

City of Providence

# COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force

—  
Recommendations for Use  
of American Rescue Plan  
Act (ARPA) Funds

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# Acknowledgements

## Task Force Co-Chairs

**Angela Bannerman Ankoma**, MPH, MSW, Vice President and Executive Director of Equity Leadership, Rhode Island Foundation  
**Oscar Mejias**, Founder and CEO, Rhode Island Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

## Members of the Task Force

**Kristen Adamo**, President and CEO, Providence Warwick Convention and Visitors Bureau  
**Peter Asen**, Director of Strategy and Development, Providence Housing Authority  
**Shannon Carroll**, President and CEO, Genesis Center  
**Sabrina Chaudhary**, Founder and Owner, Stay Silent, Crib (Providence)  
**Paige Clausius-Parks**, Senior Policy Analyst, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT  
**Julian Drix**, MPH, Co-Director, Health Equity Institute at the Rhode Island Department of Health  
**Mayor Jorge O. Elorza**  
**Jim Karam**, President, CEO, and Founder, First Bristol Corporation  
**Providence City Councilor Nirva LaFortune**, Ward 3  
**Diana Perdomo**, Chief of Policy, City of Providence (Mayor’s designee)  
**Jaychele Schenck**, Co-Founder and Executive Director, Gen Z: We Want to Live  
**Larry Warner**, MPH, Chief Impact and Equity Officer, United Way of Rhode Island

## City of Providence Task Force Support Staff

**Theresa Agonia**, Chief of External Affairs  
**Alexandra Batista**, Deputy Director of Latino Affairs  
**David Benoit**, Community Relations Coordinator  
**David dosReis**, GIS Manager  
**Daniel Esten**, Webmaster  
**Jax Gil**, Rescue Plan Communications Manager  
**Yvonne Graf**, Sr. Deputy Chief of Staff, Providence City Council  
**Bonnie Howland**, Project Manager, IT Department  
**Patrice Jean-Philippe**, Recovery Specialist  
**Joe Lazzarini**, Director of Mayor’s Center for City Services  
**Diana Perdomo**, Chief of Policy  
**Blaise Rein**, COVID-19 Outreach Coordinator  
**Emily Snow**, Graphic Designer, Communications Department

## Consulting Team and Community Partners

### Systems Change Strategies

**Michael Beauregard**, Managing Principal  
**Andrew Boardman**, Budget and Policy Consultant  
**Paula Cunanan**, Creative Director  
**Anne Geertman**, Project Manager  
**Gabrielle Godino**, Campaigns and Compliance Director  
**Samuel Howard**, Communications Director  
**Meara Levezow**, Project Manager  
**Cristian Potter**, Data Consultant  
**Tom Sgouros Jr.**, Budget and Policy Consultant  
**Sol Taubin**, Community Outreach Consultant

### Be Moore Interpreting and Translation

**Ramel Moore**, Outreach and Community Expert  
**Shirley Moore**, Founder

### Association for Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education

**Chanda Womack**, Executive Director

### Direct Action for Rights and Equality

**Monica Huertas**, Vice Chair, Board of Directors  
**Chris Rotondo**, Interim Director  
**Dee Wojcicki**, Administrative Coordinator  
**Terri Wright**, Organizer: Tenants and Homeowners Associations

### Facilitate Change

**Andrea Gómez**, Co-Founder and Senior Facilitator  
**Victoria Rodriguez**, Change Facilitator  
**Kunal Vasudev**, Co-Founder and Change Facilitator  
**Sophia Wright**, Change Facilitator

### Latino Policy Institute

**Natalie Almeida**, Communications Manager  
**Marcela Betancur**, Executive Director

### National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Providence Branch

**Nicole Tingle**, Secretary  
**Jim Vincent**, President

### With Additional Support from

**Azriel Arce**, Azriel’s Salon  
**Lynn Blais**, United Nurses and Allied Professionals  
**Sara Bratko**, Rhode Island Hospitality Association  
**Channavy Chhay**, Center for Southeast Asians  
**Alexandra Flores**, Happy Kids Homecare  
**Dwayne Keys**, South Providence Neighborhood Association  
**Creusa Michelazzo**, TechCollective

## Community Speakers and Presenters

**Lanre Ajakaiye**, City of Providence African - American Ambassador Group (AAAG)  
**Morris Akinfolarin**, AAAG  
**Dan Baudoin**, The Providence Foundation  
**Lucy Berman**, ONE Neighborhood Builders  
**Wanda Brown**, AAAG  
**Madalyn Ciampi**, Providence Promise  
**Jeremy Costa**, AAAG  
**Jessica David**, Local Return  
**Janice Falconer**, Impact RI  
**Jennifer Hawkins**, ONE Neighborhood Builders  
**Richard Lappin**, Providence Promise  
**Reverend Shane Lee**, AAAG  
**James Monteiro**, AAAG  
**V.Raffini**, AAAG  
**Cedric Russell**, Black Lives Matter New England PAC  
**Cheryl Space**, Providence Community Library  
**Valerie Tutson**, AAAG

## City of Providence Presenters

**Leah Bamberger**, Director, Sustainability  
**Stephen C. Boyle**, Executive Director, Workforce Solutions of Providence/Cranston  
**Shawndell Burney-Speaks**, Senior Advisor to Mayor Elorza  
**Jillian Fain**, Director, Education and Economic Opportunity  
**Stephanie Fortunato**, Director of Art, Culture, and Tourism  
**Emily Freedman**, Director, Housing and Community Development  
**Craig Hochman**, Deputy Chief Engineer  
**Bret Jacob**, Director, Research and Development and LGBTQIA+ Liaison, Mayor’s Office  
**Hannah Kahn**, Deputy Director, Research and Development, Mayor’s Office  
**Laurie Moïse Sears**, Director, Healthy Communities Office  
**Bonnie Nickerson**, Director, Planning and Development  
**Wendy Nilsson**, Parks Superintendent  
**Monsurat Ottun**, Associate City Solicitor and Chief Information Security, Data Privacy, and Risk Management Strategist  
**Steven M. Pare**, Commissioner, Public Safety, City of Providence  
**Victor Regino**, Small Business Coordinator, Office of Economic Opportunity  
**Jim Silveria**, Director of Information Technology, City of Providence  
**Sara Silveria**, Director of Finance

# Letter from the Task Force Co-Chairs

## Re: City of Providence’s COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force, Final Report and Recommendations

Dear Mayor Elorza and Council President Igliazzi,

Please accept this letter and accompanying report as a record of the process over the past 90 days undertaken by the City of Providence’s COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force to gather community guidance in developing recommendations for use of funds that the City of Providence is eligible to receive through the American Rescue Plan Act’s State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund. This work was completed pursuant to the [Resolution 2021-207](#).

Over the last three months, the Task Force completed a deep community engagement and listening process with a focus on reaching key constituencies across the city, including communities and industries disproportionately impacted by the effects of COVID-19. This has included: five community conversations with six community partner organizations across the city—held both virtually and in-person; two business roundtable discussions with key industry leaders from sectors that drive the city’s economy; direct door-knocking in the 02907 ZIP code; working with community partners such as Dorcas International, Federal Hill House, Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE), Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE), the Providence Coalition of Neighborhood Associations and others to fill out Rescue Plan surveys leading to over 1,100 surveys collected from Providence stakeholders to identify their recovery needs. Collectively community engagement activities have engaged more than 2,000 people across the city in our community input process.

Additionally, through weekly public meetings, the Task Force learned about the vast array of challenges facing residents and businesses in every facet of life within the city. We heard proposals from city officials and community members about how to address the city’s most pressing challenges. Throughout these meetings, a common theme arose from community members and Task Force members alike, which was the need to ensure racial equity is heavily weighted in the deployment of American Rescue Plan Act funds, and the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity these investments offer to address historic inequities.

We invite you to review and consider the findings and recommendations detailed in this report with strong weighting towards the robust community input received. The Task Force ultimately chose to align the funding allocation of American Rescue Plan Act funds by category in a manner consistent with the results of the community survey. Additional recommendations made by the Task Force for the deployment of these funds are the synthesis of community input and the expertise of respective Task Force members who participated in this extensive process.

We encourage you to align the City Council’s American Rescue Plan Act ordinance with the recommendations detailed in this report. We invite you to see the Task Force as a resource available to you in the successful deployment of American Rescue Plan Act funds, as is detailed in the resolution that created this body. We are community leaders deeply invested in and connected to neighborhoods across the city. The significant public engagement process we undertook resulted in clear and unified recovery needs from nearly every constituency we engaged. We have detailed those findings in this report. We hope to see these needs boldly addressed through this historic investment.

We wish to thank each member of the Task Force for volunteering their time, energy, and expertise to ensure this plan is as aligned with the needs of Providence’s communities and businesses as possible.

We all participated in service with the goal of improving our city.

We thank you for your due diligence in considering the many important factors as you work toward a spending plan to address the recovery and resiliency needs of Providence residents for generations to come.

Sincerely,

**Angela Bannerman Ankoma**, MPH, MSW  
Vice President, Executive Director of Equity Leadership  
Rhode Island Foundation

**Oscar Mejias**  
Founder and CEO  
Rhode Island Hispanic Chamber of Commerce

# Executive Summary

The following report details the research, findings, and recommendations of the City of Providence's COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force, an undertaking publicized as the Providence Rescue Plan. The plan details community needs and aligned investment opportunities for the deployment of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds available to the City of Providence. Per federal law, funds must be allocated by the end of 2024 and spent by the end of 2026. The City allocated the first round of funding totaling \$42.8 million on July 16, 2021.

The first round of ARPA funding was allocated through a multi-step process, which included input from City officials as well as from extensive community engagement that was already in process in response to the effects of the pandemic. After federal funds were announced, City department directors were surveyed and drafted proposals for time-sensitive, high-impact projects. Proposals that demonstrated urgency and that had garnered significant public input through prior public processes were prioritized. The Mayor's Office and City Council collectively reviewed these proposals and placed specific focus on violence prevention, youth programming, infrastructure and small business relief in the corresponding spending authorization ordinance for review through the Council's budget hearing process. All of the projects were reviewed at two public meetings — a finance committee meeting, and an open meeting as part of the City Council budget hearing process. The culmination of that work was the approval of the spending authorization ordinance by the City Council and Mayor Elorza.

Further funding allocations will be introduced by the Mayor after receiving recommendations from the Task Force. These recommendations will be vetted and approved and/or amended by the Providence City Council. Once approved by the Council, the City will begin implementation of approved uses of funding.

The Task Force was created through a resolution introduced by Councilwoman Nirva LaFortune, and cosponsored by Councilwoman Helen D. Anthony, Council President Pro Tempore Pedro J. Espinal, Councilman John Goncalves, Councilwoman Katherine A. Kerwin, Councilwoman Rachel M. Miller, Councilman Michael J. Correia, and Councilwoman Mary Kay Harris, on May 6, 2021 and signed by Mayor Jorge Elorza on May 17, 2021. Mayor Elorza and the Providence City Council worked to appoint this 14-member Task Force, composed of community leaders representing a wide array of interests and expertise who began meeting on July 23, 2021.

Following its convening, the Task Force met weekly during a 90-day period to oversee a robust community engagement strategy for public input that included a broad range of constituents across the city and to provide their recommendations on how to allocate remaining ARPA funds.

The following report provides an overview of the information and research presented at Task Force meetings, a report of all community input received across engagement strategies, and the recommendations made by the Task Force for how to deploy the City's allocation of funds to meet the needs identified by community members.

## Overview of Recommendations

The Task Force's recommendations for the City of Providence's use of ARPA funding are detailed below. These recommendations came after considerable public input including over 1100 surveys, a series of community engagement sessions, and 13 public meetings, all including opportunities for public comment. Among the tools for engagement, the survey included an opportunity for the public to weigh in on how they would distribute the funds among priority areas. The allocation numbers below mirror the public's weighting of priority areas. The following areas of investment and strategies, totaling \$166 million, are inclusive of proposals presented to the COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force over the course of the 90-day meeting period and submitted via our community proposal process. The funding totals below are also inclusive of funding already determined by the June 2021 ordinance into the relevant spending categories. Below the amounts, funding categories, and potential strategy recommendations, we also list recommendations for how ARPA funding is to be spent across all funding areas and strategies.

It is to be emphasized that throughout public input process and discussion of the Task Force that the following recommendation emerged as the highest priority for the deployment of all ARPA funding: **the City should make every spending decision through the lens of racial equity, centering not just those hardest hit by COVID-19 but those who have been disenfranchised by structural and historic racism and discrimination.**

Please see the recommendations section of the full report for a comprehensive list of strategies considered within each category.

## Recommendations & Strategies

### \$ 10.4 million

#### Arts, Culture, and Tourism

Ensure the continued development of a vibrant and creative city by integrating arts and culture into community life while showcasing Providence as an international cultural destination.

##### Strategies

- Support creative economy workforce training
- Expand public programming and events
- Support Providence's tourism industry to catalyze economic activity across the city
- Invest in arts organizations, particularly BIPOCled organizations
- Fund neighborhood-based programming
- Provide grants to artists and for public art projects

### \$ 14.4 million

#### Business and Economic Development

Create economic opportunity for all of the city's residents, and support Providence businesses to grow and hire locally with a focus on supporting minority, women, people with disabilities and veteran-owned businesses and industries devastated by the economic impacts of COVID-19.

##### Strategies

- Expand financial recovery tools such as loans and grants to small businesses
- Raise awareness and drive neighborhood economic activity
- Provide locally-informed technical assistance and recovery supports to local businesses
- Invest in local workforce development and promote empowerment models
- Support wealth building programs for historically underinvested communities

### \$ 15.3 million

#### City Services and Infrastructure

Support the city in successfully revitalizing our public infrastructure and implement economic relief programs with investments in technology, systems and public spaces.

##### Strategies

- Invest in city-wide broadband access and improve city services
- Update city network systems, technology, and cybersecurity infrastructure
- Invest in public infrastructure and public spaces

### \$ 28 million

#### Housing and Homelessness

Respond to the current housing crisis in the short term, and implement a long term strategy to end housing insecurity and homelessness in the City, addressed in collaboration with community, state, and federal partners.

##### Strategies

- Expand immediate shelter and rapid rehousing
- Increase supply and preservation of affordable housing units through a variety of tools including but not limited to land banking and strategic acquisition, repairs, rehabilitation, and new construction.
- Focus on increasing housing opportunities for people and families with low or no income.
- Fund supportive housing and other inclusive housing models
- Invest in creative homelessness prevention and housing stabilization programs, and maintain accessibility and affordability

### \$ 14.6 million

#### Racial Equity

Address historic inequities with intersectional investments including braiding from other categories to ensure equity across all ARPA programs and funding.

##### Strategies

- Support justice system reforms
- Make public health and safety investments
- Invest in economic stabilization programs
- Provide direct relief to hardest-hit communities
- Provision of reparations

### \$ 11.5 million

#### Sustainability

Provide a better quality of life for all residents while ensure adequate community infrastructure to respond to and prepare for the impacts of climate change in the City's frontline communities and to support the growth of green economic sectors within the City.

##### Strategies

- Invest in infrastructure that is resilient to and adaptive in the face of the effects of climate change
- Fund stormwater/sewer repair and flood mitigation
- Implement environmental justice strategies for frontline communities
- Make green economy investments

### \$ 17.9 million

#### Youth and Community Investments

Ensure Providence's youth have access to safe learning environments, robust options for out-of-school programs, and equal opportunity to succeed academically and professionally. Community investments support the social, economic, and cultural fabric of our communities and provide the infrastructure needed to bring people together and to address gaps of access and opportunity.

##### Strategies

- Expand youth out-of-school time programs and early learning opportunities
- Provide paid internship and employment options
- Invest in asset-building models for our youth and community
- Invest in capacity-building infrastructure for community-based organizations
- Provide support to critical service organizations
- Investment in early learning infrastructure

### \$ 4.7 million, Administration of Funds

Support efficient and equitable deployment of ARPA funds to ensure maximum community impact through program design and deployment, outcome tracking and compliance oversight.

### \$ 49.5 million, Protecting Essential City Services

Replace lost public-sector revenue from local and state sources to ensure the continuation of services and programs at pre-pandemic funding levels.

## Recommendations for Funding Across Categories

The following recommendations were informed by the information and presentations provided to the Task Force across all forms of community input. The Task Force discussed all findings from the community input process and identified priorities based upon that guidance, as well as their expertise in local industries and areas of city life. The Task Force recommends the following: if spending recommendations intersect with other local, state, and federal funding streams that those other funding streams be identified and coordinated with to maximize the impact of all programs; focus all spending on individuals, businesses, and communities that were hardest hit by the pandemic; assign funding in a way that will maximize the sustained impact of investments rather than fund short-term programs that cease to exist once that funding ends; and that **the City make every spending decision through the lens of racial equity, centering not just those hardest**

**hit by COVID-19 but those who have been disenfranchised by structural and historic racism and discrimination.**

Additionally, the Task Force recommends that the City hold public hearings before the spending ordinance is approved by the City Council. **The Task Force also recommends that it continue to meet at a to-be-determined pace in the future to achieve the aforementioned outcomes.**

## Documentation

Recordings of community engagement events, links to the Task Force’s meeting minutes, a community events calendar, and more documentation of the Providence Rescue Plan can be found at [PVDrescueplan.com](https://PVDrescueplan.com). Spanish-language access to the Providence Rescue Plan website is available directly at [PVDplanderescate.com](https://PVDplanderescate.com). The website can also be automatically translated into Arabic, traditional Chinese, Khmer, and Portuguese by selecting a language in the top right hand corner of the website.

## Future Engagement

The recommendations in this report, per the Task Force’s founding resolution, are intended to guide upcoming City Council meetings where funding allocations will be decided on. The Task Force recommends the City hold public hearings before the spending ordinance is approved by the City Council.

The public is invited to stay engaged with the work of the Providence Rescue Plan. A community events calendar and a *News and Updates* page can be found at [PVDrescueplan.com](https://PVDrescueplan.com). Members of the public can also subscribe to regular email updates on future engagement on opportunities for the Providence Rescue Plan at [PVDrescueplan.com/newsletter](https://PVDrescueplan.com/newsletter) or by scrolling to the bottom of the website’s homepage.



*“I have noticed an increase in the housing crisis with more displacement and homelessness. Boarded up housing, abandonment. Rising rents and foreclosures.”*

- Resident of 02908 (Elmhurst), 60+

# COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force

## Formation

On April 1, 2021, Councilwoman Nirva LaFortune introduced a resolution, cosponsored by Councilwoman Helen D. Anthony, Council President Pro Tempore Pedro J. Espinal, Councilman John Goncalves, Councilor Katherine A. Kerwin, Councilor Rachel M. Miller, Councilman Michael J. Correia, and Councilwoman Mary Kay Harris, later signed by Mayor Elorza, calling for a special commission on federal relief funds. This commission, the City of Providence COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force, was charged “to provide guidance and make recommendations to the City government as recovery planning efforts get underway in the wake of the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19)” and “provide critical insights to balance a long and short term equitable and impactful deployment of stimulus relief funds in the City of Providence.” Membership of the Task Force would include the Mayor (or his designee), members of the City Council, and representatives from community philanthropy organizations; Providence’s business community; arts, culture, and tourism industries; community-based organizations; the city’s youth; workforce development; and the environmental community. The Providence City Council approved the resolution creating the Task Force on May 11, 2021

In April 2021, the City of Providence issued a request for proposals calling for project management services to coordinate recovery efforts, with a focus on advancing diverse and inclusive public engagement, bolstering efficient and equitable

city governance, and implementing community-driven recommendations. In June, Systems Change Strategies (SCS) was chosen because of their wide representation from community organizations and a team equipped with Rhode Island budget and policy experts, interpreters, and translators. SCS’s community partner organizations include the NAACP Providence Branch, the Latino Policy Institute (LPI), the Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE), Direct Action for Right and Equality (DARE), and Facilitate Change.

These two efforts merged to support the community input and recommendation process for ARPA funds. Angie Bannerman Ankoma and Oscar Mejias were appointed co-chairs of the Task Force. Final membership of the Task Force would include the two aforementioned co-chairs, Mayor Jorge O. Elorza, Councilwoman Nirva LaFortune, Diana Perdomo (as Mayor Jorge Elorza’s designee), Kristen Adamo, Peter Asen, Shannon Carroll, Sabrina Chaudhary, Jim Karam, Javier Montanez (serving ex-officio in his capacity as Superintendent of Providence Public School Department), Julian Drix, Jaychele Schenck, Larry Warner, and Paige Clausius-Parks. The first meeting of the Task Force was held on Friday, July 23, 2021 at noon.

## Guiding Principles

At its first meeting on July 23, 2021, the City of Providence COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force voted unanimously to approve a set of Guiding Principles for their recommendations.

The City of Providence COVID-19 Recovery & Resiliency Task Force will:

- Be advised by our public health leaders and experts;
- Be informed by and responsive to the needs of people directly impacted in Providence;
- Be informed by and responsive to the needs of the small business community directly impacted in Providence;
- Be informed by racial equity and culturally responsive frameworks to address widening disparities caused or intensified by COVID-19;
- Be action-oriented to ensure direction and advice to place Providence on a path to economic recovery and opportunity;
- Move with a sense of urgency demanded by our residents and stakeholders;
- Advance diverse and inclusive public engagement;
- Bolster efficient and equitable city governance;
- Support the implementation of community-driven recommendations

Following its convening, the Task Force met weekly during a 90-day period to:

- Discuss, plan, and approve a robust community engagement strategy for public input as to how the ARPA funds shall be invested to address community needs.
- Listen to the needs of the City of Providence as presented by City department directors.
- Gather robust input from Providence communities, including residents, businesses, and others.
- Weigh the interests of Providence community members, especially those most impacted by the pandemic.
- Provide their recommendations on how to further allocate funding.

