



County Policy Playbook for an Equitable Economic Recovery

Public Policy to Support Communities



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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Author

Kevin Shrawder

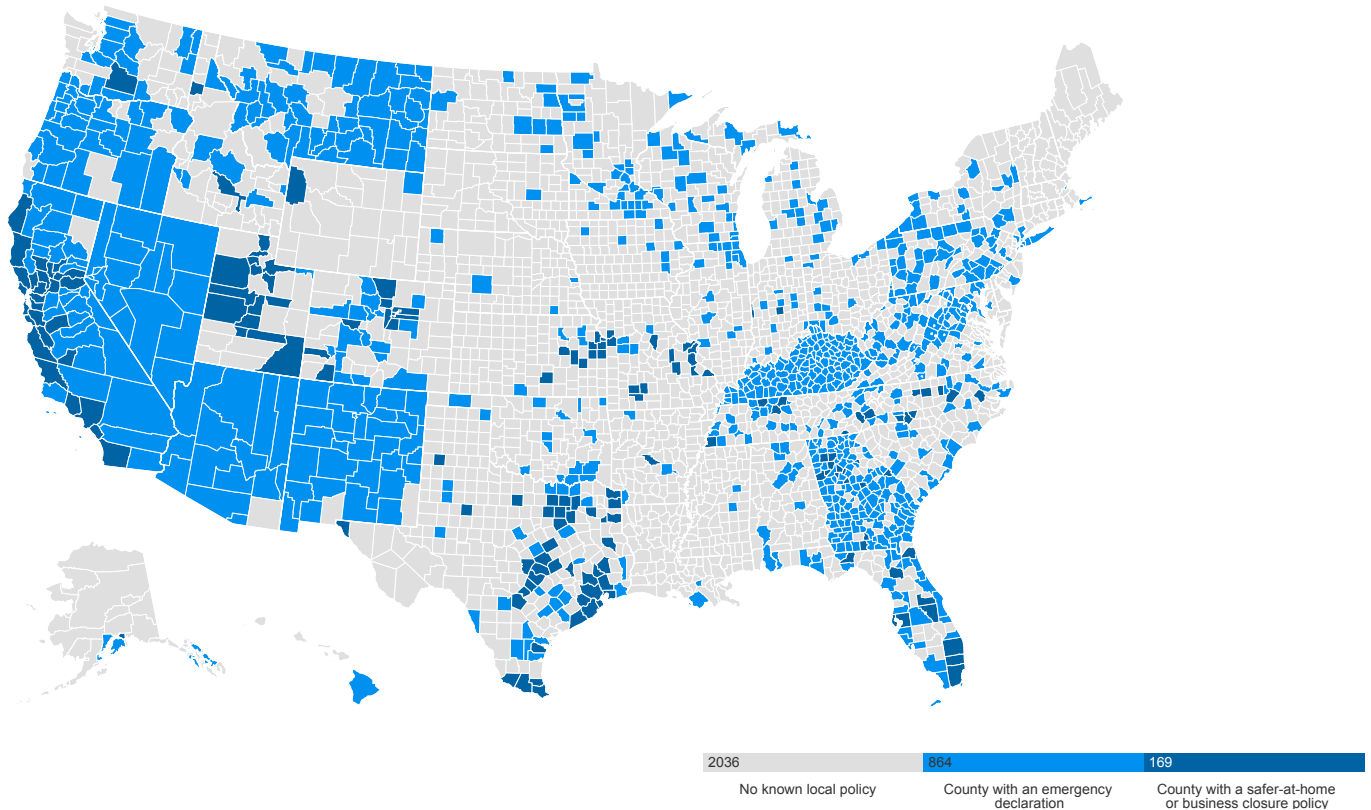
Associate Director, Economic & Government Studies

kshrawder@naco.org

Enact Policies and Systems that Support Communities

Public policy is the framework which guides local government programming and administrative systems. Each act, program, ordinance or investment by a county stems from public policies shaped by elected leaders, community members and public servants. Effective public policy sets local governments on a path to success while ineffective public policy can create inefficiencies or barriers to achieving intended impacts.

COUNTY DECLARATIONS AND ORDINANCES IN RESPONSE TO THE PANDEMIC



Source: NACo-collected data, as of April 15, 2020.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, counties were required to be nimble in creating effective public policy that could rapidly – and effectively – respond to community needs. From public health ordinances and procedures to standing up new financial support programs for residents, the responsibility of guiding the county response fell on locally elected leaders.

