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Equity Fund Progress Report Cook County



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Introduction

With the commitment to build equitable and sustainable communities for all residents, Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle established the Cook County Equity Fund as part of Cook County's fiscal year 2021 budget and seeded it with an initial allocation of \$40 million. Through the Equity Fund, the Office of the President aims 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 advisors and decision-makers. The Equity Fund Taskforce was charged with providing their subject matter expertise to help the County reimagine and transform systems around justice, public safety, health, housing, economic opportunity, community development, and social services to benefit Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities and proactively invest resources in solutions and supports to achieve equitable outcomes.

With an equity-centered and community-based interdisciplinary approach, the Equity Fund Taskforce set forth strategic recommendations to address existing inequities and disparities that impact BIPOC and other marginalized residents within the County's six policy pillars including: Health and Wellness, Economic Development, Criminal Justice, Environmental Sustainability, Public Infrastructure and Good Government. Guided by the [Policy Roadmap: Five-Year Strategic Plan for Offices under the President](#) and racial equity toolkits developed by [For Love of Country: A Path for the Federal Government to Advance Racial Equity](#), the 2021 Cook County Equity Fund Report was released in April 2022 with an investment plan of \$50M, approved by the Board of Commissioners in May 2022.

The April 2022 Equity Fund report offers an action-oriented plan for the administration to address institutional and structural barriers to racial equity that exist in operations, policies, and practices both within and outside of government. As part of the County's continued commitment to transparency, this progress report expounds on the actionable recommendations set forth in the initial report with accompanying implementation workplans developed with input from the Taskforce. Together, the reports reflect the County's vision to realign government resources to best serve residents long-term and advance equity.





Healthy Communities



Healthy Communities



Health disparities, particularly in Black, Latine and Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities, continue to persist both locally and nationally across many well-being indicators including food security and life expectancy. The pandemic not only highlighted the importance of both physical and behavioral health, but also how the lack of access can disproportionately affect BIPOC communities. Systematically addressing gaps in health and wellbeing ensures that all residents are afforded the opportunity to live the healthiest life possible, regardless of place, identity, or income. Thus, Cook County has adopted a Health Equity in All Policies (HEiAP) approach across sectors to advance collaboration between County departments and community-based organizations.

With the technology support of a countywide Community Information Exchange (CIE) System, we can reduce the disparities of accessibility and availability of health resources for marginalized residents affected by social drivers of health outcomes. The development of our CIE system over the next two to three years will integrate all the services with shared language and a resource database to ensure whole person care for residents. Additionally, Cook County Health and its public health department will lead the transformative work to establish an Office of Behavioral Health and Wellness that will drive the development of a comprehensive behavioral health needs assessment for suburban Cook County, produce a data-driven regional plan for addressing behavioral health gaps and build capacity for culturally responsive behavioral health providers in BIPOC 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.

Equity Lead

Cook County Department of Public Health

Partners

Office of the President and its Bureaus and Departments

Equity Impact

The pandemic amplified the links between well-being, health, and the economy in ways that continued to negatively impact BIPOC communities. Adopting a Health Equity in All Policies (HEiAP) approach will support inclusive and sustainable recovery from the pandemic, identify gaps to improve health outcomes for all residents and communities, and ensure Cook County works collaboratively to factor health considerations into the implementation of our policies and programs.

Objectives

- Develop a HEiAP framework and pilot that includes health and equity criteria to inform policy and fiscal decision-making where applicable.
- Align the development of HEiAP with other related equity assessments including the County's racial equity assessment criteria and equity audits in human rights and environment and sustainability.
- Provide training and technical assistance to build HEiAP capacity in municipalities within suburban Cook County to strengthen community-based organizations and residents' capacity to evaluate and respond to public programs and policies with a HEiAP lens.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Hired and onboarded key personnel to drive and facilitate a HEiAP process in August 2022.
- Convened an internal committee to guide strategy and align work with existing initiatives and began conducting best practice research.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
<p>Conduct an assessment on existing priorities, needs, and opportunities to inform a HEiAP approach with Cook County and other partner agencies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Conduct 5-6 stakeholder interviews to identify interest in and alignment with HEiAP.• Identify short-term goals and process for working with partner agencies.• Leverage community input to help inform the work.• Develop key performance indicators to demonstrate impact.	1st Quarter FY23
<p>Develop and implement an initial health equity assessment for Cook County policies and programs.</p>	2nd Quarter FY23

1.2

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

Equity Lead

Cook County Health

Partners

Cook County Department of Public Health, Office of the President, City of Chicago Department of Public Health and local behavioral health providers

Related Investments

- Behavioral Health Authority - \$74 million ARPA allocation

Equity Impact

Cook County Health has the statutory authority to provide behavioral and mental health services throughout Cook County. Unfortunately, despite the growing behavioral health needs of residents, Cook County is one of the largest metro areas that does not have such an authority in place. The Behavioral Health Authority will align all behavioral health services under one domain and will ensure that all Cook County residents have access to these services at the right time and in the right care setting. Residents with more complex health conditions whose needs are often exacerbated by social and economic inequality will be able to access a more comprehensive outpatient system. The Authority will promote a culturally and linguistically sensitive behavioral health practice throughout Cook County and will take a comprehensive approach to the health of the whole person, leading to greater equity in health outcomes.

Objectives

- Establish a Behavioral Health Authority to work with stakeholders across the county to evaluate the current behavioral health care environment, identify capacity needs, and resolve gaps in care.
- Build a robust, countywide behavioral health safety net by connecting external community programs and direct care providers.
- Partner with health stakeholders to develop the pipeline for future behavioral health practitioners in impacted BIPOC communities.
- Leverage the countywide Community Information Exchange system (once developed), to holistically address social drivers of health outcomes, deliver whole person support, and better inform and drive more equitable allocation of resources to residents across Cook County.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Hired and onboarded key personnel to lead the Behavioral Health Authority in July 2022.
- Conducted an initial site visit to observe San Diego County’s Behavioral Health Authority model and leveraged the information to help inform initial planning decisions.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE	
KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Research best practice models including San Diego’s and other jurisdictions.	3rd Quarter FY22
Work with consultancy to help draft the scope and governance structure for a Behavioral Health Authority.	3rd Quarter FY22
Hire and onboard key personnel for the Behavioral Health Authority.	3rd Quarter FY22
Create an engagement and outreach plan including an inventory of community collaboratives and aligned partners.	2nd Quarter FY23
Create an oversight board for all Cook County behavioral and mental health service providers to ensure best practices are met.	2nd Quarter FY23
Develop key performance indicators for each of the four strategic areas; clinical services, justice involved, community, and innovation.	2nd Quarter FY23
Establish the annual behavioral health impact fund grant program to support community partners contributing to the behavioral health landscape of Cook County.	4th Quarter FY24
Operationalize Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) Team capacity for availability throughout Cook County.	4th Quarter FY24

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.

Equity Lead

Office of the President

Partners

Bureau of Economic Development, Bureau of Technology, Cook County Health, Cook County Department of Public Health, Civic Consulting Alliance (CCA), health providers

Related Investments

- Community Information Exchange - \$10 million Equity Fund, \$10 million ARPA allocation

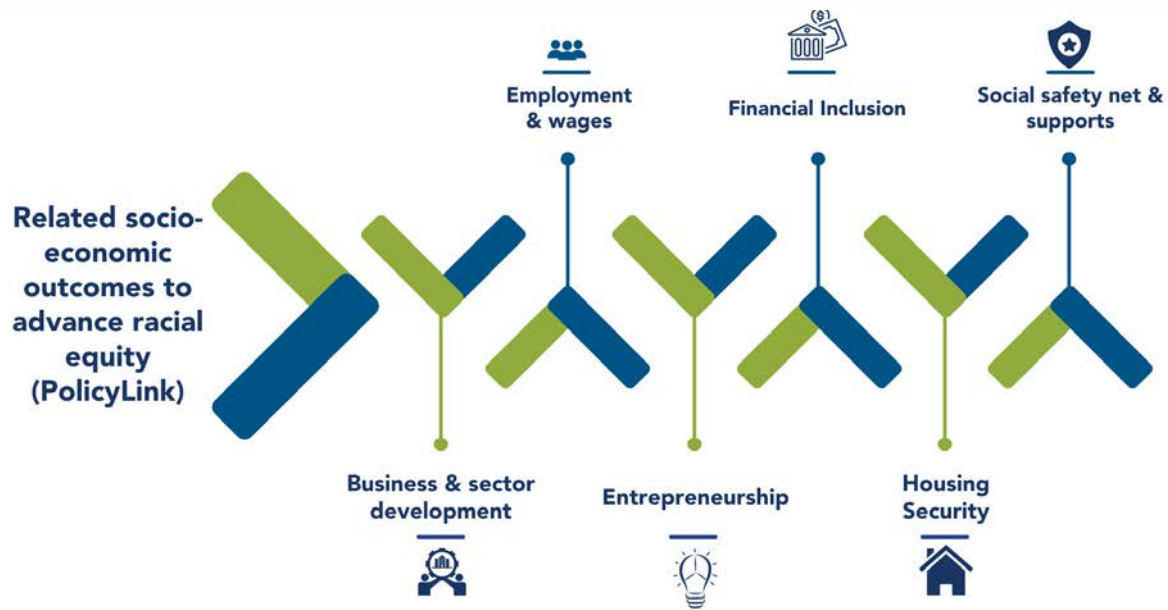
The implementation work plan for this recommendation is currently in the exploratory and planning phase and will be updated by June 2023.