## 90-Day Meeting Process

The timeline for the Task Force’s meeting cycle went through a few iterations before settling on a 90-day approach. The May 6th resolution dictated that the Task Force was to present recommendations within 60 days of its appointment, but this was deemed too short a period to achieve thorough and authentic community engagement. The City ultimately landed on a single 90-day process. This progression allowed sufficient time for community input while also wrapping up in time to get recommendations to the City Council prior to their adjournment at the end of the year. The Task Force met in a hybrid meeting format every Friday from August 6th, 2021 to October 15th 2021, and on October 29th and November 5th. Minutes from all Task Force meetings are available via the City of Providence’s Open Meeting Portal, which can be found on the City’s website ([ProvidenceRI.gov](https://www.providenceri.gov/open-meeting-portal)) under the Open Providence section. Meetings took place at a conference room at City Hall as well as over Zoom and were streamed live on either the City of Providence’s Facebook page or YouTube channel. Each meeting lasted either an hour or an hour and a half, with a few running over to accommodate lengthy public comment periods.



# Overview of All Engagement

The City of Providence hosted public Task Force meetings with a section for public comment, five community conversations, two business roundtables, created a widely-shared public feedback survey in eight languages, door-knocked in zip codes hardest

hit by COVID-19, heard over ten City Department presentations at public Task Force meetings and created a portal on the website specifically for businesses and organizations to submit more detailed proposals.

## Summary of Engagement Activities

### Community Engagement Events

Host(s)	NAACP Providence Branch	Latino Policy Institute	Facilitate Change	ARISE and South Providence Neighborhood Association	DARE
Participants	51	49	23	76	86
Facilitators	Jim Vincent and Nicole Tingle	Marcela Betancur	Andrea Gómez and Victoria Rodriguez	Chanda Womack and Dwayne Keys	Monica Huertas

## Summary of Engagement Activities

Focus	Small Businesses			Anchor Businesses		
Key Industries Represented	Restaurants and Nightlife	Retail	Essential Services	Hospitality and Tourism	Technology	Health and Medicine

## Community Surveys

Collected	1,111
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Full qualitative descriptions of these methods of engagement are detailed in the following section, and full reports can be found in Appendixes B - D.

<sup>1</sup> Rhode Island Department of Health, "COVID-19 Cases by Zip Code," accessed October 2021.

## Community Engagement

One of the primary objectives of the Providence Rescue Plan is advancing diverse and inclusive public engagement to solicit, retain and incorporate community guidance and experiences that inform the deployment and evaluation of recovery funding. Over the 90-day period of the Task Force meetings, five community engagement events were held in partnership with the City of Providence, co-hosted and facilitated by representatives of six different community-based organizations: the Latino Policy Institute (LPI), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Providence Branch, the South Providence Neighborhood Association (SPNA), the Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education (ARISE), Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE), and anti-oppressive education and consultancy firm Facilitate Change. In total, the events drew over 284 participants from across the city, and every member of the Task Force participated in at least one event each with some attending most or all. Additionally, members of the Providence City Council were invited to attend each of the meetings.

The events were originally envisioned as in-person events held in five different Providence neighborhoods, but the first wave of the Delta variant of COVID-19 began to surge during the planning process and the first four events were transitioned into virtual events. Each event included a welcome from the hosting organization/s, a presentation covering the basic tenets of the ARPA, introductions of the Task Force, Council member/s, and City representatives in attendance, and an open comment period where community members in attendance could voice their concerns. At the end of each meeting, attendants were encouraged to take the online survey, (or in DARE's case, paper versions of the survey), and given information about the PVD Rescue Plan Website ([www.PVDrescueplan.com](http://www.PVDrescueplan.com)), upcoming events, and information about how to attend a Task Force meeting. Each event was live translated into Spanish, and the LPI and Facilitate Change events also had ASL (American Sign Language) interpretation. Every event was also filmed and is available to view on the City's Facebook page or Youtube Channel.

The structure was designed to solicit feedback from members of the community in a way that maximized the impact of their input and ensured that their contributions were heard and documented. The community engagement events for this project were structured as a conversation where community members could offer suggestions or ask questions and receive an immediate response from a Task Force member or a representative of City government. The focus on dialogue between community members and Task Force members was an intentional response to feedback from community-based organizations who said they have not historically felt adequately heard and responded to in past engagements with the City. These events allowed for dialogue between Task Force members and the attendees, creating the opportunity for suggestions from the public to shape final recommendations.

## The Community Engagement Events

The first event was facilitated by Jim Vincent and Nicole Tingle, President and Secretary of the NAACP Providence branch, respectively. The event served as a preview of community-raised concerns that would become the dominant priority identified throughout all of the community events, namely a substantial focus on needs related to housing. Throughout the meeting, Task Force members took turns responding directly to the topics voiced by community participants, which included questions about separate COVID-19 recovery ARPA funded processes happening at the State level and for public schools, and other questions related to the local funding allocation process.

The second event was facilitated by Marcela Betancur, Director of the Latino Policy Institute. Many of the funding priorities raised by community members at the first event were echoed at this one, but multiple participants at this second event also voiced that they saw the biggest problems in the city as not new issues brought on by the pandemic but rather long standing concerns that have not been adequately addressed. Another group of participants requested there be a priority on investing in programming that has been

proven to work for the residents of Providence rather than gambling on new and innovative initiatives that do not already have dedicated local organizations and infrastructure in place.

The third community engagement event hosted by Andrea Gómez and Victoria Rodriguez of Facilitate Change followed a slightly different format than the others. Instead of the public comment taking place as a large group, participants reflected individually on guiding questions then discussed them in breakout rooms. Due to the smaller size of the meeting, (which had 23 participants in contrast with 51 and 49 at the first two), many participants were able to have in-depth discussions directly with members of the Task Force. Both Mr. Warner and Ms. Clausius-Parks, two of the Task Force members in attendance, reported that this facilitation style felt like a uniquely authentic experience for a public listening session. The topics of housing issues including housing shortages, gentrification, and discrimination against people of color applying for loans and mortgages emerged as a common theme. Some novel concerns raised were the desire to see funding allocated for lead pipe mitigation, municipal broadband access, harm reduction centers, and investments in the arts, particularly in supporting BIPOC artists.

The fourth event, facilitated by Chanda Womack, Founding Executive Director of the Alliance of Rhode Island Southeast Asians for Education and Dwayne Keys, President of the South Providence Neighborhood Association, saw the largest number of participants to date with 76 registrations. Participants there took a noticeable interest in seeing the funds deployed in strategic, smart, and sustainable ways. There was a fear of repeating past funding initiatives

that created youth programming but were then subsequently abandoned after the grant ran out, leaving the youth who depended on the program with nowhere to go. Others requested that the process of applying for grants and request for proposals (RFPs) be made more accessible to individuals and businesses who may not have the capacity or skill set to complete them. Workforce training was raised as an example of a strategic investment, as the positive effects of a community member securing a better job ripples out to their family, neighbors, and local economies.

The final event of the series, facilitated by Monica Huertas, Vice Chair of DARE's Board of Directors, was positioned as part of DARE's usual monthly meeting, a contributing factor behind such an impressive turnout of 85 participants. It was the only in-person event of the community engagement process, and took place in DARE's parking lot with masked participants and a socially distanced seating arrangement. The meeting began with about 20 minutes of scheduled announcements and calls to action as part of DARE's internal agenda, followed by about an hour of community input. Almost all community participants at this meeting took a paper version of the survey, and the overwhelming majority of them lived in ZIP codes 02907 and 02909, which were two areas of Providence hardest hit by the pandemic which made their input particularly valuable. Housing was the most common concern expressed by this group, followed by frustration about the lack of resources in their neighborhoods which have been experiencing poverty, lack of housing, and educational and community disinvestment for decades before COVID-19.

In addition to the above mentioned community engagement, the Task Force heard from and engaged with many additional constituents. A non-exhaustive list of other community groups who engaged in this phase of the Providence Rescue Plan include the Providence Coalition of Neighborhood Associations, Providence Public Schools, a number of the City's Health Equity Zone community partners, and the City's African-American Ambassador Group.

## Findings

The qualitative information garnered by the five community engagement events largely echoed the quantitative results of the survey: a strong focus on the need for housing, followed by a strong desire for investments in community and youth, and an overall interest in racial equity initiatives, with lesser emphases on city services, infrastructure, and arts, culture, and tourism. Common requests related to housing were: assistance with home repairs (especially in public housing), eviction moratoriums, rent relief, and housing support for the elderly and disabled. There was also significant interest in funding programs for youth, including after-school and summer enrichment programs, recreation centers, and anti-violence initiatives. There were concerns voiced at events that were not widely reported in survey findings, such as providing resources for the formerly incarcerated and persons seeking harm reduction services. In addition to suggestions around what types of programs and topic areas should be prioritized in spending, participants at every event also made suggestions for the process of allocating the ARPA funds. These included requests for an equitable and accessible RFP and contracting process, an appeal for continued

community involvement, a focus on racial equality, and a desire to see the funding directed toward neighborhoods and communities that were hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hosting events virtually had some positive and negative side effects to the engagement process. On one hand, forming authentic connections through a screen can be challenging, especially when so many people have already had lengthy days engaging virtually at work or school. On the other hand, it makes the experience more accessible for those who have historically been unable to attend weeknight in-person events due to childcare, variable work schedules, or lack of transportation. The stories, recommendations, and concerns expressed by members of the community at these events were undoubtedly an indispensable companion to the surveys collected.

For more detailed summaries of finding from each of the community conversations, reports for each event can be found in Appendix B.

*"Many of the young people I work with have taken on jobs to help support their families during this difficult time. These young people are working to pay bills for housing, utilities and food. Families need help with affordable housing and job training for jobs that pay a living wage. Too many of the youth I work with are tired at school because of family dependent upon their income from a job. Other youth have taken on child care so that family can work 2-3 jobs to support household this is not sustainable."*

- Resident of 02907 (Upper South Providence), 60+



## Business Engagement

Engaging with the Providence business community to assess the economic impact of the pandemic on the city's economy was a top priority of the Task Force from its inception. Many of the Task Force members came to the process with intimate knowledge of different sectors of the Providence business community, including co-chair Oscar Mejias, Director of the Rhode Island Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and Kristen Adamo, President and CEO of Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau. In order to gain insight into what business owners and their employees were experiencing, and how ARPA funds could be used to support them, Mr. Mejias, in partnership with the City of Providence, spearheaded and facilitated two roundtable discussions with business leaders and workers from across the city. The first focused on the needs of small businesses, and the second was organized around larger 'anchor' businesses. For each event, invited panelists representing different sectors and communities in Providence reported on their respective experiences during the pandemic. Following the panelists was a public comment period where attendees could ask questions, offer suggestions, or give feedback on the things they had heard.

The Small Business Roundtable was facilitated by Mr. Mejias and featured Azriel Arce, who owns a salon in Providence, Alexandra Flores, who operates a home daycare business, Shawndell Burney-Speaks, Senior

Advisor to Mayor Elorza and a founding member of the Mayor's African American Ambassadors Group, and Channavy Chhay, Executive Director at the Center for Southeast Asians.

Mr. Arce and Ms. Flores both spoke about the challenges COVID-19 brought on their industries and how they have seen many colleagues forced to close their businesses. Ms. Flores, Ms. Chhay, and Ms. Burney-Speaks all spoke about how small businesses, because of their size, often lack the capacity, skills, or assets to invest in things that would help their businesses grow and thrive, such as marketing and advertising tools, digital technology, and accounting and financial planning support. Some suggestions from panelists and audience participants for funding included mentorship programs for young BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) entrepreneurs, funding for faith-based programs that provide help with job seeking and other social services, and technical assistance to business owners for whom grant and RFP applications are often prohibitive.

The Anchor Business Roundtable panelists represented the industries of hospitality, healthcare, and technology. Mr. Mejias facilitated and was joined by fellow Task Force member Kristen Adamo. Both Ms. Adamo and panelist Sara Bratko, Sr. Vice President of Advocacy and General Counsel at Rhode Island Hospitality Association and Rhode Island Hospitality Education Foundation, spoke about the unique challenges facing the hospitality industry. Ms. Adamo described the state of the tourism industry as "catastrophic," with hotels alone having lost 70% of their revenue during the pandemic. Ms. Bratko referred to an indicator from the Bureau of Labor Statistics that stated that nationally the Hospitality and Leisure Industry lost as many jobs as construction, government, manufacturing, retail, education, and health services combined. In Rhode Island, 36,000 Rhode Island residents experienced losing their jobs. She described the current staffing crisis as the biggest challenge facing the industry. She said the staffing shortage is due to potential workers being unable to secure childcare, the halting of H-2B and J-1 visas for foreign workers due to travel bans, and a fear of catching COVID-19 preventing people applying for these types of jobs, among other things.

Panelist Lynn Blais, a registered nurse representing the United Nurses and Allied Professionals Union, echoed Ms. Bratko in naming staffing as the biggest challenge, albeit for different reasons. Ms. Blais explained that, unlike the hospitality industry, many of the staff losses in healthcare professions are due to employees aging out, potential workers being unable to afford the extensive schooling required for the job, or simply leaving the industry due to pandemic burnout. Her suggestion for ARPA funding was to use it for workforce development.

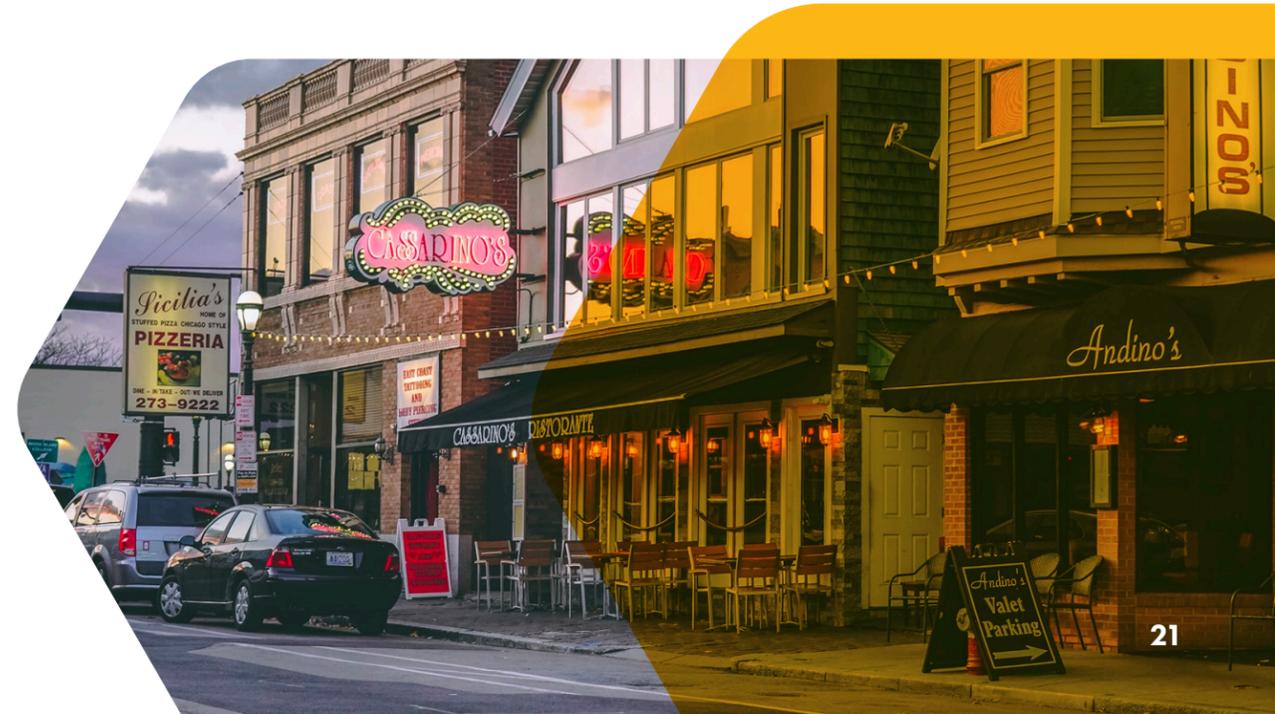
Creusa Michelazzo, Executive Director of TechCollective, a technology best practice and workforce development association based out of Providence, represented an industry that saw unprecedented growth during the pandemic due to so many industries shifting to virtual business models. Her primary concern within her industry is that a large segment of the city's population does not have access to the technology and broadband that are required to function in a world where almost every profession or industry now has digital components. She also stressed a need for widespread training in how to use technology, and placing a greater prioritization on cybersecurity.

## Findings

The key takeaways from the business roundtables revealed how the needs of different businesses vary by industry. All three of the sectors represented in the anchor business discussion were challenged by having

more work than staff available to keep up with it, but solutions for employing more servers for a restaurant versus registered nurses versus IT professionals require vastly different measures. There was also a shared understanding of how intertwined the well-being of the economy is with public health, racial equity, housing, and many other areas of life touched by COVID, and vice versa. For example, investing in daycares and early learning centers means more parents will be available to work, which in turn addresses the current staffing crisis many businesses are experiencing. We also heard that propping up one of Providence's larger businesses will not just benefit that one company but will instead support an entire constellation of employees, contractors, and other businesses whose work depends on that larger industry. Finally, there were several calls to see ARPA money not, or not entirely, invested directly into businesses themselves, but rather into initiatives that will help struggling businesses in sustainable ways, such as providing technical assistance and training in digital technology so they can keep pace with the current landscape, or investing in workforce training that will ensure there are enough potential employees prepared to work in much-needed positions while also bettering their own chances of achieving better economic prospects.

For more detailed summaries of finding from each of the roundtable discussions, reports for each event can be found in Appendix C.



## Background

To inform the Task Force’s recommendations and collect as much input and guidance from the community as possible, the Task Force, with significant support from the Mayor’s Office and consulting team, proposed an ambitious strategy of collecting over 1,000 surveys from city stakeholders (residents, workers, business owners, and others with strong connections to the City of Providence). Survey results would allow Task Force members to hear directly from Providence’s communities and understand the needs of people who have been traditionally unable to participate in public policy hearings or community engagement processes. Outreach for survey responses was performed with a focus on communities that have been disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and/or have experienced historic inequities, in particular the city’s Black, Latino, Asian (particularly Southeast Asian), and Native American communities.

## Survey Development

The survey was developed through conversations between the City administration and SCS, along with consultation with the consortium of partner organizations. The final survey text was reviewed by those groups, and then relayed to the City’s webmaster for implementation of the survey on the website dedicated to the ARPA funding process, [PVDrescueplan.com](https://www.providence.org/Pages/ARPA-Funding-Process.aspx).

It was determined that for ease of respondent completion, demographic information would be collected through a single question rather than the more traditional race/ethnicity split, which typically asks respondents to first identify a race and then asks a separate question about whether the respondent identifies as Hispanic/Latino. The survey design team determined that breaking out Hispanic/Latino as a separate question (as typically done in demographic surveys) could create ambiguity for survey takers, and function as a potential point of friction to respondent completion that could negatively impact the number of respondents.

The two most important questions in the survey were based on a survey conducted by the City of Alexandria, VA about how it should allocate its own ARPA funding. The first question asked whether ARPA dollars should: be primarily allocated to address the impacts of COVID-19, be spent on addressing systemic issues primarily, or a mix of both. The second question asked respondents to allocate a hypothetical \$100 between seven categorical spending areas. The categories of investment included: Housing and Homelessness, Youth and Community Investments, City Services and Infrastructure, Racial Equity, Business and Economic Development, Sustainability, and Arts, Culture and Tourism.

Elsewhere, residents were asked to describe their experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic and to expand (if they wanted to) on how money should be spent in each spending category.

Once the survey was finalized, the City webmaster built the survey on the website using a web form with required fields and logic to ensure responses to the “\$100 question” totaled to the sum. Protocols were implemented to limit duplication of responses or intentional manipulation of the results by bad-faith actors.

Paper versions of the survey were developed for focused outreach to hard hit and historically disadvantaged communities for which electronic access would be a barrier. These paper survey responses were transcribed into the same electronic database, and qualitative responses were compiled into the master report.

## Survey Collection

Survey collection occurred over 49 days, from August 18 to October 5. Outreach for the survey was primarily conducted online, through various City of Providence communication channels. The public was encouraged to take the survey at Task Force meetings, Community Engagement Events, and Business Roundtables. In addition, surveys were collected in hard hit communities with canvassing

conducted by the Mayor’s Center for City Services and the Community Relations staff (along with the Mayor himself). The Mayor’s Community Relations Team, SCS and consultants conducted direct outreach to community organizations and faith communities, requesting that they encourage their constituents and stakeholders to take the survey. A paper survey was also developed, with translations into Khmer, Lao, and Hmong to ensure representation of Providence’s Southeast Asian communities. These surveys were collected by ARISE. An English-language paper survey was likewise collected by DARE. Be Moore Interpreting also collected surveys at affordable housing areas, and from faith communities were collected.

