POLICYBRIDGE

Resetting the Table

An Urban Agenda for Cleveland

Resetting the Table

CLEVELAND

Executive Summary

In late February 2020, just before COVID-19 would upend life as we knew it for months, PolicyBridge, in partnership with Ohio Rep. Stephanie Howse, invited dozens of government officials, philanthropic leaders, representatives of service organizations, and community advocates to a working session with the goal of developing a framework for an urban agenda. The agenda was meant to be specific to Cleveland but applicable to other cities facing distress and disinvestment.

The 40 participants offering a diverse range of viewpoints found consensus around six overarching areas for coordinated action: economic opportunity and mobility, neighborhoods and housing, community health and wellness, criminal and social justice, educational attainment and career launching, and community mobilization and stability. These broad categories encompass a variety of related issues and intersect in ways that shape the vitality of urban areas.

We at PolicyBridge are in the practice of writing reports that are meant to shine a spotlight on a specific topic of particular concern to minority communities and other underserved populations. This urban agenda is not a report or policy brief. Nor is it a proposed new program or initiative. In our 17 years of research and advocacy, we have seen plenty of programs and initiatives undertaken to address a wide range of specific issues. Yet, as this document makes clear, these endeavors, even those deemed successful, have done little to move the needle on what we all expect the outcome of our collective efforts to be: improving the lives of Cleveland's people and strengthening its communities.

In our 17 years, we have seen Cleveland sit atop the list of most impoverished big cities—sadly, multiple times. And even when it's not deemed the worst, it remains among the worst. In addition, Cleveland routinely is singled out among the nation's worst cities for all manner of undesirable realities, ranging from Black infant mortality to internet access.

How can this be? Most especially, how can this be when we are a city with many hard-working and innovative community leaders and activists, with an engaged business community, and with admirable philanthropic institutions and resources?

Certainly, years of disinvestment and structural and institutional racism and inequity continue to loom large in Cleveland and many other distressed urban areas—and must be deliberately addressed and accounted for in any effort to bring about meaningful change. Yet, over the years, we have come to the realization that single-issue initiatives and well-intentioned endeavors are not enough to combat systemic, intersecting challenges. To truly make a dent in such broad-based needs, we need to unify our many, individual efforts behind a broad-based plan.

Consider this urban agenda a call for collective action.

The pandemic served to delay our agenda, but watching how the disease and efforts to slow its spread have impacted and harmed our community have reinforced our resolve and made clear the urgency of our effort. The fact that Cleveland will, after 16 years, have a new mayor at the start of the year and has been experiencing a change of leadership at several prominent organizations convinces us that now is the time for a common vision.

The focus areas, components and recommendations of our urban agenda are encapsulated below. Our hope is that this framework gets shared at corporate and philanthropic board meetings, helps shape local elections, sparks discussion among community members, emboldens stakeholders and drives us to act with collective purpose for a better future for Cleveland and its people.

Urban Agenda Focus Areas
Full Plate of Priority Issue Areas, Problems and Concerns
Nutrients for success by color

ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND MOBILITY	NEIGHBORHOODS AND HOUSING	COMMUNITY HEALTH AND WELLNESS	CRIMINAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE	EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT AND CAREER LAUNCHING	COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION AND STABILITY
• Business Development and Minority Entrepreneurship	• Affordable Housing and Home Ownership	• Mental Health/Addiction Prevention and Treatment Services	• 21st Century Public Safety and Police/Community Relations	• PreK-12 Education	• Public Policy, Advocacy and Voting
• Cooperative Economics and Economic Inclusion	• Housing Rehabilitation	• Integrated Primary and Preventative Health (High Quality, Accessible and Affordable)	• Re-Entry Initiatives	• Post-Secondary Education and Training	• Community Organizing and Leadership Development
• Wealth Building and Racial Income Equality	• Neighborhood Master Planning and Asset Attraction		• Sentencing Reform (Specialty Courts and Diversion Programs)	• Parental and Community Engagement	• Family-Led Reunification and Support
• Family Sustainable Wages	• Quality of Life (Recreation, Arts and Culture, Safety, Air Quality, Green Space)	• Health Disparities and Inequities	• Prosecutorial and Judicial Discretion	• Workforce Development (including youth employment)	• Digital Divide
		• Trauma/Toxic Stress	• Juvenile Justice Reform		• Community Navigators and Personal Care Ambassadors

Certainly, substantial efforts and resources have been directed over the years toward these six Urban Agenda Focus Areas. The following recommendations advocate the more integrated and inclusive approach necessary for transformation.

Recommendations

Adopt community-level accountability measures
- Set, embrace and track metrics at all levels of community
- Develop a "scorecard" of progress on specific initiatives and communitywide change
- Look for best practices, learn from what has worked elsewhere but recognize that cities have different needs and capacities

Encourage inclusive stakeholder alignment
- Create a directory including representatives of Cleveland's many different communities and organizations
- Insist that all initiatives use the directory to move beyond simply soliciting input and transition to providing a seat at the table for those beyond the "usual suspects" of thought leaders and influencers
- Tear down project silos and look for ways to coordinate actions to bring about faster, more substantive change

Acknowledge intersectionality
- Be mindful of the perceptions, biases, attitudes and behaviors that make structural and institutional racism possible and sustainable
- Build coalitions, agreements and partnerships in spaces where disparate entities are addressing similar issues

Seek extensive community input and voice
- Coordinate and host frequent (versus episodic) community forums to understand facts, life experiences and opportunities as envisioned by the community
- Invite in new voices and perspectives to broaden the view of organizational boards and government
- Build trust in processes by allowing space and opportunity for bottom-up engagement

Sequence community change efforts
- Develop a calendar of large-scale campaigns requiring significant community support
- Stage launches and estimate end dates when and where possible
- Rely on the consensus agenda to resist the allure of charismatic advocates, cause celebres and pet projects

Reimagine philanthropy
- Encourage funding organizations to unite behind an urban agenda
- Challenge the charitable community to be both nimble and bold in making concerted strategic investments

Dismantle structural and institutional racism
- Focus specific attention on policies, practices and norms perpetuating racial inequities
- Embed awareness training throughout community functions to foster understanding of explicit and implicit bias

Why Now?

We conceived PolicyBridge 17 years ago out of frustration and alarm due to the feckless and disordered response of local government, business and charitable entities to issues negatively affecting life in Cleveland's distressed and disinvested neighborhoods, most of them communities of color. That same year, Cleveland topped a list no city aspires to: With nearly a third of its population, and half of its children, living in poverty, Cleveland was named the poorest big city in the nation.

Over the years, we have produced research reports examining issues ranging from Black male unemployment and neighborhood destabilization to health disparities and the technological divide. Relying on data and viewing each issue through an economic development lens, we strove to demonstrate why addressing these disparate but interconnected challenges was central to the well-being and prosperity of the region overall. We highlighted the importance of inclusion and community engagement; we repeatedly advocated the need for collaboration and coordination among stakeholder groups.

Twelve years ago, we presented an overview of the key policy areas—including education, workforce development, crime and safety, business creation and health care—demanding attention and investment to improve the plight of urban communities. In that brief, we declared our hope that the start of the Obama administration would usher in a renewed commitment to urban America. "The work of reinvigorating urban America will require a comprehensive, collaborative effort among wide-ranging federal and state departments," we concluded in the 2009 policy briefing.

Sadly, that national urban prioritization never took root. And here at home, Cleveland's neighborhoods and its people have continued to suffer. The city continues to rank among the nation's worst for infant mortality, particularly Black infant mortality, health, well-being of Black women, childhood poverty, job creation, violent crime, and minority entrepreneurship.

In 2020, in the backdrop of the public health and economic crises ignited by the COVID-19 pandemic, Cleveland once again claimed the ignominious title as the nation's poorest big city. City officials and area residents may question whether Cleveland is actually the very worst for these and other challenges, but that is a distinction without a difference. The simple fact that the city shows up on so many rankings of core quality-of-life issues should be an alarming call to action.

The continued suffering and falling behind that the rankings reflect make clear to us that tackling interconnected socioeconomic concerns in isolation, urging local organizations and entities to prioritize collaboration and share resources, and hoping for national and state leadership will not bring about the transformation Cleveland and its residents need and deserve.

Advance the economic and social inclusion
of Black and Brown people;

Build a vital, sustainable, healthy and
engaged community;

Address conditions that result in
disinvestment in communities of color;

Mitigate policies and practices that foster
structural and institutional racism.

1

2

3

4

Success

What Is An Urban Agenda?

It's time for area stakeholders to come together and commit to an urban agenda. An urban agenda is a consensus strategy that would have the effect of fusing the many disparate activities big and small into a coordinated plan of attacking a prioritized set of challenges. Central to the success of this strategic plan would be the development of metrics for measuring and monitoring progress toward reaching key goals. Beyond short-term outcomes measured by individual programs, this consensus agenda would measure our progress in bringing about long-term, systemic change. In essence, the urban agenda would provide the reins to ensure that the area's many fine and hard-working horses all pull in the same direction to move us toward a better future. This agenda should be the blueprint that clarifies community priorities, codifies joint approaches for action and unifies like-minded thought leaders from various backgrounds and disciplines to ensure successful implementation.

Specifically, Cleveland's urban agenda should: 1) Advance the economic and social inclusion of Black and Brown people. 2) Build a vital, sustainable, healthy and engaged community; 3) Address conditions that result in disinvestment in communities of color. 4) Mitigate policies and practices that foster structural and institutional racism.

