

City of Albany COVID Recovery Task Force *Final Advisory Report*



MAYOR KATHY SHEEHAN
MICHAEL WHALEN, CO-CHAIR | JAHKEEN HOKE, CO-CHAIR

August 30, 2021

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*Thanks to President Biden,
the ARP delivered shots in
arms and money in
pockets... to help see
(Americans) through the
twin public health and
economic crises our
country was facing,"*

-White House Official,
Newsweek, June 29, 2021

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INTRODUCTION: Letter from Mayor Kathy M. Sheehan



The COVID-19 pandemic has been unlike anything we have experienced in the modern era. Rebounding from the ongoing impact of this unprecedented crisis will require a significant, multi-year recovery effort. So many individuals, families, businesses, organizations, and entire industry sectors have been impacted in ways that no one could have ever fathomed.

Looking back now, the pandemic highlighted the importance of our essential workers and their contributions to society, demonstrating the incredible strength and innovation of local businesses and organizations in our Capital City.

We must celebrate our resiliency and also integrate the lessons we have learned over the past year into the plans we are now making for the City's future. It's important we recognize our City's strengths, however, the pandemic also magnified the vulnerabilities and disparities that are holding our City back from fully realizing its considerable potential - inequities in healthcare, housing, neighborhood amenities, online access, education and more. These longstanding

issues are not unique to Albany, but we cannot truly build back better if we continue to allow them to exist and fail to incorporate solutions into the recovery efforts.

This is a monumental task that would not be possible without President Biden's signing of the American Rescue Plan, which is allocating funds directly to the City to undertake this important and critical work. We are committed to ensuring that these funds are spent in the most effective and equitable manner possible so as to maximize potential benefits in all corners of our community.

But this effort will require more than just dollars. In order to realize true success, the City will need cross-sector collaboration, as well as the knowledge, expertise, and networks of community leaders, to identify and present innovative solutions to these longstanding problems exacerbated by the pandemic, as well as the new challenges that arose due to this crisis.

In April, we launched a far-reaching effort to evaluate the City's recovery needs with input from leaders representing a variety of sectors. The 41 experts selected to participate on the COVID Recovery Task Force come from a broad cross-section of our community, housing, education, healthcare, business, the service industry, cultural institutions and neighborhoods. Their experience and expertise helped formulate a deeper understand of the impact of the pandemic.

This convening of the Task Force and its commitment to engage the public throughout the process, has resulted in the enclosed Advisory Report. We are sure to continue facing significant challenges as the recovery effort progresses, but thanks to the work of the Task Force and your input, we are on the path to success. I am especially grateful to the Task Force members and our co-chairs for committing their time and leadership during this difficult time. I also want to acknowledge the work of Capitalize Albany Corporation in facilitating this process. Thank you for your transformative contribution; we look forward to continuing this journey in the months and years ahead.

Kathy M. Sheehan
Mayor

INTRODUCTION: *Letter from the Task Force Co-Chairs*



The past year has taught us valuable lessons about the importance of community and the power of collective action.

We have come to the other side of the coronavirus pandemic largely because we leaned on and learned from one another. We emerge with a renewed understanding that we are all interconnected, and that individual actions can have a significant impact on the lives of others.



It was in this spirit that we embarked on the crucial task of post-pandemic recovery. We recognized that our success in this unprecedented effort would hinge on whether we can ensure the allocation of critical federal dollars is equitable and ensures the success of every City of Albany resident, neighborhood, business, and organization.

In short, we must build Albany back better — together.

Though the state has fully re-opened and the economy is picking up, we know that the pandemic's financial impact will take years to overcome. The investments we make today with the money allo-

cated to the City through the Biden administration's American Rescue Plan will have far-reaching implications. We must be smart and strategic in how we deploy these dollars, which offer a unique opportunity to reshape our City's future and guide its success.

That is why the work of the COVID Recovery Task Force has been so important, and we are both proud and thankful to have had the chance to chair this forward-thinking endeavor. We are also gratified by the participation and support we have received throughout this effort from the community, without which we would not have been able to proceed apace.

The 41 Task Force members were asked to participate based on their representation of a diverse array of interests and populations and their deep experience in their respective fields. But we were also acutely aware that we needed to hear directly from the community to truly be able to identify long-term needs and the most urgent priorities that would best propel the City forward.

To that end, we held dozens of working group and public meetings and synthesized the resulting information, together with feedback gleaned through public surveys, to assist us in making the most informed recommendations on how to maximize our investments.

We know that the years ahead will continue to present challenges, but as a result of robust community engagement and support from our fellow Task Force members, Albany Common Council colleagues, as well as Mayor Sheehan and her leadership team, we are confident we will overcome all obstacles and fully realize the City's near-limitless potential.

We offer our sincere gratitude to everyone who made this effort possible and look forward to continuing to build on the strong foundation we have established.

Michael Whalen & Jahkeen Hoke
Co-Chairs

INTRODUCTION: Acknowledgements

This report reflects the contributions of many individuals, organizations, and communities. The City of Albany is grateful for the time, effort, and support that each provided during this collaborative endeavor. The City of Albany would specifically like to thank:

COVID Recovery Task Force

The 41 experts who make up the Task Force represent a broad cross-section of community, education, health-care and commercial sectors, and are drawing from their diverse experience to provide information on trends and impacts in their industries, while representing the populations they serve.

Initiative Coordinators

The Recovery Task Force's work was made possible by staff and resources provided by the City of Albany and Capitalize Albany Corporation.

Additional Contributors

Thank you to the Albany Capital Center for the use of their facilities and assistance from their excellent technical and maintenance staff responsible for the successful operations of the Task Force meetings.

The City of Albany and the COVID Recovery Task Force are especially grateful for the many community stakeholders, neighborhood groups, civic organizations, public agencies and businesses who contributed their ideas, opinions and resources to help make the COVID Recovery Task Force process and advisory report successful.

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

Jahkeen Hoke (co-chair)

[Business For Good Foundation](#)

Michael Whalen (co-chair)

[M&T Bank](#)

Kaweeda Adams

[Albany City Schools](#)

Faye Andrews

[Albany Community Development Agency](#)

Hon. Dr. Dorcey Applyrs

[Chief City Auditor](#)

Kate Baker

[Small Business Development Center, University at Albany](#)

Hon. Alfredo Balarin

[Albany Common Council](#)

Carm Basile (Jonathan Scherzer)

[Capital District Transportation Authority](#)

Bob Belber

[ASM Global/Times Union Center](#)

Neenah Bland

[Albany Community Action Partnership](#)

Tricia Brown (Mike Lyons)

[North Atlantic States Regional Council of Carpenters](#)

Jeffrey Buell

[Redburn Development](#)

Michael Castellana

[SEFCU](#)

Chiquita D'Arbeau

[Albany Housing Authority](#)

Mark Eagan (Jason Benitez)

[Capital Region Chamber of Commerce](#)

Hon. Corey Ellis

[Albany Common Council President](#)

Hon. Sonia Frederick

[Albany Common Council](#)

Anthony Gaddy

[Upstate New York Black Chamber of Commerce](#)

Peter Gannon

[United Way of the Greater Capital Region](#)

Tammis Groft

[Albany Institute of History and Art](#)

Kevin Hicks

[Albany County Airport Authority](#)





Photos throughout this document were sourced from a variety of places including WAMC, Whitney M. Young Health, the Albany Times Union, the Albany Business Review, the Schenectady Gazette, the Downtown Business Improvement District, the African American Cultural Center, the Albany City School District and many others.

Mickey Jiminez
Capital District Latinos

Hon. Andrew Joyce (Mike Morris)
Albany County Legislature Chairman

Anna Kuwabara
Albany Symphony

Eileen Larrabee
Open Space Institute

Angelo Maddox Jr.
Fresh & Fly Clothing

Hon. Daniel McCoy
Albany County Executive

Dr. Dennis McKenna
Albany Medical Center

Tracy Metzger
TL Metzger & Associates, LLC

Giovanni Otero
Salvation Army

Matthew Peter
Albany Parking Authority

Dominick Purnomo
Yono's/dps

Dr. Roger Ramsammy
Hudson Valley Community College

Sarah Reginelli
Capitalize Albany Corporation

Hon. Jahmel Robinson
Albany Common Council

Dr. Havidan Rodriguez
SUNY, University at Albany

Hon. Darius Shahinfar
City Treasurer

Nolene Smith
Baby Institute

Georgette Steffens
Downtown Albany BID

Raphael Tucker
City of Albany Youth & Workforce Services

[The Task Force would like to specifically acknowledge Nora Culhane Friedel, David Galin, Renee McFarlin and Ashley Mohl for their contributions to the initiative]





“

The Task Force strongly recommends funding a limited number of highly-impactful programs that can produce profound results, rather than thinly spreading resources.”

*- Recovery Task Force,
July, 2021*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Inception & Rationale**
- **Process Overview**
- **Results**

As New York State's Capital City emerges from the pandemic, local leaders – led by Mayor Kathy Sheehan and supported by President Biden's American Rescue Plan (ARP) – are committed to "Building Back Better." This report summarizes the results of a three-month strategic planning effort conducted by 41 local stakeholders who represent a diverse cross-section of the Albany community.

Ultimately the needs assessment and recommendations herein have been provided as a suggested framework for policy development and funding deployment to strengthen the City's economic recovery and provide impactful support to populations and neighborhoods traditionally disadvantaged by structural inequities and hit hardest by the pandemic. In addition to programmatic recommendations, this COVID-19 Recovery Task Force has also provided implementation guidance to ensure Albany has the capacity to enact bold and sweeping change while in compliance with Federal guidelines.

Inception & Rationale

As in other economic downturns, the COVID-19 pandemic has reduced state and local revenues. Yet, this pandemic has been unique in the severity of its impacts on state and local governments in particular due to the blend of revenue shortfalls, increased operating expenses and reductions in staffing levels. State and local governments are expected to face shortfalls for many years as a result.

While the Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund will provide \$80.7 million in much-needed relief to aid the City of Albany in replacing these lost revenues and covering COVID-related expenses, the City of Albany is projected to face significant revenue impacts between 2020 and 2024. Therefore, the majority of the ARP funding will be required to make the City of Albany whole again, as well as enabling the City leadership to address critical operational needs such as rehiring city staff up to pre-pandemic levels, building up internal capacity or engaging external support to implement economic relief programs, re-imagining its workspaces and operations for a post-pandemic world, as well as alleviating other areas of current fiscal stress and operations shortfalls.

However, the City of Albany understands that a true recov-

ery is one that not only reverses the social and economic hardships in the City of Albany that resulted from the pandemic, but also tackles barriers to equitable health, social, and economic outcomes – inequities that have persevered for generations and were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, a portion of the ARP funding will be set aside to ensure the City of Albany allocates resources where they are needed most. To accomplish this, City leadership deemed it essential to ensure that the prioritization of these finite ARP resources was informed by a current assessment of need across all sectors, along with holistic recommendations for programmatic and funding priorities within the City of Albany.