## Survey Analysis

Survey analysis was conducted by SCS and Cristian Potter of Red Rooster. Red Rooster received raw survey data from the web form in CSV format, and loaded that dataset into Microsoft PowerBI to create a dynamic and manipulable dashboard to analyze for insights and break data down by ZIP Code, race/ethnicity, and other relevant population characteristics. SCS reviewed the analysis of the quantitative data provided by Red Rooster and added further insights. Likewise, SCS reviewed the data from the qualitative questions of the survey, coding qualitative responses for common themes, then analyzed the frequency with which those themes appeared.

This analysis was presented to the Task Force at multiple points throughout the survey collection process, updating them each time with the most recent data. Red Rooster’s dashboard of the quantitative data appears on the homepage of the Providence Rescue Plan site, [PVDrescueplan.com](https://www.providence.org/Pages/ARPA-Funding-Process.aspx). Some of the qualitative data appear in Appendix A of this document and a full supplemental report collecting all the results of the community survey are in the supplemental survey results document.



## Community Proposals

Even prior to the start of the formal Task Force process, the City of Providence had begun receiving proposals to collect all community spending [proposals](#).

All community proposals received are being compiled and analyzed by the SCS Budget Team, and packaged into a continuously updated summary to help inform programming of the eventual allocation of ARPA funds by the City Council, following the release of these recommendations. Community members were encouraged to participate in Task Force meetings and to present proposals during public comment periods, though doing so did not guarantee that the Task Force would include specific proposals in its final recommendations. Though proposal collection will continue at least until the end of 2021, the summary of proposals received as of October 14, 2021 is included toward the end of this document.

## Future Engagement

The public is invited to stay engaged with the work of the Providence Rescue Plan, all of which can be found on [PVDrescueplan.com](#). The recommendations in this report, per the Task Force’s founding resolution, are intended to guide upcoming City Council meetings where ARPA funding will ultimately be allocated and approved by ordinance. The Task Force recommends that the City Council hold public hearings before the spending ordinance is officially approved. It also recommends ongoing public meetings and reporting as the funds are deployed.

A community events calendar and a News and Updates page can be found at [PVDrescueplan.com](#). Spanish-language access to the Providence Rescue Plan website is available directly at [PVDplanderescate.com](#). The website can also be automatically translated into Arabic, traditional Chinese, Khmer, and Portuguese by selecting a language in the top right hand corner of the website. Members of the public are invited to subscribe to regular email updates on the Providence Rescue Plan at [PVDrescueplan.com/newsletter](#) or simply by scrolling to the bottom of the homepage.

## Reccomendations

### Summary of Recommendation Process

As outlined in the establishing resolution, the mandate of the COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force is to develop a set of recommendations for how the City of Providence should prioritize investment of ARPA funds to meet the particular needs of Providence’s diverse communities. The Task Force members sought to synthesize the community guidance received through community conversations, roundtable discussions, survey responses, Task Force presentations, and the individual expertise of each Task Force member into a unified approach for how to allocate these resources.

Throughout the 90-day period of weekly meetings, the Task Force heard from a variety of presenters about the needs facing Providence residents, workers, and businesses as a result of COVID-19. The Task Force then discussed and offered guidance for both the categorical and qualitative methods to guide use of ARPA funds. These recommendations were documented by SCS staff, and informed three facilitated conversations that occurred in the final Task Force meetings of the 90-day period; on October 1st, 8th, and 15th. The discussions were facilitated by the Task Force co-chairs, and synthesized previously discussed observations into a set of questions and potential qualitative recommendations. The group further refined and ultimately voted to incorporate some of these observations and proposed recommendations into their final, official recommendations. The general approach of these discussions was: start broad, with key directional questions addressed first, like how would the Task Force would want to prioritize investment by categories, and then progressively move to more granular recommendations, such as the criteria by which funds would be deployed to ensure disproportionately impacted or historically divested communities will actually receive funding directly and/or benefits of investments made.

### Funds Available

To determine the funds available for the Task Force to allocate to recommended funding categories, a

calculation of previous and anticipated future ARPA expenses was required. These calculations factored for the June 2021 ordinance, projected revenue recovery amounts for the City’s 2022-2023 and 2023-2024 budgets, and City administration of funds for those years. Those amounts are detailed in the below table. When adjusting for these fixed costs, the following calculation yields the total funding available for the task to recommend allocation of through its recommendations: \$112,136,777.00.

Item	June Ordinance	'22-'23	'23-'24	Total
Revenue Recovery	\$19,457,352.00	\$20,000,000.00	\$10,000,000.00	\$49,457,352.00
Administration of Funds	\$1,220,000.00	\$1,750,000.00	\$1,750,000.00	\$4,720,000.00
Funds to Allocate	\$22,167,339.00	\$89,969,438.00		\$112,136,777.00
Total	\$42,844,691.00	\$123,469,438.00		\$166,314,129.00

### Explanation of the Methodology of Allocating Funding

The recommendation process came to a conclusion during the third discussion meeting on October 15th.

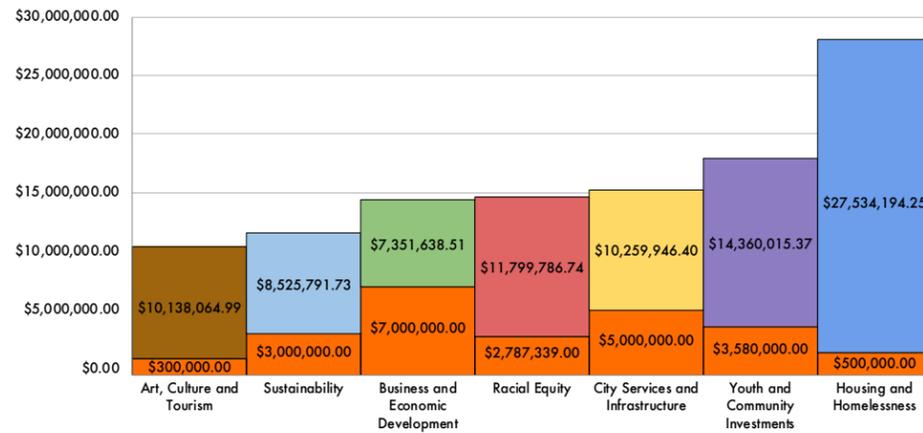
Prior to the meeting on October 8th, Task Force members were surveyed to assess their priorities and key recommendations for funding approaches. Overwhelmingly, of the nine (9) Task Force members who responded to the survey, 33% prioritized funding 2-4 areas of investment only, and 44% agreed with that approach in addition to funding other categories at a lesser amount. Additionally, there was a strong desire among Task Force members to continue meeting after their recommendations were submitted (89% supported), to both help define funding criteria and assist in communicating to community members and organizations how to receive ARPA funding or apply for programs.

During the October 8th meeting, the Task Force voted to recommend aligning ARPA funding in a manner directly proportional to the percent investment for each category according to the results of the community survey. Another recommendation made by the Task Force during that meeting was that funding for housing and homelessness be increased to 25% of all funds

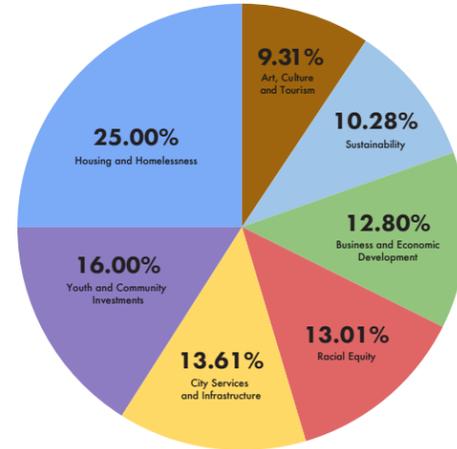
available (the final percent allocation for housing and homelessness in the community survey was 22.16%). The Task Force also requested that SCS generate a set of funding scenarios with accompanying graphs in dollars and percentage breakdowns of what spending would look like based on their guidance, with the further request that SCS factor the funding allocations already determined by the June 2021 ordinance into the relevant spending categories.

Based on that guidance, SCS staff developed two scenarios for allocating the funds according to the results of the community survey while keeping in mind the other requests made by the Task Force. The decision to increase investment in one category of spending (+2.84%), required a proportional decrease in spending in other categories ( $2.84\% / 6 = -.47\%$ , or  $2.84\% / 2 = 1.42\%$ ). So, the two scenarios that SCS developed were: to 1) spread the proportional decrease (-.47%) across all other funding categories that were not housing and homelessness, or 2) spread the proportional decrease (-1.42%) across the two lowest prioritized topics (Art, Culture, Tourism and Sustainability). These scenarios were presented as bar graphs showing the total dollar amount (see figures), pie charts, and tables so the Task Force members could see a relative comparison of each scenario.

# Scenario 1



■ Scenario 1 - Dec, 2021 Ordinance  
 ■ June, 2021 Ordinance



## Additional Recommendations of the Task Force

Additionally, the Task Force made motions and unanimously approved qualitative recommendations for ARPA funding. These recommendations and how they came to be are detailed below.

One theme Task Force members identified early in the process of meeting was that collaboration would be necessary for the success of all efforts supported by ARPA. This not only included collaboration with community partners and among the Task Force, City Council, and City, but also in the form of collaboration with state and federal partners. The fact was observed more than once in Task Force meetings that the State of Rhode Island was also in the midst of its ARPA funding recommendation review process, and that many federal COVID-19 related funding opportunities are in the process of deployment, or have yet to be approved by Congress. **With all of these factors in consideration, the Task Force decided to recommend that the City examine all spending recommendations as they intersect with other State, Federal, or local funding streams and assign those dollars in coordination with other funding streams in a way that will maximize impact.**

Task Force members heard consistently from community members, workers, and business owners alike that there is a strong desire to ensure that those who benefit from the programs and resources made available by ARPA funding be from communities adversely most impacted by COVID-19, or "hardest hit." Throughout the process, people offered various ideas for groups and people that should be included in the group. **The Task Force unanimously agreed with this idea and recommended that it would dedicate all spending in a manner that will have the greatest impact on those individuals, businesses, and communities that were hardest hit by the pandemic.**

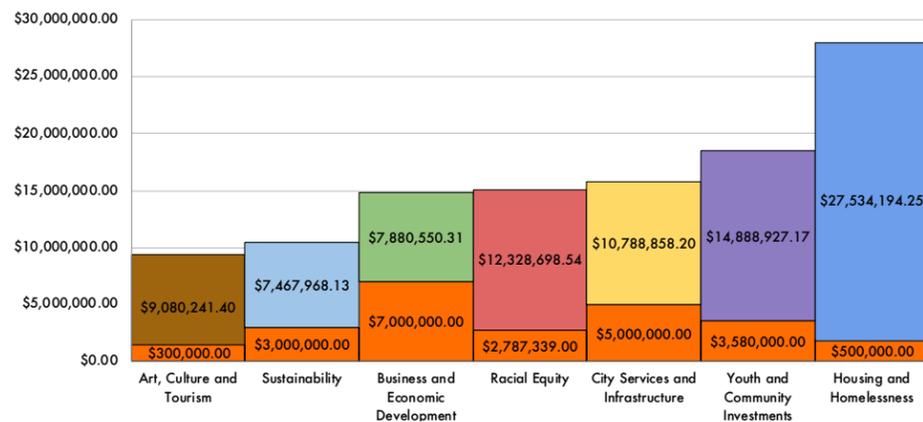
As the Task Force began the process of convening and hearing from the community, one of the foundational questions that the group determined it

needed to have an answer from the community on r was how much to focus on short-term problems due to COVID-19 relative to the long-term problems that predated the pandemic. Through community conversations and surveys, the clear desire of most residents was to focus on addressing a mix of preexisting problems and urgent COVID-19 problems (63.82% of respondents to the community survey);with respect to long-term problems people more than 2:1 (24.57% : 11.61%) wished to focus on addressing existing problems that made the pandemic more damaging to historically marginalized communities even if it means limiting what we spend on COVID-19-specific issues, rather than the inverse.

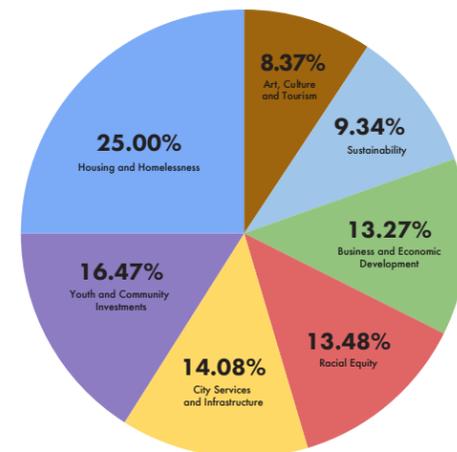
Addressing historic inequities requires long term structural solutions Given that fact, the Task Force made the following two recommendations. **The Task Force recommended that the City assign funding in a way that will maximize the sustained impact of the investments rather than doing solely short term funding for programs that then cease to exist once that funding ends.** The Task Force clarified that this does not preclude funding of short term programs with ARPA funding, but that the relevance and importance of short term investments must be weighed in consideration of the need to sustain initiatives after funds have run out. **Additionally the Task Force recommended that the City make every spending decision through the lens of racial equity, centering not just those hardest hit by COVID-19 but those who have been disenfranchised by structural and historic racism and discrimination.**

Throughout the community engagement process, Task Force members heard directly from City Councilors, city officials, community members, workers, and business owners from across the city. Throughout those conversations, participants periodically asked for how they could get more involved in the ARPA recommendation process. When responding, staff and Task Force members shared information about the survey, community and business engagement events, or community proposal portal as appropriate. But one additional way in which

# Scenario 2



■ Scenario 2 - Dec, 2021 Ordinance  
 ■ June, 2021 Ordinance



On October 15th, and after discussing both scenarios and overall goals for investment, the Task Force members unanimously approved the Scenario 1 approach to funding categories.

participants were informed they could be a part of the process, in addition to continuing to attend Task Force meetings would be to participate in City Council meetings about these recommendations for funding. **The Task Force recommended that the City hold public hearings before the spending ordinance is approved by the City Council.**

**Additionally, the Task Force recommended that it would like to meet at a to-be-determined pace in the future to achieve the aforementioned outcomes.**

### Future Role of the Task Force

Upon submission of this report to the Mayor and City Council for review, the COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force wishes to transition into a new phase in its work. The Task Force conceives of a role supporting the deployment of ARPA funds in a manner faithful to the intent of these recommendations and seeks to offer guidance toward a deployment of funds that best meets the needs of our city's communities as they've been expressed through the extensive community engagement process. In particular, the Task Force has articulated a need for the following:

- Deliberate and continued focus on embedding racial equity into every facet of ARPA spending, as well as guiding the deployment of ARPA resources toward communities of color that have faced historic inequities and a disproportionate impact of COVID-19.
- Development of criteria and guidance for RFPs, grants, etc. to ensure ARPA funds get to target communities.
- Continued oversight of ARPA programs to ensure programming and methods of deployment fulfill the community's intent.
- Communication of opportunities for funding or programs to members of the community as they become available.
- The Task Force shall continue to convene on a less frequent basis (quarterly or monthly as needed) to achieve the above goals.

### Final ARPA Funding Recommendations By Category

The funding recommendations for the City of Providence's use of ARPA as approved by the Task Force are detailed in the below table.

Item	June 2021 Ordinance	Second Ordinance	Total
Art, Culture and Tourism	\$300,000.00	\$10,138,064.99	\$10,438,064.99
Sustainability	\$3,000,000.00	\$8,525,791.73	\$11,525,791.73
Business and Economic Development	\$7,000,000.00	\$7,351,638.51	\$14,351,638.51
Racial Equity	\$2,787,339.00	\$11,799,786.74	\$14,587,125.74
City Services and Infrastructure	\$5,000,000.00	\$10,259,946.40	\$15,259,946.40
Youth and Community Investments	\$3,580,000.00	\$14,360,015.37	\$17,940,015.37
Housing and Homelessness	\$500,000.00	\$27,534,194.25	\$28,034,194.25
Revenue Recovery	\$19,457,352.00	\$30,000,000.00	\$49,457,352.00
Administration of ARPA	\$1,220,000.00	\$3,500,000.00	\$4,720,000.00
	<b>\$42,844,691.00</b>	<b>\$123,469,438.00</b>	<b>\$166,314,129.00</b>



## Community Proposals Delivered to Task Force By Category

The following summarizes proposals and ideas that were presented to the COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience Task Force and shared through the community engagement efforts over the course of the 90-Day meeting period or submitted via our community proposal process. This is not an exhaustive list, and proposals are still being received from community members and organizations. All funding opportunities made available to the public will be publicized on the City of Providence website, and [PVDrescueplan.com/apply](https://www.providence.org/Pages/PVDrescueplan/apply).

### \$ 10.4 million

#### Arts, Culture, and Tourism

Ensure the continued development of a vibrant and creative city by integrating arts and culture into community life while showcasing Providence as an international cultural destination.

##### Strategies

- Support creative economy workforce training
- Expand public programming and events
- Support for Providence's tourism industry to catalyze economic activity across the city.
- Invest in arts organizations, particularly BIPOCled organizations
- Fund neighborhood based programming
- Provide grants to artists and for public art projects

##### Summary of Proposals

- Creative economy initiatives such as workforce training and public programming
- Support local arts programs run by people of color
- Support arts, culture, and tourism organizations that saw steep declines in business due to COVID-19
- Support neighborhood-based activation programming
- Funding for BIPOC artists

### \$ 14.4 million

#### Business and Economic Development

Create economic opportunity for all of the city's residents, and supporting Providence businesses to grow and hire locally with a focus on supporting minority, women, people with disabilities and veteran-owned businesses and industries devastated by the economic impacts of COVID-19

##### Strategies

- Expand financial recovery tools such as loans and grants to small businesses
- Raise awareness and drive neighborhood-level economic activity
- Provide locally informed technical assistance and recovery supports to local businesses
- Invest in local workforce development and promote empowerment models
- Support wealth building programs for historically underinvested communities

### Summary of Proposals

- Create a neighborhood visitor services team, bilingual collateral and tourism products, and marketing campaigns
- Technical assistance for Providence-based businesses (federal aid, legal, back office support, online inventory management)
- Workforce development programs in manufacturing, technology and energy.
- Business corridor investments
- Micro-grants for small businesses
- Creation of financial products and services to build wealth in historically divested communities
- Employee ownership promotion
- Support for business districts and shared use infrastructure
- Investments in local media
- Investments in professional development for community organizations and conferences
- Outdoor or public health adaptation for businesses
- Developments to serve as hubs for BIPOC organizations and businesses
- Support for women owned businesses
- Local training, hiring and contract Awards
- Restore downtown and creative economy

### \$ 15.3 million

#### City Services and Infrastructure

Support the city in successfully revitalizing our public infrastructure and implementing economic relief programs with investments in technology, systems and public spaces.

##### Strategies

- Invest in city-wide broadband access and improve city services
- Update city network systems, technology, and cybersecurity infrastructure
- Invest in public infrastructure and public spaces

##### Summary of Proposals

- Park infrastructure investments
- Implement the city's cybersecurity plan
- Investments and upgrades to Kennedy Plaza and Waterplace Park re: climate resiliency, accessibility, open space activation
- Enhance park programming for Summer/Fall to support COVID-19 safe family activities for families with unvaccinated children (12 and below) outdoors

- Citywide broadband
- Improve city procurement and tracking systems
- Improve accessibility of city infrastructure for people with disabilities

### \$28 million

#### Housing and Homelessness

Respond to the current housing crisis in the short term, and implementing a long term strategy to end housing insecurity and homelessness in the city, addressed in collaboration with community, state, and federal partners.

##### Strategies

- Expand immediate shelter and rapid rehousing
- Increase supply and preservation of affordable housing units through a variety of tools including but not limited to land banking and strategic acquisition, repairs, rehabilitation, and new construction
- Focus on increasing housing opportunities for people and families with low or no income
- Fund supportive housing and other inclusive housing models
- Invest in creative homelessness prevention and housing stabilization programs, and maintain accessibility and affordability

##### Summary of Proposals

- Supplement the City's affordable housing trust
- Expansion of rapid rehousing
- Investment in permanent supportive housing
- Foster access to affordable housing for communities of color
- Creation of a citywide Olmstead Plan for supportive housing
- Home repair grants and loans
- Investment in pre-existing comprehensive housing strategies
- Creation of an intergenerational home-sharing program
- Increase access to homeownership for communities historically excluded from government support
- Address rental housing discrimination for people of color
- Creation of no and low income housing options

## \$ 14.6 million

### Racial Equity

Address historic inequities with intersectional investments including braiding from other categories to ensure equity across all ARPA programs and funding.

#### Strategies

- Support justice system reforms
- Make public health and safety investments
- Invest in economic stabilization programs
- Provide direct relief to hardest hit communities
- Provision of reparations

#### Summary of Proposals

- Economic stabilization investments
- Municipal fine and fee reform, and systems modernization
- Driver's licenses restoration services
- Diversionary services investments
- Public safety deployment analysis
- Expansion of the guaranteed income program
- Reparations Investments
- COVID-19 safe community programming
- Upgrades to community-based health clinics
- Improving food distribution infrastructure
- Creation of a non-profit bail bond company
- Mentorship Programs for Black Youth and Entrepreneurs
- Creation of a Black radio station

## \$ 11.5 million

### Sustainability

Ensure adequate community infrastructure to respond to and prepare for the impacts of climate change in the City's frontline communities and to support the growth of green economic sectors within the City.