How Did We Develop Our Urban Agenda?

In late February 2020, just before COVID-19 would upend life as we knew it for months, PolicyBridge, in partnership with Ohio Rep. Stephanie Howse (after several initial planning and strategy meetings), invited dozens of government officials, philanthropic leaders, representatives of service organizations and community advocates to a working session with the goal of hearing reactions and seeking input regarding a proposed framework for an urban agenda. The 40 participants, working in small groups, identified the critical constructs for an urban agenda specific to Cleveland but applicable to other cities facing distress and disinvestment. A central assertion of the process is that cities and communities must prioritize their needs, outline and communicate solutions, and work with and through policymakers to initiate change. It is important to note that structural and institutional racism and inequity contribute immensely to many of the seemingly intractable urban problems and therefore must be accounted for as an impediment to progress and success.

The working session focused on the proposed framework of six overarching areas aforementioned for coordinated action: economic opportunity and mobility, neighborhoods and housing, community health and wellness, criminal and social justice, educational attainment and career launching, and community mobilization and stability. These broad categories encompass a variety of related issues and intersect in ways that shape the vitality of urban areas. We summarize the basic framework of a consensus urban agenda that emerged from the working session and then discuss each focus area in greater detail. The pandemic-constrained months that have passed since we convened our working session have served to reinforce our advocacy for a consensus urban agenda to improve the well-being of Cleveland's people and its neighborhoods.
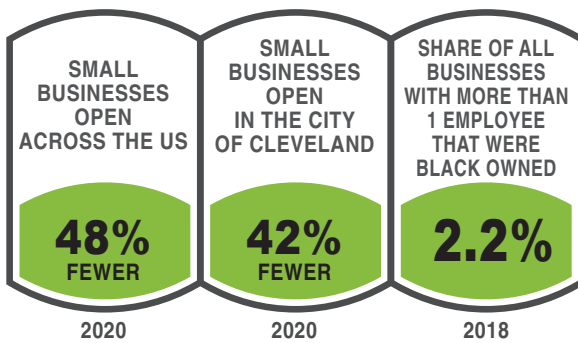
Economic Opportunity and Mobility

During the pandemic, news outlets and social media put the struggles of local businesses to stay open and viable front and center. A Harvard University-based online platform called The Economic Tracker suggests that there were 48% fewer small businesses open across the country by the end of June 2021, compared to pre-pandemic levels in January 2020. (The Economic Tracker put that figure at a slightly better 42% decrease in small businesses open for metropolitan Cleveland.) A Federal Reserve Board study suggests that this level of business closure may be overstated and temporary, but the events of the past year are likely to exacerbate a pre-existing divide that has concerning consequences for Cleveland and other minority majority cities. Black entrepreneurship greatly lags that of whites and other minorities, with Black-owned businesses making up just 2.2% of all firms having more than one employee in 2018. That gap had shown signs of marginal improvement in recent years, but the pandemic has hit Black-owned businesses, which tend to be overwhelmingly small, sole-proprietor establishments, particularly hard. Part of that disproportionate impact was due to structural inequalities (such as homeownership) that limit access to the capital necessary for sustaining economic downturns.

BUSINESS FACTS

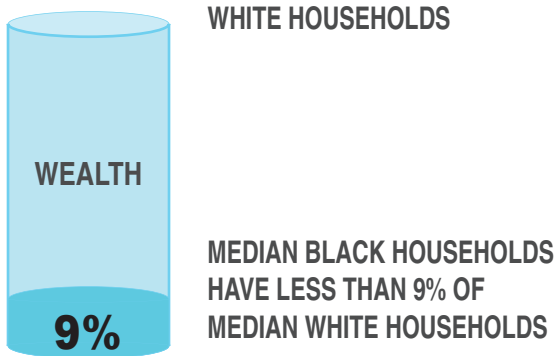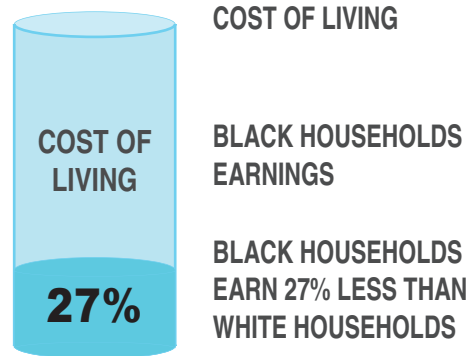| SMALL BUSINESSES OPEN ACROSS THE US	SMALL BUSINESSES OPEN IN THE CITY OF CLEVELAND	SHARE OF ALL BUSINESSES WITH MORE THAN 1 EMPLOYEE THAT WERE BLACK OWNED
48% FEWER	**42%** FEWER	**2.2%**
2020	2020	2018

MILLIONS AND BILLIONS

A 2020 Brookings report argues that the underrepresentation and under performance of Black enterprises (where revenues tend to be a fraction of non-Black businesses) costs the nation overall in the form of millions of jobs and billions in unrealized revenue. This impact is particularly pronounced in minority-majority cities, such as Cleveland, where Black businesses are critical partners in community development.

WEALTH AND INCOME DISPARITIES

HOUSEHOLD WEALTH

WHITE HOUSEHOLDS

WEALTH

9%

MEDIAN BLACK HOUSEHOLDS HAVE LESS THAN 9% OF MEDIAN WHITE HOUSEHOLDS

COST OF LIVING VS INCOME

COST OF LIVING

COST OF LIVING

BLACK HOUSEHOLDS EARNINGS

27%

BLACK HOUSEHOLDS EARN 27% LESS THAN WHITE HOUSEHOLDS

70 YEARS

A 2018 report by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis found no progress over the past 70 years in addressing income and wealth inequalities between Black and white households.

Aside from the individual benefits of entrepreneurship, Black-owned businesses are more likely to employ Black workers, serve minority populations, and contribute to the economic well-being of minority communities. However, a 2020 Brookings report argues that this underrepresentation and underperformance of Black enterprises (where revenues tend to be a fraction of non-Black businesses) costs the nation overall in the form of millions of jobs and billions in unrealized revenue. This impact is particularly pronounced in minority-majority cities, such as Cleveland, where Black businesses are critical partners in community development.

The Brookings report notes that 90% of all new businesses require no outside investment. This is where disparities in income and wealth create a near insurmountable hurdle to Black entrepreneurship. A 2018 report by the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis found no progress over the past 70 years in addressing income and wealth inequalities between Black and white households. Median Black household wealth was less than 9% that of white household wealth. A 2020 report by the Economic Policy Institute found that the income gap had widened over the past two decades, with white households earning nearly 27% more, on average, than Black households. The gap has also increased at all education levels, with the greatest gaps seen among bachelor's and advanced degree earners, which impacts the earnings potential of Black and Brown people.

It's difficult to expect entrepreneurship and community development in places where simply meeting basic needs is a struggle. The problem of insufficient quality jobs is not a challenge unique to Cleveland, nor minority communities broadly. A Brookings analysis of 2019 American Community Survey painted the issue in stark terms: "America has a wage problem." The analysis found that 44% of families with children did not earn incomes sufficient to cover living expenses. Family-sustaining wages were particularly elusive among families headed by Black or Hispanic women with low educational attainment. ***The analysis calculated a family-sustaining wage in the Cleveland metropolitan area as $20.23 an hour and estimated that the region had a deficit of nearly 51,000 jobs paying such wages.***

Clearly, Cleveland faces sizable barriers in connecting its citizens to the kinds of economic opportunities that allows them and their families to climb out of poverty. Purposeful capital investments and social supports are necessary, but alone are insufficient to overcome systems that both codified and reinforced racial inequities. Cleveland needs a commitment from corporations, financial institutions, philanthropies, government agencies, and individual investors to value and sustain an ecosystem for minority business development, economic inclusion and quality job creation. That ecosystem must account for small and non-traditional businesses that are typically not included in ecosystems as defined by large economic development intermediaries and governmental entities.

Cooperative economics has been suggested as one path toward more inclusive, equitable and just enterprises serving minority communities. Cooperatives put workers in control and root economic and social benefits in place. Communities of color have a history of cooperatives going back to mutual aid societies and farmers' alliances. Perhaps some elements of that prior approach should be revived. Cleveland's Evergreen Cooperative Initiative is a more recent example of the potential of cooperatives. Evergreen, a project of the Cleveland Foundation, Cleveland Clinic, University Hospitals, Case Western Reserve University, and the city, launched more than a decade ago with two enterprises employing 18 workers. Evergreen has since grown to five companies with roughly 320 workers. Hourly wage and profit-sharing for worker-owners approach the family-sustaining $20 level. The Evergreen example underscores the importance of two key determinants to the success of cooperative enterprises: 1) leveraging large businesses and institutions to provide significant opportunities for small and minority businesses that wouldn't otherwise be possible; and 2) enabling minorities to "control their own destiny" by instilling an owner mindset that makes personal contribution, sacrifice and responsibility for business success a customary practice.

Neighborhoods and Housing

As noted earlier, homeownership and house values are about more than personal shelter, desirability of place and achieving the American Dream. They also are key resources for business development and economic growth. Most aspiring entrepreneurs tap equity in their homes to provide startup capital for their business ventures. The Brookings report cites prior research indicating that homes in Black neighborhoods are devalued by $156 billion, enough to start roughly 4 million Black-owned firms nationwide. Decades of discriminatory housing policies and lending practices continue to foreclose the economic revival of minority neighborhoods. In the Cleveland metro area, specifically, homes in majority Black neighborhoods are valued roughly 20% below, or $19,000 less than, homes in neighborhoods where few Black residents live.