Mayor Sheehan announced on March 12, 2021 the establishment of the City of Albany COVID-19 Task Force, to which she appointed Mike Whalen, Administrative Vice President of M&T Bank, and Jahkeen Hoke, CEO of Business For Good Foundation as Co-Chairs. The 41 Task Force members were selected as a diverse group of people representing more than 108 institutions, community organizations and neighborhoods with the mandate to approach this work with a deep sense of civic duty to Albany's residents, particularly those who have been disproportionately impacted by structural barriers.

The City of Albany COVID Recovery Task Force serves as an advisory body to the City of Albany. This Task Force was formed to ensure the City of Albany equitably and strategically maximizes the resources available to city residents, businesses and community organizations, thanks to the American Rescue Plan to restart Albany and build back better. Task Force members were expected to draw from their diverse experience to provide information on trends and impacts in their industries, while representing the populations they serve.

Throughout the Task Force initiative, members were called on to obtain input from the public on local needs and priorities to ensure local needs are being well-represented, as well as to provide recommendations to the City of Albany. In drafting both the needs assessment and programmatic recommendations, the Task Force was asked not only to consider how ARP funds could be invested through a lens of equity, but also to think more broadly about how



the wider community should prioritize actions above and beyond the ARP to meet Albany's broader needs.

Specifically, Task Force members were directed to consider the below objectives in formulating their recommendations for the ARP funding:

- Obtain a shared understanding of how the American Rescue Plan can help the City of Albany
- Identify the needs of the City of Albany residents, businesses, and non-profit organizations that cannot be covered by other funding sources
- Equitably and strategically maximize resources available to our residents, businesses, and community organizations to restart Albany and build back better
- Engage every sector of the City of Albany to ensure we get resources where they are needed to restart Albany, re-open businesses, prevent evictions, and strengthen our not-for-profit organizations

While other initiatives have been dedicated to the emergency response, preparing for the reopening of the economy, and rebuilding city operations, the request to this Task Force was to focus on the City of Albany recovery needs, with a focus on identifying specific Impact Area priorities, Operational Priorities, and Overall Thematic Priorities. The Task Force was also encouraged to develop an evaluation and assessment framework to assist funding decision-makers in selecting projects and programs as well as management and implementation recommendations to help facilitate and streamline future decision making and implementation of the ARP funding.

This document represents only the first action of many toward recovery for the City of Albany. With these recommendations as an assessment tool, the City now has a lens through which to review and analyze potential American Rescue Plan projects/initiatives, to ensure that the ARP funding allocation is used thoughtfully and strategically to maximize the return on investment for the City and its residents.

The recommendations put forward by the COVID Recovery Task Force in the following document cannot and will not solve all of the challenges currently facing the City of Albany, but this report will highlight the challenges deemed a priority for the City, as well as recommend actionable strategies/initiatives as ways to address these specific challenges. It is the hope and recommendation of the Task Force that the recommendations within this document will serve as a tool and motivation for proactive action throughout the community beyond the ARP – challenging the public, private, nonprofit and institutional sectors alike to find innovative, sustainable and collaborative approaches to equitably addressing the community's needs.

Process Overview

In order to most efficiently evaluate the needs of the community and develop programmatic and operational recommendations over the course of three months, the Task Force established five Working Groups to correspond to the impact areas eligible for funding under the ARP:

- Assistance to Workers and Families – Education/Workforce/Human Services
- Assistance to Workers and Families – Housing/Transportation/Community Revitalization
- Small Business Support
- Supporting the Public Health Response
- Tourism/Travel/Hospitality/Arts Recovery

The Task Force assigned four or more Members who are specialists in the specific area to each Working Group and invited all Members to engage with all Working Groups. All elected officials were assigned to be ad hoc members of all groups to ensure there would be an overlap and exchange of ideas between and among the five Groups.

These Working Groups conducted a holistic Needs As-

QUICK FACTS

Overview of the Initiative

Timeline

- **Announced March 12, 2021**
- **Convened April 23, 2021**
- **Report Released August 30, 2021**

Task Force

- **Diverse, 41-member group of public, private, nonprofit and institutional community leaders**
- **Affiliated with 108+ local organizations representing a cross-section of the Albany community**
- **12+ sectors represented**
- **5 Working Groups aligned with ARP impact areas**
- **Appointed by Mayor Sheehan**

Activities

- **17 Task Force and Working Group meetings**
- **2 public surveys**
- **1,200+ survey respondents**
- **60+ direct meetings with community members/ community groups**

Results

- **5 impact-area needs assessments**
- **66 top challenges/inequities**
- **16 model programs**
- **32 impact area strategic recommendations**
- **245 programmatic recommendations**
- **8 guiding principles**
- **4 implementation principles**
- **Final report**

essment for the Albany community based on the depth of experience and diverse perspectives of the Task Force members, feedback from their constituents, industry research and local and national trends. Specific challenges and inequities resulting from or exacerbated by the pandemic were identified, and then vetted and amended by the public through a survey garnering nearly 500 responses and feedback from meetings with community members, businesses and community organizations.

The Working Groups then developed Impact Area and programmatic recommendations that could directly address the needs that were compiled. Because the Task Force was not charged with determining how ARP funding was spent, and rather was asked to provide a recommended framework for project and program evaluation, the Working Groups established recommendations that could be actionable by the community above and beyond the ARP.

These 32 Impact Areas and 245 programmatic recommendations were prioritized by overall impact, urgency and level of unmet need. A second survey collecting 700+ responses was conducted to again verify that the Working Groups findings were aligned with public sentiment.

The Task Force reconvened following each stage in the process to confirm the Working Groups Findings and to develop “touchstone” principles – foundational guiding and implementation principles the Task Force agreed should serve to serve as ideal standards for program evaluation and management of the initiative.

Taking the feedback from the final Task Force meeting, the Initiative Coordinators have prepared this final advisory report on behalf of the Task Force. While the publication of this report concludes the requested City of Albany COVID Recovery Task Force activities, the Task Force recommends convening biannually through 2024 to review the City's progress on ARP implementation and serve as a resource for leveraging results beyond the initiatives ultimately funded by American Rescue Plan.

Results

The Final Report presents a holistic Needs Assessment of the harmful consequences of the economic disruptions resulting from or exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and related state of emergency. In addition to a summary of the immediate economic stabilization needs for households and businesses and systemic public health and economic challenges that have contributed to the unequal impact of the pandemic on certain populations, the Task Force outlined specific challenges and inequities within each Impact Area.

Working Group members provided their diverse sector expertise, as well as relevant research and trend analysis from their field and feedback from their constituents to substantiate these local impacts in the context of the

ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK

The Task Force recommends selecting projects and programs based on their responsiveness to:



COVID-19 Impact

addressing community needs arising from or exacerbated by the pandemic.



Guiding Principles

addressing universal, foundational priorities to ensure resources are maximized



Strategic Impact

addressing programmatic recommendations outlined as priorities by the community

broader regional and national environment.

Throughout the needs assessment, common themes arose. Disparities in outcomes between the White population and communities of color were consistently cited in levels of homeownership, representation in multiple employment growth sectors, severity of health complications, and business ownership opportunities.

Limited access to quality and affordable childcare impacted nearly every Impact Area for its negative influence on childhood education, children's social/emotional and mental health, employment opportunities for working parents, and labor shortages for employers, among others.

Workforce concerns including insufficient skills development for emerging industries and challenges hiring employees for small businesses and hospitality operations, and lack of diversity in the healthcare and construction industries specifically continuously arose.

Mental health needs – both awareness of and access to services as well as erasing the stigma of seeking mental health assistance – given their escalation following the trauma of 2020 were determined to be critical across multiple Impact Areas.



Awareness and accessibility were also consistent themes across the board, whether related to financial and technical services for families or businesses, cultural and linguistic competency among service and health providers, or geographic inclusivity serving all neighborhoods throughout the City.

Neighborhood revitalization was a common thread for the negative safety, health, social/emotional, homeownership and economic impacts of distressed communities and blight. Working Groups found needs for continued investment in real estate, public infrastructure and other quality of place initiatives to address inequities in multiple sectors.

Of these community stabilization needs, low homeownership rates in general and particularly the severe disparity between homeownership rates for local White and Black residents was consistently noted by the Task Force.

Within each of these diverse needs, a common theme of a lack of capacity and collaboration among local service providers was identified as a weakness that negatively impacted the effective delivery of assistance. Every Working Group also cited the need for as much flexibility as possible when funding projects and programs to ensure that the dynamic and evolving needs outlined above are able to be most efficiently met.

In order to address these needs and others as outlined in the Needs Assessment, the Task Force identified 32 Impact Area recommendations and 245 programmatic recommendations. While the recommendations list takes a broad approach and includes a wide variety of areas for potential programmatic impact, it is not the Task Force's intent to recommend using ARP funds in all of these areas.

The Task Force strongly recommends ultimately funding a limited number of highly-impactful programs that can produce profound results, rather than thinly spreading resources among minimally-effective, un-scalable programs.

To this end, rather than define specific projects, programs or service providers and attempt to predetermine the use and recipients of the funding, the priorities identified are instead presented as a lens recommended by the Task Force for evaluating potential programs and projects. They are designed to be inclusive and stimulate entrepreneurial concept creation from municipal departments and the wider community.

These Impact Area recommendations (summarized in the table on the following page) range from supporting mental and emotional health, increasing access to and affordability of quality, holistic childcare options, and supporting real estate investments that advance community revitalization goals, to providing flexible financial assistance and technical assistance/access to information for a diverse array of small business needs, and increasing awareness

of/equitable access to existing hospitality, arts and cultural destinations for residents of all ages. Each of these Impact Area recommendations is supported by programmatic recommendations that could directly address the challenges and inequities identified in the Needs Assessment.

Because the depth and breadth of the community's need and recommendations outlined here clearly cannot be filled by the available ARP resources, the Task Force urges that all local stakeholders explore how their organizations and community groups can take action in these impact areas and help Albany not only recover, but thrive.

To help provide an evaluation framework for ultimate funding decision-makers, the Task Force also developed the eight Guiding Principles as universal ideals for all ARP funding proposals.

The first four - equity, collaboration, sustainability and impact - are seen as essential, and are recommended to be present in any forthcoming program guidelines, application questionnaires or screening tools/ evaluation rubrics developed by the City or its agents. In order to be considered for ARP funds, proposals should strive to reflect these principles.

The final four - leverage, innovation, engagement, and scale - are also critical, foundational themes that should be prioritized by decision-makers. The Task Force recommends that these themes be required to be addressed by funding applicants and sub-recipients and evaluated by decision-makers on how strongly responsive to each area the proposed program or project is.

The Task Force also recommended four Implementation principles – Capacity, Engagement, Flexibility and Compliance to ensure that the ARP program is managed efficiently and operations are streamlined and supported.

These "touchstone" guiding and implementation principles are supplemented with specific recommendations for operational priorities, capacity-building, monitoring, measurement and compliance.

Finally, the Report includes a suggested timeline for implementation and reporting in which the Task Force commits to reviewing progress and providing additional assistance where applicable throughout the ARP implementation period.