#### Strategies

- Invest in climate change resilient and adaptive infrastructure
- Fund stormwater/sewer repair and flood mitigation
- Implement environmental justice strategies for frontline communities
- Make green economy investments

#### Summary of Proposals

- Procure properties and complete capital investments in infrastructure that supports stormwater and flood mitigation
- Projects to advance climate resilience and environmental justice within Providence Frontline Communities
- Replace lead pipes
- Mitigation of environmental pollution

## \$ 17.9 million

### Youth and Community Investments

Ensuring Providence's youth have access to safe learning environments, robust options for out of school programs, and equal opportunity to succeed academically and professionally. Community investments support the fabric and infrastructure of our community to bring people together, and address gaps of access and opportunity.

#### Strategies

- Expand youth out-of-school time programs and early learning opportunities
- Provide paid internship and employment options
- Invest in asset-building models for our youth and community
- Invest in community-based organization infrastructure
- Provide support to critical service organizations
- Investment in early learning infrastructure

#### Summary of Proposals

- Expansion of early learning programming
- Expansion of college savings programs
- Summer jobs for youth
- Expansion of mentoring and after school programs
- Investments in community centers
- Increase service and capacity at libraries
- Expansion of summer camps
- Investment in Pre-K infrastructure
- Non-violence investments
- Expanded hours and facilities improvements at libraries

- Broadband at recreation centers
- Investment in childcare providers, and network-based strategies for childcare
- Bilingual theatre and literacy classes
- Youth development programs in the arts and technology
- Creation and expansion of mental health programs and services
- Creation and expansion of health services for low income community members
- Investment in faith-based organizations to address food insecurity, technology insecurity, and job training or placement
- Funding for harm reduction centers and investment in harm reduction strategies to help stem the overdose crisis
- Support for seniors, people with disabilities, and veterans

*"We need to fix our schools, we are failing our children."*

*- Community Engagement Event Attendee*



# Impact of COVID-19 on the City of Providence

## Disproportionately Impacted Communities

The health, social, and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have affected every Providence resident. The pandemic caused new losses, risks, and hardships in every corner of the city, as this report describes. In addition to the challenges faced by all Providence residents, particular segments of the population have been especially impacted.

**Evidence suggests the pandemic hit hardest in underprivileged and under-resourced**

**communities in Providence, exacerbating existing inequalities.** For instance, the two ZIP codes experiencing the highest hospitalization rates from COVID-19 — 02909 and 02907 — are also the ZIP codes which had the second and third lowest median incomes prior to the pandemic, respectively.<sup>2</sup> These ZIP codes also had the second and third highest unemployment rates, the second and third highest poverty rates, and the first and second lowest shares of residents covered by health insurance.

Zip code	Neighborhoods	Population	COVID-19 cases per 100,000	COVID-19 hospitalizations per 100,000	Median household income	Unemployment rate	Poverty rate	Health insurance coverage
02909	Olneyville, Silver Lake, Hartford, Manton, Mount Pleasant, Federal Hill, West End	40,809	24,066	1,829	\$42,041	9.2%	30%	90%
02907	Elmwood, South Providence, West End, Reservoir	31,294	22,231	1,771	\$39,877	8.8%	28%	89%
02904	Wanskuck, Charles, Mount Hope	30,613	18,904	1,474	\$44,269	5.5%	19%	95%
02908	Elmhurst, Smith Hill, Wanskuck, Valley, Mount Pleasant	36,314	22,616	1,316	\$51,981	6.7%	20%	95%
02905	South Providence, Washington Park	26,174	17,946	1,307	\$47,942	8.3%	23%	93%
02903	Downtown, Jewelry District, Fox Point	10,979	13,745	1,224	\$36,347	11.0%	33%	95%
02906	College Hill, Wayland, Fox Point, Mount Hope, Summit/Hope, Blackstone	27,825	12,144	472	\$85,270	4.2%	16%	96%

Source: Rhode Island Department of Health; U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 2015–2019 estimates. Cases are as of October 2021. Hospitalizations are as of September 2021. Figures for population, income, unemployment, poverty, and insurance coverage are from 2019.

The Providence communities hit hardest by the pandemic also tend to have higher shares of Latino and Black residents. The two ZIP codes with the highest COVID-19 hospitalization rates, for example, have the two largest percentages of Latino residents in the city. The ZIP codes with the second and third

highest hospitalization rates have the first and second largest percentages of Black residents, respectively. The disproportionate impacts of the pandemic are important to keep in mind when considering recovery efforts.

<sup>2</sup> Rhode Island Department of Health, “COVID-19 Rhode Island Data,” accessed October 2021.; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, accessed October 2021.; Data on hospitalizations provided by the Rhode Island Department of Health.

## Health and Social Determinants of Health

The most apparent effect on the health of Providence residents during the pandemic was the devastating toll caused by COVID-19. **From March 2020 to October 2021, there have been 36,035 reported cases of COVID-19 in the City of Providence, with 2,536 resulting in hospitalizations and 558 attendant deaths.<sup>3</sup> Rhode Island has not seen the magnitude of deaths in a single year, as occurred in 2020, since the 1918 flu pandemic.<sup>4</sup>**

During surges in the pandemic, hospitals became filled to capacity with COVID-19 patients, leading to a lack of beds and difficulty finding sufficient personnel to care for patients.<sup>5</sup> In March 2020, then-Governor Gina Raimondo called for Rhode Island residents to postpone elective medical procedures to ensure that hospitals could accommodate swells of COVID-19 patients.<sup>6</sup> Many deferred care for both emergency and preventative health issues. This ultimately led to backlogs and bottlenecks in the state’s hospital systems, further exacerbating crises of staffing and

capacity and assuring poorer health outcomes for those patients who had deferred treatment.

Social determinants of health are conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. These were also adversely impacted by the pandemic, evidence shows.<sup>7</sup> **The City of Providence Healthy Communities Office has observed that COVID-19 worsened many pre-existing social and health inequities, including those present in neighborhood and community conditions, economic stability, and access to education and health care.<sup>8</sup>** For example, the number of Rhode Island children testing for lead poisoning increased 22% in 2020.<sup>9</sup> Providence children accounted for nearly half of the new detections. The pandemic also negatively impacted food access, a key social determinant of health; for more on this, see the data on food insecurity presented in the [Household Financial Wellbeing](#) section later in this report.

<sup>3</sup> Rhode Island Department of Health, “COVID-19 Rhode Island Data,” accessed October 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Anderson, “RI death toll in 2020 was 1,700+ higher than average year,” The Providence Journal, February 2021.

<sup>5</sup> G. Wayne Miller, “Staffing shortages hit RI hospitals as COVID surges,” The Providence Journal, November 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Eli Sherman and Tim White, “Diverting patients’: RI hospitals face new problems amid second wave of COVID-19,” WPRI, November 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Definition of social determinants of health from: Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, “Social Determinants of Health,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, accessed October 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Laurie Moïse Sears, presentation to the City of Providence COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force, September 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Edward Fitzpatrick, “No haven at home: Amid the pandemic, childhood lead poisoning rates are rising in R.I.,” The Boston Globe, August 2021.

## Mental Health

In addition to the devastating toll of COVID-19 on the physical health of Providence residents, the conditions created by the pandemic also produced an unprecedented mental health crisis. **The combination of economic hardship, overcrowded or isolated living conditions, upheavals to education and child care routines, and widespread sickness, death, and grief have caused mounting mental and behavioral health challenges in the Providence area.**<sup>10</sup> These local conditions track nationwide trends. For example, elevated depression symptoms among adults in the United States reached 28% in 2020 and 33% in 2021, compared to nine percent prior to the pandemic.<sup>11</sup>

The pandemic caused particular mental and behavioral health challenges for young Providence residents. Lack of social interaction with peers, unpredictable school schedules and conditions,

*“Housing was already an issue and it has worsened during the pandemic. Single bedrooms are going for up to 1000 a month. That is a mortgage.”*

- Community Engagement Event Attendee

household financial challenges, and other dynamics created environments which generated and intensified mental health struggles. Cases of adolescent anxiety and depression have increased, leading to a surge in referrals to Butler Hospital for mental health assistance, according to the hospital.<sup>12</sup> Calls to Kids Link RI, an adolescent behavioral health triage service and referral network, rose 22% in 2020.<sup>13</sup>

The pandemic also exacerbated a number of related issues facing Providence residents, including substance use and domestic violence. From 2019 to 2020, the number of deaths from overdoses in Providence increased 58%.<sup>14</sup> Calls to domestic violence helplines and agencies increased an estimated 43% statewide.<sup>15</sup>

The City has taken a number of steps to support residents and address these new challenges. In July, the City allocated first-tranche ARPA funds to extend the co-response partnership between the Providence Police Department and the Providence Center, a community diversion program joining police officers and clinicians to respond to individuals in psychiatric or substance use crises, and ensure that people in need get the right kind of care. In response to the overdose crisis, the Providence Healthy Communities Office and the Rhode Island Public Health Institute developed the Downtown Overdose Hotspot Assessment and Plan.<sup>16</sup> Building on this work, the City’s fiscal year 2022 budget dedicates funds to the Safe Stations program, which offers recovery referral services at all Providence Fire Department stations. Additional resources can expand and reinforce these efforts.

<sup>10</sup> Kaiser Family Foundation, “Overview: Mental Health in Rhode Island,” accessed October 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Catherine Ettman et al., “Persistent depressive symptoms during COVID-19: a national, population-representative, longitudinal study of U.S. adults,” The Lancet Regional Health – Americas, October 2021.

<sup>12</sup> Danielle North, “Butler Hospital sees rise in mental health referrals during pandemic,” WPRI, November 2020.

<sup>13</sup> U.S. News & World Report, “Report: Rhode Island’s Kids Suffered Greatly During Pandemic,” May 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Prevent Overdose RI, “Overdose Death Data,” accessed October 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Antonia Ayres-Brown, “Domestic Violence Advocates Describe Increased Demand For Support Services During Pandemic,” WBUR, May 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Rhode Island Public Health Institute, “Downtown Overdose Hotspot Assessment and Plan,” October 2020.

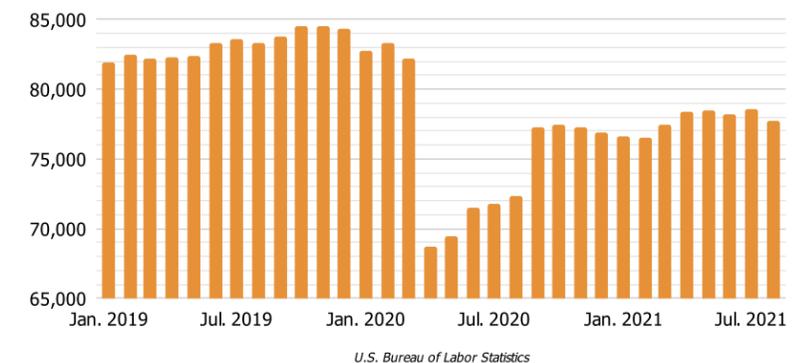
## Economy

### Jobs and Employment

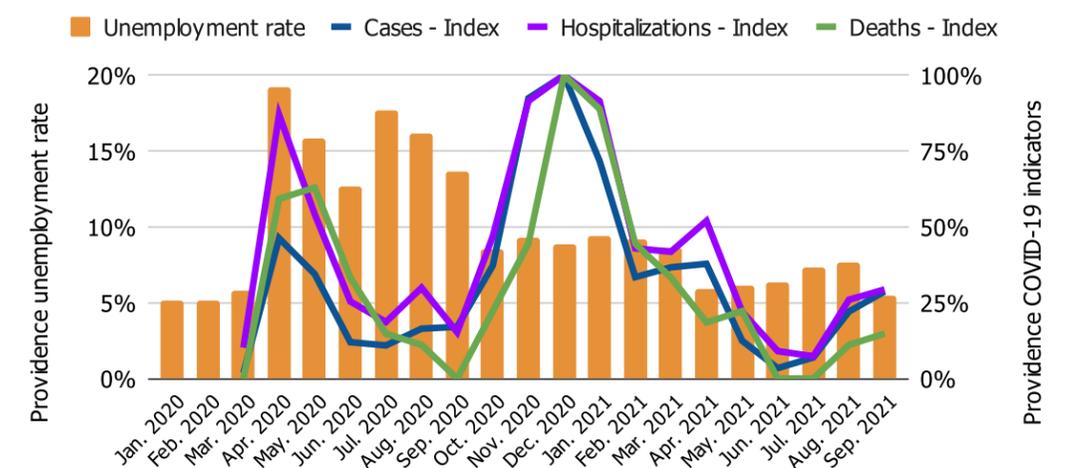
Workers, families, and businesses in Providence felt the COVID-19 economic shock immediately. From February to April 2020, 14,600 residents lost their jobs.<sup>17</sup> That month, the city’s unemployment rate peaked at 19.2%, the seventh highest in Rhode Island. From spring 2020 to summer 2021, the city regained two thirds of jobs lost. But recovery has been gradual: a year and a half past the onset of the pandemic, in August 2021, the city remained 5,500 below its February 2020 employment level. In the year between September 2020 and August 2021, the number of employed Providence residents grew by just 427. The city’s August unemployment rate was 7.6%, the second highest in the state.

Early in the pandemic, joblessness in Providence closely tracked the spread of COVID-19. As hospitalizations and deaths spiked in spring 2020, the city’s unemployment rate did the same.<sup>18</sup> This relationship weakened in the fall and winter of 2020 as unemployment remained relatively stable while COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths increased. **In recent months, unemployment has remained elevated as the spread of COVID-19 has slowed, suggesting that suppressing the virus, while critically necessary, is not alone sufficient to ensure a robust and equitable economic recovery for the city and its residents.**

Employment in Providence



COVID-19 and unemployment in Providence

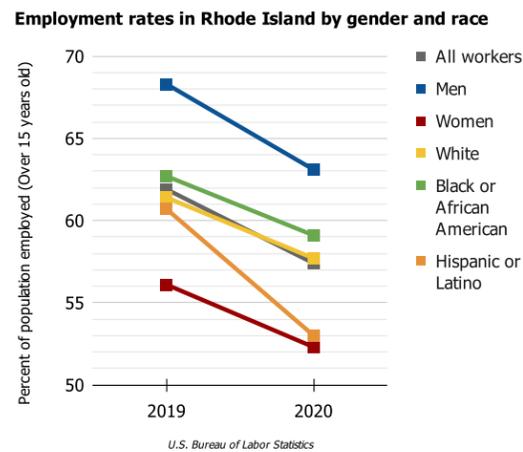


<sup>17</sup> Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, “Rhode Island City, Town, and Sub-State Labor Force Statistics,” accessed October 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, “Rhode Island City, Town, and Sub-State Labor Force Statistics,” accessed October 2021.; Rhode Island Department of Health, “COVID-19 Rhode Island Data,” accessed October 2021.

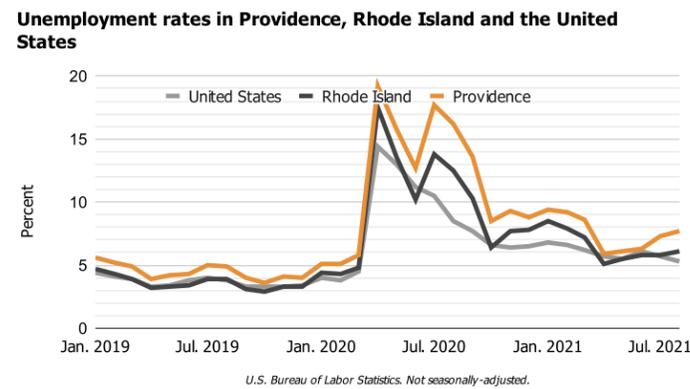
Looking beyond headline jobs numbers shows a more detailed — and disparate — impact on Providence-area employment. Disaggregated data shows that in August of this year, employment for Providence County residents with above-median-incomes was six percent higher than its level prior to the pandemic. Employment for lower-income residents remained 25% below its pre-pandemic level.<sup>19</sup>

Uneven job-loss effects are also evident across race, ethnicity, and gender. From 2019 to 2020, the number of Rhode Islanders working for pay fell 39,000, raising the state's annual average unemployment rate from 3.5% to 9.3%. For Latino workers in Rhode Island, the average unemployment rate rose to 15.2%. For Black and African American workers, it increased to 9.4%. The unemployment rate for White workers averaged 8.6%. For men, the average unemployment rate in 2020 was 9.1%; for women, 9.6%.<sup>20</sup>



As of August 2021, employment in Providence was down seven percent from its pre-pandemic level, compared to an employment loss of three percent for the United States as a whole.<sup>21</sup> This may be in part

due to the greater prevalence of harder-hit service-sector jobs in Providence: Prior to the pandemic, 24% of Providence workers were employed in service occupations, compared to 19% for Rhode Island overall and 18% for the United States.<sup>22</sup> Caregiving demands are another factor likely holding back job gains, particularly for mothers.<sup>23</sup> From January 2020 to January 2021, Providence lost 33 licensed child care providers, a 10% decline.<sup>24</sup> For additional information on the impact to Providence's child care sector, see the [Early Childhood Education](#) section of this report.



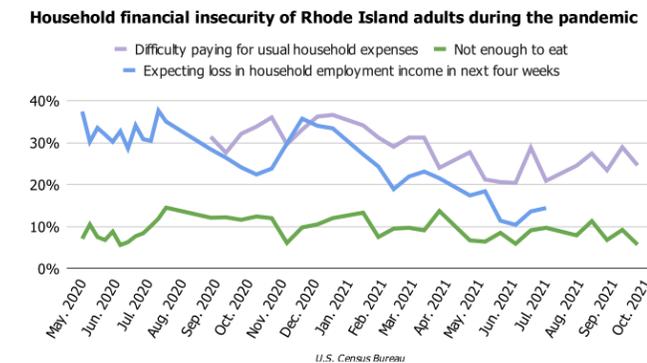
For many who kept their jobs, working during the pandemic brought new risks and challenges. Workplaces have been a significant driver of COVID-19 spread, evidence shows. An analysis of Rhode Island contact tracing data in the fall of 2020 found that 36% of community-transmission cases were likely contracted at work.<sup>25</sup> Another 26% likely occurred in settings where customers and workers are present, such as restaurants and bars. **Several studies and reports have found that frontline and essential workers most at risk during the pandemic tend to receive lower wages, have**

**lower levels of educational attainment, and are more likely to be immigrants and people of color.**<sup>26</sup>

## Household Financial Wellbeing

The pandemic caused unprecedented financial disruptions to individuals and families in Providence and beyond. In an early-pandemic April 2020 poll from the Hassenfeld Institute, three in four Rhode Islanders reported that their finances or their families' finances had been negatively impacted.<sup>27</sup>

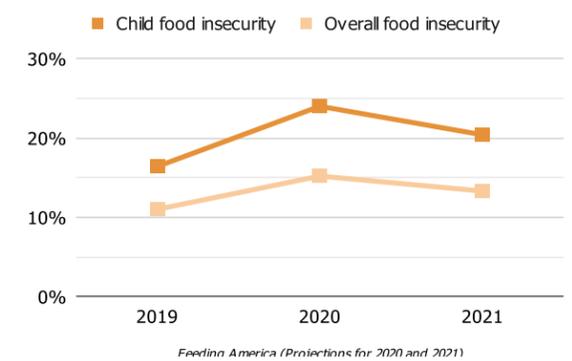
Data from the U.S. Census Household Pulse Survey shines light on some specific financial challenges Providence-area individuals and families have faced.<sup>28</sup> **Over the duration of the pandemic, between one in three and one in four Rhode Island adults have reported experiencing difficulty paying for ordinary household expenses.** From the mid-2020 to early 2021, one in three adults expected someone in their household to lose employment income. This rate has declined in recent months — partly a promising sign of a recovering economy; partly a result of earlier income-loss fears being realized.



Roughly one in ten Rhode Island adults live in households where there is sometimes or often not enough to eat, according to the Household Pulse Survey. Food insecurity is heightened in Providence, particularly for households with children, other sources

suggest. A poll commissioned by the Latino Policy Institute in February 2021 found that nearly half of Latino parents in Providence have struggled to put food on the table during the pandemic.<sup>29</sup> Feeding America estimates that the percent of Providence County residents lacking sufficient food for financial reasons rose from 11% in 2019 to 15% in 2020 and 13% in 2021.<sup>30</sup> For Providence County children, the food insecurity rate increased from 16% in 2019 to 24% in 2020 and 20% in 2021.

Food insecurity rates in Providence County



The City has taken several steps to support households struggling financially during or as a result of the pandemic. Additional resources can build on and expand these efforts. During the peak of the pandemic the Healthy Communities Office in partnership with Providence Public Schools, Providence Parks Department and multiple community partners distributed over two million emergency meals to residents. The City has also provided direct financial support through its budget process and the deployment of federal funds to nonprofit organizations which help support residents' basic needs. Nonprofits receiving support include Providence's nine community centers, homeless services system organizations, Providence Community Libraries, and more. And, with the goal of promoting financial resiliency for Providence residents and bolstering the social safety net, the City this year launched a guaranteed-income

<sup>19</sup> Opportunity Insights, "Economic Tracker," accessed October 2021.

<sup>20</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Expanded State Employment Status Demographic Data," accessed October 2021. Note: Data not available for Asian and other races for Rhode Island in 2019. People whose ethnicity is identified as Hispanic or Latino may be of any race and are classified by ethnicity as well as by race.