Vital Communities

Vital Communities



Achieving racial equity can create significant economic opportunities and help address the underlying root causes of poverty, housing instability and historic disinvestment in Cook County’s BIPOC and other marginalized communities. The implementation of the expansive recommendations set forth under Vital Communities will address the needs of residents and businesses alike, creating a pathway for thriving communities where everyone has the opportunity to fully participate in our economy through access to jobs, business supports and access to affordable, stable, safe, and quality housing.

In our efforts to advance housing stability for BIPOC and other marginalized communities, Cook County has adopted a comprehensive approach to achieve functional zero homelessness and is developing a robust continuum of housing options to meet residents where they are during their time of need. In addition to increasing the housing stock, the County will also support the preservation of homeownership for BIPOC residents through financial assistance programs.

Cook County acknowledges that stable income plays a key role in residents’ financial health and social mobility. Thus, we launched the Promise Pilot, the largest guaranteed income program in the country, and will further explore additional financial assistance programs that provide flexible, real-time financial support for residents. We will also undertake neighborhood revitalization efforts in historically disinvested areas.

Through funding and enhanced legal protections, we will work to ensure fair and high-quality compensation as well as support for small businesses and entrepreneurship. Additionally, innovative programs will be developed to reduce predatory lending, which has disproportionately affected BIPOC and other marginalized communities for decades.

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.

Equity Lead

Office of the President

Partners

Cook County Assessor's Office, Cook County Board of Review, Cook County Clerk's Office, Cook County Treasurer's Office, and Cook County State's Attorney's Office

Equity Impact

Numerous studies have demonstrated inequities in property tax assessments and appeals that unfairly shift the tax burden to lower-income communities, most of which are BIPOC communities. Creating a more fair and equitable property tax system that reverses the property tax burden will allow homeowners in low-income communities to build equity in their homes. According to studies, homes constitute 60% of middle-class wealth in the U.S., and regressive assessment practices have stripped value from their properties. In addition, by reforming incentives, exemptions, and other countywide property tax programs, the County can determine how to best halt the disinvestment in communities and address the disparity of tax rates and other consequences of past regressive policies. More efficiently and strategically using tax incentives will create new development opportunities and expand the tax base, lowering individual tax burdens and creating a more stable revenue base to better fund education and other essential services.

Objectives

- Establish an internal Property Tax working group that will create recommendations to ensure the property assessment and tax system produces fair, equitable, consistent, and accurate results in a timely and efficient manner.
- Establish research projects with academic and industry leaders in the field of property tax to assess current states of systems, benchmark programs and practices to like-jurisdictions, and provide recommendations based on the findings.
- Implement key policy and legislative changes in partnership with the County's separately elected property tax offices.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Established the Property Tax working group that began its work by creating shared mission and goals and initial recommendations of systemic reforms that could be implemented collaboratively.
 - Engaged Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and the University of Illinois Chicago and began negotiating an Intergovernmental Agreement to oversee research projects.
 - Drafted a Statement of Work for consulting and research in operations and valuation of the assessment system.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE	
KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Finalize Intergovernmental Agreement for research assistance.	4th Quarter FY22
Draft and approve a Statement of Work for operational and valuation research.	4th Quarter FY22
Develop project plan with key performance indicators that demonstrate impact.	1st Quarter FY23
Release the Operational and Valuation RFP to the public per procurement guidelines.	1st Quarter FY23
Hire and onboard key personnel to support the Director in research and project management tasks.	1st Quarter FY23
Review and draft recommendations with the Property Tax working group.	2nd Quarter FY23
Evaluate the submissions for the Operational and Valuation RFP and finalize contract award.	3rd Quarter FY23
Establish stakeholder feedback loop to inform current state of system and potential reforms.	3rd Quarter FY23

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.

Equity Lead

Department of Human Rights and Ethics

Partners

Bureau of Economic Development- Department of Planning and Development, Housing Authority of Cook County, Budget for Black Lives Coalition

Equity Impact

Home is the cornerstone from which people build better lives for themselves and their families and yet, many people are precluded access to housing entirely due to their criminal records. Most harmed by these policies are people of color who are disproportionately arrested and incarcerated and people with disabilities. Enforcing Cook County's housing protections and removing structural barriers to access helps provide stable housing for improved education and economic opportunities, reduces recidivism and is a major step toward racial and economic justice.

Objectives

- Develop an enhanced strategic plan that strengthens the enforcement of fair housing laws and reduces unlawful housing discrimination through training, outreach, and compliance.
- Explore mechanisms that work to encourage, incentivize, and monitor municipalities' adoption of fair housing laws across Cook County.
- Revise Cook County Commission on Human Rights (Commission) procedural rules to make the process more streamlined and efficient for residents who have experienced discrimination.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Negotiated with TransUnion® to update SmartMove®, a screening tool used by many small landlords, to comport with the Just Housing Amendment (JHA) two-step screening process.
- Created the [Fair Housing Video Library Collection](#) in response to community feedback; collection includes informational materials related to the JHA.
- Increased outreach and awareness of the JHA by mailing information letters to more than 22,000 Class 2-11 property owners in November 2022; with logistical support from the Office of the President, Cook County Assessor's Office, and Cook County Treasurer's Office.
- Advocated for and received additional personnel capacity to support the work in the FY23 budget.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Hire and onboard key personnel.	1st Quarter FY23
Develop enhanced enforcement plans to strengthen fair housing laws.	2nd Quarter FY23
Develop key performance indicators that more accurately track impacts of fair housing laws and enforcement in Cook County.	2nd Quarter FY23
Coordinate with the Department of Planning and Development and the Housing Authority of Cook County on the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Plan and related initiatives to ensure coordinated impact.	2nd Quarter FY23
Develop plan for outreach and training regarding the JHA and Source of Income Protections.	2nd Quarter FY23
Revise the Commission's procedural rules to streamline the complaint process.	2nd Quarter FY23

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.

Equity Lead

Bureau of Economic Development - Department of Planning and Development

Partners

Department of Human Rights and Ethics, Justice Advisory Council, Housing Authority of Cook County, Illinois Housing Development Authority, Illinois Department of Human Services, Chicago Bar Foundation, Alliance to End Homelessness in Suburban Cook County and the Continuum of Care partner agencies

Related Investments

- Fixed-site Emergency Shelter initiative - \$17.5 million ARPA allocation
- Hotel-based Sheltering initiative - \$7.4 million ARPA allocation

Equity Impact

The transition to a fixed-site sheltering model from hotel-based sheltering will serve more residents experiencing homelessness, expand the continuum of wraparound services available to them and improve their long-term health outcomes. This paradigm shift will create a more person-centered, accessible, trauma-informed shelter system that quickly connects residents to safe and stable housing in suburban Cook County. Increased permanent supportive housing stock will bring suburban Cook County closer to ending homelessness and creating a community where everyone has a safe and stable place to call home. Additional units will allow the housing system to expand to meet increased need and to more quickly connect residents and families experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness with housing interventions that meet their needs and preferences and provide long-term housing stability.