The Report, therefore, is provided to the City of Albany based on the collective expertise of the 41 community leaders comprising the Task Force and the hundreds of community members that weighed in throughout the process. The Task Force encourages everyone within the Albany community to determine how they can take part in Albany's recovery and collaborate to make sustainable and equitable impact in the Capital City.

* Indicates that the recommendation was specifically listed among program examples in AARP fact sheets and other guidance. Lack of designation in this column does not mean that a recommendation is not responsive to COVID-19 impacts

Recommendations Summary

	Recommendation	Cross-sector	Direct C-19 Response*	Need level	Top Priority	Urgent Need	
Public Health	Promote access to healthcare for traditionally underserved individuals		C	+++	*	!	
	Support mental and emotional health		C	++	*	!	
	Retain, develop, and attract a qualified and diverse workforce			*	!	++	C X
	Support universal access to healthy food and nutrition education				!	+	
	Mitigate public health risk for essential workers					+	C
Ed./Wforce/Hum Svc	Expand access to affordable, high-speed broadband access throughout the City of Albany			*	!	+++	C
	Increase awareness of, support navigation of and improve access to available services and financial resources					++	X
	Provide mental health support and address social-emotional impacts of the pandemic				!	++	C X
	Retain/develop/attract a qualified and diverse workforce for emerging/expanding industries and job opportunities			*	!	++	C X
	Create efficiency for or sustainability of existing programs producing impactful results			*	!	+++	
Housing/Transp/Comm. Revitaliz.	Increase access to and affordability of quality, holistic childcare options			*	!	++	C X
	Invest in implementation of neighborhood revitalization strategies				!	++	C X
	Target public infrastructure improvements in distressed census tracts and disinvested neighborhoods			*	!	+++	C X
	Encourage use of and spending at local businesses				!	+	
	Retain, develop and attract a qualified and diverse workforce				!		C X
Small Business	Increase awareness of, support navigation of and improve access to available services and financial resources					+	X
	Improve public safety				!	+	
	Support quality, affordable and diverse housing opportunities			*	!	+++	C
	Support local real estate development that advances community revitalization goals			*		+++	C X
	Enhance alternative transportation use and increase accessibility and equity in transportation options			*	!	++	C
Arts/Hosp...	Provide flexible fin. assistance/tech. assistance/access to information for a diverse array of small business needs			*	!	+++	C X
	Support entrepreneurship opportunities/start-up businesses, particularly for individuals unempl. due to pandemic					++	C
	Focus on financial support for businesses with ongoing reopening challenges					+	C
	Retain, develop and attract a qualified and diverse workforce				!	++	C X
	Stabilize inventory costs resulting from supply chain disruption/market gaps					++	C



"The inclination is to spread money around like peanut butter, so that you help out a lot of people who need relief, but nobody really gets all that they need when you do that."

- Steve Adler, City of Austin Mayor
New York Times, July 6, 2021





“

We expect the resources here to really fuel a very strong economic recovery.”

*-Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen,
MSNBC, March 8, 2021*

Background

- **COVID-19 in Albany**
- **ARP Funding Opportunity**
- **Summary of Task Force Activities**

COVID-19 IN ALBANY

The World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, declared the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak a global pandemic, and on March 15, 2020, Governor Andrew Cuomo declared a State of Emergency and put New York “On Pause.” Mayor Sheehan subsequently declared a State of Emergency in the City of Albany on March 15th. From that point on, statewide mandatory business closures and COVID-19 restrictions were rolled out in the following weeks, through the diligent efforts of New York State in an effort to protect New Yorkers and save lives.

Essential City Operations During a Pandemic

Thus, while the City of Albany was facing an unprecedented public health crisis along with the rest of the world, the City faced mandatory density reductions issued by New York State to help control the spread of the coronavirus. As a result, in March of 2020, Mayor Sheehan took steps to reduce the on-site presence of City’s workforce by more than 64% to maintain compliance with the Governor’s directive to reduce the number of employees coming to work by at least 50%. Yet, a pandemic doesn’t prevent water pipes from breaking, apartments from becoming infested, vacant buildings from falling into disrepair, or eliminate the occurrence of any other emergency that cities must respond to on a regular basis in order to protect and promote the health, safety, and wellbeing of their residents.

Despite this necessary reduction in workforce, City leadership recognized the importance of continuing to deliver essential City services throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As many in our community were focused on protecting themselves and their families, our essential workers were called upon to continue the important work they do every day – under greater stress and at even greater risk. The Albany Police Department and Albany Fire Department continued to respond to emergency calls, the Department of General Services continued to collect curbside solid waste and recycling as scheduled, and the Albany Water Department continued to repair water main breaks, protect the City’s reservoirs, and ensure water treatment facilities continue to operate effectively and efficiently, among the many other essential services the City performs on a daily basis.

However, continuing to provide essential services was not without significant challenges and added expense from a city operations perspective, all while suffering from reduced revenues. City departments had to deliver services with less staff, placing a greater strain on the retained employee base.

Essential workers had to be provided with adequate personal protective equipment, work spaces had to be reorganized to enable proper social distancing, work schedules had to be revised to ensure sufficient coverage should an employee contract COVID, additional safety and sanitation protocols like cleaning and disinfection of city vehicles and other equipment or “zero contact inspections” for building and code inspection had to be incorporated into daily work, and the list of city operational adaptations to respond to the needs of the pandemic goes on. These changes combined with the City’s operational losses, which totaled more than \$15.2 million in 2020 alone.

Furthermore, there were some unique, sometimes unanticipated consequences of the pandemic that made city operations more difficult or presented novel challenges.

The Department of Administrative Services brought together a PPE task force dedicated to ensuring our frontline workers could deliver essential city services safely. The Department of Administrative Services also teamed up with the Clerk’s Office and Treasurer’s Office to create a City Hall ambassador program to help make accessing City services safer and easier for both residents and employees. The Cultural Affairs Office had to tackle the challenge of coordinating and orchestrating the City’s first Virtual Tulip Festival ever due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Clerk’s Office continued to ensure our residents could get married, even virtually.

The Human Resources office made sure the City could continue to hire, onboard, and support its most valuable asset – city employees.

The IT department made sure employees had the tools they needed to work remotely and safely.



QUICK FACTS

Municipal Response

Finances

- **\$15.2 million in COVID-related revenue reductions in 2020 alone**
- **Nearly \$1 million in COVID-related expenditure increases in 2020 alone**
- **Detrimental fiscal impacts are forecasted to persist through at least 2024**

Operations

- **Continued to deliver essential City services**
- **Responded to emergency calls for service**
- **Continued to pick up trash and recycling pick-up**
- **Opened spray pads and pools**
- **Held award-winning Summer Youth Employment Program**
- **Provided recreational programming to young people throughout the City**

Health Interventions

- **Together with business and community partners, City quickly geared up to ensure people were fed and had access to masks, hand sanitizer, and other PPE**
- **Held a Community Health Impacts Town Hall with to share information about testing, contact tracing, the disparate health impacts of COVID-19, and preventative measures our residents could take to protect themselves and their families**
- **Worked with State & Local partners to ensure the equitable distribution of vaccines, especially in Albany's historically underserved communities**
- **Mayor Sheehan provided weekly updates on testing, contact tracing, vaccinations, and other resources available to help residents through the pandemic**

The Law Department ensured the continued prosecution of building code violators.

The Common Council held their first-ever virtual public meeting in our City's 334-year history.

And the Payroll office made sure every employee continued to be paid on time, which was no small feat.

These are just a few of the many unprecedented strains to city operations experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic, all of which were managed in tandem with responding to the most critical public health emergency in recent history.

RESPOND. COVID-19 response efforts

The City of Albany's governmental partners were instrumental in the COVID-19 public health response. New York State and Albany County held live, daily briefings regarding the number of new cases, number of hospitalizations, number of recoveries, and sadly, the number of deaths as a result of COVID-19. Further, Albany County helped lead the vaccination response locally by hosting hundreds of community clinics throughout the County, with scores within the City of Albany.

As the outbreak began to take hold, the City of Albany recalibrated to ensure that as vital services continued, the City also filled new needs – helping its most vulnerable residents and those who lost their jobs due to the pandemic.

Together with business and community partners, the City quickly geared up to ensure people were fed and had access to masks, hand sanitizer, and other PPE.

The City of Albany also took the time to ensure it was educating its residents.

Mayor Sheehan held a Community Health Impacts Town Hall with Albany County Department of Health Commissioner Dr. Liza Whalen, Chief City Auditor Dr. Dorcey Applyrs, Black Nurses Coalition Director Dr. Brenda Robinson, and St. Peter's Chief of Emergency Medicine Dr. Frank Dimase to share information about testing, contact tracing, the disparate health impacts of COVID-19, and preventative measures residents could take to protect themselves and their families.

Mayor Sheehan provided weekly video updates on testing, contact tracing, vaccinations, and other resources available to help residents through the pandemic, and the City also worked closely with its higher education partners to ensure students, and the entire City, were masking up to help prevent a second shutdown.

The City of Albany worked diligently to award more than a half-million dollars in CDBG funding to help Albany residents and businesses recover from the impacts of COVID-19.

This includes \$1 million for small business assistance, \$250,000 for rent and mortgage payment assistance, \$130,000 for health resources and broadband access, and \$100,000 for summer camps and day care programming to a variety of organizations including the Black Nurses Coalition, South End Children's Cafe, Equinox, Salvation Army, South End Neighborhood Tutors, and Albany PAL.

And Mayor Sheehan also created two working groups – one focused on aiding our business community, and one focused on the needs of our residents.

Local and regional nonprofit organizations also sprung to action when the impacts of the pandemic necessitated critical services and deliveries to the Region's at-risk and in-need individuals. As of April 21, just over a year since the pandemic began, local 501(c)3 nonprofit Feed Albany has provided over 500,000 meals to at-risk and in-need individuals in Albany, New York and the Greater Capital Region with access to prepared & packaged meal solutions by utilizing commercial kitchens, unemployed restaurant workers, volunteers and the use of donated vehicles to produce, package and distribute prepared meal solutions.

Meanwhile, the SupportsmAlbany collaborative, a community partnership of representatives from more than a dozen small business partnership organizations such as the Capital Region Chamber, the Small Business Development Center, Capitalize Albany Corporation and Albany's three Business Improvement Districts, have been working together to coordinate efforts to help small businesses through direct financial assistance, and disseminate information during this rapidly-evolving situation.

While the State and County handled the public health emergency response, the City of Albany continued to identify and implement proactive measures to ensure that residents could access both new and existing resources available in the community throughout the pandemic. Springing immediately into action at the onset of the pandemic locally, the City published its COVID-19 Resource Guide. The Resource Guide supports Albany's residents, businesses, and employees by providing information about employment, transportation, restaurants, child-care, health, and human services, among others. Specifically, where the City's children and seniors could access meals, how to apply for unemployment insurance or small business assistance, and ways to connect with available volunteer opportunities, among other critical services.

For those members of the community who do not have access to the internet, City leadership encouraged individuals to dial 2-1-1, where a member of the United Way of the Greater Capital Region's information referral service assisted callers and connected them with this vital information.