Beyond the devaluation of Black-owned homes, a large gap persists in homeownership—and it's growing. A recent report by the real estate brokerage Redfin found a homeownership rate of 44% among Black families, compared to nearly 74% of white households. And Black homeownership has been falling throughout much of the past decade. The report found the gap in the Cleveland metro area to be even wider, with nearly a 40-percentage point difference in 2018 in the rates of Black homeownership (36%) compared to white homeownership (75%). As stark as that divide is, it was not the worst; Minneapolis had a 51-percentage point difference in homeownership rates (25% to 76%). Washington DC was the only metro area in which the Black homeownership rate topped 50%, and it had the smallest gap in rates. The report attributed that distinction to the vast number of federal jobs paying good wages.

Despite its significantly larger-than-average gap in homeownership rates, Cleveland's housing prices are among the lowest of the 53 metro areas assessed. The median house sale price in Cleveland in 2018 was less than $146,000. Cincinnati, Columbus, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, Detroit and Chicago were all substantially higher.

Homes in Black neighborhoods are devalued by $156 billion, enough to start roughly 4 million Black-owned firms nationwide.

$156 Billion

Most aspiring entrepreneurs tap equity in their homes to provide startup capital for their business ventures.

Black neighborhoods in Cleveland are valued roughly 20% below, or $19,000 less than homes in neighborhoods where few Black residents live.

Homeownership has traditionally been considered a key path to wealth-building, especially for low-income and minority households. For most homeowners, the equity they have in their house is their biggest financial asset. The equity assumed to build over time provides an asset to tap in the event of a job loss or health crisis; it may represent a nest egg of forced savings for retirement; and it may offer a vehicle for passing wealth to the next generation to give them a cushion in life.

The housing crisis of the mid-2000s—when trillions of dollars of wealth evaporated and more than 4 million homeowners lost their homes through foreclosure—precipitated a re-examination of the assumed benefits of homeownership. A 2011 report from the Pew Research Center, for example, found that the collapse in house values led to dramatic declines in net worth of most households, an impact particularly pronounced among minority households where house equity made up a larger share of their net worth. A 2013 study by Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies examined the significant financial risks of homeownership, particularly in periods of high volatility (such as the buying frenzy reported in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic), and concluded that, despite the risks, homeownership continued to be an important vehicle for wealth building for low-income and minority households. The authors found support for policies that encouraged homeownership among disadvantaged populations, but they urged care in providing supports that would help sustain homeownership, realize its individual and social benefits, and lessen the risk of failure.

Cleveland Metro Area Homeownership Rates
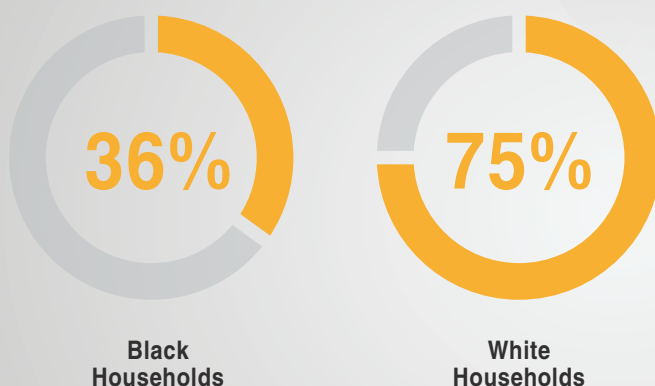
36% Black Households

75% White Households

Homeownership has traditionally been considered a key path to wealth-building, especially for low-income and minority households. For most homeowners, the equity they have in their house is their biggest financial asset.

$63 Million

Cleveland spent more than $63 million to demolish thousands of abandoned homes between 2005 and 2015.

Communities need a mix of ingredients for good health and quality of life.

Healthy Community Pyramid

- Markets
- Parks/Green Space
- Arts / Theaters
- Social Support
- Housing

Vacant houses are a blight on neighborhoods and a drain on city resources that could be spent elsewhere; the city of Cleveland spent more than $63 million to demolish thousands of abandoned homes between 2005 and 2015. Additional money for demolition has come from county, state, federal and other sources. Although advocates say demolition of deteriorated, abandoned structures is more cost-effective than subsidizing renovation and helps preserve the value of surrounding homes, the millions that have been spent removing distressed properties mean fewer resources available to put toward quality-of-life improvements in beleaguered neighborhoods.

Cleveland neighborhoods tend to have few parks and recreational spaces. Cost and security concerns often mean existing facilities have limited hours of use and are poorly maintained. This limits opportunity for physical activity in communities where rates of obesity and related health issues tend to be disproportionately high. Moreover, compromised air, soil and water quality, legacies of the city's past industrial might and development patterns, continue to impact the health of Cleveland residents. Polluted "brownfields" present barriers to economic redevelopment to reverse the downward cycle of decline and disinvestment. Residents of Cleveland, and other cities like it, also lack many quality-of-life amenities that residents of suburban neighborhoods take for granted, such as shopping centers, community theaters, arts organizations and social support networks. The policy focus on issues such as jobs, economic development and education often overlooks the importance of cultural amenities in not only building healthy communities, but also improving the lives of residents. For example, a growing body of research suggests that creating and experiencing art has the power to reduce stress, slow cognitive decline and improve well-being.

Cleveland has made progress in stabilizing its neighborhoods, turning blighted properties into green space, and adding amenities such as bike lanes and parks access. Yet reviving Cleveland's urban areas, particularly devastated East Side neighborhoods, will require a comprehensive plan for attracting investment, locating amenities and facilitating homeownership and housing rehabilitation. A 2020 Brookings article advocates for addressing persistent housing segregation as a path toward social justice. The article argues that "allocation of low-income housing tax credits, housing vouchers, and the siting of public housing also contribute to today's unprecedented isolation of low-income people of color." Black applicants continue to be more likely to be denied mortgages or refinancing opportunities than white applicants, erecting a barrier to the sales and rehabilitation activities that blighted, disinvested neighborhoods desperately need. The Brookings article argues that discriminatory lending practices have contributed to the precipitous drop in homeownership in legacy city neighborhoods: "[S]ystemic bias in lending and appraisals are among the reasons that Black neighborhoods are significantly devalued relative to predominantly white neighborhoods."

Discriminatory practices also limit renters to largely segregated neighborhoods. Renters who rely on subsidies, whether they are jobless, disabled or mentally challenged, are often denied housing based on their source of income. Ohio currently has no law protecting renters from discrimination due to their source of income, although a handful of inner-ring suburbs around Cleveland have adopted such measures. In May, Akron City Council passed legislation making it illegal for landlords to deny renting to potential tenants simply because they would pay with housing vouchers. Akron also passed legislation that stops evictions of delinquent tenants who catch up on outstanding rents and pay court costs and fees. As made searingly clear in the 2017 book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, eviction falls particularly hard on Black women. A 2014 MacArthur Foundation report put the alarming disparity in succinct context: "Poor Black men may be locked up, but poor Black women are locked out."

Policies and practices that perpetuate racial and economic segregation have led to continued disinvestment in minority neighborhoods. That means deliberate, racially equitable, sustained policies and practices are needed to counter decades of negative effects. More equitable access to capital is certainly warranted after decades of being subjected to discriminatory and predatory lending practices. But non-monetary support, ranging from financial literacy and budgeting to home maintenance awareness and skill-building, is necessary as well. Greater input from community members, inviting them to share what they see as lacking in their neighborhoods as well as their visions for the future, is also needed.

The Biden administration has launched an interagency effort aimed at addressing inequity in home appraisals and lending. Biden's proposed American Jobs Plan includes $10 billion to build and attract assets and amenities to help revitalize urban communities. In July, Cuyahoga County Executive Armond Budish issued an executive order establishing equity zones to address historic disinvestment. Designation as a Cuyahoga County Equity Zone would provide the area with special considerations regarding infrastructure investments and proposed development projects. The equity zone directive was developed with input from a 17-member Citizens Advisory Council on Equity that Budish and Cuyahoga County Council established in 2020 to review all aspects of Cuyahoga County government and look for ways to make policies and practices more equitable.

Unemployment has been associated with higher mental health hospitalizations, complications from chronic disease and premature death.