Objectives

- Expand access to crisis shelters that includes co-located support services.
- Create a Landlord Incentive and Mitigation Fund to encourage landlords to rent to residents who may have a previous eviction on their record.
- Increase investments in transitional and permanent supportive housing units in partnership with the State of Illinois and other partners.
- Advocate for increased Emergency & Transitional Housing (ETH) program funding for ongoing operations of shelter and crisis housing at the state level.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Incorporated new funding from the Community Development Block Grant– CARES (CDBG-CV) as a stopgap to support hotel-based sheltering as initiatives are implemented; current average nightly count of residents served is 400.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE	
KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Develop a project plan that outlines the pipeline of projects, integrated timeline of the funding sources available and potential uses and constraints.	2nd Quarter FY23
Assess opportunities to reduce constraints on using federal and state resources for homelessness to support reentry housing.	3rd Quarter FY23
Develop key performance indicators that demonstrate impact.	3rd Quarter FY23
Continue supporting hotel-based sheltering and other emergency shelter options as a stopgap while new shelter options and permanent supportive housing is developed.	4th Quarter FY23
Establish a Landlord Incentive & Mitigation fund.	4th Quarter FY23

2.4

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

Equity Lead

Bureau of Economic Development - Department of Planning and Development

Partners

Housing Authority of Cook County, Cook County Land Bank Authority, Cook County separately elected property tax offices

Equity Impact

The implementation of stop-gap measures such as rental assistance and temporary supportive housing will keep vulnerable residents housed in the interim as affordable units are built. In addition to increasing the housing stock to meet the needs of residents, the creation of affordable housing units is essential to maintaining housing stability for BIPOC and other marginalized communities vulnerable to displacement. Using a racial equity lens in planning will enable the County to target housing investments in those communities, thus driving the creation of affordable units in an equitable manner to ensure that key populations benefit.

Objectives

- Create new units of affordable housing using a racial equity lens in planning and decision-making to ensure housing is closest to transportation, job opportunities and critical services.
- Continue funding temporary and supportive housing and rental/eviction assistance as a stopgap to ensure stability of housing pending the development of affordable units.
- Develop a Housing Trust Fund Action Plan to drive housing development in impacted communities in partnership with the Housing Authority of Cook County.
- Establish an ad-hoc Affordable Housing Taskforce to set common goals to stabilize the marketplace, better assist homebuyers and target housing investments in impacted communities.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Invested \$145,727,458 in Emergency Rental Assistance funding to support 17,644 renter households in suburban Cook County.
- Received national recognition for the creation of the Cook County Legal Aid and Housing Debt program (CCLAHD), a coordinating partnership established during the height of the pandemic with the Office of the President, Office of the Chief Judge, Cook County Commissioners, Chicago Bar Foundation, Illinois Housing Development Authority, and legal aid and housing partners.

Key Performance Indicators

- # Residents assisted through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program.
- # Units of permanent supportive housing constructed.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Draft the Regional Fair Housing Plan which will provide residents better access and options for where they live.	1st Quarter FY23
Establish an ad-hoc working group with separately elected property tax offices to better leverage and coordinate county resources in the development and preservation of affordable housing.	2nd Quarter FY23
Develop a feasibility plan for a homebuyer interest buydown program.	3rd Quarter FY23
Develop an outreach and communications plan to increase municipal partnerships on affordable housing in impacted communities.	4th Quarter FY23
Develop a Housing Trust Fund Action Plan with the Housing Authority of Cook County.	4th Quarter FY23

2.5

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

Equity Lead

Bureau of Economic Development

Partners

Office of the President, Housing Authority of Cook County, Elevate, Community and Economic Development Association (CEDA), Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA), Chicago Bar Foundation

Related Investments

- Healthy Homes, Water Conservation, and Deep Energy Retrofit Program - \$30 million ARPA allocation
- Water Affordability Program - \$20 million ARPA allocation
- Emergency Mortgage Assistance - \$15 million ARPA allocation

Equity Impact

Home ownership is a key avenue for residents to build wealth and can have life-changing impacts on households over time. However, historic, and systemic inequities in employment and income, education and access to affordable financing have left BIPOC and other marginalized residents unable to purchase a home or build long-term equity. For the few who can overcome these barriers, the disproportionately high property tax burden in Cook County makes it nearly impossible to preserve homeownership. Reforming the County's property assessment and taxation system and providing direct financial assistance for residents to maintain their homes will help close the racial wealth gap and positively impact families and the communities in which they live.

Objectives

- Develop a Mortgage Assistance 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.
- Increase access to, and coordination of, existing household assistance programs to holistically address the needs of homeowners including water affordability, home retrofitting programs and energy efficiency programs.
- Reform the Cook County property assessment and taxation system to reduce the disproportionately high tax burden that prevents BIPOC residents from having the financial means to make improvements to their home and build home equity.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Restarted the Mortgage Foreclosure Mediation Program (MFMP) in partnership with IHDA as a component of the Cook County Legal Aid for Housing and Debt (CCLAHD) Program.

Key Performance Indicators

- # Residents assisted through the Mortgage Assistance Program (once underway).

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE	
KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Develop Mortgage Assistance Program in alignment with IHDA’s program and resources.	2nd Quarter FY23
Develop additional key performance indicators that demonstrate impact.	2nd Quarter FY23
Inventory home retrofit programs and identify major gaps and opportunities for County intervention.	4th Quarter FY23
Identify potential legislative solutions, mandates and partners currently in support of limiting utility shutoffs.	1st Quarter FY24
Identify potential cross-program connections to holistically address homeowner needs in relation to utility shutoffs.	1st Quarter FY24

2.6

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

Equity Lead

Bureau of Economic Development

Partners

Give Directly, University of Chicago Inclusive Economy Lab and Crown Family School of Social Work, Policy, and Practice

Related Investment

- Promise Guaranteed Income Pilot - \$42 million ARPA allocation

Equity Impact

Following the success of the Cook County COVID-19 Recovery Resident Cash Assistance program, the County launched the Promise Guaranteed Income Pilot. Direct cash payments improve recipients' ability to weather an emergency, be stably employed, invest in educational resources for their children and access needed healthcare. This in turn positively impacts their mental and physical health, as well as improves financial stability and economic mobility.

Objectives

- Design and implement the Promise Guaranteed Income Pilot that will provide 3,250 households with the financial resources to improve their economic mobility.
- Explore the development of an emergency relief fund to provide direct, flexible financial assistance to residents at their time of need.
- Partner with workforce providers on how they can better leverage Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) barrier reduction funds to support jobseekers in maintaining employment.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Launched the Promise Guaranteed Income Pilot, the largest guaranteed income pilot in the United States in October 2022; first round of payments distributed in December 2022.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Begin implementing the Promise Guaranteed Income Pilot including the initiation of financial counseling for participants.	1st Quarter FY23
Conduct a feasibility study for the creation of an emergency relief fund that provides flexible, real-time support to residents in need.	4th Quarter FY23
Conduct a comprehensive evaluation (quantitative and qualitative) to assess the impacts of the Promise Pilot on the local economy and the participants financial stability, economic mobility, physical and mental health.	4th Quarter FY25

2.7

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

Equity Lead

Bureau of Economic Development

Partners

Office of Contract Compliance, Office of the Chief Procurement Officer, Department of Human Rights and Ethics, Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership (Partnership)

Related Investments

- Economic Development Administration's Good Jobs Challenge Grant Award to the Chicago Cook Workforce Partnership - \$18.5 million
- Investing in Families and Youth - \$15 million ARPA allocation
- Defense Manufacturing Community Support Program Grant - \$675,000

Equity Impact

Cook County's investments in workforce initiatives and programs that support high quality jobs will provide residents with adequate resources to meet their basic needs, build assets and achieve economic security. The County's sector-based economic development programs help grow good, middle-skill jobs (manufacturing, energy) and The Partnership's training and placement programs connect workers to career pathways with good jobs. These investments help reduce income inequities and nurture the well-being of Black and Latine communities and the shared prosperity of local economies. Closing racial gaps through employment and livable wages can boost regional economies while lifting families and communities.