In addition to providing critical information on available resources and services to residents, City leadership played an active role in advocating for the needs of City residents at the State and Federal level, and implementing local policies and programming to support small businesses and local organizations. Mayor Sheehan was an active member of the Capital Region Control Room, which was set up along with nine other Regional Control Rooms across the state to monitor regional metrics such as hospitalization rate, death rate, and the number of new hospitalizations during the reopening process.

City leadership also repeatedly called on the Federal Gov-

Albany County Helps Lead Response

- Albany County Executive Daniel P. McCoy and Albany County Health Commissioner Dr. Elizabeth F. Whalen, MD, MPH, held daily COVID-19 briefings to provide residents with clear, concise information about infections, testing, contact tracing, PPE, vaccines, and other vital information throughout the pandemic
- County Executive McCoy and Dr. Whalen also helped lead the County-wide vaccination effort, hosting hundreds of vaccination sites in cities and towns across Albany County to ensure residents were vaccinated as quickly as possible with a focus on equitably distributing vaccines in our historically underserved communities

ernment to make more test kits available in the City and Region, advocated for more PPE and for federal funding to help our community recover once the outbreak is controlled.

From a small business support perspective, City leadership initiated the aforementioned SupportSmAlbany initiative and launched the flexible, Small Business Adaptation Program grant through Capitalize Albany; suspended metered parking and created new, free curbside pick-up spots through a partnership with the Albany Parking Authority (APA) to facilitate customer pick-up of deliveries from local eateries and other retail establishments; and enhanced the existing café permit through another partnership with APA to enable expanded outdoor seating areas and cafes for local small businesses, among numerous other small business support initiatives.

STABILIZE. Status of COVID-19 Infections and Vaccinations
Thanks to the diligent response efforts implemented



throughout New York State and though local partners, the City appears to be emerging out of the critical phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, as active cases of COVID-19 continue to decline and vaccination rates continue to rise. From its peak in January 2021 at 337 daily cases of COVID-19 infection,¹ as of July 12, 2021, Albany County has begun averaging 23 daily positive cases. There are 16 people under mandatory quarantine. There have been 24,452 confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Albany County to date, which is an increase of 15 new positive cases since July 10. 65.5% of Albany County's population has received at least the first dose of a vaccination, while 61% of the population has been fully vaccinated.²

While federal, state and local government leaders are staying vigilant in their vaccination efforts and keeping a close eye on any concerning upticks in infection rates, the City of Albany and all of New York State has officially had all COVID-19 restrictions lifted as of June 15, 2021 when New York State hit the threshold of 70 percent of eligible New Yorkers being vaccinated. Albany City Hall and other city buildings have been reopened to the public. To protect the health and safety of city residents and employees, residents are encouraged to continue accessing services online and by phone, when possible. Unvaccinated individuals continue to be responsible for wearing masks, in accordance with federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) guidance.

STRATEGIZE. Rebuilding

As the urgent health and safety response needs required by the COVID-19 pandemic have eased within the City of Albany, the true economic impact of the pandemic remains to be seen. The City is aware of the immediate impacts: all non-essential businesses were closed and/or had significant capacity reductions for several months during 2020, leading to significant job losses and millions unemployed across New York State. As of May 2021, 19,000 are still unemployed in the Albany-Schenectady-Troy Metropolitan Statistical Area,³ and rent delinquency remains a significant issue for both residential and commercial renters and property owners.

These negative impacts have the potential for devastating ripple effects that can inhibit the full recovery of the City of Albany for years. That is why the American Rescue Plan funding is of critical importance, along with the development of a targeted strategy for responding to the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the City.

American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) Funding Opportunity

The \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) was signed into law by President Biden on March 11, 2021 and

includes a \$350 billion Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Fund to provide direct relief to states and local governments. Funding allocated through this program is flexibly designed to accomplish the following objectives:

- Support urgent COVID-19 response efforts to continue to decrease spread of the virus and bring the pandemic under control;
- Replace lost public sector revenue to strengthen support for vital public services and help retain jobs;
- Support immediate economic stabilization for households and businesses; and,
- Address systemic public health and economic challenges that have contributed to the unequal impact of the pandemic on certain populations.

The Department of Treasury's Interim Final Rule, published on May 10, 2021, further clarifies the eligibility of these funds for the following uses:

- To respond to the public health emergency or its negative impacts, including assistance to households, small businesses, and nonprofits, or aid to impacted industries such as tourism, travel, and hospitality;
- To respond to workers performing essential work during the COVID-19 public health emergency by providing premium pay to eligible workers;
- To provide government services to the extent of the reduction in public sector revenue due to the COVID-19 public health emergency; and
- To make necessary investments in water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure.

Specifically cited in the Interim Final Rule is a non-exclusive list of programs/services for which funding can be used. The Interim Final Rule also provides flexibility for state, local, and Tribal governments to use ARP funds for programs or services not specifically identified in this list; however, all expenditures must respond to the COVID-19 health emergency or its negative impacts:

"Assessing whether a program or service "responds to" the COVID-19 public health emergency requires the recipient to, first, identify a need or negative impact of the COVID-19 public health emergency and, second, identify how the program, service, or other intervention addresses the identified need or impact.

While the COVID-19 public health emergency affected many aspects of American life, eligible uses under this category must be in response to the disease itself or the harmful consequences of the economic disruptions resulting from or exacerbated by the COVID-19 public health emergency." – U.S. Department of Treasury

Funding will be allocated to states, local and tribal govern-

1 [Albany County DOH COVID-19 Dashboard](#)

2 [News 10 Albany COVID and Vaccine Update](#)

3 [NYS DOL Economic Data](#)

ments, metropolitan cities, and territories as per a formula set forth within ARP and authorized by Congress. For local governments, the funds shall be distributed in two payments: 50% of each recipient's allocation beginning in May 2021, and 50% twelve months later.

Upon distribution, direct recipients shall prepare, publish, and provide to the U.S. Dept. of Treasury reports as follows:

- *Interim Report*
 - Expenditures at summary level
 - Covering the period from distribution through July 31, 2021
 - Due by August 31, 2021
- *Quarterly Project and Expenditure Reports (QPER)*
 - Financial data
 - Information on contracts and subawards over \$50,000
 - Types of projects funded
 - Other information regarding utilization
 - Due 30 days following the calendar quarter
 - The first QPER is due by October 31, 2021, and dates back to the date of disbursement.
 - Subsequent QPERs will cover one calendar quarter and must be submitted within 30 days after the end of each calendar quarter

Summary of Task Force Activities

The 41 members of this Task Force were asked at the beginning of the process to represent a cross-section of the community and ensure that they brought not only their individual voice and perspectives to the table, but those of the organizations they represent, and their constituents.

Following the commencement of the Task Force on April 23, 2021, Task Force members engaged in an extensive process to collect, disseminate, analyze, and synthesize information and feedback to help formulate thoughtful and comprehensive recommendations regarding COVID-19 recovery to the City of Albany and the Common Council.

To streamline and expedite the development of this advisory report and subsequent ARP funding utilization and project/program implementation, all Task Force activities took place over an aggressive timeline of April through July 2021. With the final advisory report identified as the ultimate end goal for this three-month period, the Task Force activities were broken into four phases of report development: 1) Kickoff; 2) Needs Assessment; 3) Draft Recommendations; and 4) Final Recommendations.

Kickoff

The initial phase was the Kickoff Phase – Task Force members were named, the kickoff meeting was held, and members were introduced to each other, as well as to the goals and objectives of the Task Force. Following the kickoff meeting, the City immediately launched a [COVID](#)

QUICK FACTS

Eligibility Considerations for American Rescue Plan Funding

- **\$80.7 million total funding to City of Albany**
- **Albany County, The City of Albany School District and the Capital District Transportation Authority have received an additional \$94.5+ million**
- **Must be used for eligible activities that:**
 - Support urgent COVID-19 response efforts to continue to decrease spread of the virus and bring the pandemic under control;
 - Replace lost public sector revenue to strengthen support for vital public services and help retain jobs;
 - Support immediate economic stabilization for households and businesses; and,
 - Address systemic public health and economic challenges that have contributed to the unequal impact of the pandemic on certain populations.
- **Must be obligated (orders placed/contracts entered into/sub-awards made) by December 31, 2024**
- **Any funds not obligated by the end of 2024 must be repaid**
- **The period of performance is between March 3, 2021 and December 31, 2026. All expenditures must be for activities completed within this window**
- **Payments will be subject to the provisions of the Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards**
- **Final Federal guidelines and requirements are anticipated later in 2021**



[Recovery Task Force website](#). The website has served as the main headquarters for all Task Force information, including a full list of all Task Force members, information on their background, as well as all Task Force meeting materials, remote access to live public meetings, and links to any open public surveys.

Needs Assessment

To transition into the Needs Assessment phase of the Task Force, the COVID Recovery Task Force was then divided

TASK FORCE'S CHARGE

- Obtain a shared understanding of how the American Rescue Plan can help the City of Albany
- Identify the needs of the City of Albany residents, businesses, and non-profit organizations that cannot be covered by other funding sources
- Equitably and strategically maximize resources available to our residents, businesses, and community organizations to restart Albany and build back better
- Engage every sector of the City of Albany to ensure we get resources where they are needed to restart Albany, re-open businesses, prevent evictions, and strengthen our not-for-profit organizations

into five Working Groups, each comprised of four or more Task Force members who are specialists in the area. The five Working Groups were developed to align with the eligible uses outlined by the ARP and categorized as follows:

- Assistance to Workers and Families – Education/Workforce/Human Services
- Assistance to Workers and Families – Housing/Transportation/Community Revitalization
- Small Business Support
- Supporting the Public Health Response
- Tourism/Travel/Hospitality/Arts Recovery

These five Working Groups were set up to directly align with the U.S. Treasury Guidance set forth in the Interim Final Rule published on May 10, 2021 and to allow for members to dive deeper into sector-specific discussions and tasks necessary to identify relevant priority needs and recommendations.

Task Force members were asked to serve as experts in their specific industry sectors and were essential members of their assigned Working Groups, but their input was invaluable and encouraged across all Working Groups.

Elected officials and the Co-Chairs served at-large, rather than on any specific Working Group, to ensure that Working Group findings were woven together where necessary to achieve the most effective recommendations.

The Task Force conducted two rounds of Working Group sessions - Round 1 – Needs Assessment and Round 2 – Recommendations – for each working group, totaling 10 working sessions completed throughout Summer 2021. Their charge was to develop a holistic understanding of the broad needs of the community, with particular attention to challenges and inequities that were created or exacerbated as a result of the pandemic.

The first round of Working Group sessions were conducted over a period of two days, with approximately 30 Task Force Members participating overall. Each session was led by a dedicated facilitator that guided the Working Group through a thoughtful discussion with five previously-generated questions provided as prompts to engage the group regarding pre-COVID strengths, challenges, inequities, changes/impacts due to COVID, and thoughts on what would be needed for inclusive and equitable recovery in their sectors within the City of Albany. Needs identified during this first round of Working Group discussions, as well as previous Task Force meetings, then informed the creation of a preliminary needs assessment.