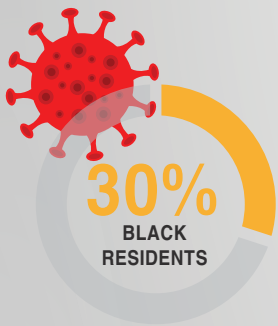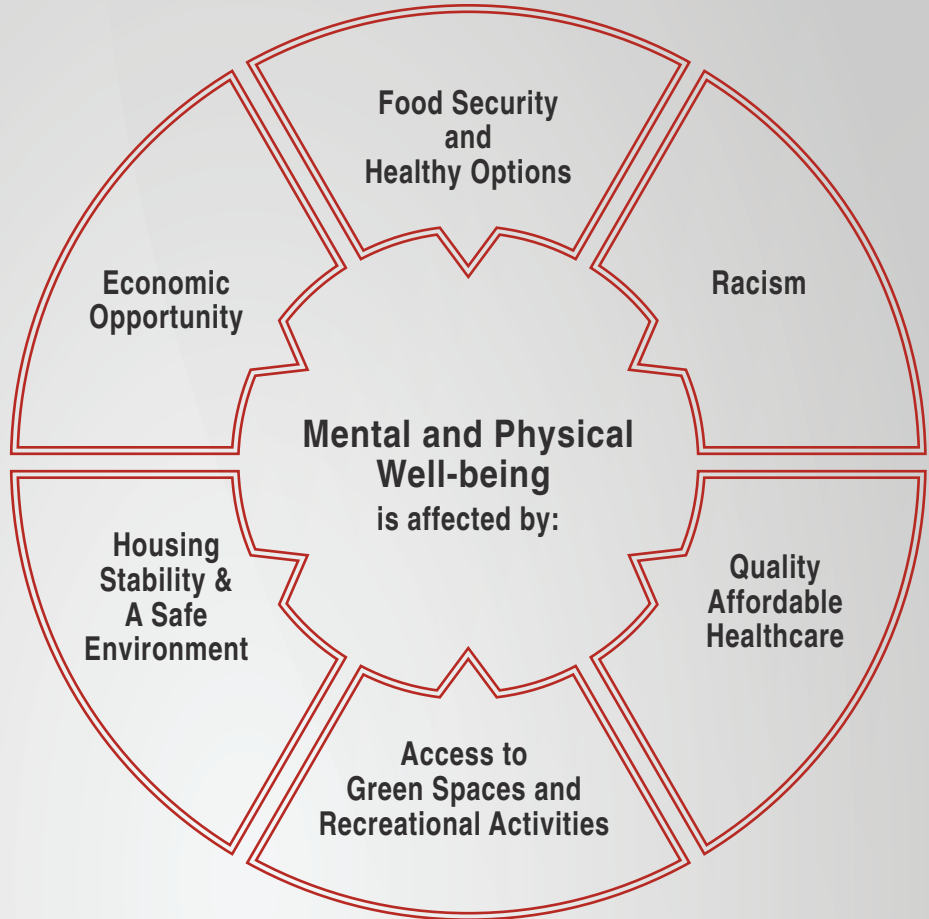**HEART ATTACK/STROKE**

HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE

160

DIABETES

130
mg/dl

Mental and Physical Well-being is affected by:

Food Security and Healthy Options

Racism

Economic Opportunity

Quality Affordable Healthcare

Housing Stability & A Safe Environment

Access to Green Spaces and Recreational Activities

30%
BLACK RESIDENTS

54%
WHITE RESIDENTS

COVID-19 VACCINATION RATES

As of mid-July, less than 30% of Cuyahoga County's Black residents were fully vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2, compared to nearly 54% of their white counterparts.

⬆ **DRUG OVERDOSE DEATHS**

Overdose deaths in Cuyahoga County have skyrocketed in 2021 and are on pace to exceed 2017's record. In 2019, Black males had the highest drug overdose death rate in Ohio.

⬆ **GUN VIOLENCE**

RISE IN GUN VIOLENCE

Cleveland neighborhoods, along with other large cities across the nation, have faced a sharp increase in violence.

Community Health and Wellness

Economic stability and adequate shelter, the focus of the previous two sections, contribute to both physical and mental well-being. Numerous studies have demonstrated the impact of joblessness on physical and mental health. Unemployment contributes to stress and higher reported levels of anxiety and depression. Yet joblessness has also been shown to exacerbate or even cause ailments such as high blood pressure, heart disease and diabetes. Unemployment has been associated with higher mental health hospitalizations, complications from chronic disease and premature death. Yet, the unemployed, who often may lose access to health insurance along with their jobs, are more likely to delay treatment due to cost. This would suggest chronic lack of economic opportunity to be a public health threat for urban neighborhoods and those who call them home.

In June 2020, amid the worldwide COVID-19 public health crisis, the Cleveland Clinic announced support for a Cleveland City Council resolution declaring racism a local public health crisis. In the year since, the Clinic has expanded some health activities, focused on increasing workforce diversity, and become a founding member of OneTen, a coalition of dozens of the nation's top employers that have pledged to hire and train a million Black Americans in family-sustaining jobs over the next 10 years. Cleveland's other nationally recognized health system, University Hospitals, also announced support for the City Council resolution, highlighting the system's increased community benefit, the charitable contributions made in exchange for tax-exempt status, its efforts to address food insecurity, and its commitment to minority job creation. MetroHealth, our county medical center, is engaged in several community transformation efforts to enhance the surrounding neighborhood, strengthen the housing market, and advance economic opportunities for residents. Current activities include a three-building mixed-use housing project along West 25th Street; developing a Clark-Fulton neighborhood master plan; collaborating with Cuyahoga Community College on workforce development; and the $1 billion main campus construction project.

These are welcome efforts to better serve Cleveland's underserved communities. Yet, Clevelanders need better access to treatment services, especially related to trauma, substance abuse and mental health. They need an integrated system of primary care—along with intentional outreach—that focuses on prevention and early intervention before illnesses become acute or chronic. The pandemic underscores the consequences of communities lacking trusted, ongoing relationships with care providers. As of mid-July, less than 30% of Cuyahoga County's Black residents were fully vaccinated against SARS-CoV-2, compared to nearly 54% of their white counterparts. Vaccine hesitancy, and mistrust in the care system, among Black citizens has consequences beyond personal health; the region and nation overall suffer by allowing the virus to continue to threaten lives and livelihoods.

Recognizing racism for the public health threat that it is allows communities to marshal resources and collaborate across systems and sectors to address the contributors to health disparities, such as low-wage jobs and food deserts. Resolutions put pressure on governments and participating organizations to build consensus and bring about change. Yet, within a longer-range plan to address the racist roots of disparities of health and access, we need an immediate action to address specific concerns. Along with the threat COVID-19 has posed to minority populations, residents of Cleveland neighborhoods, along with those of other large cities across the nation, have faced a sharp increase in violence, particularly gun violence. Overdose deaths in Cuyahoga have skyrocketed in 2021 and are on pace to exceed 2017's record. In 2019, Black males had the highest drug overdose death rate in Ohio. These and other traumas playing out daily in Cleveland's neighborhoods demand action stat.

POLICYBRIDGE

Criminal/Social Justice

The horrific murder of George Floyd under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer touched off protests of police brutality and calls for reform in cities across the country, including Cleveland. Cleveland Police was already operating under a consent decree to reform its policies and procedures after a 2014 investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice found the department engaged in unconstitutional and unlawful practices. That decree followed a 2002 Department of Justice investigation that found that Cleveland Police engaged in excessive force and racial profiling. Cleveland missed the original 2020 date for completing the decree reforms and now hopes to meet requirements for compliance by 2022. Although use of force and suspect injuries in the city had been trending down since 2017, the team charged with monitoring reforms criticized Cleveland Police response to protesters in May 2020, particularly calling out the department's failure to follow consent decree protocols for reporting and reviewing officer use of force incidents.

The monitoring process makes clear that, despite years of federal and community scrutiny, Cleveland Police continues to fall short of the culture and training changes necessary for equitable and constitutional 21st century policing. These changes must include a commitment to transparency, accountability, and procedural justice. Efforts to build trust and relationships in communities that need protection but view interactions with police officers warily are essential, as is a willingness to root out officers who lack the empathy and respect needed to protect and serve.

Beyond policing reform, an equitable and just urban agenda means addressing disparities in prosecution and sentencing. Prosecutors and judges have latitude in charging and sentencing offenders. Two cases brought in the same week in August in Cuyahoga County demonstrate how prosecutorial and judicial discretion may be unequally applied. Two women, one white, one Black, were charged with similar crimes of stealing public funds. The white woman received probation, despite being guilty of stealing a substantially larger sum, while the Black woman was sentenced to 18 months in jail. After considerable media attention to the disparate sentences, the judge in the Black woman's case announced that he would consider her early release from prison.

**Disparities
In Prosecution and Sentencing**

White Woman
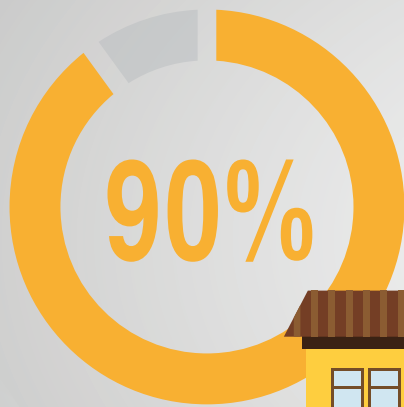
Stealing Public Funds
Amount - $250,000

Sentence
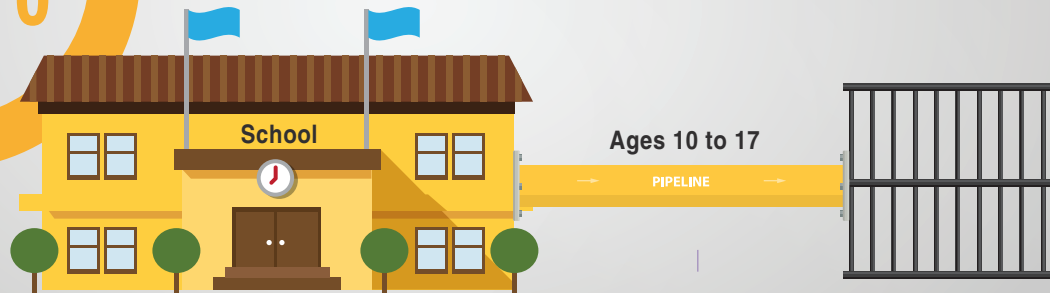**Probation**

Black Woman

Stealing Public Funds
Amount - $40,000

Sentence
18 Months In Jail

Two cases brought in the same week in August in Cuyahoga County demonstrate how prosecutorial and judicial discretion may be unequally applied.