Objectives

- Enforce Cook County's Minimum Wage and Living Wage provisions and support sectors that pay living wages, provide good benefits, create potentials for career pathways and reduce precarious work environments.
- Develop internal policies and procurement practices to ensure that vendors that work with Cook County are held to high standards for public accountability and promote equitable employment outcomes.
- Define and publicly report equity goals for workforce investments and connect those goals to support high growth sectors.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

Successfully applied for and completed, the first phase of Results for America’s (RFA) Good Jobs & Equity Project to support Cook County in leveraging historic ARPA and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) to improve job quality and advance workforce equity.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE	
KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Hire and onboard key personnel to support and coordinate workforce development programs and investments.	2nd Quarter FY23
Develop key performance indicators that demonstrate impact.	2nd Quarter FY23
Define and publicly report equity goals for workforce investments.	2nd Quarter FY23
Participate in the RFA Good Jobs and Equity Project. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete the Good Jobs & Equity definition process.• Create a plan to apply that definition (and enforce County minimum wage requirements) to the County’s and Partnership’s sector-based and workforce development work.• Scope a process to apply the good jobs definition as well as related equity goals for tax incentives, County procurement practices, and W/MBE certifications.	1st Quarter FY24

2.8

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

Equity Lead

Bureau of Economic Development

Partners

Bureau of Finance, Department of Environment & Sustainability, State of Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Local Business Support Organizations, Next Street, the Fund for Equitable Business Growth

Related Investments

- Small Business Grant Program - \$70 million ARPA allocation
- Small Business Assistance Program and One Stop Shop - \$15.7 million ARPA allocation

Equity Impact

Small businesses form the backbone of Cook County's economy. They not only stimulate economic growth by creating jobs, but also offer a path towards wealth creation for entrepreneurs. Residents from BIPOC communities have historically faced significant barriers to entry into entrepreneurship. The County bridges this gap through our programs targeted at business owners from historically excluded populations. These programs foster small business growth by offering no cost advising services, as well as giving grants to address capital needs, thereby strengthening small business resiliency, advancing long-term equity, and reducing the racial wealth gap.

Objectives

- Continue supporting the recovery of women- and minority-owned small businesses from the pandemic through the small business grant and business advising programs.
- Develop an entrepreneurship program for Black and Latine residents in alignment with the County's Small Business Source Program.
- Pursue Inclusive Procurement strategies that increase purchasing from minority-owned businesses and help locally owned businesses in target groups attain W/MBE certification and participate in County procurement.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Launched the Small Business Source program in May 2022 which assisted 4,500 small businesses with direct 1:1 assistance; 68% are businesses owned by BIPOC, 76% have 5 or fewer employees.
- Launched the Small Business Grant Program (the "Grow Grant") in October 2022; funds available to support ~2,500 businesses annually. 34% of business owners were Black, 10% were Latine non-white business owners and 24% were other POC business owners.

Key Performance Indicators

- Business advising clients reflect demographic distribution in line with Cook County demographics.
- Distribution of grant resources in line with Cook County demographics and hard-hit sectors (many of which often are owned by BIPOC businesses).
- # Adaptations to programs based on demand (e.g., adapting business advising approach based on small business feedback and composition of applicant pool).

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Launch and actively monitor the Small Business Grant Program.	2nd Quarter FY23
Conduct an Access to Capital study to better understand the barriers small businesses face in accessing capital and opportunities to generate additional financial resources.	3rd Quarter FY23
Continue working with and engaging the Small Business Advisory Council.	3rd Quarter FY23
Develop responsive services and resources to support entrepreneurship.	3rd Quarter FY23
Develop Inclusive Procurement strategies to increase and strengthen the pipeline of M/WBE in the County's procurement process. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reactivate the internal Inclusive Procurement working group. • Complete an assessment of County expenditures with W/MBE businesses and identify opportunities to expand set of W/MBE contractors and suppliers. • Re-align County policies to increase the pipeline of minority-owned businesses and help them access procurement opportunities from the County, other local governments, and County partners. 	4th Quarter FY23

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.

Equity Lead

Bureau of Economic Development

Partners

Office of the President, United Way of Metro Chicago, Restoration Ministries, Community and Economic Development Association (CEDA), Cornerstone Community Development Corporation

Related Investment

- Transforming Places - \$15 million Equity Fund, \$500,000 ARPA allocation

Equity Impact

Ongoing disinvestment in low-income communities has negatively impacted access to opportunities for the predominantly Black and Latine residents living in these areas. Leveraging a place-based approach will help the County invest in these historically excluded communities by working alongside residents and local partners to help identify community needs and create a resident-driven neighborhood strategy. The arc of this work will help the selected communities to build their capacity to implement desired community growth, as well as help the County build our ability to invest in community-driven initiatives.

Objectives

- Establish a community-driven, place-based investment program in five (5) suburban communities utilizing the County's Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) and other data to inform geographic locations.
- Partner with identified communities to leverage and coordinate existing and new County resources that can help implement local priorities as determined by the community.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Launched the Transforming Places Initiative in October 2022 in partnership with United Way.
- Completed a data-driven community selection process along with a qualitative assessment to identify two (2) of the five (5) participating communities.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Select and recruit three (3) communities for new Neighborhood Networks for cohort 2 of the initiative.	4th Quarter FY22
Launch two cohorts with 1-3-year programming including coalition building, creating workplans and capacity building and implementation.	1st Quarter FY23
Develop key performance indicators in partnership with local community partners and United Way based on the needs of the community.	4th Quarter FY23
Develop program infrastructure including the hiring and onboarding of personnel, retaining external evaluator, developing systems for internal County coordination, and determining the approach for allocating program implementation funds.	4th Quarter FY23

2.10

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

Equity Lead

Office of the President

Partners

Bureau of Economic Development, Illinois Department of Financial and Professional Regulation, Woodstock Institute

The implementation work plan for this recommendation is currently in the exploratory and planning phase and will be updated by June 2023.

2.11

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

Equity Lead

Cook County Department of Public Health

Partners

Department of Human Rights and Ethics, Raise the Floor Alliance, Chicago Jobs with Justice, University of Illinois in Chicago School of Public Health, Shriver Center on Poverty Law

Related Investment

- Cook County Suburban Worker's Protection Initiative - \$5 million ARPA allocation

Equity Impact

The pandemic highlighted the critical importance of workers being able to take paid sick time and has shown that the lack of a uniform paid sick leave policy across municipalities is a health and racial equity issue because BIPOC workers are less likely to work jobs that offer paid sick leave. In recovery and beyond, the Suburban Worker's program will continue to advance sustainable, worker-centered systems for education, reporting and compliance, and support policy changes that promote worker's rights, health, and safety. To ensure that future health related crises are effective in addressing the health and safety

needs of workplaces in general, education and outreach in the most vulnerable communities will mitigate disproportionate negative impacts experienced within those communities.

In addition, this work will inform overall system level improvements and demonstrate how trusted community-based organizations can be leveraged to strengthen a more equitable response to future health and safety needs.

Objectives

- Increase outreach and education to ensure workers and employers are aware of worker protection laws and enforcements in partnership with the Department of Human Rights and Ethics.
- Establish a worker safety committee pilot to support workers in high violation workplaces.
- Establish a process to acquire and share violation data to increase visibility and guide strategic enforcement plans.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Hired and onboarded key personnel and successfully applied for Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funding to support the piloting of worker safety committees.
- Successfully monitored and enforced COVID-19 mandates during the pandemic. Over 1.2 million communications distributed throughout various mediums to reach workers most impacted by COVID-19; nearly 5,000 attendees at town halls to provide trusting spaces for information-sharing; over 2.6k worksites were reached for PPE; 600+ employers reached with vital COVID-19 mitigation/protection education; and 800+ referrals for additional social services needed by workers most impacted by COVID-19.

Key Performance Indicators

- # Workplaces or communities that establish a worker safety committee
- # Violations tracked
- # Workers reached, educated, or trained
- # Businesses inspected that improve work standards
- # Policies or system changes adopted
- # Community/worker-led solutions

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Re-launch the Suburban Cook County Healthy Work Partnership.	1st Quarter FY23
Complete an environmental scan to inform strategy agenda and program redesign.	3rd Quarter FY23
Develop legislative agenda to holistically support workers.	4th Quarter FY23
Establish methods to acquire and share violation data for strategic enforcement purposes; draft relevant inter-agency agreements as needed.	4th Quarter FY23
Establish an inter-agency hub for collaboration on enforcement to maximize impact.	4th Quarter FY23





Safe and Thriving Communities

Safe and Thriving Communities



All residents should have the ability to feel safe at home and in their communities regardless of where they live. Unfortunately, many Black residents continue to face unprecedented levels of violence in their community and have been disproportionately targeted for arrest and prosecution due to long-standing biases in the public safety and criminal legal system.

To create safe communities and a more equitable criminal legal system for all residents, Cook County will continue our work to reform the pretrial system intentionally focusing on addressing racial and ethnic disparities. In addition, we will significantly increase our investments to address the underlying root causes of violence by removing structural barriers in housing and economic development and through the expansion of behavioral health resources and the implementation of community-informed alternatives to policing in suburban Cook County.

The Justice Advisory Council (JAC) will lead this work in a holistic and collaborative way, leveraging data to ensure evidence-based decision-making and transparency to the public through the establishment of a publicly accessible database in partnership with criminal justice stakeholder offices.

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.