As the crisis subsides, the focus has shifted from immediate needs to long-term projects and innovations that can support and rebuild communities impacted by the pandemic. County public policy continues to guide

investments funded through the American Rescue Plan Act State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funding (Recovery Funds) into local communities. In the recovery phase, local policymakers are taking the opportunity to learn from experiences of the past few years to rethink the policies and systems to ensure resilience and equity are priorities going forward.

Elected county officials across the country are taking steps towards ensuring an equitable economic recovery by enacting policies and systems that support communities.

Leveraging Public Policy to Set the Course for County Government

The process for setting public policy at the local level varies by state and county. Generally, to enact new laws and regulations, the governing body of a county will draft legislation, host public hearings or comment sessions and then vote on specific measures before enactment. Similarly, non-regulatory public policy often requires input and support from elected officials and the public.

Even simple public policy measures have the ability to generate significant impact and improve local outcomes; by the same token, ineffective public policy can create bureaucratic hurdles and stymie local progress. Ineffective public policy can create bureaucratic hurdles and stymie local impact.

THE COUNTY POLICYMAKING PROCESS



Define Measurable Goals or Outcomes in Response to a Problem



Craft Policies Based on Public Input and County-Governance



Policy Implementation by County Staff



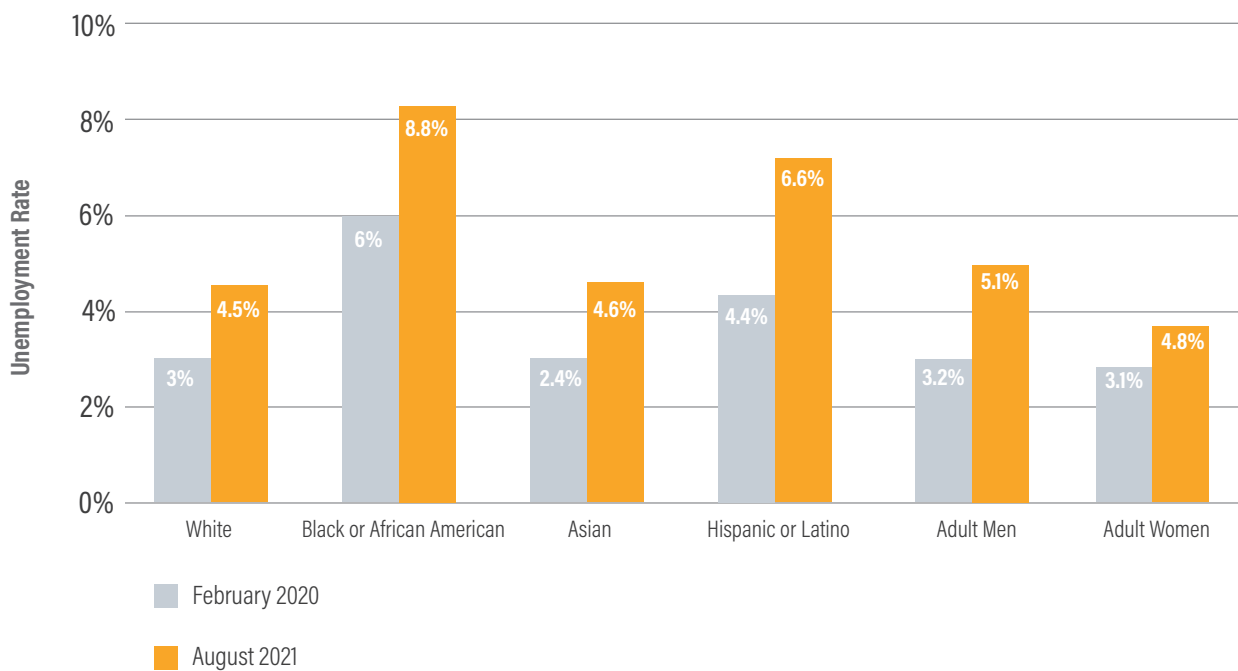
Tangible Impacts for Local Communities



Crafting Public Policy Through A Lens Of Equity and Inclusion

The operative word in equitable economic recovery is equity. The pandemic created an economic toll on residents stemming from job and income loss, school-aged children learning deficits and public health and safety impacts. Because it is more common for Black and Hispanic households to work service-industry or blue-collar jobs – the sectors most impacted by the economic downturn – these communities of color were more likely to experience negative economic impacts.¹

THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED RACIAL AND ETHNIC COMMUNITIES



Source: NACo Analysis of U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics: Employment Situation

Furthermore, as schools, health care and government services turned to online mediums, communities that lacked adequate connectivity and access to technology experienced additional challenges. For example, lack of connectivity and broadband access in rural communities translated into difficulty with receiving health care and services. Similarly, disparities in technology access in urban areas created deficits in the ability to participate in remote learning, telework or accessing supportive resources for individuals negatively impacted by the pandemic.