90% of Cuyahoga County youth ages 10 to 17 **who were institutionalized** by the criminal justice system **were Black.**

Signs of such unequal application of justice abound. A 2019 report from the Center for Community Solutions found that Black inmates made up 74% of the Cuyahoga County prison population although Black residents account for only 30% of the county population overall. Among juveniles, the disparity was even more stark: 90% of Cuyahoga County youth ages 10 to 17 who were institutionalized by the criminal justice system were Black. Black males are arrested and incarcerated at disproportionately high rates. These encounters with the criminal justice system have long-term consequences. Those who are incarcerated often find limited opportunities for stable employment and housing upon re-entry into society. Moreover, children who have an incarcerated family member may suffer long-term health effects.

Two bills before the Ohio General Assembly would reform the cash bail system that incarcerates people who cannot afford to pay. Such pretrial justice reforms have broad bipartisan support, both due to equity concerns over jailing people largely for being poor and financial savings from incarcerating fewer people (the conservative Buckeye Institute estimates that bail reform could save Ohio communities $67 million).
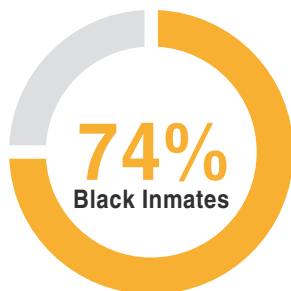
Cuyahoga County Prison Population

2019 report from the Center for Community Solutions found that Black inmates made up 74% of the Cuyahoga County prison population although Black residents account for only 30% of the county population overall.

In 2008, the Plain Dealer reported that white defendants in Cuyahoga County were far more likely than Black defendants to receive plea deals for low-level drug offenses and have felony charges reduced to misdemeanors. After a months-long investigation, reporters found that first-time white offenders who pleaded guilty to a single felony drug-possession charge were also more likely than Black defendants to have the opportunity to complete a treatment plan and have their charges dismissed. A study commissioned by then-Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Bill Mason in response to the Plain Dealer articles used statistical analysis to conclude that observed racial disparities were in fact due to differences in legal characteristics, such as differences in the nature of offenses, prior convictions, and type of attorney used. Researchers at the University of Cincinnati's Center for Criminal Justice Research acknowledged in their analysis that they had not been able to access socio-economic data, such as family support, employment history and income, which may have played a role in understanding racial disparities in sentencing.

In the more than decade since those investigations, sentencing reform, especially related to drug charges, has gained some traction across the country. The First Step Act was passed in 2018 to reduce overly long federal sentences, specifically providing a process to shorten sentences for those imprisoned on crack cocaine offenses, and improve conditions in federal prisons. Several states have taken steps to scale back extreme sentencing practices, reduce incarceration rates and begin to address racial disparities in the prison system. In July, the Ohio Senate approved a criminal sentencing reform bill that would reduce most nonviolent drug possession felonies to misdemeanors. Advocates of the bill, which still must be voted on by the Ohio House, say it would reduce the prison population by as much as 2,700 a year and better address addictions.

These are positive steps toward reform. However, more action is needed to achieve a system, as a recent report from the Brookings Institution and American Enterprise Institute so eloquently put it, "focused on the safety, health, and well-being of communities rather than on maintaining a harsh, semi-militarized revolving door system from which, for too many, there is often no escape." The report recommends a series of short-term and longer-term reforms to address pretrial and sentencing disparities. These include: setting fines and fees based on ability to pay, holding prosecutors accountable for the decisions they make regarding filing charges and plea bargaining, taking a more graduated approach to parole violations that are responsible for sending many back to prison, identifying metrics by which prosecutors and judges can compare their decisions and outcomes to those of their peers, revising sentencing statutes to ensure that punishments are proportionate to the offenses, eliminating pretrial detention for all but the most serious of offenses, and collaborating with social service, public health and educational resources to develop programs and alternatives to justice system intervention. It is through collaborations that more effective and just diversion and re-entry programs are likely to arise.

The Brookings-AEI report makes clear that sentencing reform does not come at the expense of protecting the public. In 2020, Cleveland experienced its highest rate of homicides in decades, and 2021 is on pace to exceed 2020. The escalation in violence that is being seen in cities across the country has no doubt been exacerbated by the pandemic, which forced the closure of many of the community-based programs that work to interrupt violence. Responding to this spike in violence, particularly gun violence, will require both traditional community policing and support for alternative approaches, such as violence interruption programs. The question is not criminal justice reform or support for policing but doing both to protect and serve the public.

Educational Attainment and Career Launching

In 2013, nearly a decade ago, the National Education Association made a formal commitment to end the "school to prison pipeline," the observation that zero-tolerance policies were pushing far too many young people, particularly Black and brown boys, out of school and into juvenile detention and, ultimately, prison systems. The U.S. Department of Education's 2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection revealed that Black children were 3.6 times more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions for preschool than were their white classmates. The disparity continues during elementary and secondary grades, with 18% of Black boys and 10% of Black girls receiving an out-of-school suspension, compared to 5% of white boys and 2% of white girls. Although relaxing zero-tolerance policies has led to a decline in suspensions overall, the racial disparity in punishments persists. The appalling reality that Black youth make up some 90% of the Cuyahoga County juvenile detention population shows that far more needs to be done to break the "school-prison pipeline" and ensure that area schools are preparing their minority students to succeed in careers, not spend a life behind bars. A commitment to data collection in order to identify and track disparities in punishment is one step; another would be to require intentional teacher and administrator training in understanding systemic racism and identifying personal bias.
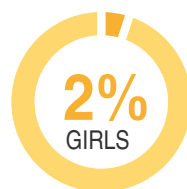
School Suspensions By Race
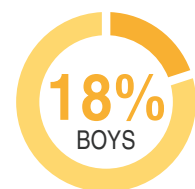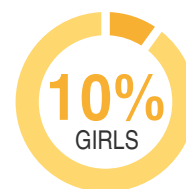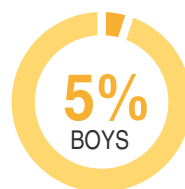
Preschool Suspensions

3.6x   Civil Rights Data Collection revealed that Black children were 3.6 times more likely to receive out-of-school suspensions for preschool than were their white classmates.

Elementary and Secondary Grades Suspensions

2% GIRLS   **5%** BOYS   **10%** GIRLS   **18%** BOYS

White Students   Black Students

*Black youth make up some **90%** of the Cuyahoga County juvenile detention population, demonstrating that far more needs to be done to break the "school-prison pipeline" and ensure that area schools are preparing their minority students to succeed in careers, not spend a life behind bars.*

Government mandates to slow the spread of COVID-19 made clear other racial disparities in Cuyahoga County schools. Minority students were more likely to attend under-resourced schools lacking the access to and familiarity with technology that made remote learning possible. A survey of parents by the Cleveland Metropolitan School District revealed that 40% of its roughly 40,000 students had no internet access and two-thirds lacked an adequate device for online learning.

CMSD was certainly not the only school to find that its student body was woefully disconnected and ill-equipped to function in the modern digital world. The pandemic shutdown of schools in states across the country led to a flurry of reporting on the digital divide students in urban schools as well as rural ones faced. The digital divide is partly a reflection of an educational funding divide. The nonprofit EdBuild estimated the funding disparity between predominantly white and predominantly nonwhite school districts to be $23 billion, despite serving similar numbers of students. EdBuild's influential 2019 report calculated that the average nonwhite school district received $2,226 less per pupil than the average white school district, largely due to school funding formulas that rely heavily on local property taxes. Disparities in home values in the communities schools serve mean disparities in the resources schools have to teach and prepare students for the future.

40%

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$23 Billion

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$2,226 Less Per Pupil

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Shockingly, segregation that leads to school districts where more than 75% of student populations are white or nonwhite appears to be increasing, at least here in Northeast Ohio. Last summer, Northeast Ohio native Beth Fry presented results of an analysis of local school "re-segregation" that she had undertaken for her master's thesis at Cornell University. She found that many Cleveland-area schools, particularly in the eastern suburbs, are now as segregated as they were in the 1960s. Her research sought to document the tendency of white families to "opt out" of sending their children to local public school districts as Black students moved in, either by enrolling in private schools, moving out of the community, or paying to send their children to schools in other communities. Fry found white opt-out rates of 71% in the South Euclid-Lyndhurst district and 85% in Cleveland Heights-University Heights. In the years 2009-2017, Fry found the average Black enrollment in inner-ring East Side suburban districts to be 77% of the total student population. That compares to just 4% Black enrollment in inner-ring West Side suburban districts, 67% for Cleveland, and 34% for outer ring East Side suburban districts. Across all of Cuyahoga County's public school districts, 31% of students identify as Black.