Equity Lead

Justice Advisory Council

Partners

Office of the Chief Judge, Cook County State's Attorney Office, Cook County Sheriff's Office, Cook County Public Defender's Office, and the Clerk of the Circuit Court

Equity Impact

Currently, criminal justice data exists in separate systems managed by different stakeholder offices, making it difficult to provide a comprehensive picture of public safety. By identifying and sharing disaggregated, deidentified criminal justice related data, practitioners and community stakeholders can (1) better understand the impact of the criminal legal system in their communities, (2) better visualize and address disparate impacts, (3) greater inform resource allocation to address violence, and (4) better measure progress in creating safe communities. Community-based organizations and practitioners alike regularly find themselves operating without enough information to understand the efficacy of their own programs and reform efforts. Black and Latine communities remain disproportionately impacted by the operations of these systems and a more unified and public facing body of data would better address the inequities experienced by these communities and help drive more resources to where they are needed the most.

Objectives

- Coordinate existing research bodies working with the County to advance data-driven, community-informed decision-making.
- Develop a comprehensive public-facing data dashboard that includes key ARPA outputs and desired equity outcomes across the criminal legal system.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Hired and onboarded key personnel to advance the work in collaboration with County criminal justice stakeholders offices.
- Developed uniform Community Violence Intervention Street Outreach metrics and definitions to advance more robust evaluation on impact through the Violence Prevention Intergovernmental partnership with the State of Illinois and City of Chicago.
- Successfully awarded a MacArthur Foundation Safety and Justice Challenge Equity Cohort grant to convene a multidisciplinary body of community and system representatives to do a structured analysis of racial disparity in the County's criminal legal system.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Conduct a landscape analysis of current data collection and public data reporting and identify gaps and opportunities for increased data-collection, data sharing and public-facing transparency.	4th Quarter FY23
Co-design key performance indicators with practitioners and the existing Community Engagement Committee through the Justice Advisory Council.	4th Quarter FY23
Develop a long-term data plan that identifies large-scale data needs, processes, and resources to ensure sustainability in the dissemination and maintenance of data.	4th Quarter FY24

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.

Equity Lead

Justice Advisory Council

Partners

Bureau of Economic Development- Planning and Development, Housing Authority of Cook County, State of Illinois, City of Chicago, Illinois Justice Project (ILJP)

Related Investments

- Reentry Housing Resources Initiatives - \$20 million ARPA allocation
- Emergency Reentry Vouchers - \$10.5 million ARPA allocation

Equity Impact

The impact of incarceration extends beyond those physically housed in a secure facility. Family members, friends, employers, and community are all impacted by the incarceration of someone in their network. Employment, childcare, housing, and social services are all vulnerable to disruption when someone is incarcerated. However, re-entry services work to mitigate these impacts and help foster safe and thriving communities by supporting residents' safe and successful return to community, economically and socially. Unfortunately, re-entry and supportive services remain under-resourced and fragmented in communities with the greatest number of returning residents. By increasing County resources—particularly investments in housing supports—creating a Cook County Re-entry Services network and embarking on a collaborative budgeting process, Cook County will work to address gaps in resources, help organizations coordinate and build a more robust continuum of care for re-entry services. Returning residents and providers supporting them will be able to count on a reliable information source and coordinating body at the County level to maintain this network.

Objectives

- Develop a Returning Resident's unit to leverage and coordinate existing resources across County criminal justice stakeholder offices and networks to expand housing options, access to healthcare, and public benefits for returning residents.
- Launch a rental assistance program for returning residents that includes wraparound services in partnership with the Housing Authority of Cook County.
- Expand the No Place to Stay (NPTS) housing program for pre-trial defendants ordered to electronic monitoring but who lack a community residence.
- Develop a state and local continuum of coordinated re-entry services in partnership with the State of Illinois and City of Chicago.

Objectives, cont'd.

- Establish a Cook County Assistance for Returning Residents Portal that would be a public resource network for residents and providers.
- Leverage the emerging 211 and 988 infrastructures under development to ensure a pathway for support of returning residents.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Established a Pretrial Fairness Act Supports and Services workgroup to connect re-entry services to residents as early as pretrial to facilitate early engagement and continuity of care from pretrial to post-sentence.
- Hired and onboarded key personnel to support the development of a diverse array of re-entry services and programs.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE	
KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Launch a Returning Resident Rental Assistance Program that includes wraparound supports.	2nd Quarter FY23
Conduct a landscape analysis of existing County criminal justice stakeholder offices engaging in the re-entry space; analysis will include surveys and interviews.	3rd Quarter FY23
Develop a comprehensive set of key performance indicators that demonstrate impact.	3rd Quarter FY23
Formalize agreements with state and local correctional facilities and re-entry providers.	4th Quarter FY24
Design and activate the Returning Resident portal on the Cook County website.	4th Quarter FY24
Draft and implement a collaborative budgeting framework to support better coordination of re-entry resources across County criminal justice stakeholder offices to maximize impact of investments.	1st Quarter FY25

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.

Equity Lead

Justice Advisory Council

Partners

Cook County Health, Cook County Department of Public Health, Cook County Public Defender's Office, Office of the Chief Judge, Cook County Sheriff's Office, Cook County State's Attorney's Office, Budget for Black Lives Coalition

Related Investments

- Office of Behavioral Health and Wellness - \$74 million ARPA allocation
- Community Information Exchange System - \$10 million Equity Fund, \$10 million ARPA allocation
- 211 System - \$2.3 million Corporate funding

Equity Impact

With well over 100 different policing agencies in suburban Cook County, what leads to police contact can vary widely from one municipality to another. Many of these municipalities have 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. Investing in alternatives to a police response can more effectively work to address the underlying root causes of crime and violence, reduce reliance on law enforcement and the criminal legal system, and minimize the chances of violent or deadly encounters with police.

Objectives

- Advance the recommendations of the Alternatives Health Intervention Response Taskforce (ALT-HIR) Report focused on appropriate non-law enforcement responses to residents experiencing behavioral/mental health crises.
- Build a comprehensive understanding of policing practices in suburban Cook County, informed by law enforcement and community through listening sessions, interviews and existing data.
- Support the emerging work to develop a 211 infrastructure to ensure policing bodies and providers have non-emergency access to social services.
- Invest in alternatives to 911 responses for behavioral health crises by working with communities to identify the needs and priorities that best serve them in emergency situations.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Established and co-chaired the Alternative Health Intervention Response (ALT-HIR) Taskforce and released report in September 2022.
- FY23 budget approval of two new clinically trained staff for the Emergency Telephone Service Board (ETSB) to address behavioral and mental health calls in lieu of dispatching law enforcement.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Develop a community engagement process—including conducting listening sessions—to define public safety needs of residents and inform non-policing solutions.	3rd Quarter FY23
Conduct focus groups/interviews with law enforcement stakeholders across high contact municipalities to better understand their resources and interactions with suburban residents.	3rd Quarter FY23
Inventory and map diversion and deflection practices of policing agencies in suburban Cook and how referrals to court compare to deflection programs and referral practices in Chicago.	3rd Quarter FY24
Coordinate and drive progress on ALT-HIR Task Force Report Recommendations.	4th Quarter FY23
Develop key performance indicators.	4th Quarter FY23
Develop strategic work plans for dedicated investments related to suburban policing alternatives.	4th Quarter FY24



Smart Communities

Smart Communities



Quality and equitable transportation and digital infrastructure connect residents to employment, education, healthcare, government services and much more. Recognizing the fact that BIPOC and other marginalized communities are the most financially burdened and reliant on public transportation, the County will continue to expand the accessibility, availability, and affordability of public transportation through our successful Fair Transit Pilot.

Moreover, in our commitment to expand access to broadband in suburban communities, Cook County will adopt a regional approach to increasing digital access and partner with high vulnerability municipalities to develop a regional Digital Equity Action plan that centers impacted communities and advances four priority areas: digital infrastructure, digital proficiency, digital accessibility and digital security and safety. Technical assistance and financial assistance for internet service and digital services to support households in those communities will also be provided.

The Department of Transportation and Highways and Office of the President will primarily drive this work and ensure residents have access to affordable, high-performance transportation and broadband networks.