<sup>21</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey," accessed October 2021. Figures compare non-seasonally-adjusted employment levels for Providence to non-seasonally-adjusted national levels.

<sup>22</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, accessed October 2021.; Gabriel Mathy, "The First Services Recession," Phenomenal World, March 2020.

<sup>23</sup> Lauren Bauer, "Mothers are Being Left Behind in the Economic Recovery from COVID-19," The Hamilton Project, May 2021.; Nick Bunker, "Indeed Job Search Survey September 2021: Job Search Stays Stagnant," Indeed Hiring Lab, October 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Rhode Island Kids Count, "2020 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook," April 2020.; Rhode Island Kids Count, "2021 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook," May 2021.

<sup>25</sup> Eli Sherman, "Households and families fueling coronavirus transmission in Rhode Island, IBM data shows," WPRI, November 2020.

<sup>26</sup> Adie Tomer and Joseph Kane, "To protect frontline workers during and after COVID-19, we must define who they are," Brookings Institution, June 2020.; Devan Hawkins, "Differential occupational risk for COVID-19 and other infection exposure according to race and ethnicity," American Journal of Industrial Medicine, June 2020.; Tara Dawson McGuinness and Gabriel Zucker, "Tens of Millions of Americans Are Risking Their Lives for Less Than \$15/Hr," New America, April 2020.

<sup>27</sup> Hassenfeld Institute for Public Leadership, "Rhode Island Leadership Survey," April 2020.

<sup>28</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, "Measuring Household Experiences during the Coronavirus Pandemic," accessed October 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Latino Policy Institute, "A 2021 survey of Providence Latino parents about virtual learning during COVID-19 and other district educational practices," February 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Feeding America, "State-By-State Resource: The Impact of Coronavirus on Food Insecurity," March 2021.

pilot program which will provide \$500 per month to 110 low-income households.<sup>31</sup>

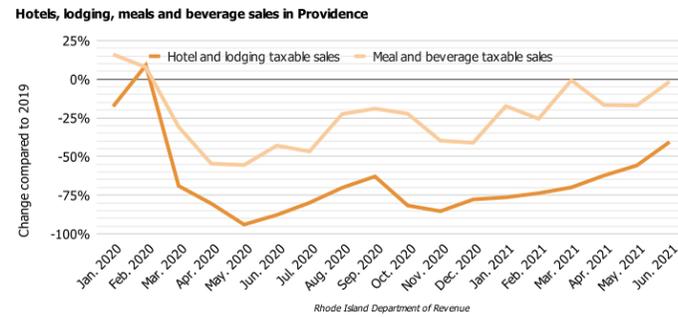
## Businesses

The immediate impact of COVID-19 on Providence businesses was drastic. **By mid-April of 2020, hundreds of Providence metropolitan area businesses operating on March 1 had permanently or temporarily closed — an economic jolt comparable to the impact of several hurricanes** — according to data from Yelp.<sup>32</sup> Over a similar timeframe, 60% of hospitality-sector businesses in Rhode Island closed, the Rhode Island Hospitality Association reports.<sup>33</sup>

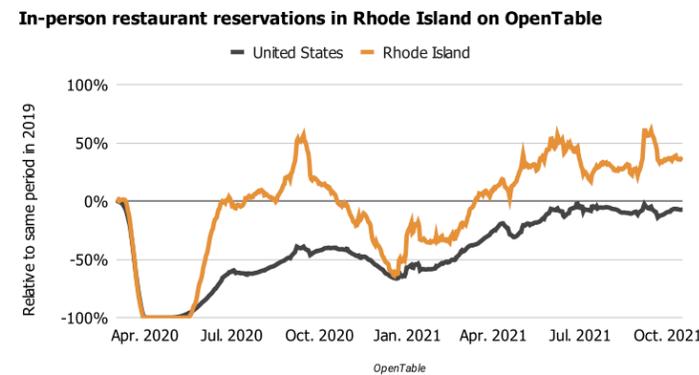
Analysis of tax information shows great industry-level variation in business activity during the pandemic. Service-sector sales in Rhode Island decreased nearly 60% in the early months of the pandemic, and did not fully recover through the end of 2020.<sup>34</sup> Activity for retail trade businesses, meanwhile, fell 11% in April 2020 but recovered and surpassed pre-pandemic levels the following month and for the remainder of the year, driven by extraordinary gains in non-store retail sales.

In Providence, taxable sales at hotels and other lodging providers fell 94% by May 2020 relative to a year prior, an \$11.8 million drop.<sup>35</sup> Hotel and lodging providers have seen only a partial recovery: In June 2021, sales remained down \$499,000, 41%, relative to that time in 2019. From March 2020 to June 2021, these establishments lost a total of \$116 million relative to 2019 sales levels. Taxable meal and beverage sales at Providence food service establishments fell 56%, \$30 million, in March, April and May of 2020.<sup>36</sup> While sales have mostly recovered — down just two percent in July 2021 relative to 2019 levels —

these businesses have lost \$238 million in aggregate sales from the start of the pandemic to this summer.



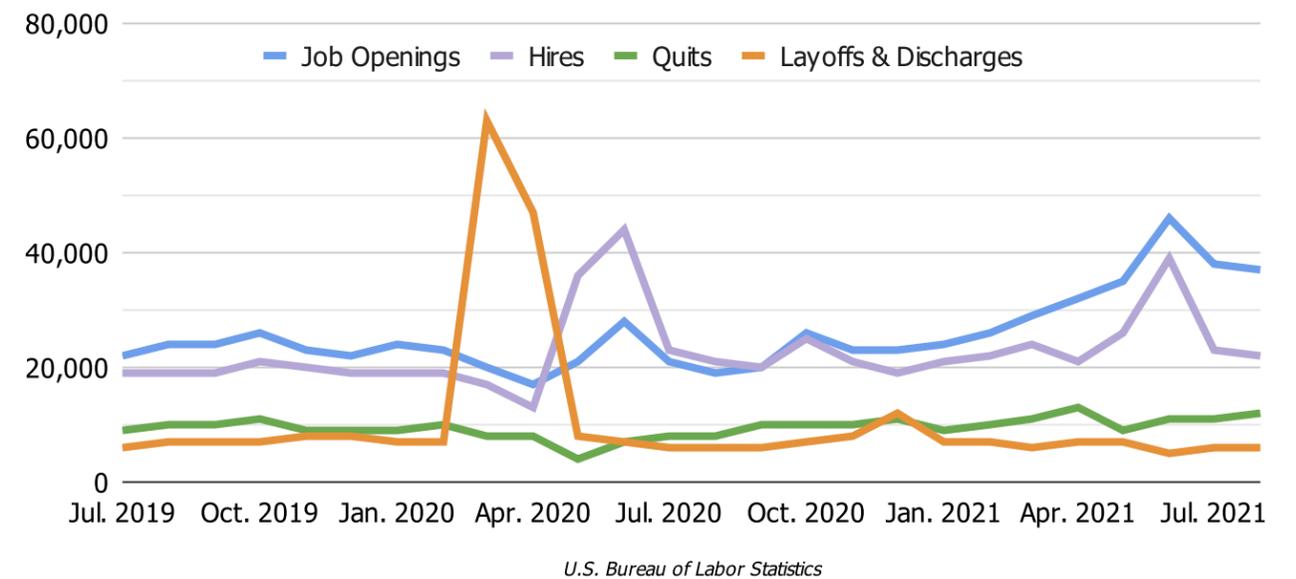
Evidence on the current state of the recovery for local businesses is limited and can be challenging to parse. Some indicators point in positive directions. Data from OpenTable, for example, suggests that in-person dining reservations in Rhode Island in October 2021 were up roughly 35% over their levels during the same period in 2019.<sup>37</sup> By this metric, the state is outpacing the country as a whole, which is experiencing roughly nine percent lower restaurant reservation levels than in 2019. Rhode Island also saw a record amount of new business creation in 2020.<sup>38</sup>



Other indicators are more mixed. Data from Foursquare finds that foot traffic in Rhode Island businesses is roughly level to its February 2020 level, while visits to Providence establishments are down approximately 20%.<sup>39</sup> Data from Homebase finds that in late August of this year there were 10% fewer Rhode Island small business locations open, but six percent more workers clocking in, relative to February 2020.<sup>40</sup> Among retail and leisure businesses and entertainment businesses, there are now more establishments open than in February 2020, per Homebase. Food and drink businesses and health care and fitness businesses remain below their February levels. The Foursquare and Homebase data do not account for normal seasonal fluctuations in business and consumer activity.

Employers and workers in Providence have experienced significant changes in work and employment situations during the pandemic. In March and April of 2020, an estimated 110,000 Rhode Island workers were laid off.<sup>41</sup> In the two following months, May and June, 80,000 were hired. Layoffs again increased in December 2020, coinciding with the state's "pause" in reopening.<sup>42</sup> Job openings and hires accelerated in the first half of 2021, while quits and layoffs generally returned to pre-pandemic levels. In recent months, some Providence-area employers have expressed challenges in hiring and retaining workers.<sup>43</sup> As of early October of this year, job openings in the Providence metropolitan region posted to job-finding site Indeed were up 51% relative to February 2020.<sup>44</sup>

## Job turnover in Rhode Island: Openings, hires, quits and layoffs



<sup>31</sup> City of Providence, "Mayor Elorza Launches Providence Guaranteed Income Pilot," July 2021.

<sup>32</sup> Yelp, "How the Coronavirus Pandemic Has Affected Local Businesses Around the Country," April 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Rhode Island Hospitality Association, "Impact of COVID-19 on the RI Hospitality Industry," June 2020.

<sup>34</sup> Rhode Island Department of Revenue, "Estimated 2020 Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Rhode Island," August 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Rhode Island Department of Revenue, "Local 1% Hotel Tax Collections," accessed October 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Rhode Island Department of Revenue, "Local 1% Meal and Beverage Tax Collections," accessed October 2021.

<sup>37</sup> OpenTable, "The restaurant industry in recovery," accessed October 2021.

<sup>38</sup> Eli Sherman, "Despite pandemic, RI sees record number of new businesses started in 2020," December 2020.

<sup>39</sup> Foursquare, "Foursquare Recovery Index: Rhode Island," accessed October 2021.; Foursquare, "Foursquare Recovery Index: Providence," accessed October 2021.

<sup>40</sup> Homebase, "Real-time data on COVID-19 impacts: The state of hourly work at Rhode Island small businesses," accessed October 2021.

<sup>41</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "JOLTS Experimental State Estimates," accessed October 2021.

<sup>42</sup> ReopeningRI, "Rhode Island on Pause," December 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Paul Edward Parker, "RI lacks workers in many fields this Labor Day weekend," The Providence Journal, September 2021.; Brian Amaral, "In Rhode Island, restaurants are not the only businesses having a hard time finding workers," the Boston Globe, April 2021.; Eli Sherman, "RI worker shortage a 'full-blown crisis,' say providers of social services," WPRI, September 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Jed Kolko, "Indeed US Job Postings Tracker," Indeed Hiring Lab, accessed October 2021.

The City has taken several actions to help businesses weather the pandemic. In April 2020, the Providence Business Loan Fund expanded its reach with \$1.5 million in new funding.<sup>45</sup> This program supports Providence businesses in scaling their operations and creating employment opportunities across the city. In July 2021, the City allocated \$7 million in ARPA funds to establish a COVID-19 Small Business Grant Program which will provide \$2,500 relief payments to qualified businesses that have been negatively impacted by the pandemic.<sup>46</sup> The program launched October 15.<sup>47</sup> The City also allocated \$300,000 in ARPA funds to support Waterfire, which promotes Providence’s tourism economy. Additional strategic investments can deliver the support Providence businesses need to emerge revitalized from the challenges they face.

### City Revenue

The pandemic has had a significant impact on Providence’s revenue collection. **In fiscal year 2020, spanning July 2019 to June 2020, city revenue from all sources totaled \$487 million, down \$18.9 million from the amount anticipated prior to the pandemic. In fiscal year 2021, covering July 2020 to June 2021, revenue landed \$28.8 million below what had been expected.**

Most of the revenue shortfall is a result of decreases in transfers from the state. This funding category fell \$18.5 million in fiscal year 2020, accounting for 98% of the city’s net revenue decline. It fell \$24.9 million in fiscal year 2021, accounting for 86% of the net revenue decline that period. State transfers include the Distressed Communities Relief Fund and payments in lieu of taxes. The state substituted federal Coronavirus Relief Fund dollars for its state-to-city transfers, reducing the aid amount substantially in both fiscal years. Providence experienced a coinciding reduction in qualified public safety expenditures, making the state funding reduction budget-neutral. The state-transfer funding category also includes revenue from

<sup>45</sup> City of Providence, “City of Providence Announces Additional Resources for Small Businesses Impacted by COVID-19,” April 2020.

<sup>46</sup> City of Providence, “City of Providence’s COVID-19 Small Business Grant Program,” accessed October 2021.<sup>47</sup> Danielle North, “Butler Hospital sees rise in mental health referrals during pandemic,” WPRI, November 2020.

<sup>47</sup> City of Providence, “Mayor Jorge O. Elorza, Providence City Council Members Launch COVID-19 Small Business Relief Program,” October 2021.

taxable meal and beverage sales, which declined significantly due to the pandemic, as described in the [Businesses](#) section of this report.

The pandemic impacted collections elsewhere in the budget as well. Revenue from fines and forfeits fell sharply. Funds in this category — which include municipal court fines and fines from traffic cameras — declined 41% in fiscal year 2020 and 65% in fiscal year 2021 relative to pre-pandemic expectations, accounting for 11% and 12% of the overall net revenue loss in each respective fiscal year. Departmental and other revenues — which include parking fees, hotel tax revenue, and building permit fees — dropped six percent in fiscal year 2020 and two percent in fiscal year 2021. Reductions in revenue from parking fees accounted for 51% of the losses in the two respective fiscal years.

The largest component of the budget, municipal tax revenue, remained relatively stable. This category, which comprises approximately two-thirds of city funding, includes revenue from real estate and motor vehicle taxes. Collections rose one percent — \$3.4 million — in fiscal year 2020, and rose three percent — \$8.8 million — in fiscal year 2021 relative to pre-pandemic expectations.

	FY2020 Approved Budget	FY2020 Actual Revenue	FY2020 Revenue Gains or Losses	FY2021 Pre-pandemic Projected Budget	FY2021 Actual Revenue	FY2021 Revenue Gains or Losses
Taxes	\$345,218,386	\$348,593,003	\$3,374,617	\$351,962,754	\$353,793,078	\$1,830,325
State Aid and Grants	\$91,637,834	\$73,109,170	-\$18,528,664	\$99,436,731	\$74,584,624	-\$24,852,107
Fines and Forfeits	\$5,000,000	\$2,974,464	-\$2,025,536	\$5,200,000	\$1,820,294	-\$3,379,706
Interest Income	\$4,700,000	\$4,675,501	-\$24,499	\$4,600,000	\$4,941,863	\$341,863
Departmental and Other Revenue	\$52,249,471	\$49,335,177	-\$2,914,294	\$51,179,685	\$50,383,740	-\$795,945
Transfers to General Fund	\$7,255,000	\$8,518,023	\$1,263,023	\$7,242,585	\$5,346,677	-\$1,895,908
	<b>\$506,060,691</b>	<b>\$487,205,338</b>	<b>-\$18,855,353</b>	<b>\$519,621,754</b>	<b>\$490,870,276</b>	<b>-\$28,751,478</b>

In July, the City allocated \$19.5 million of ARPA funds to recuperate revenue lost due to the pandemic during fiscal year 2022. The revenue replacement amount was calculated against a baseline which assumes three percent annual budget growth, pursuant to guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Treasury.<sup>48</sup> In the

following two fiscal years, 2023 and 2024, the City finance department anticipates an aggregate revenue loss of up to \$30 million relative to pre-pandemic trends. Restoring these funds will allow the City to continue providing essential services and programming, averting cuts that could undermine recovery.

<sup>48</sup> City of Providence Department of Finance, “ARP General Fund Revenue Loss,” August 2021.

## K-12 Education

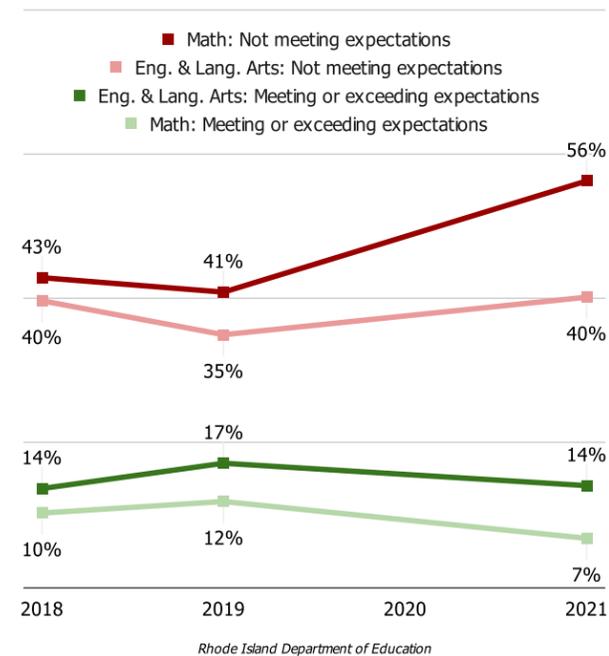
Just months into the first year of the takeover of Providence Public Schools by the State of Rhode Island, COVID-19 forced the closure of schools and a rapid movement to remote learning. The pandemic created new challenges and exacerbated many pre-existing insufficiencies and disparities.

Over the course of the 2020-2021 school year, over half of students in the city school system missed more than 18 days of school, an unprecedented amount of learning loss.<sup>49</sup> Virtual learners also struggled with attendance and focus. The Providence Public School District is dealing with the dual realities of a teacher shortage that is forcing more learning to be conducted through digital means and growing evidence that students are not finding virtual learning effective. Access to the internet and quiet dedicated study spaces continue to be a challenge for many families.<sup>50</sup> Losses in learning caused by the pandemic are expected to have long-reaching negative impacts on students' future educational achievement, earnings, and other outcomes.<sup>51</sup>

Standardized test scores provide a snapshot of the challenges faced by students and educators during the pandemic. From 2019 to 2021, Providence student proficiency in math fell from 12% to 7%, Rhode Island Comprehensive Assessment System scores show.<sup>52</sup> Proficiency in English and language arts declined from 17% to 14%. The share of students not meeting expectations in math increased from 41% to 56%; for English and language arts, the share rose from 35% to 40%. Relative to statewide scores, Providence experienced larger percentage point changes in math

insufficiency, English and language arts insufficiency, and English and language arts proficiency; students statewide experienced a larger percentage point decline in math proficiency than in Providence. The pandemic also caused some parents to delay childrens' kindergarten enrollment. In October 2020, the number of Providence students in public kindergarten was 26% below the October 2019 level, a decrease of 443 students.<sup>53</sup> Kindergarten students account for seven percent of Providence public school enrollment, but the 2020 decline in kindergarten enrollment represented nearly one third of that year's K-12 enrollment decline. Nationwide, kindergarten participation has fallen between 13% and 16%, reports indicate.<sup>54</sup>

RICAS scores for Providence students



<sup>49</sup> Steph Machado, "More than half of Providence students were chronically absent this school year," WPRI, June 2021.

<sup>50</sup> Rebecca Watts, "Rhode Island learners need closure of digital divide," The Providence Journal, July 2021.

<sup>51</sup> Kristin Blagg, "The Effect of COVID-19 Learning Loss on Adult Outcomes," Urban Institute, February 2021.; Eric Hanushek and Ludger Woessmann, "The Economic Impacts of Learning Losses," Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, September 2020.; Nicola Fuchs-Schündeln, Dirk Krueger, Alexander Ludwig, and Irina Popova, "The Long-Term Distributional and Welfare Effects of Covid-19 School Closures," National Bureau of Economic Research, September 2020.

<sup>52</sup> Rhode Island Department of Education, "Assessment Data Portal," accessed November 2021.

<sup>53</sup> Rhode Island Department of Education, "October Enrollment, 2019-2020," accessed November 2021.; Rhode Island Department of Education, "October Enrollment, 2020-2021," accessed November 2021.

<sup>54</sup> Daphna Bassok and Anna Shapiro, "Understanding COVID-19-era enrollment drops among early-grade public school students," Brookings Institution, February 2021.