The preliminary Needs Assessment, informed by the input of Task Force members, then served as the basis for the creation of the first public survey. While this survey was distributed widely and live on website, Task Force members were tasked with having parallel conversations/executing alternative methods within the communities they serve where the survey may not be the most effective format.

This first public survey, launched on June 11, 2021, had nearly 450 respondents overall. In large part, the results of the public survey were nearly identical to that of the Task Force members preliminary needs assessment and reinforced the findings of the Task Force. At the July 1st Task Force meeting, the Task Force members were provided the results of the first public survey, and the Task Force discussed the public's feedback on the preliminary needs assessment and where the Task Force's findings were validated or should be amended or added to based on the survey results and engagement with Task Force members. The Needs Assessment section of this report (page 15) will elaborate further on specific findings and any discrepancies in the needs identified.

Draft Recommendations

With the completion of the Needs Assessment phase, the Task Force then transitioned into the Draft Recommendations phase, commencing with a second round of Working Group sessions. The Task Force was charged with developing holistic, broad recommendations that could directly

address the challenges and inequities identified in the Needs Assessment, and prioritizing them based on their impact, urgency and depth of unmet financial need.

Like the previous round of Working Group sessions, the second round was also conducted over a period of two days, with more than 30 Task Force members participating overall. These sessions were also led by a dedicated facilitator, who took the group through three exercises.

These exercises were designed to efficiently and effectively enable the Task Force to arrive at consensus on the following: 1) any additions/deletions/edits to the Impact Areas or Programmatic Examples; 2) identify the top 3 targeted Impact Areas that address the community's needs within the Working Group; 3) identify the impact areas that have the most immediate need (most urgent to least urgent); and 4) identify the Impact Areas to be prioritized for resource allocation. Priority recommendations identified during this second round of Working Group discussions, as well as previous Task Force meetings, then informed the creation of draft recommendations.

These draft recommendations informed by the input of Task Force members were then the basis for the creation of the second public survey. Distribution of the second survey followed a similar dissemination as the first, with an added emphasis on specialized Task Force member engagement of the communities they serve in which surveys may not be the most effective format. The second public survey, launched on July 6, 2021, had more than 1,200 respondents overall. The recommendations section of this report (page 37) will elaborate further on specific findings and any discrepancies in needs identified.

The two surveys provided an efficient opportunity to gather widespread feedback, and were implemented as part of this initiative to serve as check-points along the way. The survey responses were intended to complement the input provided by the 41 community leaders comprising the Task Force. They provided an opportunity to vet the needs and priorities identified by the Task Force and to validate, amend, and add to the preliminary findings.

Both surveys were provided online, with paper copies made available to Task Force members to share. A Spanish language version of each survey was provided, with additional translation options to be made available upon request.

In an effort to engage communities that traditionally do not respond to surveys, the Task Force members advocated for, and were encouraged to use, as many methods/ opportunities as possible to hear from their constituents on these issues. This direct outreach encompassed more than 60 one-on-one meetings between Task Force members and the individuals, businesses or community groups they serve.

All of this was done with the objective to obtain as much direct feedback as possible to assist in finalizing this advisory report.

Final Recommendations

With all prior Task Force input and all public survey data collected and analyzed, the Needs Assessment and Recommendations sections reviewed, the Task Force then entered into the Final Recommendations phase at the July 22nd Task Force meeting.

At this meeting, the Task Force members were provided the survey results for the second public survey, and the Task Force discussed the public's findings on the priority recommendations. Task Force members were also provided refreshers on the previous phases and discussed "touchstone" principles – foundational guiding and implementation principles the Task Force agreed should serve to serve as ideal standards for program evaluation and management of the initiative.



I believe with every fiber in my body, that this is our time. Our time to escape the oppression of a deadly virus and make our schools and workplaces safe for return... Our time to help small businesses and create new jobs for New Yorkers hit hard by the pandemic. This is our time to look forward with a powerful sense of optimism and determination."

- NYS Governor Kathy Hochul

August 24, 2021

Taking the feedback from the final Task Force meeting, the Initiative Coordinators have prepared this final advisory report on behalf of the Task Force. While the publication of this report concludes the requested City of Albany COVID Recovery Task Force activities, the Task Force recommends convening biannually through 2024 to review the City's progress on ARP implementation and serve as a resource for leveraging results beyond the initiatives ultimately funded by American Rescue Plan.





“

We need to ensure that we're equitably and strategically maximizing the resources that are available.”

*-Mayor Kathy Sheehan,
Times Union, March 12, 2021*

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- **Overview & Context**
- **Impact Areas Summaries**
- **Impact Areas Challenges & Inequities**

Needs Assessment Overview

Context

The first round of Working Group sessions engaged Task Force members in a thoughtful discussion regarding pre-COVID strengths, challenges, inequities, changes/impacts due to COVID, and what would be needed for inclusive and equitable recovery in their sectors within the City of Albany. Needs identified during this first round of Working Group discussions, as well as previous Task Force meetings, then informed the creation of a preliminary Needs Assessment.

A public survey was then used to obtain the public's feedback on the preliminary needs assessment and identify where the Task Force's findings were validated or should be amended or added to based on the survey results and engagement with Task Force members. The preliminary Needs Assessment was then amended as necessary, following Task Force discussion of the public survey results, which has resulted in the final Needs Assessment contained in the following pages. Specific notes from the Working Groups are available in the Appendix.

The final Needs Assessment is arranged by sector in the pages that follow, and each sector includes an overview of the needs assessment, as well as a detailed breakdown of the challenges and inequities identified. These needs assessments include information on industry trends, local/state/federal data, and/or relevant background obtained from the Task Force members to support the needs identified by Task Force members. To ensure that the needs assessment is truly responsive to identified community needs, the final Needs Assessment contained in this report is reflective of both Task Force member prioritization and the prioritization of needs identified by the public.

While ARP funding is required to be used to "respond to the negative impact of the COVID-19 public health emergency", it is important to note that the Task Force's directive was to take a holistic approach to needs assessment – to identify all real-time needs across each of the five sectors, irrespective of the funding levels required to meet the need or if the need could be connected to a COVID-19 impact. This meant that the Needs Assessment that follows is not limited by the bounds of an anticipated

available funding amount or to only those needs which appear to directly respond to COVID-19 impacts.

Therefore, it will be the ultimate responsibility of the Mayor and Common Council to identify the available funding for this recovery effort, allocate budgets for specific sectors, and then work with the administrative team to select projects/programs that clearly respond to the negative impact of the COVID-19 public health emergency.

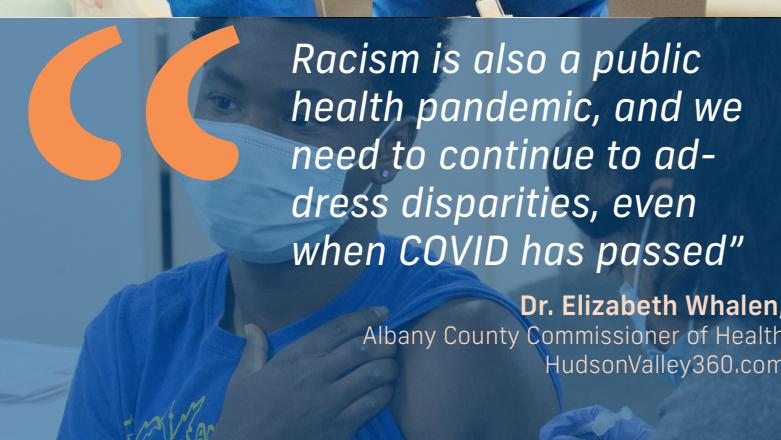
With respect to the decision-making process, it is further noted that a number of needs identified were highlighted consistently across working group categories as universal or cross-sector needs. These needs have been determined by the Task Force to have the potential for significant impact on the community, as they influence the sustainability, strength and success of multiple sectors, and should have the utmost consideration in any evaluation process.

ELIGIBLE USES

Impact Areas

- **Supporting the Public Health Response**
- **Assistance to Workers and Families – *Education/Workforce/Human Services***
- **Assistance to Workers and Families – *Housing/Transportation/Community Revitalization***
- **Small Business Support**
- **Travel, Tourism, Hospitality & Arts Recovery**





NEEDS ASSESSMENT: Supporting the Public Health Response

Supporting the Public Health Response

Overview Summary of Impacts of COVID-19

While the public health response to fighting the COVID-19 pandemic created new meaningful partnerships between organizations, raised awareness and investment in public health to a level not seen in generations and provided new opportunities to explore innovative health care solutions such as tele-health, it also highlighted a number of inherent weaknesses, particularly when viewed through an equity lens.

The pandemic disproportionately disrupted under-served communities and populations who have traditionally relied on in-person community-based services, such as communities of color, low-income communities, immigrants and homeless. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that by early August 2020, racial and ethnic minorities (24% of the general U.S. population) sustained about 61% of all COVID-19 infections and accounted for 50% of all COVID deaths. A study completed by Georgetown's Health Policy Institute found that higher proportions of minorities compared to Whites do not have a usual source of (health) care and do not have health insurance, contributing to these outcomes.¹

In terms of demographics, over 45% of the City of Albany is non-White, with a Black population of 28.9% and nearly 23% of households in the City live below the poverty line, which is nearly double compared to Albany County and State.² In addition, Black non-Hispanic residents in the region had 5.4x the percent of families below the poverty line when compared to White non-Hispanic residents.³ As it relates to COVID-19, the Black age-adjusted death rate from COVID-19 per 100,000 people in Albany County was over 40% higher than the White population.⁴

This crisis highlighted the need for enhanced service delivery to under-served communities as well as an exploration into the some of the underlying public health causes. One key finding is the need for trusted community leaders to be involved in the public health messaging in their communities.

Whether it's rolling out information on CDC guidelines or raising awareness about vaccines, as evidenced by the successes with the COVID-19 mobile testing, partnering with community leaders and organizations helps alleviate public distrust.

Public health messaging continues to be an important issue as Black people make up 13% of the population in Albany County, however only 9.7% have received at least one dose, compared to White people who make up nearly 78% of the eligible vaccine population and have one-dose vaccination rate of 80%.⁵ Community leaders highlighted

1 [Georgetown Health - Cultural Competence in Health Care](#)

2 American Community Survey 2015-19

3 Healthy Capital District 2019

4 NYS DOH - COVID-19 Fatality Data

5 NYS DOH - Vaccine Demographics

the need for information to be transmitted via multiple diverse channels and with consultation from diverse representatives to broaden reach and accessibility of the information. Sources of information that community members rely on for COVID-19 updates may vary by race/ethnicity. Black or African American respondents are more likely to get COVID-19 updates from television and less likely to get them from social media.⁶

In addition, ensuring that that available information and resources are accessible in multiple languages, particularly Spanish, would aid local efforts in building that trust. In the City of Albany, 17% of households have a language other than English spoken at home, which is higher than Albany County, which is 13% overall.⁷ Last, there is an ongoing need to ensure that critical social services continue to be funded – whether it is aiding homeless vaccine distribution, increasing mental health services or ensuring access to healthy food options, providing the resources to local partners that are doing this work was seen as a key part of the recovery.