4.1

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

Equity Lead

Department of Transportation and Highways (DOTH)

Partners

Metra, Pace, Chicago Transit Authority (CTA), Regional Transportation Authority (RTA), Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP), University of Illinois, Center for Neighborhood Technology

Related Investment

- Fair Transit Pilot - \$35 million allocation from motor fuel tax revenue

Equity Impact

Through several initiatives, including the development of a countywide transit plan and the continued implementation of the Invest in Cook program, Cook County is working with partners to make key improvements to the transit system that would make it more convenient, affordable, and equitable for all residents, regardless of their geographic location. Some of the most important capital improvements include better bus service, modernizing stations, and providing safe access to trains and buses. For example, County investments to make buses faster and more reliable disproportionately benefit lower income and minority communities as analysis for the transit plan shows they tend to be more reliant on bus service. The Fair Transit model expands the affordability of transit, helping encourage additional ridership while giving people new options to travel for work, school, and play. At the same time, the transit system in the Chicago metro area is one of several large systems in the United States that face a fiscal cliff in the upcoming two to three years as fare revenues have declined due to the pandemic. The County's leadership and advocacy in this area, in partnership with other stakeholders, can help bring needed financial stability to the system, which benefits all County residents but especially transit reliant communities.

Objectives

- Expand direct investments in public transportation and continue the commitment to the Fair Transit model to increase transit affordability and enhance service.
- 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.
- 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.

Objectives, cont'd.

- Partner with the RTA 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.
- Adopt and publish equity metrics in County-funded transportation projects and factor equity into Cook County appointments to transit service boards.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Fair Transit pilot launched in January 2021 is now approaching the end of its second year.
- Ridership on the Metra Electric and Rock Island (the two Metra lines included in pilot) has rebounded from its post-pandemic low at a 20% faster rate as compared to the rest of the system.
- Pace has adopted the Fair Transit increase in service frequency along the 352 Halsted Route as part of their regular schedule.
- Nearly \$1 million of Invest in Cook funding was awarded to Metra to partially fund design and construction of the 147th Street station on the Metra Electric. The new station construction was initiated in the Fall of 2022 and will bring passenger amenities such as a warming station, overhead canopies for shelter from the weather and an elevator providing ADA accessibility.
- The County has partnered with Metra to submit a federal grant application for the reconstruction of the 95th Street Metra Electric station at Chicago State University and committed \$5 million for the local project funding match.

Key Performance Indicators

- Number of capital investments for transit projects made by the County each year.
- Amount of grant and other local funding for transit projects leveraged through County investments each year.
- Percentage of Invest in Cook awards in moderate and high need communities.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
<p>Prepare feasibility study and implementation action plan for fare integration in conjunction with RTA and service boards.</p>	<p>1st Quarter FY23</p>
<p>Complete the Cook County Transit Plan, which will identify improved transportation options for transit reliant communities to guide county investment.</p>	<p>2nd Quarter FY23</p>
<p>Formalize policy recommendations on transit-supportive economic development incentives as part of DOTH transit plan.</p>	<p>2nd Quarter FY23</p>
<p>Formalize a transparent process for increasing the diversity of transit board appointees for Cook County Board President.</p>	<p>3rd Quarter FY23</p>
<p>Work with University of Illinois/Center for Neighborhood Technology to develop equity measures for Invest in Cook and broader DOTH programs.</p>	<p>3rd Quarter FY23</p>
<p>Prepare assessment of transit access for County assets.</p>	<p>4th Quarter FY23</p>
<p>Participate in the RTA Strategic Plan process and assist CMAP in developing its required transit overview report to the Illinois General Assembly.</p>	<p>1st Quarter FY24</p>

4.2

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

Equity Lead

Office of the President

Partners

Bureau of Technology, Bureau of Economic Development, Council on Digital Equity (CODE)

Related Investments

- Chicago Southland Fiber Network Expansion - \$10 million ARPA allocation
- Digital Equity Planning and creation of Regional Digital Equity Action Plan - \$2 million ARPA allocation
- Broadband Expansion at Housing Authority of Cook County - \$2 million ARPA allocation

Equity Impact

The largest gap area in digital equity is attributed to race: Black and Latine adults are almost twice as likely as white adults to lack broadband access. Research shows that nearly half (43%) of unconnected Illinois households reside in Cook County. Furthermore, 17% of Black and Latine households in Cook County lack a computer. Barriers like the affordability of the internet, limited availability of devices, internet speed, and knowledge of digital platforms prevent youth, adults, and families from full participation in the digital world, including the ability to access government resources. Cook County is advancing digital equity by increasing digital connectivity, access to broadband infrastructure, and digital devices through broadband expansion projects, community-based fiber networks, and strategic partnerships with organizations that provide no-cost and low-cost devices. Additionally, Cook County is demonstrating leadership through organizing and planning with our Council of Digital Equity (CODE), that will lead to the creation of the inaugural regional digital equity plan in 2023. By advancing these digital equity goals and implementation of related activities, Cook County residents can actively and equitably participate in the internet economy that leads to improved quality of life and digital prosperity.

Objectives

- Adopt a regional approach to increase digital access and partner with high vulnerability municipalities to better understand residents' needs and municipal infrastructure.
- Develop a regional Digital Equity Action Plan that centers impacted communities and advances four priority areas: digital infrastructure, digital proficiency, digital accessibility and digital security and safety.
- Support the continued expansion of broadband in impacted households and provide financial assistance for internet service and digital devices in partnership with the Housing Authority of Cook County and other stakeholders.
- Continue the internal facilitation of Council of Digital Equity (CODE) and leverage their input to help achieve the County's digital equity goals.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Hired and onboarded an inaugural Director of Digital Equity on June 13, 2022, to advance and coordinate digital equity planning.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE	
KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Draft a 60-day action plan to identify people and processes needed to advance digital equity activities.	3rd Quarter FY22
Conduct an assessment and inventory of digital equity champions, stakeholders, and activities through a digital equity survey and regional focus groups.	1st Quarter FY23
Draft key performance indicators that demonstrate impact in the four identified focus areas: Digital Infrastructure, Digital Proficiency, Digital Accessibility and Digital Security and Safety.	2nd Quarter FY23
Release an RFP to procure external consultant to support the drafting of a regional digital action plan.	3rd Quarter FY23
Publish the County's first regional Digital Equity Action Plan.	4th Quarter FY23





Sustainable Communities

Sustainable Communities



Environmental health and resilience are critical to the health and well-being of Cook County residents and can significantly reduce the human and economic toll of climate change and natural disasters. Residents in BIPOC communities have disproportionately suffered the burden of pollution and climate change impacts due to segregation, disinvestment and insufficient environmental management and disaster preparedness.

Led by the Department of Environment and Sustainability, Cook County aims to improve both public and environmental health not only through investments in technical assistance and financial resources in partnership with trusted community-based organizations but also by developing an environmental justice policy that incorporates environmental and equity impacts into our decision-making. Moreover, we will invest in climate-resilient infrastructure and renewable energy to help residents mitigate hazard risks and build resiliency.

5.1

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

Equity Lead

Department of Environment and Sustainability

Partners

Offices Under the President, Forest Preserve District of Cook County, Cook County Land Bank Authority, Housing Authority of Cook County, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District

Related Investments

- Stormwater Management Project Implementation - \$20 million ARPA allocation
- Climate Resiliency Plan Development - \$15.9 million ARPA allocation
- Forest Preserve Restoration Projects - \$10 million ARPA allocation
- Rain Ready Plan Implementation - \$6 million ARPA allocation
- Resilience Hubs - \$2.8 million ARPA allocation

Equity Impact

Climate resilient infrastructure will support residents by reducing negative impacts from flooding and high-heat events and bolster these communities in the face of future climate-related natural disasters. By focusing on areas of disinvestment and centering the needs of residents, the County intends to ensure that they are not left behind in the coming years, but rather stand at the forefront of preparation. Benefits of investing in climate resiliency include improved public health, reduction in property loss/damage, ability to rebound after major hazard or disaster events, improved local knowledge and capacity, and building opportunities for local green jobs.

