Reduction Grant Portfolio* | -- |
| | OCJ | Strengthening Chicago's Youth Juvenile Justice Collaborative Expansion* | -- |
| | SAO | Gun Crime Strategy Unit* | -- |
| | | State's Attorney's Office Crime Investigations* | -- |

Appendix B

Policy Roadmap Pillar: Sustainable Communities

**= planned spend in FY22 pending program rollout*

| ARPA Key Theme | Lead | ARPA Initiative | Equity Fund Taskforce Rec. |
|--|-------|---|----------------------------|
| Climate Resiliency | DES | Climate Resiliency Plan Development* | 5.1 |
| | | Resilience Hubs | 5.1 |
| | FPDCC | Implementing the Southeast Cook County Land Acquisition Plan* | 5.3 |
| | | Riparian Restoration* | 5.3 |
| Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy | DES | Residential Renewable Energy Subsidy* | 2.5, 5.1 |
| Environmental Justice | DES | Healthy Homes and Deep Energy Retrofit Residential Properties* | 2.5, 5.3 |
| Hazard Mitigation & Pollution Prevention | DES | Businesses Reducing Impact on the Environment (BRITE) Fund* | 2.7, 5.3 |
| | | Neighborhood Revitalization Brownfield Remediation* | |
| | | South Suburban Hazardous Household Waste Facility and Satellite Collection Locations* | 5.1 5.3 |

Policy Roadmap Pillar: Smart Communities

| ARPA Key Theme | Lead | ARPA Initiative | Equity Fund Taskforce Rec. |
|----------------------|------|---|----------------------------|
| Capital Improvements | BED | Municipal Capacity for Capital Improvements* | -- |
| Digital Equity | BED | Digital Equity Planning* | 4.2 |
| | BOT | Chicago Southland Fiber Network Expansion* | 4.2 |
| | HACC | Broadband Expansion at HACC Properties* | 4.2 |
| Transportation | DES | Electric Vehicle Charging Station* | 4.1, 5.3 |
| | DOTH | Invest in Cook Expansion* | 4.1 |
| Water Infrastructure | BED | Lead, Leaking, & Obsolete Service Line Replacement Pilot Program* | 5.3 |
| | DES | Rain Ready Plan Implementation* | 5.1 |
| | DOTH | Stormwater Management Project Implementation* | 5.1 |
| | HACC | Lead Pipe Removal at Vera Yates Homes and Richard Flowers Home* | 5.3 |



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