*Many Cleveland-area schools, particularly in the eastern suburbs, are now as segregated as they were in the 1960s.*
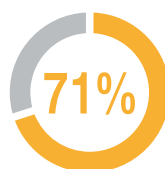
**71%** White Opt-Out Rate South Euclid-Lyndhurst
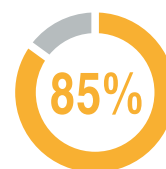
85% White Opt-Out Rate Cleveland Heights-University Heights

Racial disparities that are seen as early as preschool persist long after high school. The United Way of Greater Cleveland undertook a three-year examination of the underlying causes and conditions of area poverty and found that roughly half (49%) of Black residents of Cuyahoga County and 56% of Hispanic/Latino residents had a high school diploma or less. White residents of Cuyahoga County were more than twice as likely to have earned a bachelor's degree or higher (38% vs. 15% of Black residents and 16% of Hispanic residents). The United Way report made clear the increasingly strong connection between educational attainment, employment and earnings. People with a bachelor's degree or higher were far more likely to be employed than those with only a high school diploma (86% vs. 66%, respectively).
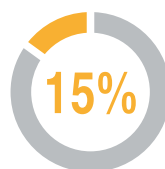
15% Black Residents w/ Bachelor's Degree or Higher
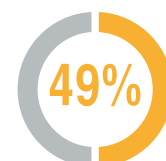
49% Black Residents w/ High School Diploma or Less

This year marks 10 years that the Higher Education Compact of Greater Cleveland has been working to increase the number of Cleveland students who are prepared for, pursue, and complete college. Its 2020 Report to the Community reveals that some significant progress has been made over the past decade in college readiness and persistence. (Six-year college completion rates for CMSD students enrolled at Compact institutions grew from 28% in 2011 to 37% in 2019, although improvement has not been consistent.) Yet, the share of CMSD graduates who enroll within one year of completing high school has fallen 17 percentage points since the Higher Education Compact began reporting on progress, with 44% of the 2018 graduating class enrolling in college within a year. Cleveland's Say Yes to Education program, launched in 2019, is expected to improve those numbers. The program represents a $125 million community commitment toward providing scholarships and support to help more low-and middle-income students gain the postsecondary education and training they need to access rewarding careers. However, Say Yes is about more than supporting the individual promise of Cleveland's young people; it also aims to spark local economic growth by developing a better-skilled local workforce.

The Say Yes program recognizes the role of family stability and parental support in student success. As such, Say Yes funds the embedding of a family support specialist at CMSD schools to help connect families to services they may need, such as housing, food or internet assistance. Say Yes also plans to offer after-school and summer enrichment programs.

Beyond meeting basic needs and offering student programs, Say Yes and area schools need to focus more intentionally on building partnerships with parents and caregivers. Research supports the important link between parent (or guardian) involvement and student success in school. However, evidence suggests lower-income and less-educated parents and guardians tend to be less likely to engage with school activities due to work requirements and discomfort with subject matter. The shutdown of schools in response to the COVID-19 pandemic also showed that many lower-income and less-educated parents and guardians lacked both the internet access and the technical proficiency to help their students with remote learning.

Yet, a 2020 study examining school initiatives targeted at parental engagement in Baltimore City Schools found "that most commonly used parent engagement indicators may not be useful ways to capture this important construct in urban school districts serving predominantly low-income families and families of color." The study sought to identify indicators of engagement that were relevant to student success as well as feasible for both parents and schools to enact. The findings stressed home-based indicators of parental engagement, such as parents' reading with their children, asking them what they are learning, and setting educational expectations, along with early and frequent communication with teachers, to be more meaningful and feasible measures of engagement than school-based indicators, such as attendance at back-to-school events and parent-teacher conferences. The study encouraged periodic surveying of parents about their involvement in their students' learning and their communication with teachers and schools. Deliberately seeking the perspectives and suggestions of parents should be part of the strategy for building a learning-supportive bond with parent, teacher and school.

The community's investment in the Say Yes program should ensure that more Cleveland students access the education and training they need to launch rewarding careers. But additional community commitment to education and training is necessary to overcome skill deficits that keep so many workers stuck in low-skill, low-pay jobs or shut out of the job market. Government-supported workforce development programs aim to generate economic opportunity by helping individuals gain skills and master tools that allow them to be more productive and prosperous workers. The national nonprofit Prosperity Now, which champions economic opportunity for low-income families and communities, calls for a more deliberate, race-conscious approach to workforce development programs to overcome historic discrimination (in the workplace and workforce development programs themselves) as well as ongoing structural barriers that disproportionately affect people and communities of color. In a July 2020 examination of racial economic equity in workforce development, Prosperity Now advocates better data collection on the local labor market to understand barriers that disproportionately impact demographic groups and identify strategies for moving beyond employment opportunities in dead-end jobs that fail to pay livable wages. Better data collection would help ensure that workforce development programs put individuals on career pathways to stable employment and financial security. Prosperity Now's manual for racially conscious workforce development also emphasizes the importance of building partnerships with local businesses and anchor institutions to establish employment pipelines and create expectations for equity in wages and working environments.

Focus on partnerships and pathways is particularly warranted now for addressing youth unemployment and disconnection from the workforce in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. The tight job market of the past few years, combined with intentional effort, had helped reverse the high rate of detachment from the workforce among young people ages 16-24 following the Great Recession. Yet, that progress was uneven, with high rates of joblessness persisting among young Black men, in particular. Given that youth employment tends to be concentrated in retail and food service jobs, it's not surprising that the pandemic's monumental impact on those sectors would result in extraordinary unemployment among young workers. An analysis by the Brookings Institution in September 2020 found that young workers had accounted for a disproportionately high share of pandemic-related job loss and that unemployment among young Black workers remained high months after employment among their peers began to improve. Jobs for young workers serve as important steppingstones to careers. Being denied such opportunities to learn specific skills and develop general workplace readiness has been shown to have a lasting impact on employment trajectories. This highlights the critical need for specific support for youth employment and career awareness, particularly among young people of color.

Community Mobilization and Stability

Today's urban neighborhoods, in Cleveland and throughout the country, bear the imprint of decades of federal, state and local policies, some deliberately discriminatory and others perhaps well-meaning but poorly conceived, often without input from those they were meant to serve. The national reckoning on policing and racial justice that emerged from the George Floyd killing points to the power that even marginalized groups can have if they come together to amplify their voices behind a common cause or a common agenda. Community organizing is the term for the practice by which residents collaboratively act to achieve short-term initiatives or build longer-term power and influence over multiple issues.

Marginalized communities, by definition, are those relegated to powerless positions within society. They struggle to have their voices heard and their perspectives valued. This call for an urban agenda is meant to provide the framework for revitalizing long disinvested neighborhoods of Cleveland and cities across the country. Bringing about the type of changes that will meaningfully improve the lives of minority residents will require new policies, programs and priorities at all levels of government. It will require a commitment from the philanthropic organizations, business leaders and usual power brokers who throw their support behind projects big and small. But it will also require mobilization of members of underserved urban communities themselves to drive the agenda.

Beyond the broad areas already discussed, several issues have the potential to shape the future vitality of urban neighborhoods. During the 2021 legislative session, hundreds of bills with provisions restricting voting access have been introduced in states across the country, including Ohio. The nonpartisan Brennan Center for Justice calls the flurry of legislation the "most aggressive" efforts to restrict voting in more than a decade. Among the 30 laws enacted over the past six months in 18 states are provisions to limit mail-in ballots, require voter identification, and restrict polling hours or locations. Such actions are likely to disproportionately affect voters of color, the very voters more likely to favor and benefit from candidates supportive of elements of an urban agenda.

As discussed earlier, the shutdown of schools in Ohio and states across the country exposed the grim reality that millions of children lacked the equipment and access necessary for remote learning. Yet, the pandemic revealed the contours of a "digital divide" that extends well beyond the confines of public education to keep mostly poor rural and urban communities disconnected from the social and economic benefits of technological advancements. Members of households that lacked high-speed internet access were unable to work remotely and faced barriers in applying for unemployment benefits, as well as registering for lifesaving vaccinations. Residents of communities already underserved by hospitals and health care workers also often lack access to the alternative care option of telemedicine. The 31% of Cleveland households lacking internet access of any type, including cellular service, led the National Digital Inclusion Alliance to name Cleveland the worst-connected big city in the country. The digital divide is more than an issue of technology; it impacts a variety of Cleveland's long-term challenges outlined in this urban agenda, including educational disparities, work-ready skills, employment opportunities, minority business creation and healthy communities. (For a more detailed discussion of Cleveland's digital divide, see PolicyBridge's July 2021 report, Access Denied.)