Amid the economic dislocations, health risks, and educational disruptions caused by COVID-19, some students have left school to enter the workforce. In 2021, the share of 16 to 19 year olds who are employed climbed to levels not experienced in over a decade, national data shows.<sup>55</sup> In September 2021, employment among teens was up one percent over its pre-pandemic level, while employment among 25 to 54 year olds was down 3 percent.<sup>56</sup> Not all of these newly-employed teens have left the education system, but some have — particularly students from disadvantaged backgrounds, reports suggest.<sup>57</sup> Young people are entering the labor market for a variety of reasons, including bolstering family incomes reduced due to the pandemic, taking advantage of renewed labor demand, and seeking out new experiences.<sup>58</sup>

Other young people are leaving school to accommodate increased family caregiving demands. The effects are particularly significant for young women: The share of women aged 16 to 24 who are neither employed nor enrolled in school increased nationwide from 2019 to 2020, and young women are more likely than men to identify care responsibilities as the main reason for exiting the workforce during the pandemic.<sup>59</sup>

Providence Public Schools are facing a perfect storm of staffing turbulence. Retirements and resignations have increased significantly from prior years, and the new teacher certification process was not designed

to be flexible enough to address the short-term needs triggered by the pandemic.<sup>60</sup> As Providence schools need many new teachers and other staff members, personnel are in short supply. Nationwide, one in three educators say the pandemic has caused them to plan to leave the profession earlier than previously expected, according to a June 2021 survey of National Education Association members.<sup>61</sup>

In addition, school facilities have presented challenges during the pandemic. Half of the city's public school buildings are older than 40 years old, and just 10% are less than 10 years old. Building maintenance costs are up to \$29 million per year, with \$7 million dedicated to heating and lighting expenses.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, as of 2019, over half of the city's schools are within 1,000 feet of major roads or highways, even though current state law would prohibit schools from being built in those locations.<sup>63</sup> This causes significant air quality issues, and is associated with higher prevalence of asthma and other health risks for children.<sup>64</sup> Amid the onset of COVID-19, air purifiers were placed in most rooms. But older school buildings tend to have lower air quality, and, according to a 2020 report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office, two in five schools across the country need to update or replace their ventilation systems.<sup>65</sup> Ventilation concerns in Providence schools are often addressed by keeping windows open, even in the winter.

<sup>55</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employment-Population Ratio - 16-19 Yrs.," Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, accessed November 2021.

<sup>56</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employment Level - 16-19 Yrs.," Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, accessed November 2021.; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Employment Level - 25-54 Yrs.," Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, accessed November 2021.

<sup>57</sup> Evan McMorris-Santoro, "Thousands of students have dropped out of school due to Covid-19. These are the educators trying to track them down," CNN, March 2021.; Robert Klemko, "As coronavirus took jobs or workers fell ill, teen children have toiled full-time, becoming lifelines," the Washington Post, June 2020.; Jeanna Smialek and David McCabe, "The Luckiest Workers in America? Teenagers," the New York Times, May 2021.

<sup>58</sup> Paul Wiseman and Joseph Pisani, "As employers struggle to fill jobs, teens come to the rescue," Associated Press, July 2021.; Petula Dvorak, "Covid-19 has gotten a helicopter generation of teens to embrace work. Just in time," the Washington Post, June 2021.

<sup>59</sup> Shengwei Sun, "Out of Work, Taking on Care: Young Women Face Mounting Challenges in the 'She-Cession,'" Institute for Women's Policy Research, April 2021.

<sup>60</sup> Shengwei Sun, "Out of Work, Taking on Care: Young Women Face Mounting Challenges in the 'She-Cession,'" Institute for Women's Policy Research, April 2021.

<sup>61</sup> Steph Machado, "Nearly 10% of Providence teachers have left in 2021 amid staff shortages across RI," WPRI, September 2021.

<sup>62</sup> Celeste Busser, "NEA survey finds educators back in classrooms and ready for fall," National Education Association, June 2021.

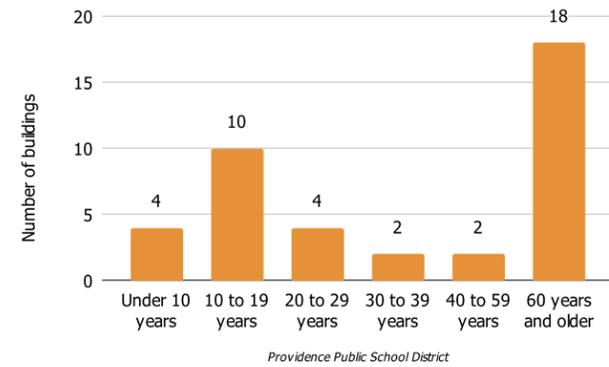
<sup>63</sup> Providence Public School District, "2021-2022 Budget Executive Summary," June 2021.

<sup>64</sup> Grace Kelly, "Intersection of Schools and Highways Produces Bad Air," ecoRI News, November 2019.

<sup>65</sup> Rob McConnell et al., "Traffic, Susceptibility, and Childhood Asthma," Environmental Health Perspectives.; Jamie Smith Hopkins, "The Invisible Hazard Afflicting Thousands of Schools," The Center for Public Integrity, February 2017.

<sup>66</sup> Center for Health Security, "School Ventilation: A Vital Tool to Reduce COVID-19 Spread," Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health, May 2021.; U.S. Government Accountability Office, "School Districts Frequently Identified Multiple Building Systems Needing Updates or Replacement," June 2020.

Age of school buildings in Providence public schools



## Early Childhood Education

The pandemic has had a significant impact on child care and early childhood education, creating new challenges and intensifying many pre-existing ones. Even prior to COVID-19, the expense of child care could often exceed other essential costs of living, leaving parents unable to work or receive education, unable to afford quality care, or both. In Rhode Island, child care cost 21% of median family income, according to one 2019 estimate.<sup>67</sup> At the same time, child care workers and early childhood educators face low pay: A typical Rhode Island child care worker earns \$12 per hour, and a typical preschool teacher earns \$14 — both far below the statewide median wage of \$23.<sup>68</sup> The pandemic exacerbated these challenges, pushing affordable and quality child care further out of reach for many Providence families while increasing strains on providers.

As a result of COVID-19, enrollment in care and early education programs declined, costs for families increased, and providers have faced evolving challenges including adaptation to public health guidance and workforce retention and recruitment. From December 2019 to December 2020, the number of Providence children participating in the Rhode Island Child Care Assistance Program declined from 3,950 to 2,504 — a 37% drop.<sup>69</sup> The number of Providence four year olds enrolled in Head Start or Rhode Island Pre-K decreased from 53% in 2019 to 37% in 2020, a 30% reduction.<sup>70</sup> Nationwide, 85% of parents report spending 10% or more of their income on child care in 2021, up from 72% in 2020 and 71% in 2019.<sup>71</sup> Nearly all parents, 94%, have used at least one major cost-saving strategy to ease child care costs in 2020 or 2021 — including two in five who report reducing hours at work and one in four who report leaving the workforce.<sup>72</sup>

The City has committed to invest up to \$400 million over the next ten years to improve public school facilities. Nearly \$20 million was allocated to improvements in fiscal year 2020, in addition to \$15 million in fiscal years 2018 and 2019. The City has also dedicated millions of dollars through the budget process and first-round ARPA allocation to support after-school programming, social-emotional support staff in middle schools, low-cost summer camps, summer meals programming, and broadband access.

The Providence Public School District has received \$202 million in federal emergency relief funds from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, the Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act, and ARPA.<sup>66</sup> A first tranche of \$14 million was available for obligation through September 2021. A second portion of \$58 million can be obligated through September 2022, and a third portion of \$130 million is usable through September 2023. These funds are separate from the \$166 million in flexible aid the city is receiving through ARPA.

Simultaneously, complications faced by providers have resulted in decreased availability of care and early education programming.<sup>73</sup> As detailed in the [Jobs and Employment](#) section of this report, the number of licensed early learning providers in Providence declined 10% from January 2020 to January 2021.<sup>74</sup> Taken together, these challenges have had significant negative effects on young children’s learning and social development progress, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, reports indicate.<sup>75</sup>

The pandemic also disrupted early intervention services that detect and support young children with developmental delays and disabilities. These critical programs help children make developmental progress and can help them catch up with peers, and form the front door to Rhode Island’s public education system and the foundation of the special education system.<sup>76</sup> As a result of the pandemic, children with developmental delays and disabilities are less likely to have been identified by educators and are less likely to be receiving the services they need.<sup>77</sup>

Providence and Rhode Island data indicate that access to early intervention has fallen amid COVID-19. As of September 2021, five of the nine early intervention providers in Rhode Island were not accepting new referrals, primarily due to challenges in retaining and recruiting staff.<sup>78</sup> The share of young Providence children receiving developmental screenings through their school district — the first step to receiving services — decreased from 28% in 2019 to 22% in 2020, and the share enrolled in

preschool special education fell from six percent to five percent.<sup>79</sup>

State data shows that fewer children were referred into the early intervention pipeline during the pandemic, as families were disconnected from typical supports such as child care providers and Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children sites.<sup>80</sup> For children entering the pipeline, fewer completed the intake process — those losing contact before completing an eligibility evaluation were disproportionately in lower-income and families of color. And among children enrolled and completing services, fewer are making progress toward catching up with peer development, the data show.

## Postsecondary Education

As a result of the pandemic, fewer people are pursuing higher education — a troubling trend as half of Rhode Island jobs created between 2018 and 2028 are projected to require postsecondary credentials.<sup>81</sup>

Prior to the pandemic, 55% of Providence students enrolled in college within six months of graduating high school, and 84% planned to attend at some point.<sup>82</sup> These trends were significantly disrupted by the onset and persistence of COVID-19. Among Rhode Island students completing high school in 2020, enrollment rates fell 5.5% for those attending four-year colleges and 3% for those attending two year colleges relative to the cohort of 2019.<sup>83</sup>

In the 2020 academic year, enrollment dropped at at

<sup>66</sup> Rhode Island Senate Fiscal Office, “Federal COVID Funds: CRRSA, ESSER II, and ARP ESSER III,” May 2021.

<sup>67</sup> Economic Policy Institute, “Child care costs in the United States,” July 2019.

<sup>68</sup> Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, “Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics - May 2020,” accessed November 2021.

<sup>69</sup> Rhode Island Kids Count, “2020 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook,” April 2020.; Rhode Island Kids Count, “2021 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook,” May 2021.

<sup>70</sup> Rhode Island Kids Count, “2020 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook,” April 2020.; Rhode Island Kids Count, “2021 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook,” May 2021.

<sup>71</sup> Care.com, “This is how much child care costs in 2021,” June 2021.; Care.com, “Child care costs more in 2020, and the pandemic has parents scrambling for solutions,” June 2020.

<sup>72</sup> Care.com, “This is how much child care costs in 2021,” June 2021.

<sup>73</sup> Leanne Barrett and Lisa Hildebrand, “RI’s child care sector is in crisis,” the Providence Journal, October 2021.

<sup>74</sup> Rhode Island Kids Count, “2020 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook,” April 2020.; Rhode Island Kids Count, “2021 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook,” May 2021.

<sup>75</sup> Christina Weiland et al., “Historic Crisis, Historic Opportunity: Using Evidence to Mitigate the Effects of the COVID-19 Crisis on Young Children and Early Care and Education Programs,” the Urban Institute and the University of Michigan Education Policy Initiative, June 2021.; Zero to Three, “State of Babies Yearbook 2021,” April 2021.

<sup>76</sup> Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, “Early Intervention Financing, Staffing, and Access in Rhode Island,” 2021.

<sup>77</sup> Christina Weiland et al., “Historic Crisis, Historic Opportunity: Using Evidence to Mitigate the Effects of the COVID-19 Crisis on Young Children and Early Care and Education Programs,” the Urban Institute and the University of Michigan Education Policy Initiative, June 2021.

<sup>78</sup> Data and information provided by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, November 2021.<sup>79</sup> Care.com, “This is how much child care costs in 2021,” June 2021.

<sup>79</sup> Rhode Island Kids Count, “2020 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook,” April 2020.; Rhode Island Kids Count, “2021 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook,” May 2021.

<sup>80</sup> Rhode Island Children’s Cabinet, “Early Intervention in Rhode Island: Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic,” May 2021.

<sup>81</sup> Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training, “2028 Occupational Projections by Education,”

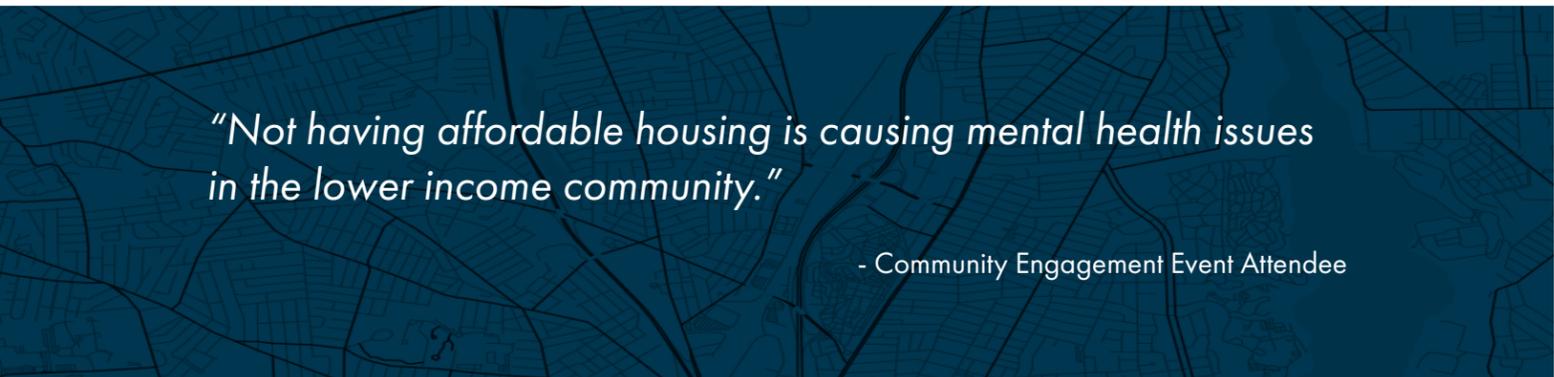
<sup>82</sup> Rhode Island Kids Count, “2020 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook,” April 2020.

<sup>83</sup> Jessica Howell et al., “College Enrollment and Retention in the Era of Covid,” the College Board, June 2021.

least eight of the 11 colleges and universities in Rhode Island — including every school headquartered in Providence with the exception of Brown University.<sup>84</sup> Dropoffs in enrollment and challenges associated with pandemic adaptation have put significant strains on institutions' budgets.<sup>85</sup>

The pandemic also impacted students' progress toward degrees as fewer students returned to school. Among students from Rhode Island, retention rates — the share of first-year students who continued enrollment for their second years — fell 2.5% for those at four-year institutions and 5.4% for those at two-year institutions in 2020.<sup>86</sup> Nationwide, the most expensive private colleges saw the largest declines in retention, suggesting cost may be a leading factor driving students to exit higher education amid the unprecedented economic shock brought on by COVID-19.<sup>87</sup>

Enrollment and retention reductions occurred among students of all backgrounds and for a variety of reasons, including health concerns, reduced quality of virtual education and social opportunities, emotional wellbeing challenges, family caregiving obligations, work demands and opportunities, lacking access to sufficient housing and food, and turbulent household financial circumstances.<sup>88</sup> Data suggest students of color and students from lower-income households disproportionately declined higher education for economic reasons, heightening longstanding inequities in access and completion.<sup>89</sup> A majority of students who withdrew from higher education during the pandemic expect their decisions to be temporary, but it remains to be seen how many will return.<sup>90</sup> For most students, delaying degree completion and exiting prior to completion can be expected to have negative effects on lifetime earnings and other outcomes.<sup>91</sup>



*“Not having affordable housing is causing mental health issues in the lower income community.”*

- Community Engagement Event Attendee

<sup>84</sup> Leanne Barrett and Lisa Hildebrand, “RI’s child care sector is in crisis,” the Providence Journal, October 2021.

<sup>85</sup> Alex Gagosz, “Rhode Island state colleges seek tuition hikes, more state aid,” the Boston Globe, October 2021.; Melanie DaSilva, “RIC, CCRI look to raise tuition amid enrollment declines,” WPRI, October 2021.

<sup>86</sup> Jessica Howell et al., “College Enrollment and Retention in the Era of Covid,” the College Board, June 2021.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Shelbe Klebs et al., “One Year Later: COVID-19’s Impact on Current and Future College Students,” Third Way, June 2021.; Jessica Dickler, “25% of students postponed college during Covid, some indefinitely,” CNBC, April 2021.

<sup>89</sup> Sara Weissman, “Steep Enrollment Declines This Spring,” Inside Higher Ed, April 2021.; Sepideh Jessica Vasseghi, “Pandemic-Related Drop in College Enrollment Reveals Inequities in Access to Higher Ed,” Center for Economic and Policy Research, February 2021.; Junior Achievement, “2021 JA Teens & Personal Finance Survey,” April 2021.

<sup>90</sup> Junior Achievement, “2021 JA Teens & Personal Finance Survey,” April 2021.

<sup>91</sup> Dirk Witteveen and Paul Attewell, “Delayed Time-to-Degree and Post-college Earnings,” Research in Higher Education, October 2019.; Jaison R. Abel and Richard Deitz, “Delaying College During the Pandemic Can Be Costly,” Federal Reserve Bank of New York, July 2020.; Mark Schneider and Lu Michelle Yin, “The High Cost of Low Graduation Rates,” American Institutes for Research, August 2011.

## Housing

The pandemic significantly exacerbated the challenge of realizing housing affordability and security in Providence. Data from the U.S. Census Bureau helps quantify the prevalence of housing insecurity during the pandemic. From August 2020 to October 2021, approximately one in fourteen Rhode Island adults each month, on average, was living in a household that missed at least one rent or mortgage payment and had little or no confidence about being able to make the following month’s payment.<sup>92</sup> Approximately one in four has been unable to pay a household energy bill during the pandemic.

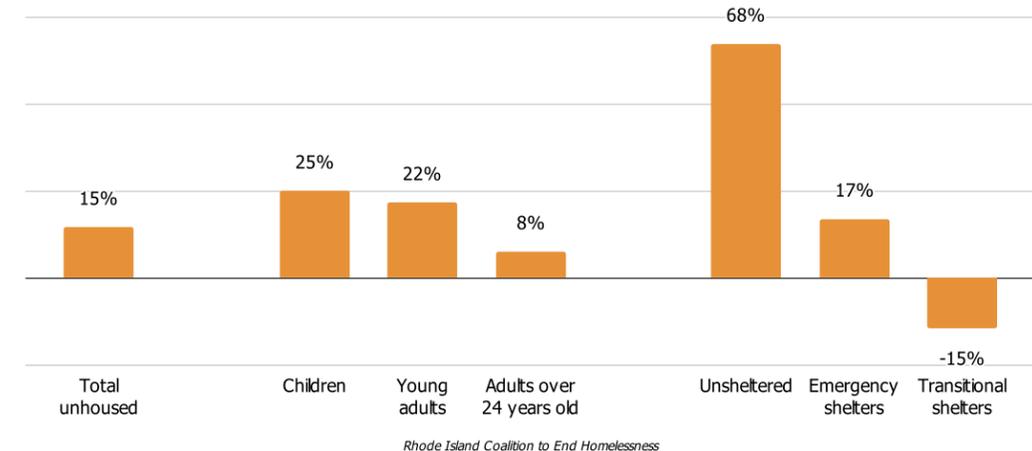
Evidence suggests Providence households headed by people of color and women have disproportionately experienced housing insecurity. **Of the Providence households receiving federal emergency rental assistance through October 2021, nearly half are headed by Latino residents and more than a third are headed by Black residents.**<sup>93</sup> Women-headed households represent two in three households in Rhode Island receiving assistance.<sup>94</sup>

The pandemic also brought about an increase

in the number of Rhode Islanders experiencing homelessness. During the pandemic, the Rhode Island Coordinated Entry System, which connects individuals in need with housing and resources, has received hundreds of calls each week seeking shelter or other services.<sup>95</sup> **The number of unhoused Rhode Islanders rose 15% in 2020, compared to a five percent rise the previous year.**<sup>96</sup> **The increase was especially stark for young people: The count of unhoused children grew 25% in 2020, and the count of people aged 18 to 24 grew 22%. The number of unhoused older adults increased eight percent.** Emergency shelters saw an occupancy increase of 17%. The number of unhoused and unsheltered Rhode Islanders — those living outdoors or in cars — grew 68%, and is at or near a historical high as of September 2021.<sup>97</sup>

Two in five unhoused Rhode Islanders are located in Providence.<sup>98</sup> In late October 2021 there were at least 720 people in Providence unhoused or at imminent risk of becoming unhoused, including at least 533 adults and 187 children, according to records from the Rhode Island Homeless Management Information

Change in unhoused population in Rhode Island, January 2020 to January 2021



<sup>92</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “Measuring Household Experiences during the Coronavirus Pandemic,” accessed October 2021.

<sup>93</sup> Analysis of data provided by Rhode Island Housing, October 2021.

<sup>94</sup> Rhode Island Housing, “Rent Relief RI Dashboard,” accessed October 2021.

<sup>95</sup> Kristina Contreras Fox, “Homelessness & COVID-19,” Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness, July 2021.

<sup>96</sup> Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness, “Point-in-Time Count 2021,” accessed October 2021.

<sup>97</sup> Caitlin Frumerie, “RI State of Homelessness Address 2021,” Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness, October 2021.

<sup>98</sup> Data provided by the Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness, October 2021.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

System.<sup>99</sup> Of those counted, 41% were in emergency shelters, 26% were unsheltered, and 33% were at risk.

Economic and public health conditions triggered by COVID-19 have heightened pre-existing insufficiencies in housing affordability, security and quality. **Even prior to the pandemic, 64% of Providence households were cost-burdened by high housing prices, and 24% were severely burdened**, according to the City of Providence's 2021 Anti-Displacement and Comprehensive Housing Strategy report.<sup>100</sup> The report finds the city has an estimated unmet demand for nearly 13,000 price-appropriate housing units for renting and owning.

To address these challenges, the City dedicated over \$5 million from its budget and federal sources to support residents at risk of or experiencing being unhoused. Those investments support projects, programs, and organizations that tackle housing insecurity and unaffordability through affordable housing construction, homelessness prevention, emergency sheltering, rapid rehousing, and wraparound services.