The Working Group, which was represented by a cross-section of government, non-profit and health care professionals identified several needs resulting from the impacts of COVID-19.

Challenges and Inequities

Access to trusted and culturally sensitive community health advocates and coordinators

- Community-based organizations had to find new ways of connecting with their constituents, many of whom were not able to participate remotely due to access
- Need identified to disseminate information and services in multiple languages, particularly Spanish
- Need to provide understandable and culturally appropriate messages by trusted voices to deliver timely and accurate messages was encouraged to build trust with government and the local healthcare system
- Nationally, the Georgetown study finds that "Spanish-speaking Latinos are significantly less likely than Whites to visit a physician or mental health provider, or receive preventive care, such as a mammography exam or influenza vaccination"⁸
- As reported by the Georgetown study, the American Journal of Public Health finds "African Americans and other ethnic minorities report less partnership with physicians, less participation in medical decisions, and lower levels of satisfaction with care. The quality of patient-physician interactions is lower among non-White patients, particularly Latinos and Asian Americans. Lower quality patient-physician interactions are associated with lower overall satisfaction with health care"⁹

6 City of Albany Audit and Control - Final Report on the City of Albany's COVID-19 Response Among Communities of Color.

7 American Community Survey 2015-19

8 [Georgetown Health - Cultural Competence in Health Care](#)

9 [American Journal of Public Health - Patient-physician realtionships and racial disparities in the quality of healthcare](#)



Health disparities in communities of color and low-income communities

- Racial disparities identified in the number of positive COVID diagnoses, hospitalization rates, outcomes and vaccinations highlight not only information barriers during the pandemic, but the need for additional funding to address the social determinants of health
- Local access to pharmacies and places to get supplies and healthy foods in low-income communities and communities of color is limited

Insufficient support for mental health issues

- Information on mental health programs offered were available online during the pandemic, however access to those programs was an issue identified
- Need for additional mental health programs, particularly with multiple languages was identified

Insufficient staffing in healthcare workforce, particularly in clinical nursing and entry-level employment

- Need to provide additional staff training and specialists for mental health was identified
- Need to create pipeline of local and diverse talent to fill healthcare jobs was identified

Low diversity representation across all levels in health care professions

- Increased diversity in the health care profession is seen as aiding efforts to increase trust with communities of color and low-income communities
- Results of a national George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health found severe underrepresentation of Black, Latino and Native American people in the health care workforce and resulting disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on minority communities¹⁰
- The same study also, distressingly, found that the representation of new Black students in the medical profession was actually less than currently in practice, which will result in an even less diverse sector in the future and continued disproportionate burden on future diseases in communities of color¹¹

Access to bilingual medical and mental health specialists and staff

- Challenges were identified in receiving healthcare information, both written and oral in other languages, particularly Spanish, during the pandemic
- Increasing diverse voices in the healthcare industry is seen as aiding efforts to increase trust in under-served communities

Low trust in government and institutions creating difficulties reaching minority communities about health issues

- The pandemic forced many people who had previously

¹⁰ [George Washington University - New Study Finds Severe Lack of Diversity in Health Care](#)

¹¹ *ibid*

received community-based services to seek help directly from government and healthcare institutions they have not engaged with previously, in part due to low trust

- Need was identified for government to better engage with local partners and trusted voices on strategies and messaging to increase transparency and access to information about health issues in under-served communities

Inequities in the public health risk between essential and remote workers

- Entry-level frontline occupations are well represented by immigrants and racial and ethnic minorities, jobs that were not able to be remote. Need identified to ensure that workers and their families are protected

Lack of universal access to healthy food

- The pandemic created job losses and economic hardships, exacerbating the need for access to local healthy food as evidenced by an increasing need for entitlement benefits
- Public transportation to grocery stores during the pandemic was difficult, highlighting a need for local food access
- A 2021 study from Capital Roots found "Healthy food access can be increased by supporting healthy food distribution to existing retail food outlets in the majority of the Capital District" including within Albany, and therefore "interventions should support small independent retail businesses already established in neighborhoods to be able to better access financing and regional food distribution"¹²

Ability to reach traditionally underserved individuals

- Many service providers had traditionally relied on in-person communication to reach underserved populations, which was challenging during COVID-19
- Need identified to provide more resources/funding/support for those organizations on the frontlines to increase access to services

Access to health care for people experiencing homelessness

- Epidemiologists at UCLA found nationally that of patients contracting COVID-19, individuals experiencing homelessness were 30% more likely to die¹³
- Lack of housing contributes to poor physical and mental health outcomes and poses unique contact and engagement challenges like frequently changing addresses and phone numbers and unreliable access to the internet
- Resources limited for supportive housing and for non-profits that increase access to housing, shelters, education, and work-force training
- Supportive services clustered in areas with high levels of other services and needs, limiting pathways to stability
- Additional funding needed to homeless vaccination efforts

¹² [Capital Roots - Greater Capital Region Food System Assessment](#)

¹³ [NPR - Vaccinating Homeless Patients Against COVID-19](#)

MODEL PROJECTS/PROGRAMS



Think Cultural Health U.S. Department of Health & Human Services

Cultural and linguistic competency is recognized as an important strategy for improving the quality of care provided to clients from diverse backgrounds. The goal of [this e-learning program](#) is to help behavioral health professionals increase their cultural and linguistic competency.

After completing this continuing medical education (CME) credit-bearing continuing education activity, participants will be able to:

- Describe how culture, cultural identity, and intersectionality are related to behavioral health and behavioral health care.
- Describe the principles of cultural competency and cultural humility.
- Discuss how our bias, power, and privilege can affect the therapeutic relationship.
- Discuss ways to learn more about a client's cultural identity.
- Describe how stereotypes and microaggressions can affect the therapeutic relationship.
- Explain how culture and stigma can influence help-seeking behaviors.
- Describe how communication styles can differ across cultures.
- Identify strategies to reduce bias during assessment and diagnosis.
- Explain how to elicit a client's explanatory model.

Feed Albany Food Distribution

[Feed Albany](#) is a 501(c)3 and NYS registered charity which provides at-risk and in-need individuals in Albany, New York and the Greater Capital Region with access to prepared & packaged meal solutions by utilizing commercial kitchens, unemployed restaurant workers, volunteers and the use of donated vehicles to produce, package and distribute prepared meal solutions.

Feed Albany works closely with Albany County, the City of Albany, The Food Pantries, The Regional Food Bank, the United Way, the Albany County Sheriff and various other local organizations and service providers to identify those at-risk and in-need and through our resources & partnerships, to facilitate delivery of both prepared meals and food items to these individuals and organizations.

#ReachOutSUNY Expansion of mental health services

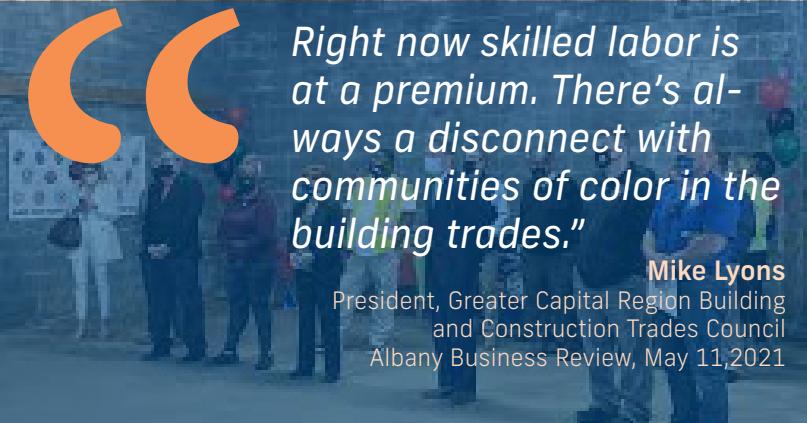
As part of this new plan, [SUNY is partnering with Thriving Campus](#) to provide every student from SUNY's colleges and universities with access to a network of more than 6,000 licensed mental health service providers. The mobile-friendly app breaks down a number of crucial, often overlooked barriers that students frequently encounter in the process of reaching out for help.

By streamlining and simplifying what can be a stressful and overwhelming process, and building synergy with local mental health providers, more students will be seamlessly connected with the specific help they need, when they need it.

SUNY Downstate Health Sciences University will also join SUNY Upstate Medical University as a hub for tele-counseling for SUNY students. SUNY will also expand a peer-to-peer assistance hotline operated by the University at Albany to all students across the entire SUNY system.

SUNY also launched #ReachOutSUNY, a public awareness campaign designed to shatter the stigma associated with mental health struggles and asking for help, while educating students about available services. The campaign will also encourage more faculty, staff, and students to take the free online crisis training program Question, Persuade, and Refer (QPR) that teaches individuals how to recognize someone who may be in emotional distress.





NEEDS ASSESSMENT: Education Workforce & Human Services

Education, Workforce & Human Services

Overview Summary of Impacts of COVID-19

The pandemic and subsequent shifts in daily and professional life, presented this Working Group's organizations with some novel challenges. Simultaneously, other existing challenges and inequities were further exacerbated. Vulnerable portions of the local population were particularly affected by the pandemic.

According to the Albany County Department of Social Services, there was a 47% increase in the unsheltered homeless population between July 2019 and July 2020. FeedingNYS.org reported that there was a 50% increase in emergency food distribution through the food banks during the summer of 2020, demonstrating the highest demand for emergency food since the Great Depression. In the 12 months prior to the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, Albany County averaged 932 monthly SNAP applications. In the past 14 months (through May 2021) of the COVID pandemic, applications have increased 15.5% (averaging 1,076 applications/month).

The May 2020 Bureau of Labor Statistics Employment Situation Report finds that the human and social services sector was particularly hard hit by unemployment at the onset of the COVID-19 crisis. The report cited 2.5 M jobs lost in education and health services, 1.4 M in health care, and 651,000 in social assistance.

Unemployment levels during the pandemic rose to historic heights, with some sectors experiencing more severe levels than others. For instance, non-profit employment reflected an estimated loss of over 1.6 M jobs from March to June 2020, which represents 13% of all jobs across the sector according to FEMA Region 3 report on the Human & Social Services sector.

Difficulties surrounding access to affordable and reliable childcare also hindered the return to the workforce for some, or the ability to maintain employment for others. By December of 2020, the US Chamber of Commerce Foundation reported that, nation-wide, two out of three working parents have changed their childcare arrangement due to COVID-19, and the majority had yet to find a permanent solution.

The Chamber of Commerce Foundation also reported that 40% of employers in the education industry nationally have seen employees leave the workforce, and 61% of those education employers cite childcare concerns as a contributing factor to that departure. Similarly, 41% of health care employers had seen employees leave the workforce, and more than three-quarters of those employers point to childcare concerns as a contributing factor.