For the first time in 16 years, Clevelanders will have a new mayor deciding the city's path. This looming inflection point underscores the importance of developing new leaders with new ideas for the city's future. In its 2019 report titled "Missing in Action," PolicyBridge argued that Cleveland's Black community had failed to develop its next generation of leaders. Filling this void will require deliberate action as well as conscious yielding of power among members of the city's "old guard." Educating young people on the importance of civic involvement and public advocacy is an important place to start. Developing new platforms that allow the voices of emerging minority leaders to be heard is another. As this urban agenda makes clear, the city faces a broad web of intersecting problems. Cleveland's neighborhoods are home to pragmatic, solution-minded thinkers. We need to help them grow into the leaders and problem-solvers the city needs.
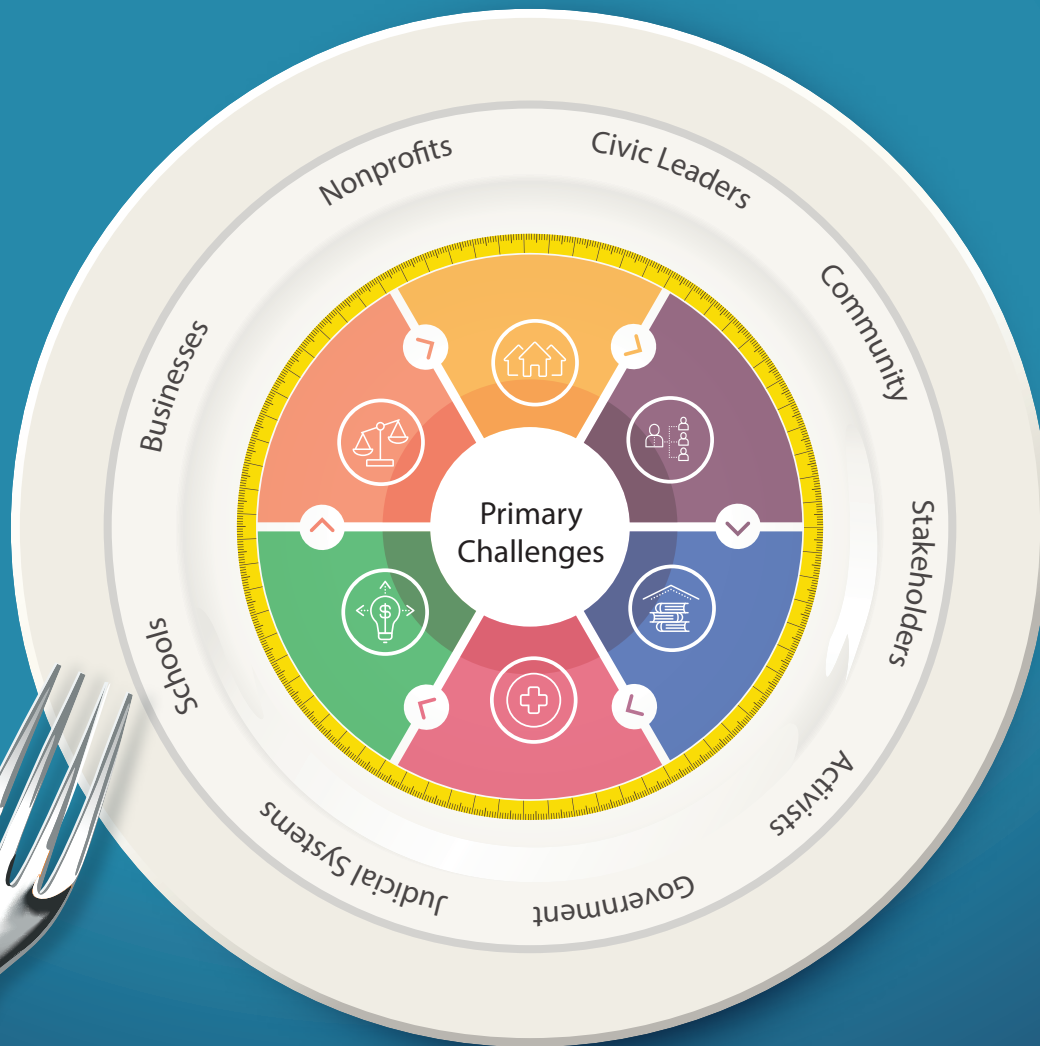
Key to developing the city's next generation of leaders is growing the social capital in its neighborhoods. Poverty and violence have been shown to erode social cohesion. Membership in community groups and trust in institutions tend to be lower in areas of severe distress. The COVID-19 pandemic suggests that this erosion in trust of institutions and each other has dire consequences for the public good. Community Navigator programs are ways in which to rebuild social networks and connect individuals to opportunities to serve their neighborhoods. Community Navigators, in turn, become liaisons, connecting those in need to the services and supports that are available. For example, the Cleveland Foundation awarded a two-year grant to the Cleveland Public Library and East Cleveland Public Library to create a network of "Digital Navigators" to provide personal support in helping community members develop technical skills and access high-speed internet. Such navigators could be useful in addressing issues beyond the digital divide.

One issue of particular importance to the stability of Cleveland communities is the stability of its families. In Cleveland, 60% of households with children under the age of 18 are headed by single mothers. Wage inequalities, eviction and incarceration, discussed previously, are societal challenges that fall particularly heavy on children in female-headed households with no father present. Such children are 5 times more likely to be poor in Ohio than children in married-couple households. In 2014, Cuyahoga County launched an innovative "Pay for Success" program that sought to reduce the time children spent in foster care by providing families with housing, case management for mental health care or substance abuse services, transportation support and in-home therapy. The social investment initiative did not achieve the desired results of fewer days in foster care and reduced overall costs. But the experiment did shed light on the social supports that served to increase family reunification, particularly among Black children. This should remind us that programs may not hit the performance metrics they intend but may still yield valuable insights necessary for change. In that regard, efforts to reunify families should be focused on improving quality of life and providing access to opportunities that strengthen family bonds.

The pandemic-forced closure of schools and daycares and the challenges of remote learning have added to instability and stress among families in Cleveland and around the world. Drug addiction, particularly the opioid crisis, has contributed to an increase in the number of Cleveland children removed from their homes and placed in foster care. The goal of easing the burdens on single-parent households and supporting the appropriate reunification of children with incarcerated parents is not simply a moral stand; it is an economic imperative that strengthens families and in turn the communities in which they live.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The diagram shows a circular "plate" infographic. The central circle reads "Primary Challenges" surrounded by six colored segments with icons. The outer ring lists stakeholders: Nonprofits, Civic Leaders, Community, Stakeholders, Activists, Government, Judicial Systems, Schools, Businesses.

Recommendations

As outlined here, the challenges facing Cleveland's people and communities are sobering. Modest, disconnected responses are no match for hulking, deep-rooted problems. The time is now for resolute commitment to a shared vision and collective action. We are not naïve in thinking that our recitation of Cleveland's problems is any more insightful than other accounts nor that good efforts and programs are not already working to address many of the issues raised. Our goal for an urban agenda is to provide a framework for identifying primary challenges, their central components, and the ways in which these issues may intersect and impact each other.

A central assertion of this framing process is that cities and communities must prioritize their needs, outline and communicate solutions, and work with and through policymakers to initiate broad-based, population-level change. Another foundational principle is that siloed efforts, no matter how many or how wonderful, cannot bring about the broad-scale transformation needed in Cleveland. We're not dismissing the good that such programs may do for the populations they serve. But they are insufficient to the task. The challenge before us is too great and multifaceted for

single purposed entities to surmount. Moreover, such organizations are incentivized to keep their sights fixed on narrow, tangible results by the funding systems they find themselves in. Performance-based funding models arose as a means of ensuring that programs and services were meeting specific milestones and achieving particular outcomes. This was, and is, a worthy goal. Yet, it encourages a stay-in-your-lane mentality that ultimately undermines those performance goals. ***The challenge for Cleveland neighborhoods is macro, but our solutions tend to be micro.***

Our framework for an urban agenda does not minimize the work of agencies and nonprofits dedicated to addressing specific societal needs. These entities are critical partners and, most certainly, will continue to do the heavy work in uplifting Cleveland's people and neighborhoods. The change we see as central to progress is one of vision and structure. We need accountability measures that track indicators, not at the individual program level, but at the level of overall community/population well-being. We need inclusive stakeholder alignment that brings more actors and leaders from various categories together to better understand intersectionality. Schools need to understand neighborhoods; businesses need to understand the impact of health disparities; elected officials need to know the impact of trauma; prosecutors and judges need to wrestle with the hard data regarding sentencing inequities, systemic racism and bias. And we need a big tent with lead organizers to make all of this happen.

Certainly, much of what we are proposing has been tried or is currently being attempted. What has been missing, we contend, is coordination and annual data tracking across all leaders and stakeholders, as well as more community forums and roundtables that allow everyday citizens to share their views, needs, criticisms and ideas. Also missing is an acknowledgement that structural and institutional racism substantially impacts the lives of all people, especially people of color.

Although our vision for a consensus urban agenda is broad-based and deliberately attuned to the compounding effect of intersectionality, Cleveland lacks the capacity to move the needle on all aspects of the agenda all at once. The challenge Cleveland faces brings to mind Nobel Peace Prize recipient Bishop Desmond Tutu's astute observation on change: "There is only one way to eat an elephant, a bite at a time." The urban agenda framework we present here sketches the shape of Cleveland's "elephant." Bishop Tutu's words remind us of the power of small bites so long as they are purposeful. This means that we can choose to break up our actions into smaller-scale, achievable objectives so long as they are in service to the larger goal of community transformation.

Budget constraints and scarcity of resources typically serve to make change efforts an incremental process. Yet, instead of facing the all-too-familiar challenge of lean coffers and pressing needs, Cleveland and Cuyahoga County governments are receiving an infusion of roughly $750 million in federal stimulus money that is to be spent within two years. This provides not only the wherewithal to act but a mandate to act quickly. However, the importance of achievable, digestible bites should not be lost.

Sequencing of efforts that are aligned in furtherance of a shared vision of and path toward community transformation prevents the often-repeated blunder of overcommitting resources and underdelivering on promises, which has the effect of eroding trust among the very people the efforts are meant to serve. Agreeing to a prioritization of objectives allows for better monitoring of progress, changing of course when necessary and continuous improvement toward the larger goal of community transformation. That's the strategy for achieving lasting change for Cleveland's people and its neighborhoods.

