

County Policy Playbook for an Equitable Economic Recovery

Thriving Through Partnerships



About the National Association of Counties

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

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

NACo's Vision

Healthy, safe and vibrant counties across America.

Acknowledgments

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Nurture Existing Partnerships and Cultivate New Ones

Potential County Partners Include:



Special Districts



Nonprofit and community-based organizations



Private businesses and industry



Other local governments including cities and states

County governments have varied authority to support equitable recovery efforts based on state statute, individual charter provisions and county ordinances. At the broadest level, home rule counties possess more direct authority than Dillon's Rule counties. However, what each county has in common is the ability to engage in productive partnerships to accomplish goals.

Partnerships take many forms, including formal contractual agreements with nonprofits and private businesses, memorandums of understanding (MOU), shared work agreements or simple handshake engagements. To achieve equitable economic recovery goals, counties frequently partner with community-based organizations that can act as specialty service providers in areas where counties may not have direct authority, capacity or relationships.

Other important partners are cities, towns, tribal governments, states, local boards (e.g., workforce investment board, school board, etc.) and other counties. An equitable recovery does not recognize jurisdictional boundaries so these partnerships will often extend beyond a single county border. To best achieve results, consistent communication with intergovernmental partnerships and coordinated planning are essential.

Some questions to consider regarding county partnerships for an equitable recovery:

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

Leveraging the Strengths of Partners to Achieve Strategic Goals

Each partner has different assets, skill sets and, in the case of intergovernmental partners, authority and funding. County leaders can leverage these attributes to achieve maximum impact and strategic goals. However, it is also incumbent upon counties to recognize the capacity challenges with partners.

An example of where partner capacity can be a challenge is with reporting. Federal funds convey particular reporting requirements, most of which are passed through to any sub-contractor of the county. As such, it can be challenging for some partners to engage with community-based groups with lower capacity to meet federal requirements, even if the partners are the most strategically positioned to accomplish county goals. Because of potential capacity challenges, it is important for counties interested in engaging in financial partnerships to work with these organizations to streamline the reporting process, while still ensuring adherence to necessary requirements.

These two processes – identifying the strengths of the partner and working to understand barriers to engaging in the partnership – are not mutually exclusive. Sometimes they can even work as counter forces when an organization has the best skill set for the need but lacks appropriate capacity or resources to comply with the administrative responsibilities of a partnership with the county.

In all cases, the county should make a thorough examination of the partner’s capacity, abilities, expertise and administrative functioning. Based on this assessment, counties can work to mitigate one or more factors to create efficiencies in the partnership process. County support to ease administrative burdens could be achieved through providing additional funding to build partner capacity to adhere to reporting requirements, forming a team of partners with complementary expertise or leveraging a partner in an advisory or consultancy role without financial obligations.



Assessing Blind Spots and Identifying Partners That Can Help Ensure Equity

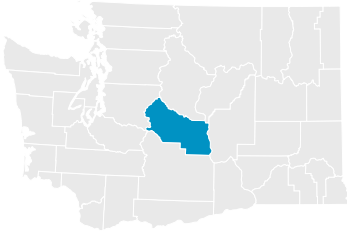
Engaging in partnerships is not new to county governments. It has long been a powerful tool of counties to accomplish shared goals and execute on special projects without needing to stand up new departments within the county. In the context of working toward an equitable recovery, counties are being especially intentional on their mix of partners and the services provided.

Much of the work of recovery is having the right people at the table to understand the needs and conduct the work. Nonprofits and neighborhood- and community-based organizations are often among the most socially connected groups to local constituencies, particularly in under resourced areas of the county. These groups can play a powerful role providing feedback on the needs of different residents and identifying potential blind spots for county service providers. As counties are selecting partners for economic recovery, they can re-evaluate existing partnerships to ensure they are best suited to connect with prioritized communities and intentionally engage with new organizations working in less-resourced areas or with disconnected communities.

The Power of Partnerships to Facilitate Economic Recovery

The most powerful resources counties have in facilitating an equitable recovery are the partners at the table. Even counties with sufficient resources and expertise can benefit from partnerships. Intergovernmental partners can help to maximize the scale of the impact through resource pooling. Community-based organizations can help to engage underserved residents. Other partners can help to provide direct subject-matter assistance to administer programs or solve emergent problems.

Counties around the country have engaged in partnerships to facilitate the equitable economic recovery from the pandemic. Many counties used partnerships to provide personal protective equipment to front-line workers, educate communities on health, support residents suffering from economic hardships, foster new business startups, administer skills-based training and lay the foundation for an equitable recovery.



Kittitas County, Wash.

2022 POPULATION:

Approx. 45,000

Establishing an Intergovernmental Economic Development and Recovery Plan

A rural community in the Pacific Northwest, Kittitas County sits just outside of the Seattle-Tacoma Metropolitan Statistical Area, which was one of the early epicenters of the COVID-19 pandemic. The largest city within Kittitas County is the county seat of Ellensburg.