Children, many of whom transitioned to remote learning in 2020, also faced challenges on multiple fronts. Beyond the

social ramifications on children of remote learning, many schools had to continue to provide vital services to students such as meals and counseling. Proficiency in some elementary subjects fell by anywhere from 5% to 10% in the Fall of 2020 compared to the same period in 2019 according to the Brookings Institution.

The lack of consistent, equitable access to sufficient broadband connections, and hardware which have been a vital means of communication with many jobs/services/class-rooms transitioning to remote platforms, have become even more crucial. A May 2021 study from BroadbandNow found that 42 million Americans did not have the option of purchasing broadband internet.

Prior to COVID-19, access to, and enrollment in, services, programs and training had gained momentum. Organizations were able to leverage an overall established strength in community to allow them to engage the population and execute their respective missions. The onset of the pandemic forced this sector to shift engagement, outreach and services to non-traditional means including remote learning and service delivery models. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically affected our medically, socially and economically vulnerable populations through loss of employment, further reductions in access to essential services and an increase in food insecurity.

This Working Group consists of a wide variety of organizations representing vital sectors of society including public/higher education institutions, labor workforce, youth services and community outreach and support groups. Together, the group has identified the following challenges and inequities:

Challenges and Inequities

Insufficient/inaccessible Human Services support/outreach to address traumatic impacts of 2020

- Lack of a coordinated referral process to help funnel those in need of services to the appropriate providers

Access to trusted and culturally sensitive education, workforce and community service advocates and coordinators

- Shortage of case managers and interpreters to counsel and direct people to vital services

Access to services/resources for undocumented community members

- Undocumented population has been disproportionately left out of assistance programs

Access to the internet/broadband (hardware and service)

- The National Telecommunications and Information Administration's most recent annual Internet Use Survey found that Black and Hispanic Americans were 7% less likely, and Asian Americans 4% less likely, to use the internet compared to whites. Additionally, 19%



of broadband non-users cite expense as the primary reason they do not subscribe.

Low diversity in skilled construction trades professions

- Inadequate training/mentorship/apprenticeship programs to meet the Region's current demand
- Difficulty attracting individuals to this sector and retaining those embarking on careers in the trades

Lost connections and confidence between service providers and historically underserved populations

- Need to reengage and rebuild relationships, especially among underserved portions of the population
- Delivering services to those who have disengaged
- Dearth of access to mental health services, employment opportunities and nutrition services for vulnerable parts of the population

Ability to re-start successful pre-pandemic initiatives

- Funding needed for additional marketing/outreach to ensure people are aware that programs have resumed
- Many programs delivering measurable results pre-pandemic have lost staffing or funding or have become over-subscribed due to the pandemic's negative impact

Awareness of and access to available services for newly unemployed or low-income individuals

- McKinsey & Company estimates that 4.3 million jobs may disappear over the next decade in customer service and food service roles compared to before the pandemic
- Loss of jobs in these industries can disproportionately impact communities of color

Insufficient workforce development resources for individuals aged 25+

- A gap exists after the 'post high school years' to access vital training and apprenticeship programs geared towards older individuals

Non-competitive salaries in fields critically in need of staffing, such as childcare and education

- Employment opportunities in this sector's fields curtailed by shortage in training/ programmatic support and an absence of equitable/competitive salary distribution
- The nation's median pay for child care workers is \$12.24, and a national study found that half of child care workers utilize public support systems such as SNAP food aid¹

Academic and social-emotional impacts on children

- About two-thirds of U.S. public-school students are doing at least some of their classes from home, and as of December 2020, at least 11 of the 25 largest districts in the U.S. were still distributing devices or internet to

¹ [Bloomberg - The Latest Pandemic Supply Shock: Childcare Workers](#)

students with of lingering connectivity needs²

- According to an October 2020 Bellwether Education report that was updated in March 2021, an estimated 3 million students nationwide have not received any instruction - in-person or virtual - since the beginning of the pandemic

Shortage of qualified and available workforce to meet employment demand across multiple sectors

- Insufficient access to diverse employment opportunities/industries
- Data from CompTIA, a Downers Grove, Illinois-based information technology trade association, shows tech employment is projected to grow 2.5% in 2021 nationally with Albany, NY region seeing a nearly 50% jump in hiring for tech jobs between 4Q 2020 and 1Q 2021³
- A survey by the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) found that builders' top concern is labor, with 85% expecting future cost and availability problems, up from 13% in 2011⁴

Access to workforce development and training programs

² [USA Today - A year into the pandemic, thousands of students still can't get reliable WiFi for school.](#)

³ [The Business Journals - The battle for tech talent is heating up. Texas isn't the only emerging hotspot.](#)

⁴ [Bloomberg - Finding Workers is Getting Harder for Busy Homebuliders](#)

MODEL PROJECTS/PROGRAMS



to facilitate career advancement or career transitions

- Prior to COVID-19, 56% of occupational transitions by white men were upward, compared to only 43% and 37% for Black and Hispanic women, respectively,⁵ with expectations that trend will continue post-COVID
- In the United States, people without a college degree are 1.3x more likely to need to make transitions compared to those with a college degree, and Black and Hispanic workers are 1.1x more likely to have to transition between occupations than white workers⁶

Limited coordination among service providers to address impacts at scale

- Definite need for cooperation/shared services among industry partners especially entities with similar missions

Access to diverse employment opportunities/industries

- Across the United States, customer service and food service jobs could fall by 4.3 M, while transportation jobs could grow by nearly 800,000 because of the pandemic⁷

⁵[Brookings - New But Narrow Job Pathways for America's Unemployed and Low-Wage Workers](#)

⁶[McKinsey - The Future of Work After COVID-19](#)

⁷ibid

- Regionally, the Center for Economic Growth has identified the Advanced Electronics/Semiconductors, Off-Shore Wind & Clean Energy, Digital Gaming, Biotechnology/Life Sciences, Advanced Materials, Software/Information Technology, Logistics & Distribution, Creative Econom sectors as growth industries in need of targeted workforce development
- Between 2001 and 2020, New York experienced a 4% job increase, lower than the U.S. growth of 9%. Upstate NY further lags this pace, with a 3% job loss in the same period⁸

Insufficient access to affordable, enriching childcare options to allow individuals to return to the workforce

- A Bureau of Labor Statistics analysis shows that the child care workforce is down 15% from pre-pandemic levels to 2Q 2021⁹

Lack of resources for operational activities for service providers

- Inability of service providers to expand/staff up vital programs and services due to diversion of or decrease in operational revenues resulting from the pandemic

⁸EMSI

⁹[Bloomberg - The Latest Pandemic Supply Shock: Childcare Workers](#)

ConnectED NY

Providing broadband & device access

The Schmidt Futures and the Ford Foundation, in partnership with New York State, has created ConnectED NY, an emergency fund to provide approximately 50,000 students in economically disadvantaged school districts with free internet access through June 2022.

Through [ConnectED NY](#), school districts with a high percentage of economically disadvantaged students are eligible for free hotspots and data plans. This provides essential internet access for students to learn, complete homework, and engage in virtual learning.

The BRIDGE Network

Building a more diverse, inclusive & equitable workplace

The [B.R.I.D.G.E. Network](#) is a grassroots initiative launched by Capital Region business professionals to promote and advance inclusion, diversity and equity in the workplace and greater community. B.R.I.D.G.E. understands promoting inclusion, diversity and equity is essential to recognize and further the potential of every individual — regardless of race, gender, age, economic or educational background, sexual orientation, or diverse ability — and to empower our businesses and region to catalyze and accelerate meaningful change.

Multi-Craft Apprenticeship Preparation Program Inc.

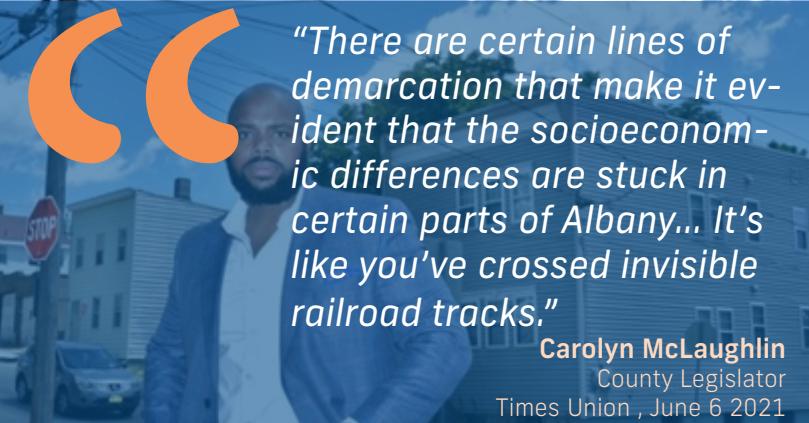
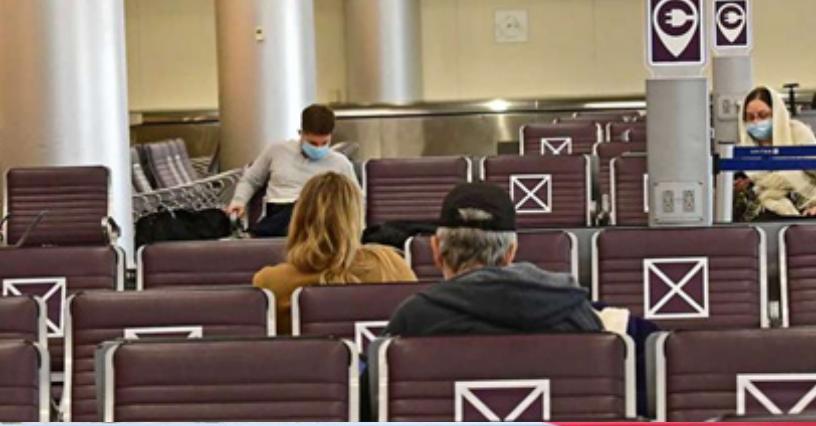
Building trades pre-apprenticeship program

The [Multi-Craft Apprenticeship Preparation Program \(MAPP\)](#) is a New York State not-for-profit organization that provides hands-on training and education in the construction trades to historically under-served populations.

MAPP works in partnership with local trade unions to address the historic lack of diversity within the building trades, while simultaneously providing a solution to the critical shortage of skilled labor.

MAPP began in Rochester NY, where the program has a track record of success in providing training and subsequent employment for 42 people since 2017.





NEEDS ASSESSMENT: *Housing, Transportation & Community Revitalization*

Housing, Transportation & Community Revitalization

Overview Summary of Impacts of COVID-19

Guided by citywide and targeted neighborhood development plans and strategies, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Albany's community revitalization had significant momentum with \$1 billion of private development projects in the pipeline citywide, a focus on improving the City's overall walkability and connectivity, and the steady investment in public infrastructure improvements to support quality of place.