While acknowledging and valuing the substantial efforts and resources that have been and are being directed toward our six Urban Agenda Focus Areas, we advocate the following recommendations as critical to the more integrated and inclusive approach needed for Cleveland's long-awaited transformation.

Adopt community–level accountability measures—An old adage reminds us that "what gets measured gets done." Cleveland has no shortage of programs and initiatives, with many seeming to operate in a continuous state of development and implementation. Initiatives often are launched with a big splash and broad buy-in from key leaders and organizations, only to be trumped or replaced by the next large-scale project to come along that requires significant financial and public support. As a community, we are adroit at creating new programs to tackle enduring problems, but we are far less skillful at measuring the impact of those initiatives in making Cleveland a better place to live, work and raise a family. In the 17 years since PolicyBridge began issuing reports, there have been numerous initiatives, yet, as this document makes clear, we have not moved the needle on that overriding goal. Cleveland remains one of the poorest, most disconnected, most inequitable cities in the country. That fact alone, after so many good-faith efforts have been tried, should tell us that our efforts have been missing the mark. They may be hitting the metrics set by individual organizations or funders, but they are not, in the collective, making Cleveland a better, healthier, more prosperous city. In creating this urban agenda framework, we sought consensus among political, business and community representatives. We continue to invite response. Pursuing this agenda requires even greater commitment to community accountability. Broad community initiatives demand broad input from the members of the community; their perspectives are critical to setting goals and monitoring progress. It should become common practice that annual reports and "state of the project" forums are coordinated to educate the public on the progress of initiatives. The Fund for Our Economic Future established a dashboard years ago to monitor Northeast Ohio's progress toward meeting broad economic metrics. Cleveland would benefit from a dashboard of its various initiatives, their programmatic outcomes, and the broader impact on the community. Regular neighborhood forums could be used to both update community stakeholders on progress while also gaining input on how efforts are making a difference in the lives of Clevelanders. In other words, such a process would ensure that what needs to get done is in fact what's getting measured.
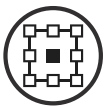
Encourage inclusive stakeholder alignment—The challenge Cleveland has in developing and pursuing community-level accountability measures extends, in part, from decades-old failures in aligning resources behind shared goals. Too many organizations, entities and institutions operate in a bubble and, as a result, go about the business of community problem-solving with a limited perspective. That limited perspective often results in a faulty or incomplete vision and process that excludes important voices and views and, ultimately, stop even the best-intentioned initiatives from reaching their full potential. A more complete view begins by acknowledging and including more stakeholders. Create a matrix detailing the full breadth of stakeholders who make up Cleveland (e.g., youth, minorities, clergy, small business, government, elected officials, philanthropy, elderly, disabled, veterans, LGBTQ, immigrants, professionals, low-income workers, families, etc.). This matrix could allow organizations access to a kaleidoscope of views that would, in fact, help them better focus their decisions about policy, fundraising campaigns, community development and more. This would encourage strategic partnerships that bring other voices in the room side by side with the "usual" suspects to set priorities, weigh pros and cons of approaches to problems and opportunities, engage residents and other constituencies, and determine best practices for collaboration. It is only when silos fall and all facets of community are invited to the problem-solving table that true change will happen.

Acknowledge intersectionality—Although our two previous recommendations call for more broad-based goals and perspectives, the most fertile ground for meaningful change is where problems overlap and intersect. Intersectionality is particularly apparent in Cleveland neighborhoods and urban areas across the country, as data in this document make plain. Merriam-Webster defines

intersectionality as "the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism and classism) combine, overlap or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups." The time has come for in-depth study and analysis of how intersectionality is crippling the quality of life and stifling opportunities for disenfranchised populations, particularly people of color. Racism and prejudice impact K-12 school experiences, which directly impact both the workforce and penal systems (with too many people of color ending up in the latter instead of contributing their talents to the former). Housing and city infrastructure policy dictates the quality of life in neighborhoods and sheds light on why health disparities and higher crime rates persist in particular ZIP codes. Such cross-referencing of concerns should be built into any grand plans to lift up the city, move it from the top of the list for poverty and other negative indicators, and make it a much more inclusive, just and competitive place. Each major community issue or challenge contributes to or builds on another. Girded with that understanding, those who care about this city and other disadvantaged urban areas will be better equipped to address the harmful and corrosive structures that thwart meaningful change.

Seek extensive community input and voice—This recommendation is similar in intent to inclusive stakeholder alignment but is actually a precursor. Before stakeholders can align, they need ample opportunities to share ideas and perspectives. That comes, or should come, from ongoing opportunities for dialogue, debate and information sharing. Such efforts take place in episodic fashion in Cleveland when the next big project comes along and the proverbial "community roundtable discussions" are organized to get the perspectives of everyday citizens. This process has caused more harm than good in recent years, as community residents (minorities in particular) feel like they are a first priority for brainstorming sessions and roundtables but a last priority when it comes to resource allocation and real investment. Rather than waiting for the special project that comes along every two or three years, civic and political leaders should devise an ongoing process that collects data about communities and gleans real-time information and perspectives from those with important lived experiences. Quarterly community forums, small group meetings, topical keynotes aimed at particular communities, state of the neighborhood (or demographic group) presentations with question-and-answer sessions and similar efforts could ensure that community voice and input are woven into the fabric of community decision making. Cleveland could be a national model in this space due to strong community partners already in place, such as the City Club of Cleveland and Neighborhood Connections, that seek to solicit and amplify the voice of Clevelanders. We need more of these encounters, easier access, comfortable venues and a mechanism for turning valuable input into measured outcomes. These must not be mere listening exercises, but true commitments to engagement.

Sequence community change efforts—Cleveland should be lauded for the large-scale community change efforts it has undertaken. The recent Say Yes to Education and Cleveland Lead Safe Coalition initiatives are two examples of broad campaigns that brought disparate people and organizations together to address important issues. Having said that, projects such as these requiring $100 million "investment" or more in a city like Cleveland with limited means can be a draining and risky proposition. It also inevitably pits projects against each other, resulting in "winner and loser" categories of causes. The time has come to build the scaffolding for a new approach to large-scale projects that would sequence when and how such initiatives are launched. Establishing a list of community priorities could help "grade" proposals, lessening the influence of charismatic visionaries and faddish causes and improving the chances of meaningful progress. Such criteria would, of course, need to be flexible

enough to take advantage of external funding opportunities that arise but come with short-term deadlines and nimble enough to respond to a pressing and timely community need, such as COVID relief or the digital divide. But Cleveland needs a logical, well-defined process that sequences community change efforts to avoid duplication, unnecessary competition and poor results stemming from a crowded field of initiatives that all require leadership and financial support from a resource-limited city. Commitment of city leaders to collaborate in the process and not prioritize their own pet projects will be paramount. Cleveland and Cuyahoga County, like local governments across the country, will see a welcome infusion of millions of dollars as part of federal COVID-relief and stimulus packages. An established framework of priorities would help ensure those resources are put to good use.

Reimagine philanthropy—Philanthropy has long been a respected and trusted convener of key players in the city of Cleveland on any number of issues. Foundations launch initiatives, help establish needed organizations and collaborate with elected and civic leaders to set priorities for the city and the region. While the impact of local philanthropy can't be denied in areas including education, economic development and human services, they are often stymied by an inability to push projects over the finish line due to governmental bureaucracy or misalignment with the priorities of business. As arguably the most nimble resources for addressing community challenges, Cleveland's philanthropic institutions should be first in line to invest in new programs that address emerging concerns or offer fresh solutions to existing problems. But beyond being nimble, at this point in Cleveland's history, we need our admirable philanthropic network to be bold. It should put its considerable influence and reach behind a set of priorities, commit to authentic engagement with the community, help develop broad-based measures of progress (not mere performance outcomes of supported organizations) and then bet big. Our local needs are big. Our local philanthropy should consider giving beyond the 5% minimum payout requirement. Awarding 5% of invested endowments in charitable grants annually helps ensure that funds are available in perpetuity to address challenges the city and region face. That practice of good stewardship has served the area well. But it's time to end some of Cleveland's persistent problems, and that takes resources. Philanthropy can be the driving force behind this urban agenda. To that end, local philanthropies should invest more in capacity building for nonprofits as the work of those organizations is growing more difficult. Foundations (as community thought leaders) should also be more deliberate in developing and maintaining direct ties with local, state and federal officials to work in tandem on various issues and keep the focus on the priorities of an urban agenda.

Dismantle structural and institutional racism—Successfully implementing an "Urban Agenda for Cleveland" will require that specific attention be paid to the influences and impacts of structural and institutional racism. Structural racism is racial bias across and within society. Institutional racism is racism that is embedded through laws and regulations within society or an organization. Both structural and institutional racism affect an array of factors such as public policies, organizational practices, cultural representation and other norms that work in various, often reinforcing, ways to perpetuate racial inequity. To change the way structural and institutional racism impacts Cleveland and its people, community members involved in designing and redesigning systems, structures, policies and practices must participate in training and capacity-building sessions that focus on eliminating implicit and explicit bias, dismantling structural and institutional racism, and promoting racial equity and racial healing. Such training and capacity-building sessions must become embedded in the ongoing fabric of our local community to foster greater understanding and awareness among community stakeholders and others. This is how we avoid the traps that previously led to economic and social disparities and inequities as we seek to realize a more prosperous and equitable Cleveland.

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Resetting the Table ● *November 2021*

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