Objectives

- Evaluate flood risk with other government partners in coordination with the County's Hazard Mitigation Plan to inform future investments.
- Provide technical assistance to impacted communities to strengthen climate resiliency through planning and project implementation, with a focus on green infrastructure, tree planting, and job training opportunities.
- Create Resilience Hubs, which will embed climate resilient infrastructure into community focal points so impacted communities are better prepared for disasters.
- Secure federal funding and bolster departmental capacity to support ongoing climate resiliency planning, green infrastructure, stormwater management, job creation, and hazard preparation beyond ARPA.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Released the 2021 Annual Cook County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Key Performance Indicators

- # Applicants for participation in Climate Resiliency Planning.
- # Community members participating in RainReady Plan Implementation.
- # Community partnerships identified for Resilience Hubs.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE	
KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Conduct outreach to begin the process of establishing three resilience hubs in the south suburbs.	1st Quarter FY23
Conduct outreach to community-based organizations for input on Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan.	1st Quarter FY23
Release application for Climate Resiliency Planning and identify communities for participation.	1st Quarter FY23
Initiate engagement and project prioritization with RainReady communities.	2nd Quarter FY23
Initiate RainReady installation and project implementation in communities.	3rd Quarter FY23
Draft update to Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan.	1st Quarter FY24
Initiate green infrastructure planning and technical assistance with municipalities and connect regional efforts with ARPA projects.	4th Quarter FY24

5.2

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

Equity Lead

Department of Environment and Sustainability

Partners

Cook County Department of Public Health, City of Chicago Department of Public Health, various environmental justice organizations

Equity Impact

An Environmental Justice Policy, once adopted by the County, can help inform and guide programmatic and policy decision-making across Offices under the President. Codifying our work will positively impact residents and communities by reducing or eliminating inequities in environmental problems and health outcomes. It will also provide communities more control over decisions that directly impact their health, livelihood, and economic development. Adoption of these tools and guidelines will allow the County to better qualify for and respond to federal funding opportunities as applicable to [Justice40 initiatives](#), a White House effort that directs 40% of Federal environmental investments into disadvantaged communities that are overburdened by pollution.[]

Objectives

- Draft and codify an Environmental Justice Policy for Offices Under the President.
- Develop a comprehensive Environmental Justice screening tool that will help identify impacted areas for planning and future investments in alignment with equity related initiatives, including the Health Equity in All Policies (HEiAP).
- Work with partners including the City of Chicago, Chicago Environmental Justice Network, and other stakeholders to ensure coordination and alignment of efforts as well as geographic inclusion.
- Develop a legislative agenda for Cook County to address environmental justice concerns and minimize added burden to impacted communities.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Convened an internal Environmental Justice Policy working group that has begun to explore environmental justice screening/mapping tools.
- Incorporated the Cook County Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) data into the ARPA program development process to help identify geographic areas of need and ensure access and inclusion for those most impacted communities.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Develop an engagement plan for community and stakeholder input, with an intentional focus on impacted residents.	1st Quarter FY23
Conduct community outreach in coordination with the City of Chicago for input on the creation of an Environmental Justice Policy and Environmental Justice screening tool.	2nd Quarter FY23
Engage community review and feedback on the tool and policy.	2nd Quarter FY23
Develop first draft of the Environmental Justice Policy.	3rd Quarter FY23
Develop key performance metrics to demonstrate impact.	3rd Quarter FY23
Finalize the Environmental Justice Screening Tool.	4th Quarter FY23
Finalize and implement the Environmental Justice Policy.	2nd Quarter FY24

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.

Equity Lead

Department of Environment and Sustainability

Partners

Offices Under the President, Forest Preserve District of Cook County, Cook County Land Bank Authority, Housing Authority of Cook County, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District

Related Investments

- Healthy Homes, Water Conservation, and Deep Energy Retrofit Program - \$30 million ARPA allocation
- Businesses Reducing Impact on the Environment (BRITE) Fund - \$10 million ARPA allocation
- Neighborhood Revitalization Brownfield Remediation - \$10 ARPA allocation
- Forest Preserve Restoration Projects - \$10 million ARPA allocation
- Household Hazardous Waste Site - \$7 million ARPA allocation
- Electric Vehicle Charging Stations - \$5.5 million ARPA allocation
- Cook County Sun and Save (Residential Renewable Energy Subsidy program) - \$3 million ARPA allocation
- Urban Farming Initiative Gap Analysis - \$150,000 ARPA allocation

Equity Impact

Environmental and public health are inextricably linked. The County's investments in both areas will help to address the generations of disinvestment, racist and inequitable policies and practices which have resulted in BIPOC communities experiencing higher rates of asthma, heart disease, flooding, and lack of access to natural areas. By reducing toxins and improving indoor air quality in residences, removing lead pipes that may contaminate drinking water, minimizing pollution from surrounding businesses, converting brownfields into usable space, and enhancing the forest preserves, Cook County residents will have access to safe water to drink, clean air to breathe, and an improved quality of life.

Objectives

- Partner with municipal water utilities to oversee and manage lead service line replacement across Cook County, starting with a pilot phase focused on high-risk home and facility-based childcare facilities.
- Align the Health Equity in All Policies (HEiAP) and the implementation of the Environmental Justice Policy to ensure an equity lens is utilized in the planning and programming of future investments in impacted communities.
- Acquire land to preserve more natural areas and restore existing preserves to high levels of ecological health in partnership with the Forest Preserves of Cook County.

Objectives, cont'd.

- Implement the Businesses Reducing Impact on the Environment (BRITE) program to support business investments that reduce pollution and improve air quality.
- Revitalize disinvested communities by facilitating the assessment and cleanup of contaminated and abandoned properties.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Assisted 48 County residents in installing solar panels on their homes through the Grow Solar Chicagoland group buy program.
- Assessed 66 sites in the South and West suburbs for contamination and developed cleanup and redevelopment plans, e.g., a former gas station was cleaned up by the Village of Bellwood with loans from Cook County and now contains two single-family homes.

Key Performance Indicators

- # Residences that proceeded with retrofits and upgrades through Healthy Homes
- # Acres where Riparian Restoration is initiated
- # Acres acquired as part of Forest Preserve’s Southeast Land Acquisition
- # Brownfields Environmental Site Assessments completed
- # Business assessments conducted as part of the BRITE Program

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE	
KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Initiate the acquisition of land which will improve access to green space for residents.	4th Quarter FY22
Finalize contracts for consultants to support climate resiliency and the BRITE Program assessment.	1st Quarter FY23
Hire and onboard key personnel in the Cook County Department of Public Health to serve as point person for the Healthy Homes program.	1st Quarter FY23
Launch the Lead Service Line Replacement Pilot Project.	1st Quarter FY23
Initiate riparian restoration work to reduce flooding in surrounding areas and improve overall ecological health.	2nd Quarter FY23
Begin Healthy Homes evaluations, remediation, and upgrades.	2nd Quarter FY23
Initiate hydrologic assessments in targeted areas.	4th Quarter FY23



Open Communities

Open Communities



Cook County strives to provide responsive, transparent services to all residents as part of our commitment to equity, engagement, and excellence. As evidenced by the 2020 Census, Cook County’s population and demographics continue to shift, reflecting more diversity across the County. It is imperative that we respond accordingly to ensure that we have the infrastructure to provide residents with access to culturally responsive services and meaningful ways to engage in our decision-making process. Communities with inclusive civic engagement—where everyone has a place at the table to define, direct and implement public services and amenities—are better able to meet the needs of their residents.

To ensure more equitable outcomes, we will establish flexible and empowering ways to encourage residents in BIPOC communities and other marginalized communities to meaningfully participate in developing and implementing programs and services. Moreover, we recognize the special needs and cultures of immigrants and refugees and will work on culturally responsive services to help them navigate systemic barriers and protect their rights.

In addition, Cook County relies on strong partnerships with community-based organizations to deliver many services to these same residents. 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. To ensure that there is an alignment of resources and a sustainable investment in BIPOC communities, we will work to revamp our grantmaking processes to reduce administrative burdens during the application process, and work with these organizations to increase their access to funding and strengthen their internal capacity to improve and maximize service delivery.

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.

Equity Lead

Office of the President

Partners

Justice Advisory Council, Violence Prevention Intergovernmental Partnership, Philanthropic partners

Related Investments

- \$15 million Equity Fund

The implementation work plan for this recommendation is currently in the exploratory and planning phase and will be updated by June 2023.

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.

Equity Leads

Justice Advisory Council (JAC), Office of the President

Partners

Chicago United for Equity

Equity Impact

Those who experience the most pressing challenges in our communities, including the disproportionate impact of crime and violence, are too often the furthest from the resources and influence to improve conditions. Cook County can better include representation of these experiences in our policymaking by ensuring people closest to the problems are also closest to the solutions. This will require a deliberate commitment by the County to engage residents to share their experiences and participate in crafting policy and practice at a larger systemic level. Residents so engaged will personally benefit from the empowerment that comes from being valued for their wisdom not only through compensation for providing subject matter expertise relevant to a given policy matter but also through the fulfillment of advocating on behalf of similarly situated peoples while holding government accountable for the consequences of its actions. This type of formalized, community-centered participatory process builds trust between the County and our residents and creates a level of meaningful civic engagement that will have long-lasting impacts.