Because the pandemic intensified economic inequity, public policy to support recovery must consider the disparities of these impacts. To advance an inclusive recovery, local leaders are tasked with rigorously case testing new policies to ensure programs, investments or laws and regulations support disadvantaged communities and don't create negative consequences for others.



Using Public Policy To Understand And Address Community Needs

To effectively foster an equitable economic recovery, it is important that local leaders understand how residents interact with government services and resources. Counties can create forums through which resident feedback on policy measures and their subsequent implementation is aggregated and operationalized. Counties gather community feedback through public forums, town halls, surveys, focus groups and community or neighborhood meetings.

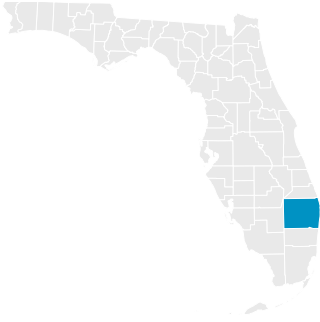
Each feedback mechanism has benefits and drawbacks. For instance, public meetings may be difficult for residents to attend due to the time or location of the event. Surveys may provide unreliable information or the sample size could be too small relative to the population of the community. While many communities have benefitted from increased flexibility in implementing feedback mechanisms due to virtual integration in public meetings, there are still important segments of the community that may lack broadband access or the digital literacy required to participate.

It is incumbent upon local leaders seeking to implement new public policy that perspectives from all members of the community are reflected in the process. To ensure maximum input, counties can engage intentionally with community partners representative of underserved groups; adjust the dates, times and locations of public meetings to make it more convenient for different communities to attend; and use multiple feedback mechanisms to allow residents to engage in the way that works best for them.

Questions to consider when enacting policies and systems intended to support communities:

- How will this policy/system address the unique needs and challenges of our specific community?
- What are the potential unintended consequences of implementing this policy/system, and how can we mitigate them?
- What steps can we take to ensure transparency and accountability in the implementation and management of this policy/system?
- What existing resources or partnerships can be leveraged to support the implementation of this policy/system?
- How will this policy/system promote equity within the community?

Counties implemented programs to support the return to work, including job training, business reopening and support for the many new small businesses started by entrepreneurs during the pandemic.



Palm Beach County, Florida

2022 POPULATION:

Approx. 1.5 Million

Using Public Policy to Engage Community Stakeholders and Inform Future Investments

Crafting impactful public policy requires local elected officials and staff to understand how the general public interacts with the resulting implementation. Examining the successes and failures of current policy intended to support economic recovery will help adjust current programming and to inform new policymaking in the future.

Palm Beach County has engaged county residents and technical experts to better understand the extent to which policy has adequately supported equitable economic recovery. These policies are being developed in a context of tremendous economic growth but also significant disparities.

Palm Beach County has a stark economic divide. Several wealthy communities line the county's Atlantic coast. Well known for its tourist destinations like West Palm Beach and Boca Raton, the county is also increasingly attracting new businesses in the finance sector. However, many residents that support tourism, retail and other service sectors are increasingly unable to afford to live in the county. These cost-of-living pressures for low-wage workers are common in many counties that have strong tourism and service industries and were exacerbated by the economic downturn associated with the pandemic.

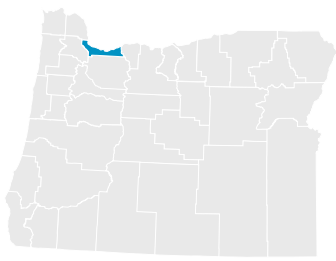
Though the economy in Palm Beach County quickly rebounded, the impact and inequities associated with the economic downturn persisted. The county is undergoing a review of its services and partnerships in order to develop policies and programming that are likely to generate sustainable and long-term economic recovery.

Reliable community-driven feedback on solutions is critical to developing new legislation, programs and service administration intended to benefit underserved communities.