In fiscal year 2022, the City allocated \$1.9 million to Providence's Affordable Housing Trust, \$1.5 million in rapid rehousing assistance, and \$725,000 to assist homeless shelters with preparing, preventing, and responding to COVID-19. In addition, in July, the City dedicated \$500,000 in ARPA funds toward homelessness interventions to support additional crisis beds responsive to COVID-19 public health protocols.

The City also increased investment in rapid rehousing by \$1.5 million in 2020 and 2021, making use of a one-time boost in federal Emergency Solutions Grant funds. Amos House, Crossroads, and Sojourner House deployed the money to provide rapid rehousing services to unhoused Providence residents. The one-time funds provided lifelines to residents in need, and will be fully spent by summer 2022. The City does not anticipate receiving additional Emergency Solutions Grant disaster response dollars to enable renewal of services at the level needed to respond to the ongoing crisis.

## Public Safety

As in many cities across the country, the pandemic had a complicated effect on issues of public safety in Providence. The lockdown phase of the pandemic was associated with a fall in property crimes and crimes of opportunity, but also with an increase in crimes without co-offenders, such as intimate partner violence and homicide.<sup>101</sup> Though there is not a comprehensive analysis available, the same trends seem to be reflected in Providence police reports, and they have persisted since the onset of COVID-19 in March of 2020.<sup>102</sup> In a way, this is an unsurprising result of the frustration of the lockdowns and foreclosed opportunities brought on by the pandemic. **In fact, researchers have used the event to explore and confirm the link between frustration and increases in crimes of aggression.<sup>103</sup> This suggests that the mental health effects of the pandemic may be having an outsized effect on public safety.**

This has significant impacts on the police as well. 96% of emergency calls to the Providence Police Department are not related to Part 1 crimes such as homicide, assault, and larceny.<sup>104</sup> The same is true of

the city fire department, which reports that three in four emergency calls are for EMS services rather than fires. Even prior to the pandemic, the Providence Police Department has promoted the idea that alternate forms of response are necessary to address the large number of distress calls resulting from behavioral health issues. The uptick in the rate of non-law enforcement related calls makes such an approach even more of a priority.

The City is currently undergoing a Behavioral Health Crisis Response planning and design process, to be completed in November 2021, with the Providence Center and Family Service of Rhode Island. That process' final report will outline an organizational and investment strategy the City can undertake to build an emergency response infrastructure that responds to behavioral health related calls for service in a medically appropriate, culturally responsive manner. Investing in and implementing an alternative response system will provide Providence residents in behavioral health crises the care they need from trained professionals while also unburdening the current public safety response system with these calls.

*"I lost a significant amount of work in 2020 due to COVID-19. My daughter was only a year old when it started, so we also lost her childcare. It was a difficult time."*

- Resident of 02909 (Federal Hill), business owner

<sup>100</sup> City of Providence, "Anti-Displacement and Comprehensive Housing Strategy," February 2021.

<sup>101</sup> John Boman and Owen Gallupe, "Has COVID-19 Changed Crime? Crime Rates in the United States during the Pandemic," American Journal of Criminal Justice, July 2020.; Shelby Scott and Louis Gross, "COVID-19 and crime: Analysis of crime dynamics amidst social distancing protocols," PLOS One, April 2021.

<sup>102</sup> See, e.g. the Providence Police Department crime report for May 31, 2021, where most crimes are down significantly from the previous year, contrasted with a more recent report for October 10, 2021, where most property crimes remain down even from the low levels of one year before, but homicides are up significantly from the 2019 level.

<sup>103</sup> William Killgore et al., "Increasing aggression during the COVID-19 lockdowns," Journal of Affective Disorder Reports, July 2021.

<sup>104</sup> PFM, "Department of Public Safety Budget Analysis – Executive Summary: City of Providence, Rhode Island," April 2021.

# Conclusion

In conclusion, this report details the impact of COVID-19 on the City of Providence; the formation and actions taken by the COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force to engage community members in the formulation of recommendations for uses of the American Rescue Plan Act funds to address immediate and long term needs of the city's residents, workers, and businesses; and the recommendations that were developed out of that process.

The extensive community engagement detailed in this report represents one of the most expansive and in-depth listening processes conducted on the American Rescue Plan Act and use of those funds, both in terms of the range of topics covered,

and the depth of ideas and proposals shared. That community guidance and those ideas and proposals can serve as a framework of possible actions for the Task Force, City Council and the Mayor to prioritize as they work collaboratively to deploy these resources.

The participation and leadership of the Task Force was critical to extensive engagement and listening efforts to succeed in such a relatively short period of time. Each member of the Task Force brought a unique set of expertise and perspectives that informed the recommendations contained in this report. Their continued guidance will be critical to ensuring resources are deployed effectively and equitably in a manner consistent with the desires expressed by community members throughout this process.

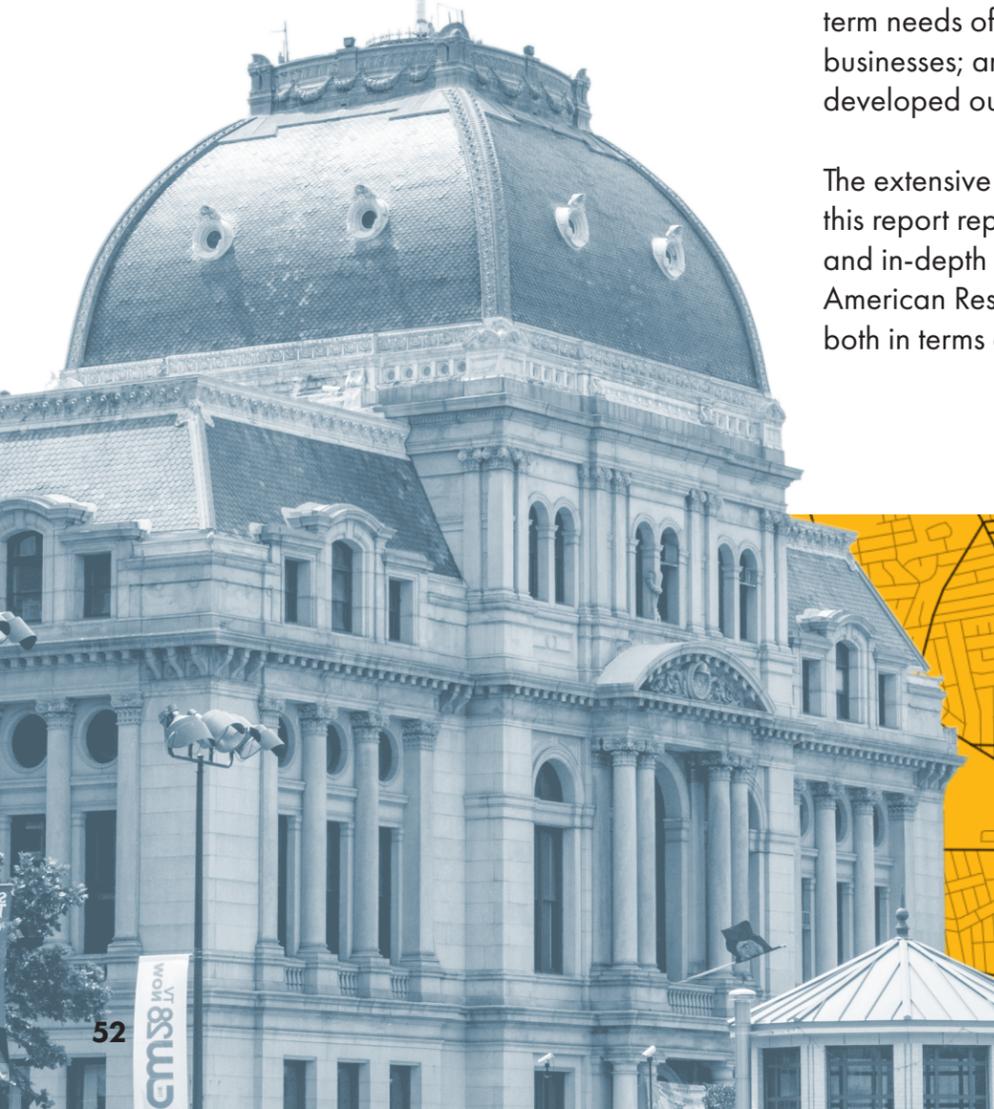
Members of the public should be commended for their robust participation in this process as well. A wide variety of perspectives, ideas, and opportunities were presented with the sole intent of addressing the most pressing needs facing our city's communities. Many took the time after long work days, or took breaks during work hours to participate in one or more of the sessions to make

their voice heard and ensure the needs of their communities are addressed.

As these recommendations move from ideas to legislation and then implementation, there will be continued opportunities for the public to stay engaged with the work of the Providence Rescue Plan. The recommendations in this report, per the Task Force's founding resolution, are intended to guide upcoming City Council meetings where funding allocations will be decided on. The Task Force recommends the City hold public hearings before the spending ordinance is approved by the City Council.

This collaborative effort between the community, the Task Force, City Council, and the Mayor to develop a community-driven spending plan for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity represents an ideal of good government being exemplified through this consensus-building process to create policy that addresses the most pressing needs of our city.

Thank you to every person who made this effort possible and successful.



# Appendix A

## Community Proposals for American Rescue Plan Act Funding

During the Task Force's 90-day process, a community proposal intake form was launched on the [PVDrescueplan.com](https://PVDrescueplan.com) website (<https://PVDrescueplan.com/proposals/>) to collect all community proposals for uses of ARPA funds. Additionally proposals were received by a variety of City department staff.

All submitted community proposals were then compiled and analyzed by the SCS Budget Team, and packaged into a continuously updated summary (below) to inform programming of the eventual allocation of ARPA funds by the City Council, following the release of these recommendations.

- **After School Music Program** Teaching the basics of DJing and audio recording for middle and high school students
- **Olmstead Plan for Supportive Housing** Supportive housing for residents with disabilities and mental health needs
- **Providence Promise College Savings Plan** Subsidized college savings plan for low-income students
- **Local Return Community Development Proposals** A collection of proposals to address economic and community issues in low-income communities
  - **Individual Development Accounts** Matched savings accounts for building assets and planning for life goals
  - **Local Currency Stimulus** Using a local currency to give area small businesses a boost
  - **Local Economy Preservation Fund** Equity investments in local businesses as

- a way to preserve businesses on the edge due to COVID-19
- **Exit to Employee and Cooperative Ownership** Promoting employee ownership, including co-ops, as a way to preserve businesses when owners want to retire; Enhancing economic development and creating more secure employment opportunities
- **Community Equity Fund** Equity investments for entrepreneurs who don't have access to traditional financing sources
- **Community Property Ownership** Promoting anti-speculator ownership models like community land trusts and social ownership
- **Social Infrastructure Grants** Grants for the construction and maintenance of community infrastructure, (block clubs, neighborhood associations that improve vacant properties, community gardens, or other forms of shared equity)
- **Home Repair Grants and Loans** Grants and no-interest lending for home repairs
- **Support for Business Districts and Commercial Corridors** Creation and support of Business Districts to provide collective services to businesses in neighborhoods other than downtown Providence
- **Wireless networks in low-income QCTs** Broadband infrastructure in low-income neighborhoods
- **CDFI for small business development** A local lending institution to provide business credit to small businesses who may not be eligible at a larger bank
- **CDFI for affordable housing development** A proposal to provide rapid-deployment lines of credit or bridge financing for affordable housing development

- **Polaris MEP Jane Addams Careers in Manufacturing** Supportive workforce development for low-income women seeking jobs in manufacturing
- **African Alliance Initiative: Food Insecurity and Vertical Farming** Intensive farming in greenhouses and community-based food production development with an education component
- **Right from the Start, Child Care** Wage supplement for child care professionals. Development of a child care network for capitalizing shared resources
- **Children and Youth Cabinet** Youth-designed suite of mental health outreach and intervention services
- **Provider-Powered Networks Project, Child Care** Job training and network development for child care
- **MFJ Media, community radio** Community radio focused on low-income communities in Providence
- **Fines and Fees, Drivers license restoration** Driver's license restoration clinics, to address the leading cause of arrests in Providence
- **New Bridges for Haitian Success** Community development in Providence's Haitian community
- **25 Bough, Community Infrastructure Development** Education and community development assets for a low-income neighborhood
- **ONE Neighborhood Builders Housing** Agenda Housing initiatives from one of the city's larger non-profit housing developers
- **R.I.S.E. Women's Leadership** Networking, mentorship, and workforce development for BIPOC women
- **AAAG Community Assistance** Support for African-American community institutions
  - **Co-op community housing** On Manton or Urban League property to provide affordability in perpetuity

- **African American History Museum** At the Narragansett Rail and Trolley land
- **Research and Mobility Park** ATV, Dirt bike, pedal bike facility
- **Southside Cultural Center Meeting,** performance, and exhibit space
- **In Between the Lines** Mental health provider access
- **Community Health Support Network** Community public health initiative
- **Re-entry Campus** Program to facilitate re-entry for the formerly incarcerated
- **YesPVD** Youth Summit / Conference event
- **Funda Fest** Cultural edutainment event
- **We Got Next** Community sports programming
- **Billy Taylor House** Youth workforce development and enrichment
- **Rhode Island Music Therapy** Music and deejay instruction and technology
- **Hoops Over Violence** Community sports and non-violence events
- **Providence Youth Teams** Local youth sports leagues
- **Music One** Music instruction and training
- **Juneteenth Festival** Outdoor arts and cultural festival
- **Community Radio** Black-owned community radio station and programming
- **Re-entry Clothing Store** Clothing store to support re-entry for formerly incarcerated people
- **Hall of GrafX** Expansion of internship opportunities at the Met School
- **Future Doctors of Rhode Island** Youth development organization
- **Accounting Institute** Accounting certification classes aimed at BIPOC people
- **Women in Trades** Workforce development for women in the construction industry
- **The Impowerment Group** Workforce

development focused on development and real estate investing

- **Cultural Murals** Five local murals
- **King’s Cathedral** Technology centers for the elderly
- **Consulting** Assistance for local businesses that need help with marketing, financial planning, and grant writing
- **Non-violence Conflict Resolution Fund**
- **Community Organization Support** Including the Nigerian Community of RI, LA Providence No 9 (Haitian), Oasis (African immigrant community), Concerned Brothers, NAACP, African Catholic Community, Islamic Center of Rhode Island, and the Rhode Island Black Business Association
- **Crossroads Master Plan** Construction and renovation of Crossroads facilities for unhoused persons
- **Ocean State Shields Outdoor Dining Solutions** Provision of outdoor dining “igloos”
- **Teatro ECAS** Expansion of educational arts classes for literacy and performance
- **Next Generation & Futures** Youth mentorship and leadership with specific emphasis on Black males and men of color
- **World Premiere TV** Media production business
- **Down City Design** Youth development program focused on design including architecture and graphic design
- **Rhode Island Elite Sports** Basketball league
- **Rhode Island Black Heritage Society**
  - **Land bank and land trust** Establish a community land trust and bank for preservation of affordable housing and minority business development
  - **City-wide broadband** Close the digital divide
  - **Bail fund** Create a non-profit bail bond company

- **Offshore Wind Workforce Training** Renewable energy jobs
- **African Heritage Innovation Center** Development of Urban League property
- **Philip Farm Pork** Adding meat production to a local farm
- **Providence Children’s Museum** Continuation of programming and financial aid to bridge the current gap
- **Elmwood Community Center** A center for the Elmwood neighborhood, suggested by Community Action Partnerships of Providence (CAPP)
- **Providence Community Library** Improvements to HVAC and Exhaust systems to improve air quality libraries, and funding to expand library hours

## Appendix B

### Qualitative Feedback from Community Survey

Qualitative data from the first long response survey question (“Please describe how COVID-19 impacted your life or your neighborhood since the start of 2020?”) was presented on two occasions to the Task Force.

The responses from 1,111 surveys were analyzed by SCS team members who identified and categorized the responses based on similar themes, resulting in a list of 14 thematic categories along with what proportion of responses mentioned those categories. Duplicate responses and a lack of response were removed from the list, and duplicated responses were excluded from the survey total. These are listed in Table A-1 below.

Response Code	Percent of Responses Mentioning
Personal Financial Impact	24.52%
Lifestyle Changes	20.69%
Impact on Social Interaction	14.86%
Mental Health Impact	11.12%
Concern for How Others Fared	10.67%
Concern for Physical Health	8.66%
Housing/Homelessness	7.66%
Business Impact	7.66%
Family Had/Died of COVID-19	6.75%
Issues with Childcare/School	4.56%
Neighborhood Changes	4.10%
Issues with City	3.83%
Public Safety Concerns	3.37%
No Impact	1.00%

Respondents provided a range of experiences in the survey, with no singularly identified theme mentioned in more than a quarter of responses. SCS attributes this to the open-endedness of the survey question, which may have seen people respond merely with the most salient issue(s) they faced, rather than recall the full depth of their experiences.

Some themes were mentioned more often than others, notably, nearly 25% of respondents specifically identified some level of personal financial impact, whether it was a lost job, reductions in income, unaffordable expenses, or food insecurity. Nearly 21% of respondents brought up lifestyle changes; which referred to transitioning to remote work, wearing masks, switching to deliveries, or following social distancing and other public health measures.

More than a tenth of responses expressed a lack of social interaction, such as being unable to visit with family members, missing friends, or being unable to attend religious services or cultural institutions and events. These were often accompanied by fears of the impact on their mental health (which were also present in over a tenth of responses); including the stress caused by the constant threat of the pandemic or the burden of managing childcare, work, and life. Finally, just over one tenth of respondents expressed concern about their neighbors or others who had been affected by the pandemic; those who were fortunate enough to avoid the worst impacts of the pandemic often requested that support go to those who were most affected. In that same thematic category, a number of respondents also said that the pandemic had allowed them to build solidarity within their neighborhood, either by developing mutual aid societies, working together to provide support to one another, or merely getting to know their neighbors.

The full range of anonymized responses is available in the full survey supplemental document.

# Appendix C

## Community Engagement Reports

### NAACP Providence Branch Event

#### City of Providence COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force Community Partner Engagement Event Report

**Host Partner:** NAACP Providence

**Date:** Tuesday August 24, 2021

#### **Task Force and City Officials in Attendance:**

- Mayor of Providence Jorge Elorza
- Councilwoman Nirva LaFortune, Task Force Member
- Peter Asen, Providence Housing Authority, Task Force Member
- Shannon Carroll, Genesis Center, Task Force Member

#### **Project Support Staff in Attendance:**

- Jax Gil, City of Providence, Project Support
- Meara Levezow, Systems Change Strategies, Project Support
- Sam Howard, Systems Change Strategies, Project Support

**Participants in Attendance:** 51

**Number of Attendees Who Spoke or Participated in the Chat:** 11

#### **Event Summary and Reflections:**

As the first event, there was the opportunity to consider what aspects went well and what needed improvement. This first meeting was well facilitated, had a decent turn out and had strong participation from community members who raised a number of good questions and points on a range of topics. Task Force members took turns responding directly to the topics voiced by community participants. Areas of improvement for future events were largely around the framing and purpose of the event. There were a lot of questions about the funding, the Task Force, the process and the timeline to allocate the funds. There were a couple times where Task Force members also provided clarity on other, separate COVID-19 recovery processes happening at the State level and for Public Schools.

Early on, participants seemed to be interested in what the Task Force was considering for policies and programs, but eventually the discussion became more of a listening session for community needs and concerns, as intended. Additionally, many topics were referenced in intersectional ways. For instance, housing was the most discussed topic overall, but also came up in discussions on mental health, family stability, and workforce and jobs.

#### **Topics that Came Up through Questions Ask and Chat:**

- **Targeting Hardest Hit Communities First**
- **Housing and Homelessness**
  - Need for Affordable Housing
  - Prioritize repairs and fix existing public housing
  - Building code enforcement can be increased or targeted in areas to ensure landlords are providing adequate, safe, and healthy housing to their tenants.
  - Fund to help elderly, disabled or low income people with housing repairs
  - Continue eviction moratorium and relief to renters

- Other cities are building apartments on top of public buildings, like libraries.

#### **Quotes from Community Members**

- *"Housing was already an issue and it has worsened during the pandemic. Single bedrooms are going for up to 1000 a month. That is a mortgage."*
- *"Not having affordable housing is causing mental health issues in the lower income community."*
- *"Elderly, disabled, low income need help for home improvements"*

#### • **Youth Investment**

- After School, Summer, Enrichment Programs
- Recreation Centers
- Align programming with arts and technology
- Investing in schools (was explained there is another process for schools)
- Address violence in the city, and create other options for youth

#### **Quotes from Participants**

- *"Teens need somewhere to go"*
- *"We need to fix our schools, we are failing our children"*

#### • **Mental Health**

- Lack of providers, especially for most vulnerable people
- Helping people to access health insurance

#### • **Workforce Development**

- Job development resources, green jobs
- More support to help people build basic math and reading skills needed to be employed

#### • **Infrastructure**

- Infrastructure discussions must include accessibility standards for the disabled population. Adaptive spaces are not the same as accessible spaces for those who use wheelchairs or walkers.
- New policy for the use of four-wheelers and ATVs
  - Mobility park, track or trails.