Despite being in a rural community, Kittitas County faces similar challenges as many communities across the country, including housing affordability and stability, workforce development and recruitment and retention. Similar to other communities, the impacts of the pandemic largely served to exacerbate these existing local challenges.

Even prior to the pandemic, coordinating services with limited government capacity across a widely distributed community has been challenging. Kittitas County and the City of Ellensburg both operate with the individuals serving in the elected local legislature – Board of Commissioners or City Council – rotating the executive duties as the Chair of the Commission or Mayor, respectively. Despite these similarities, the city and the county have different authority and responsibilities over the services, programs and policies that respond to social and economic needs.

In the wake of the pandemic, city and county leadership sought to forge a new path of partnership and understanding founded in data sharing and coordination. To support coordinated efforts, the jurisdictions initiated a joint city-county economic development and recovery plan, including a cultural arts plan, projects to address homelessness and a joint effort to engage the community.

One large part of this effort is the establishment of a joint city and county data tracking hub to measure economic metrics within the community that can help inform future planning and coordination efforts. Splitting the costs and responsibilities with the City of Ellensburg, Kittitas County engaged a contractor to collect, analyze and report on key indicators to be included in a strategic plan for future economic development. These indicators include businesses by sector and type and other employment indicators across a 20-year time period.

With the data in hand, the city and county collaborated to form a comprehensive strategic plan steering committee consisting of both elected leaders and governmental staff from the two entities. The steering committee met on a regular basis, with the aim to coordinate across departments on economic development goals. With the help of a consultant, the steering committee hosted workshops with leaders in the community to talk about trends and best practice examples, developed a common definition and shared vision for economic development in the community and identified key areas

INTERVIEWS AND ROUNDTABLES



30 Interviews

- Industry leaders
- Economic development
- Government officials
- Community leaders
- Healthcare
- Energy
- Central Washington University



8 Roundtables

- Agriculture
- Real estate
- Tourism
- Young professionals
- Manufacturing
- Small business, (upper and lower County)
- Technology/remote workers

STEERING COMMITTEE



24 Members

- Industry leaders
- Economic development
- Government officials
- Community leaders
- Healthcare
- Energy
- Central Washington University

ECONOMIC DEVELOPERS



2 Workshops with Live Polling

Elevated discussions on collaborations with economic development organizations in the county. Solicited input via interactive polling tool. (Mentimeter)

TIP PLANNING MODEL WORKSHOPS



1 Discovery (Leadership)

Presented discovery findings to steering committee and local leadership. Archived consensus on plan's five guided principles.



1 Opportunity

Presented playing goals and high-level strategies to local leaders and community members. Breakout groups provided input and recommendations.



3 Implementation

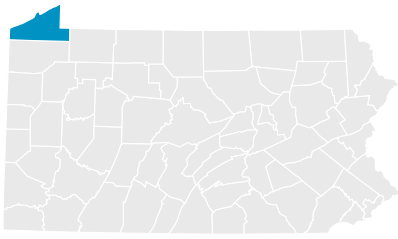
To be in the six months following plans release. Used to evaluate progress and adjust the plan as needed.

For a summary of the consultative process, see the above example from the Kittitas County Stakeholder Engagement Overview.

where intergovernmental collaboration could be used to support these shared objectives. Over the course of 10 months, the group worked diligently to identify a set of core objectives that were published in February 2023 in the Economic Development Strategic Plan. However, leaders within the county and city knew that setting the path forward was just the first step and that for meaningful impact there would need to be shared accountability to implement the plan. As a next step, the steering committee worked to identify a matrix of responsibilities, identifying which entity and individual would be tasked with implementing the corresponding part of the plan and how the implementation would be tracked.

As the county and city approaches the annual milestones for completing the strategic plan, they will compile and review a scorecard to assess progress and identify areas for iteration and improvement.

By leveraging the assets, authorities and capacity between the two governmental communities, Kittitas County and the City of Ellensburg can ensure that resources are appropriately distributed to those in the community with the most need, thereby demonstrating the power of partnerships in catalyzing an equitable economic recovery.



Erie County, Pa.

2022 POPULATION:

Approx. 267,000

Engaging Community, Intergovernmental and Cross-Jurisdictional Partners to Cultivate a Region of Innovation and Development

Erie County, situated on the shores of Lake Erie and bordered by New York and Ohio, holds a unique position as a major economic influencer in the region due to its proximity to neighboring states. County Executive Brenton Davis, assuming office during the pandemic recovery, spearheaded a visionary economic opportunity plan for the community.