To gather feedback that informs future policy on recovery, Palm Beach County organized a Securing Our Future: Economic Mobility Summit that brought together community stakeholders, including providers and recipients of care. The summit served a dual purpose: connecting families to employment opportunities and supportive services and receiving feedback on the systems and strategies that are currently in place within the county.

Another key component of the summit was engagement with leading national experts on topics of economic mobility. These experts spoke on challenges and key services that impact the economic mobility of residents, including child poverty, education, child care, transportation, housing and workforce development.

Structured conversations amongst county staff, service providers, technical experts and residents centered on barriers for achieving economic mobility in the midst of a national economic recovery. Ensuring a diverse set of speakers that included the families receiving services revealed blind spots on policies and services. Based on the input, officials in Palm Beach County then began working to adjust the services, programs and legislation that drive a more inclusive and equitable economic recovery.



Multnomah County, Oregon

2022 POPULATION:

Approx. 795,000

Establishing New Systems Based in Public Policy to Facilitate Recovery and Resiliency

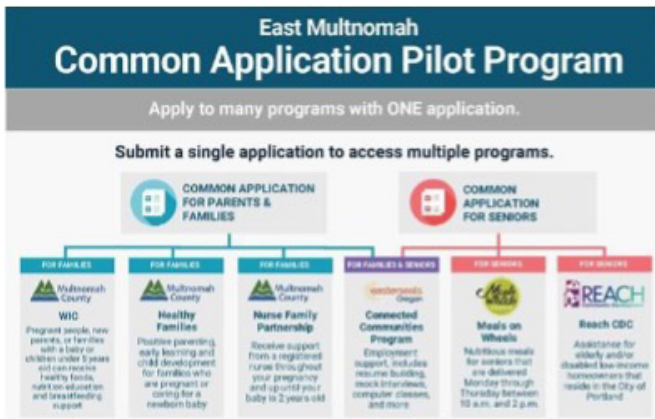
With physical locations for service provision closing as a result of the pandemic and a growing number of residents requiring new services, service delivery during the COVID-19 pandemic needed to become more efficient. Often, community members seeking services are eligible for a wide array of county, state and federal programs. Although eligible, these residents may be unaware of services available or may face barriers to accessing known services due to paperwork burden, limited hours of operation or financial constraints.

To create efficiencies in connecting residents to needed services that facilitate recovery, Multnomah County officials created a common application with plans to develop a physical resiliency center. These new systems span across government services and seek to streamline service application, provision and administration, eliminating barriers for both residents and county staff alike.

The common application is accessible by mobile phone and online. The pilot contains 12 programs, with plans to expand to an additional 8 programs, for a total of 20, within the next year. Previously, programs like the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC) required the navigation of up to five different websites to complete an application. Though other programs may be less complicated to navigate, the application process typically requires similar information submitted to an entirely different system.

Multnomah County's common application reduced the number of questions to apply for a program from 84 to 19 for parents and family services, and from 70 to 17 for senior benefits. By providing a unified application for multiple programs into a single portal, the paperwork burden on residents seeking services is diminished. Furthermore, the consolidated access point provides an opportunity for residents who would previously only be aware of and apply to one program to access multiple programs that can help catalyze their recovery.

The common application is not limited to serving residents; community-based organizations (CBOs), small businesses and other local organizations also benefit from the one-stop-shop model. To pilot test the hub, Multnomah County disseminated grants to small businesses in the eastern portion of the county that were impacted with lower revenue due to the pandemic.



County leaders are looking to expand the model of situating access to services on a single virtual platform through a physical resiliency center. The center was built in a community with a high share of historically marginalized populations, where distrust of government due to past racism and discrimination in public services may prevail. A physical center provides a space for community members to directly interact with the county staff and community partners who can help residents identify and apply for services. Perhaps most importantly, the center serves as a physical representation of the county investment into the community.

Through the implementation of a common application and physical resiliency center, county leaders can foster a culture of interconnectedness within county service

provision. Streamlining information sharing, referral processes, coordination and breaking down silos are all important in providing the services that residents and local organizations need for economic recovery.

Models of system coordination like this can be seen in many areas of local government such as emergency management, justice system services and public health. Though the benefits are most acute for residents, county employees also profit from the increased coordination and efficiency from these systems, allowing departments and staff to focus more time on providing services that support recovery.



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.

Hon. Lena Fowler
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
Economic Revitalization

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



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county strategies for
equitable investments.*



660 North Capitol Street, N.W.
Suite 400 • Washington, D.C. 20001
202.393.6226 • www.NACo.org

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