#### • **Funding Programs of Faith Based Organizations**

- Churches, especially in Black and brown communities, have done a lot to help connect people with COVID-19 tests and resources to address food insecurity, technology insecurity, and job training and placement.

#### • **General ARPA Spending and Policy Suggestions**

- Transparency around Task Force, recommendations, spending
- Desire to see funds specifically earmarked for intentional uses.
- Amend rodent policy so that non-homeowners can report issues.
- Don't want to see this funding go to supporting the police

## LPI Event

### City of Providence COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force Community Partner Engagement Event Report

**Host Partner:** Latino Policy Institute

**Date:** Thursday August 26, 2021

#### Task Force and City Officials in Attendance:

- Jorge Elorza, Mayor of Providence
- Councilwoman Nirva LaFortune, City of Providence, Task Force Member
- Oscar Mejias, Rhode Island Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Co-Chair of Task Force
- Julian Rodrigues-Dix, Rhode Island Department of Health, Task Force Member

#### Project Support Staff in Attendance:

- Diana Perdomo, City of Providence, Project Support
- Jax Gil, City of Providence, Project Support
- Meara Levezow, Systems Change Strategies, Project Support

**Participants in Attendance:** 49

**Number of Attendees Who Spoke or Participated in the Chat:** 9

#### Event Summary and Reflections:

Taking what was learned from the first event, this second event included more context on the purpose of the event, the Task Force process, and information on the ARPA funds for the benefit of community awareness and participation. Additionally, there were interpreters available for audience members who benefit from Spanish language and American Sign Language interpretation. Although this meeting was well facilitated, turnout and participation from community members was lower than the first event. This may be attributed to the short time available to promote the event, as well as the fact that LPI is not a membership-based organization like the previous host. This will be taken into account as an area of improvement for future engagement events.

One major highlight from the conversation that came up from multiple participants, is that the biggest problems in the city that need resolution, are not new problems due to the pandemic, but long standing problems that have not been adequately addressed. A couple of speakers made the point that to address these problems, namely poverty, poor housing access and quality, and economic and educational disparities, there need not be new, innovative or inventive solutions brought forward. Participants described a preference for investing in tested policies that work, programs that already have infrastructure, and funding local public and private organizations that already work in the Providence community. To that end, the point was made that the City should invest in solutions that will be sustainable once this federal funding is gone.

#### Topics and Sentiments that Came Up through Questions Ask and Chat:

- **Problems that need addressing are long standing in the City**
  - Desire for policies that address extreme poverty, and disparities across neighborhoods
  - Desire to fund existing programs and organizations that serve residents
  - Preference to invest in direct aid or dependable solutions, rather than innovative ideas that may be untested.

- **Housing and Homelessness**

- 2/3s of Providence residents are renters and there are many absentee landlords
- Housing stock is not affordable or safe, lead paint is still a problem
- Homelessness is a growing problem
- Consider fund to rehab abandoned buildings for housing

- **Targeting Hardest Hit Communities First**

- Poverty is also a growing problem among the elderly population whether they live in public or private housing.
- Support for reparations for Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) Residents

- **Youth Investment**

- Invest in programming and activities
- Enrichment, recreation, education
- Invest in public and community libraries

- **Workforce & Economic Development**

- Job creation
- Small, local Business need attention and support
- Women-owned business were closed at higher rates

- **Food Security**

- Many people are food insecure, or have inadequate access to healthy, fresh foods.

# Facilitate Change Event

## Providence Rescue Plan - Community Conversation Hosted by Facilitate Change

Date: September 10, 2021

Attendees participated in “Breakout Rooms” to reflect on different question prompts. Used the 1-2-4-All method.

### 1st Reflection Question:

How has COVID-19 impacted your daily lived experiences? How have your hopes & fears changed before/after pandemic?

### Common Themes

- Housing
- COVID-19 has worsened the housing shortage
- Communities are experiencing gentrification
- People are experiencing discrimination (particularly against renters of color)
- Impact on different economies
- Ex: Creative economy which has been entirely shut down
- Education
- Discrepancy and connectivity amongst people in classrooms
- Doesn't just mean installing broadband, but making sure people know how to access it.
- Climate change
- Need to ensure we are really “Building back better”
- Violence Prevention
- Safe Water
- Replacing lead pipes

### 2nd Reflection Question:

Imagining Phase - How would you like the City of Providence to use these funds to address these needs?

### Common Themes

- **Clean Water**
  - “We did some ‘large ‘imagining’ for a city in which there was a major investment in removing lead from the pipes at the home ownership-level. There’s been so much work done in the city infrastructure, but unless we do that (last 30 feet), we’re still exposing future generations and people who are living in homes now to risk of harm.” - Jennifer
- **Municipal Broadband Access**
  - Transformative investment that can be made once and make a big change
  - Digital divide is so real and harsh and even more apparent during the pandemic when so many things are online
  - Ex: Access to rental assistance (also true for most public benefit programs)
  - One Neighborhood Builders - pilot program for universal neighborhood-based broadband access. This is also happening across the US in many cities at the municipal level.
  - Imagined a Providence where all residents have broadband access at the city-level without having to purchase at the household level

- **Access to Homeownership (for community members who have been traditionally excluded by government policy)**
  - After WWII, families were specifically excluded from access to capital, homeownership, redlining which has destroyed traditionally-stable communities of color.
  - Use this funding to get traditionally excluded families into homeownership and the intergenerational transfer of wealth that results from that
- **Youth**
  - All three areas contribute to interventions that would be supportive of the city’s youth by create more infrastructure and opportunities for youth
  - Ex: job training and jobs in building new homes, Lead pipe remediation, Broadband access
- **BIPOC Artists:**
  - Focus on how BIPOC artists have been impacted
  - Ex: minimum income program
- **Guaranteed Income Pilot**
  - Expand and include more people
- **Housing**
  - Construction of affordable rental units and ensuring they truly are low-income and affordable
  - Addressing discrimination that happens in the renting process
  - Ex: professors of color who can’t find rental units
  - Need to address both availability and discrimination faced by Providence residents
- **Transportation Infrastructure**
  - “ Part of a broader conversation about transportation networking throughout the state but there’s a lot of areas that are inaccessible (that if you don’t have a car and don’t drive) - our city and state are too beautiful not to be able to access solely because transportation doesn’t fully meet the needs of its riders.” - Larry
- **Harm Reduction Centers**
  - Despite legislation passed by General Assembly for harm reduction centers and other measures to be made available, it would require local approval by City Council
  - Funding for construction harm reduction centers / investing in harm reduction strategies would help to stem overdose crisis
- **Mental Health**
  - Robust support group of contact and referrals to provide resources for people in need

## ARISE/SPNA Event

### Community Conversation with ARISE and South Providence Neighborhood Association Held Virtually

**Date:** Tuesday September 21, 2021

#### **Task Force and City Officials in Attendance:**

- Angela Ankoma, Rhode Island Foundation, Co-Chair of Task Force
- Paige Clausius-Parks, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, Task Force Member
- Councilwoman Nirva LaFortune, City of Providence, Task Force Member
- Peter Asen, Providence Housing Authority, Task Force Member
- Julian Drix, Rhode Island Department of Health, Task Force Member

**Summary and Reflections:** ARISE and South Providence Neighborhood Association partnered up to engage their constituencies in this community conversation. There was a lot of space and attention for young people to participate and share their ideas and observations, yet the event was attended by people of all ages. The audience was very engaged both on camera and in the chat which made for a robust discussion on the Providence Rescue Plan. In all, 76 participants were registered for the event.

#### **Distribute Funds to a Range of Recipients Organizations**

- Ensure funds are distributed widely, and not just to the more well established entities.
- Include opportunities for grassroots groups that aren't formally incorporated but provide direct service to Providence's communities.
- Applying for funds should not be so cumbersome that it excludes the very people that need rescuing.
- Set aside funding to give stipends either directly to people or through an organization that does not require a response to an RFP, and 30 or more days of waiting for payment
- Ensure that when RFPs and the standard procurement process is necessary, that the people and organizations closest to the problems are consulted in designing the RFP and selection processes.

#### **Prioritize Funding Sustainable Programs and Needed Policy Updates**

- With limited dollars, it is important to consider the sustainability of programs and services funded. It is preferential to prioritize programs that can self-sustain after the initial rescue plan investments.
- There are many social and economic issues to be addressed by the rescue plan funding that are connected to existing public policy and budgets.
- Consider using the rescue plan funds as a means or incentive to update these policy and budget items

#### **Attention for Elderly, Disabled, Veterans and Vulnerable Residents**

- A lot of focus has been placed on reopening schools, but there are many other programs and social centers attended by populations that have not re-opened, especially for seniors, disabled, and veterans. The services, activities and even meals that people were once getting at social centers are now falling on families, and come at a cost that may be unaffordable.
- Focus on reopening these centers safely, or finding alternative ways to provide services. Additionally, any stipend for families or individuals bearing the added cost or meals or activities for supported individuals would be helpful.
- Environmental pollution is a problem in Providence, especially in neighborhoods by the port and can cause health issues like asthma. Consider projects to support a clean environment and resident health.
- Additionally, people who are in reentry programs after being incarcerated could benefit from supportive services to prevent recidivism.

#### **Training and Workforce Development**

- The pandemic has shown us that all workforce eligible people are needed, including seniors, disabled, immigrants, people who are homeless or who live with substance-use disorders.
- Connect training opportunities with work needing to be done, or work funded by the City Trainees can be cleaning up neighborhoods, graffiti, while learning new skills.

## DARE Event

### Community Conversation with D.A.R.E - Direct Action for Rights and Equality Held in Person

**Date:** September 30, 2021

#### **Task Force and City Officials in Attendance:**

- Oscar Mejias, Rhode Island Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Co-Chair of Task Force
- Paige Clausius-Parks, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, Task Force Member
- Sabrina Chaudhary, Stay Silent PVD, Task Force Member

**Summary and Reflections:** Direct Action for Rights and Equality (DARE) hosted an in-person meeting for their constituency and neighborhood, which included many engaged residents who have long been working toward a more just and equitable city on a number of fronts.

#### **No Income, Low Income & Affordable Housing**

- More and more people are becoming homeless. The state started the pandemic in a housing deficit and it has gotten much worse for people across the board.
- We need no income homes for unsheltered people and those on fixed incomes, homes for women and children, homes for people in recovery including non-abstinence recovery.
- Support for democratically run housing options like Oxford Houses in Maryland.
- Connect people to social workers to make individual housing education plans to build people up to be able to rent and access housing.

#### **Investment in Community Centers and Youth Recreation**

- Many people remember being able to visit recreation centers, play sports or study music as youth and don't see those opportunities in the city anymore.
- Want to see recreation centers, youth programming & sports expanded to keep them away from violence or trouble with the police.
- Interest in seeing investment in restorative practices and programs, and divestment in police and incarceration.

#### **Local Training, Hiring and Contract Awards**

- Skills training for trades, mechanical and other needed professions for youth, adults and people coming out of prison.
- Help Providence contractors get work opportunities with the City, especially giving the chance to smaller contractors who compete against big firms.

#### **Environmental Investment and Remediation**

- Stop coal and oil expansions at the Port of Providence.
- Plant more trees, especially where we know it is affecting childhood health.
- Support to help to educate people and remediate lead paint in Providence's homes.

#### **Recommendations and Funding Process**

- Community members are interested in how residents can be involved throughout the process.
- Interest in seeing interactive survey results and spending results that break down responses by race and ZIP code.

# Appendix D

## Business Roundtable Reports

### Small Business Roundtable

City of Providence COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force  
Small Business Roundtable on the Service Economy  
Presented Virtually on September 7, 2021 | [Recording Available Here](#)

Hosted by Task Force Co-Chair Oscar Mejias, Rhode Island Hispanic Chamber of Commerce with guests:

- Alexandra Flores, Happy Kids Homecare
- Azriel Arce, Azriel's Salon
- Channavy Chhay, Center for Southeast Asians
- Shawndell Burney-Speaks, African American Ambassadors Group

#### Overall Reflections:

Very small businesses are the backbone of Providence, and yet face the highest barriers to advancement because of their small size and stretched capacity to do financial and growth planning, marketing, e-commerce, and other important practices.

For service-based businesses, many are not yet able to operate at full capacity, which is straining their ability to stay open. This has been detrimental particularly for home-based childcare providers, and the families they serve. Hair salons have also had their capacity and services limited, which not only has an economic effect but a social detriment as well. These fields and others like it could especially benefit from assistance in marketing and awareness of the availability of their services. On top of everything it takes to keep their doors open, these small business owners are not able to do all it takes to build back their business, especially with the pandemic still looming.

#### Topics Discussed:

- Support with Marketing and Advertising for Small Service Based Industries. On top of everything it takes to keep their doors open, small business owners running childcare centers and hair salons, among other types of businesses, are not able to do all it takes to build back their business, especially with the pandemic still looming.
- Build Community Around Small Businesses. Especially for service-based businesses, they are serving local residents and have cultural connections that break down barriers often faced by the public sector. Providing grants or stipends for businesses who engage in community organizing on behalf of the city, could help connect many people who may not have been reached or moved to participate in traditional public engagement efforts.
- Fund Mentorship Programs for Black Youth and Entrepreneurs. Provide stipends for mentors for their time, support experiential programming
- Fund Faith-based Programs. Many churches find creative ways to serve and support their communities and those in need. They are close to the people in their neighborhoods and are often where older generations turn to for help and guidance.
- Black Radio. There is no black radio station in Providence where people can enjoy music, but also hear the news, discussions and broadcasted updates on ongoing events in the community.

### Anchor Business Roundtable

City of Providence COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force  
Anchor Business Roundtable  
Presented Virtually on September 21, 2021 | [Recording Available Here](#)

Hosted by Task Forceperson Kristen Adamo, Providence Warwick Convention & Visitors Bureau & Task Force Co-Chair Oscar Mejias, Rhode Island Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, with guests:

- Lynn Blais, United Nurses and Allied Professionals
- Sara Bratko, Rhode Island Hospitality Association
- Creusa Michelazzo, TechCollective

#### Overall Reflections

The Anchor Business Roundtable focused on 3 distinct industries that together, account for much of Providence's economy: hospitality, healthcare, and technology. Each industry was forced to quickly adapt to the challenges of COVID-19, undergoing rapid change in their operations, employment and even business models. For the hospitality and travel industry, COVID-19 meant many businesses shut down entirely and many workers were laid off. In the healthcare and technology industries, COVID-19 had the opposite effect and meant their operations were pushed into overdrive. Although we are better equipped with information, and are now accustomed to living with the dangers of the COVID-19 virus, businesses in each industry are still not stabilized nor are operating under pre-pandemic circumstances.

#### Workforce Training and Development

The healthcare industry and hospitality industries are still struggling to find employees to fill all the vacancies. Particularly for healthcare workers, many are aging out of the workforce, have illnesses and can't risk exposure, or are too burnt out to continue in the field. For people interested in working in healthcare, the costs of the required education and training can be a deterrent.

#### Restoring Downtown and the Creative Economy

The hospitality industry houses many businesses who bring people together, and places like Providence's downtown are a nexus of gathering for not only leisure, but work and convenience. Restoring downtown and supporting the creative economy gets people into the doors of our restaurants, hotels and venues to enjoy what the city has to offer. Helping these businesses expand outdoor dining and entertainment options, as well as to make ventilation upgrades is imperative. We must also recognize that downtown is a place where people in crisis come to seek help and refuge, and so we must have adequate services available.

#### Technology and Broadband Access for Everyone

With much of daily life moving into the virtual space, from work and school to doctors visits, and paying bills, everyone needs to be equipped with the training and access they need to fully participate. There are still many people who are not "online" because prior to the pandemic, it wasn't a necessity. Since COVID-19 hastened the speed of technology adoption, we need to consider what norms are acceptable, and what precautions must be in place for students, employees and anyone else to ensure a positive impact of this new scale of technology in our daily lives.

# Appendix E

## Glossary

**ARPA or “American Rescue Plan Act”:** refers to the \$350B American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 President Biden signed into law on March 11, 2021 to bring direct and immediate relief to families and workers. The Providence Rescue Plan is a combination of city and county funds totaling \$166 million.

**Allocation:** the giving out or dividing up of resources, money, etc. to particular groups or individuals

**Area Median Gross Income (AMGI):** refers to the average income for a community. AMGI is defined each year by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for all cities across the country. The median household income for Providence (in 2019 dollars) is \$45,610.<sup>105</sup>

**BIPOC:** stands for “Black, Indigenous, People of Color”. A term that has been used to update the widely used expression ‘people of color’ (POC). It tries to acknowledge that not all people of color face the same experiences or levels of injustice.

**Broadband:** high speed internet that is not connected to a telephone line.

**Disaggregated Data:** data that has been broken down into subsections by, for example, gender, age, race, etc.

<sup>105</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/providencecityrhodeisland/INC110219#INC110219>

**Federal Emergency Rental Service:** this federal program gives money to state and local groups to help people pay for rent, utilities, and home energy costs.

**Guaranteed Income Pilot:** Providence is running a pilot program for a guaranteed income program, which gives monthly, recurring cash payments directly to individuals to help address poverty. From the City’s [website](#): “It is unconditional, with no strings attached and no work or education requirements. The program is not universal but is designed to target a specific population. It is entirely philanthropically funded, meaning the money used for this program is donated by outside contributors for the express purpose of implementing this program”.

**Indicator:** a thing, especially a trend or fact, that is an example of how an overall process is going.

**Median Income:** The median income is the income amount that divides a population into two equal groups, half having an income above that amount, and half having an income below that amount.

**Metric:** a system or standard of measurement.

**Mitigation:** the action of reducing the severity, seriousness, or painfulness of something.

**Ordinance:** a law that is passed by a local government.

**Poverty Rate:** the percent of people (in a given group or geography) whose income falls below the poverty line; as defined by the US Census Bureau.

**Procurement:** the term that is used to refer to the process or the act of sourcing or obtaining services or goods for a business, or in this case the City of Providence.

**Qualified Census Tract:** geographic locations established by the US federal government’s Census Bureau that have 50 percent of households with incomes below 60 percent of the Area Median Gross Income (AMGI) or have a poverty rate of 25 percent or more.

**Qualitative Data:** information that cannot be expressed easily by numbers or statistics, such as the feelings, opinions, or experiences people communicate when responding to a survey, for example.

**Quantitative Data:** information collected that can be expressed by numbers, such as ‘how many people contracted COVID in this city’ or ‘how much money did this company earn in the past year’.

**Resolution:** a less-formal type of law passed by a local government, usually written for temporary or special purposes.

**RFP:** ‘request for proposal’ is a business document that announces a project, describes it, and solicits bids from qualified contractors to complete it.

**Social Determinants of Health:** from the World Health Organization: “The social determinants of health (SDH) are the non-medical factors that influence health outcomes. They are the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. These forces and systems include economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies and political systems”.

**Tranche:** a portion of something, especially money.

**U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD):** The Department of Housing and Urban Development administers programs that provide housing and community development assistance. The Department also works to ensure fair and equal housing opportunities for all.

# Appendix F

## Resolution: COVID-19 Recovery and Resiliency Task Force



### RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL

No. 207

Approved May 17, 2021

WHEREAS, On March 11, President Biden signed the American Rescue Plan Act into law, a plan that will help the nation begin to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic; and

WHEREAS, The American Rescue Plan will help boost vaccination efforts, improve healthcare infrastructure, transition to in-person learning and educational resources, provide financial relief to communities, and support local businesses that have been hit hardest by COVID-19; and

WHEREAS, Among the \$1.9 trillion worth of federal COVID-19 relief is \$350 billion for "Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds", of which the City of Providence is scheduled to receive \$165 million; and

WHEREAS, Providence faces severe budget challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic due to substantial revenue losses, costs incurred due to responding to the public health emergency, and the need for services such as emergency medical facilities and vaccination sites, including support for struggling small businesses, and resources for youth, families and essential workers; and

WHEREAS, The American Rescue Plan allocation will enable the City of Providence to enhance its public health response, invest in capital and broadband infrastructure, supplement costs to provide assistance to families, essential workers, non-profits and social services organizations, small businesses, and put Providence residents back to work to set the foundation for a strong and equitable economic recovery.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, That the City Council of the City of Providence does hereby establish The City of Providence COVID-19 Recovery & Resiliency Task Force the purpose of which shall be to provide guidance and make recommendations to the city government as recovery planning efforts get underway in the wake of the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). This task force will provide critical insights to balance a long and short term equitable and impactful deployment of stimulus relief funds in the City of Providence.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the City of Providence COVID-19 Recovery & Resiliency Task Force shall be comprised of 14 members. Members may include:

- The Mayor or his designee
- (2) Members to be Appointed by Council President
- (2) Representatives from Community Philanthropy
- (2) Representatives of the Business Community
- (2) Representatives of Arts, Culture and Tourism industries
- (2) Representatives from Community Based-Organizations
- Youth Representative
- Workforce Development Representative
- Environmental Representative

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That, in addition to the above listed members, the Superintendent of the Providence Public School District or their designee shall serve as a non-voting/ex-officio member for the purpose of consulting and/or providing input on how funds will be allocated for the City's youth.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That the City of Providence COVID-19 Recovery & Resiliency Task Force shall issue recommendations to the Mayor & City Council within 60 days of the date appointments are made to the task force.

IN CITY COUNCIL

MAY 6 2021

READ AND PASSED: *As Amended*

  
PRES.

  
CLERK

I HEREBY APPROVE.

  
Mayor

Date: 5/17/21