One remarkable achievement in this plan is the significant investment in Project RESOLVE at Penn State Behrend, demonstrating how strategic funding can drive the county's progress. Initially kickstarted with \$5 million from Erie County's American Rescue Plan, this initiative is set to flourish into a \$50 million project, thanks to collaborations with partners like Penn State University and industry leaders such as Wabtec. At the core of Project RESOLVE lies a strong commitment to bolstering the local manufacturing sector, highlighted by the upcoming construction of the Center for Manufacturing Competitiveness. This development marks Erie County's emergence as a pioneer in sustainable manufacturing, with far-reaching economic benefits expected, and solidifies its position as a strong contender in both regional and national markets.

The economic impact is expected to be substantial, fostering innovation, efficiency, and long-term competitiveness. Project Resolve's success stems from the strategic collaboration between Erie County and Penn State University, laying the groundwork for future projects like Project NePTWNE, addressing water

testing, research and environmental education for climate challenges in the Great Lakes region.

Erie County's \$1.5 million investment from the American Rescue Plan has resulted in the Great Lakes Research & Education Center within the Erie County Blasco Memorial Library. This facility will lead water testing, research and environmental education initiatives, with state-of-the-art facilities promoting scientific discovery and community engagement. Interactive exhibits will encourage public involvement in addressing water conservation and climate change impacts on the Great Lakes.

Project NePTWNE, marked by a public-private partnership with Gannon University, emphasizes a joint commitment to community and environmental well-being. The Great Lakes Research & Education Center pledges to safeguard vital water resources for future generations, providing valuable educational opportunities, especially for children, fostering environmental stewardship and preparing future leaders to address environmental challenges.

With the support of the Erie County Economic Development team, the County has become an attractive prospect for businesses, with an increase in interest, including four businesses seriously considering Erie for new operations. The Erie County Department of Economic Development has played a crucial role in showcasing the town's advantages, from a skilled workforce to strategic location and a commitment to sustainable growth.

STEERING COMMITTEE

Oversees the execution of the investment playbook; provides guidance and oversight to the local organizations implementing projects

Purpose, initial structure in Erie:

Karen, Bilowith, *Erie, Community Foundation.*

Brenton Davis, *Erie County Executive*

Joe Schember, *Mayor of Erie*

Ferki Ferati, *Jefferson Educational Society*

James Grunke, *Erie, Regional Chamber and Growth Partnership*

Gary Lee, *Erie County DEI commission*

Chris marsh, *Erie insurance*

Perry Wood, *Erie County gaming revenue authority*

NERVE CENTER STAFF

Provides day-to-day support to the entities, implementing the projects of the playbook

Purpose, initial structure in Erie:

Kim Thomas (*Director*)

Project manager, (*TBD*)

Optional: *consultants*

The economic development team's key achievement lies in establishing meaningful connections with site selectors, indicative of Erie County's potential for growth. Their dedication to providing a seamless experience for businesses exploring Erie County is evident through strategic planning, infrastructure development and proactive engagement with potential investors.

DELIVERY TEAMS

Conduct additional research and planning for Exploratory Project from the Playbook

Propose, initial structure in Erie:

1. Expand and rollout Clusters strategy
2. Developing a line inclusive, entrepreneurship programs
3. Create supply, Erie initiative
4. Determine needed electrical upgrades
5. Explore public capacity boost needs
6. Develop comprehensive homelessness strategy
7. Explore adaptive re-use downtown
8. Explore Bayfront remediation and new users
9. Develop comprehensive housing strategy
10. Conduct park conservancy feasibility
11. Expand geographic reach of Playbook

While progress has been made, the commitment to economic development is ongoing. Erie County aims to sustain momentum, welcoming businesses and site selectors to make Erie the preferred destination for a dynamic and supportive business environment. The focus on cultivating new business growth and development is essential for creating a prosperous future for generations to come. Opportunities must be actively cultivated to ensure a thriving economic landscape for the community's present and future.



About NACo's Equitable Economic Recovery Project

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

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

Recovery Cohort Project County Leads

Coconino County, Ariz.

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County Supervisor

Chris Pasterz

Economic Development Manager
(former)

Multnomah County, Ore.

Hon. Lori Stegman

County Commissioner

Layan Ammouri

Director of Planning and Policy

Palm Beach County, Fla.

Hon. Mack Bernard

County Commissioner

Sherry Howard

Deputy Director, Department
of Housing & Economic
Sustainability

Erie County, Pa.

Hon. Brenton Davis

County Executive

Douglas Smith

Director of Administration

City and County of Honolulu, Hawaii

Amy Asselbaye

Executive Director, Office of
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Florencio C. Baguio Jr.

Assistant Director, Department
of Human Resources

El Paso County, Texas

Hon. David Stout

County Commissioner

Michael Hernandez

Economic Development Director
(former)

Hennepin County, Minn.

Hon. Marion Greene

County Commissioner

Patricia Fitzgerald

Director, Economic Development

Kittitas County, Wash.

Hon. Brett Wachsmith

County Commissioner



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



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