Objectives

- Develop and formalize a community-centered participatory engagement process for Offices Under the President (OUP) that includes best practices on engagement of residents and other community stakeholders.
- Develop a community engagement compensation policy to be adopted and implemented across OUP.
- Formalize the JAC Community Engagement Calendar that includes the “Action Summit” and Community Dialogues model as developed under the MacArthur Safety and Justice Challenge.
- Facilitate community partnership workshops where community residents and community-based service providers meet regularly to discuss Cook County policy and practice matters.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- The Community Engagement Committee (CEC), through the JAC, participated in the MacArthur Foundation Equity cohort to identify racial inequities in the criminal legal system and potential solutions.
- Incorporated community representatives from the CEC into the collaborative decision-making process in the Pretrial Fairness Act (PFA) planning workgroup and held seven community engagement informational meetings with targeted communities.
- The Equity Cohort Steering committee through the JAC launched a fellowship program comprised of justice impacted community members alongside external County office representatives and community-based organizations.
 - The Fellowship program partners with Chicago Regional Organizing for Antiracism (C-ROAR) and is designed to use an equity lens to identify systemic and institutionalized inequities across the County’s criminal justice offices.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE	
KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Analyze current state of community engagement across OUP to better understand existing practices and gaps.	3rd Quarter FY23
Develop a plan for OUP to leverage existing community spaces and trusted community-based organizations when seeking community input.	3rd Quarter FY23
Develop key performance indicators to demonstrate impact.	4th Quarter FY23
Continue to participate in the MacArthur Foundation Equity Cohort to identify strategies that address racial inequities in the criminal legal system.	1st Quarter FY24
Draft and implement a community compensation policy using Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) best practices.	4th Quarter FY24
Pilot new engagement models to increase community involvement and participation in county decision-making.	4th Quarter FY24

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.

Equity Leads

Department of Human Rights & Ethics, Office of the President

Partners

Offices Under the President (OUP), Latino Advisory Committee

Equity Impact

Over 21 percent of Cook County residents are immigrants. In its work to increase equity and inclusion, the County has an opportunity to create and implement intentional policies and practices that measure impact, increase access to programs and services and reduce disparities for immigrant and refugee residents. Through the use of a human rights-centered approach, the Equity Audit will reveal potential barriers or gaps in residents' ability to access County services and engagement and inform the cross-collaboration work of the County to close those gaps through improved policy and practice implementation.

Objectives

- Create internal guidelines for collecting data and information that effectively measure impact on immigrant and refugee communities in partnership with Office of the President.
- Conduct equity audits across OUP, 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.
- Develop a public-facing report to provide the status of equitable access and recommendations for enhanced accessibility.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- Hired and onboarded a Data Fellow in collaboration with the Office of Research, Operations, and Innovations within the Bureau of Administration.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Create plan for developing and executing equity audits across OUP.	2nd Quarter FY23
Develop the Audit policy and processes, which will include an accessibility scan of current programs and services and further collaboration with community groups and OUP.	3rd Quarter FY23
Develop key performance indicators to demonstrate impact.	3rd Quarter FY23
Finalize and deploy relevant surveys to community groups and OUP.	4th Quarter FY23
Draft and publish Equity Audit Report and Recommendations.	4th Quarter FY24
Support OUP departments in the implementation of Equity Audit recommendations.	4th Quarter FY24

Additional Recommendations

Establish a Cannabis Business Development Program 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.

Equity Lead

Bureau of Economic Development

Partners

Cook County Cannabis Commission

Related Investments

- \$2 million Equity Fund to support a pilot program

Equity Impact

Cook County comprises the majority of the Bureau of Labor Statistics regions where the State of Illinois designated granting licenses. The Cannabis Business Development Program (CBDP) will impact eligible social equity applicant businesses operating in Cook County, which will be a major boost to the industry currently hampered with limitations in funding under current federal restrictions. The CBDP will not serve as the only grant program for Cook County social equity programs. It will serve as a supplement for other government grant programs for small cannabis businesses.

Objectives

- Engage cannabis subject matter experts to help develop the pilot program.
- Convene meetings with similarly situated government jurisdictions with similar cannabis small business grant programs to discuss best practices (i.e., programs in Oakland, CA., Sacramento, CA., Portland, OR.).
- Host town hall sessions with social equity applicants to garner feedback and ensure the finalized program addresses the specific needs of social equity applicants in Cook County.
- Engage the Cook County Cannabis Commission throughout the program planning and execution.
- Coordinate and collaborate with the State of Illinois and Cook County's 135 local municipalities relative to developments in government funding, programs and legislative/policy changes.

FY22 Highlighted Accomplishments

- The Cook County Cannabis Commission worked with local and national cannabis subject matter experts to educate the County and the Board of Commissioners relative to Illinois’ new recreational cannabis industry and its potential short-term and long-term impact on Cook County residents.
- The Cannabis Commission worked with both the State of Illinois’ Cannabis Regulation and Oversight Officer and the City of Chicago’s Cannabis Taskforce to collaborate on intergovernmental initiatives to support the development of Illinois’ new cannabis industry.
 - As of May 2022, the State of Illinois released 185 cannabis dispensary business licenses to cannabis dispensaries with social equity applicants representing the majority of the licensees.
 - As of June 1, 2022, Illinois issued over 341 licenses for craft growers, infusers, and transporters. The Cook County Cannabis Commission continues to speak with subject matter experts and several social equity applicants who received licenses.

Key Performance Indicators

- # Businesses applying to the program.
- # Businesses engaged in the program.
- Amount of grant funding received by program participants.
- # Businesses open for at least five years after obtaining licenses.

IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE	
KEY ACTIVITIES	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE
Develop the CBDP pilot with the Cook County Cannabis Commission, Bureau of Economic Development, and subject matter experts.	1st Quarter FY23
Present the finalized program details and application to Cook County Cannabis Commission and the Board of Commissioners.	2nd Quarter FY23
Begin advertising program and public outreach in preparation for the launch of the program.	3rd Quarter FY23
Launch Cook County Cannabis Business Development Program.	3rd Quarter FY23

Additional Recommendations, cont'd

Cook County Land Bank will continue working to increase affordable housing stock and economic opportunity in systematically disadvantaged communities.

Equity Lead

Cook County Land Bank Authority

Partners

Bureau of Economic Development, Housing Authority of Cook County

Related Investments

- \$5 million of Equity Fund

The implementation work plan for this recommendation is currently in the exploratory and planning phase and will be updated by June 2023.



Equity Fund Spending Plan

\$50 Million over FY22 and FY23

Transforming Places (Budget: \$15 million; Add'l Funding Sources: \$500,000 - ARPA)

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.

Equity in Grantmaking (Budget: \$15 million)

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.

Community Information Exchange (Budget: \$10 million; Add'l Funding Sources: \$10 million - ARPA)

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 Land Bank Authority (Budget: \$5 million)

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.

Cannabis Business Development Program (Budget: \$2 million)

The Cannabis Business Development Program 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.

FUTURE

As it stands, the taskforce initiatives budgeted within the Equity Fund Special Purpose Fund (SPF) have received an allocation of \$50 million, with \$47 million split between five recommendations and \$3 million in reserve. Revenue from Cook County's cannabis tax goes toward the Equity Fund SPF and the County has assigned surplus fund balance from FY2021 to ensure the near-term sustainability of the current initiatives. The County is working to dedicate additional revenue sources to the sustainability of the SPF and implementation of future recommendations, along with continued support of aligned ARPA initiatives that are proven to be effective to ensure their sustainability.



Conclusion

The Equity Fund Report and its first progress report highlight the historic commitment of the County to intentionally allocate and operationalize equitable resources for residents, prioritize policy solutions in alignment with the Cook County Policy Roadmap, and strategically plan for the sustainability of ARPA and Equity Fund initiatives in years to come.

The community-centered and long-term Equity Fund marks a great starter for Cook County to bring additional voices into resource allocation and ensures policy priorities are in line with the needs of BIPOC and other marginalized communities. Eliminating systemic inequities and disparities requires a persistent commitment to tackling historically rooted injustices, a commitment that the County fully owns.

The innovative, flexible model set by our Equity Fund provides opportunities to plan and implement our stated recommendations, with annual reports to be published to track our progress over time, as well as maintain transparency and accountability to the public. Through the Equity Fund plan and other investments, we will continue to advance our vision to build vibrant, sustainable, and inclusive communities for all residents.



Toni Preckwinkle
Toni Preckwinkle
Cook County Board President

Board of Commissioners

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