While significant progress has been made, blight, disinvestment and public safety concerns – in particular an escalation of gun violence – were identified as critical needs to be addressed. Pandemic-related restrictions on community policing and anti-recidivism initiatives have hindered local efforts to mitigate violent crime and reversed positive trends. As of July 2021, the shooting incidences have increased to such an extent in Albany and other cities in New York State that the Governor declared the first-in-the-nation gun violence disaster emergency. The City of Albany announced a local state of emergency on July 23 as well, mirroring national data indicating both fatal and non-fatal firearm violence had been increasing in the United States.¹

Beyond safety, the persistence of and level of blight, which visibly contributes to the impression that “a community is uncared-for or that incivilities and crime are tolerated”² has sweeping impacts on the surrounding community – much of which, in Albany, is highly concentrated inequitably in Albany's predominantly Black and Hispanic and Latino neighborhoods.

Significant barriers to private investment limit the City's ability to conquer urban blight, address historic inequities in the built environment and access to green space, and create equitable neighborhood revitalization. Public investment alone is not sufficient to meet all of the existing needs of the City's most distressed neighborhoods, but barriers such as challenging development pro formas with low/un-financeable projected returns inhibit private development interest in distressed neighborhoods. Further, with construction costs escalating and the continuing market uncertainty, there is a growing concern for future negative impacts and increase in real estate development risk.

Albany's communities most impacted by blight and public safety concerns, also were hit the hardest by the hardships caused by the pandemic's significant job losses and workforce capacity restrictions on employers due to government mandates.³ According to surveys conducted in the Capital Region cited by the Times Union, Black residents were most likely to report concern about losing housing due to hardships with meeting financial obligations due to the pandemic.⁴

¹[American Journal of Public Health - Urban Blight Remediation as a Cost-Beneficial Solution to Firearm Violence](#)

²ibid

³[Times Union - COVID's Unequal Toll](#)

⁴ibid

These same communities are in the most jeopardy of being impacted negatively by rental housing market trends being experienced nationally as rent (and therefore mortgage) delinquencies escalate and landlords defer maintenance. As government-mandated eviction moratoriums come to an end in New York State (currently set to expire August 31, 2021),⁵ renters all across the state could face court orders for back rent and eviction proceedings. “We are setting up millions of people for long-term harm and a cycle of economic and housing instability,” said Emily Benfer, chair of the American Bar Association's COVID-19 Task Force Committee on eviction.⁶

While the City of Albany has a comparably low homeownership rate overall, exacerbating these trends, the gap between Black and White homeownership for the Albany-Schenectady-Troy Metropolitan Statistical Area is one of the largest in the nation.⁷ Similarly, with the poverty rate in the City of Albany at more than double the national rate,⁸ taking steps to achieving equitable homeownership is a critical piece to community revitalization identified by the Task Force. A history of racial discrimination in the housing and mortgage industry over many decades continues to be a barrier that increases the wealth gap between Black and White households.⁹ Investment is needed to ensure that communities of color have the support and the assets needed to purchase homes in the City, make homeownership possible and build wealth. Because homeownership inherently carries financial risk, the Task Force also identified the need to protect new homeowners through support for general maintenance and repairs.

In addition to working within neighborhoods, the Task Force cited improving connectivity as vital to neighborhood revitalization. COVID's impact on revenues has reduced the funding available within local entities to expand on walkability/connectivity efforts to improve quality of place and connect neighborhoods to each other and to anchor institutions like schools, employers, and essential services. Also challenging connectivity efforts, CDTA has been experiencing a decline in public transportation ridership and associated revenue, combined with added costs to increase safety and protect riders from COVID-19. The Task Force cited the need to expand mobility options, as well as create more affordable and equitable access to all public transportation.

This Working Group, which was represented by a cross-section of government, public authorities, non-profit and professionals from private commercial enterprises, have highlighted the following challenges and inequities that must be addressed for the City of Albany to truly recover from the pandemic:

⁵[NYS Emergency Eviction & Foreclosure Prevention Act](#)

⁶[LA Times - Rent Debt Worries Grow COVID Strains Tenants](#)

⁷[PolicyGenius.com - Black Homeownership in the U.S.](#)

⁸[Times Union - Albany Divided](#)

⁹[Brookings - Rethinking Homeownership Incentives to Improve Household Financial Security and Shrink the Racial Wealth Gap](#)



Challenges and Inequities

Insufficient resources to address blighted properties and inequities in neighborhood investment

- As of July 2021, there are roughly more than 1,000 vacant buildings within the City of Albany¹⁰
- Despite more than \$696 million invested in Park South, \$189 million in the South End, and more than \$229 million in Arbor Hill and Sheridan Hollow, urban blight is prevalent and distressed neighborhoods require additional investment to make a significant impact
- Demolition funding, without a comprehensive project plan for the site, is not typically available

Insufficient Resources to Address Community Revitalization, Programming and Public Infrastructure needs

- Development pro formas are challenging, and many projects in disinvested neighborhoods require significant public investment to bring to fruition
- With COVID causing reductions in revenue for many local organizations, less funding is available for community programming and creating equitable access

Impact of work from home/hybrid schedules on the City's restaurants and retailers

- Accenture reports that 83% of more than 9,000 workers surveyed prefer a hybrid model (with remote work for at least 25% of the time)¹¹
- According to a WeWork and Workplace Intelligence survey, 75% of employees are willing to give up at least one benefit or perk for the freedom to choose their work environment¹²
- The City of Albany's commercial districts, and the businesses within them, rely on the influx of tens of thousands of employees daily to support their businesses

Access to qualified and diverse talent

- As of April 2020, McKinsey & Co. had found that 39% of jobs held by Black employees are vulnerable due to the COVID-19 crisis, compared with 34 percent for White employees, while 65% of U.S. Hispanics and Latinos work in the five sectors that are suffering the largest drops in GDP during the pandemic¹³
- Women are highly concentrated in sectors that were expected to suffer high rates of unemployment in 2020, including hospitality, food services, and retail¹⁴
- Employers locally cite that there is a shortage of talent that meet the qualifications of available positions
- Need to ensure that the workforce development is addressing specific skills gaps

Awareness/Access to existing resources for support and funding

- Better coordination/collaboration among organizations is necessary to achieve impacts at scale

10 City of Albany Vacant Building Registry

11 [Forbes - Remote Work Evolves into Hybrid Work and Productivity Rises](#)

12 [CNBC - How Post COVID Hybrid Work Will Change Job Benefits](#)

13 [McKinsey - Investing in Black Lives and Livelihoods](#)

14 ibid

Public safety concerns including an escalation of gun violence, pandemic-related restrictions on community policing and anti-recidivism initiatives

- There were 48 shootings that resulted in the injury of a person in 2019 compared to 101 in 2020 (an increase of 110 percent)¹⁵
- As of May 2021, there have been 9 homicides in Albany this year, and 15 homicides in all of 2020¹⁶
- Albany police have confiscated 62 guns so far this year¹⁷

Insufficient resources for payment of unpaid rent and other financial obligations

- As of June 2021, Albany Housing Authority has reported \$2 million in uncollected rent
- According to research completed in May 2021 through the Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative, nationally, up to 20% of all renters are behind on rent as of January 2021¹⁸
- This Study further found that 46% of rental properties in Albany were in arrears in 2020, compared to just 18% a year earlier¹⁹
- According to a study published in 2021 by the University at Albany, over 50% of survey respondents were concerned about losing their housing. Only 17% of Hispanics were not concerned about losing housing whereas 40% of non-Hispanics were not concerned, a significant difference²⁰
- Further, COVID-19 stands to have lasting negative effects on neighborhoods, as nearly 30% of Albany landlords are planning to defer maintenance in the future²¹

Low homeownership rate, particularly among minorities

- The City of Albany has a homeownership rate of 37.5%²² compared with a 65.6% homeownership rate for the U.S.²³
- In the City of Albany, 69 % of White residents own homes, but only 20% of Black residents do²⁴ and Albany has the second largest Black/White homeownership gap in the nation²⁵
- The gap in median household income between those who live in predominantly Black and White neighborhoods in the City can be as much as \$60,000²⁶
- Nationwide, Redfin reported that 16% of Black Americans who apply for mortgages are rejected, compared with 7% of White Americans²⁷
- Housingwire states that Black Americans are more likely to be turned down for mortgages due to low credit scores and debt than their white counterparts²⁸

15 [News 10 ABC - Gun Violence in Albany](#)

16 [Daily Gazette - More Police Coming in Response to Albany Gun Violence](#)

17 [News 10 ABC - Albany Police Recover 2 Illegal Guns](#)

18 Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative 2021

19 ibid

20 [UAlbany - Understanding and Eliminating Minority Health Disparities in a 21st Century Pandemic](#)

21 Bloomberg Harvard City Leadership Initiative 2021

22 [US Census](#)

23 [US Census](#)

24 [Times Union - Albany Divided](#)

25 [Policywire.com - Black Homeownership in the U.S.](#)

26 [Times Union - Albany Divided](#)

27 [Housingwire - Black Americans Still Face Massive Housing Barriers](#)

28 ibid

Increased homelessness

- According to the County Department of Social Services (DSS) there has been a 47% increase in the unsheltered homeless population between July 2019 and July 2020²⁹

Escalation of real estate development risk due to rising construction and labor costs, combined with an uncertain market

- An increase in construction costs is being experienced as a result of temporary plant closures and an uptick in demand as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic
- According to the Commercial Construction Index, construction prices will continue to rise throughout 2021 due to factors such as labor shortages, project delays and increasing material costs³⁰
- Locally there was initially a slowdown in new project activity due to apprehension/risk aversion in the development community
- Local project activity steadily continued throughout the pandemic and projects continue to move ahead, albeit at a slower pace and with added costs
- Additional costs reduce the profitability of projects with already weak margins, making development in

29 [Spectrum Local News - Pandemic Homelessness Spike](#)

30 [US Chamber - New Study Finds Commercial Construction Facing Shortages Due to COVID](#)

distressed communities more infeasible than they were pre-pandemic

Perception of alternative mobility options like public transit and bike-share

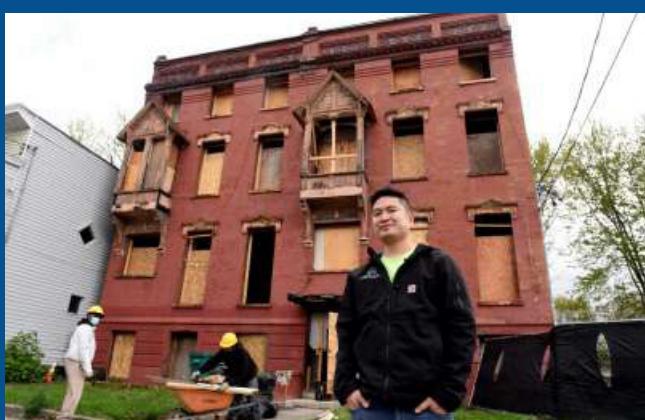
- At the beginning of April 2020, average weekday ridership for CDTA went from 55,000 to under 25,000, but boardings slowly inched back to over 35,000 per day over the next few months and are slowly returning to more typical levels³¹
- There is a significant population in the City without access to cars; walkability improvements and improvements in the public transportation system are vital
- Roll-out of alternative transportation options may be delayed due to budget deficits related to COVID-19 or lack of density driving need for new options

Historic inequities in the built environment: Housing, parks/open spaces, Sidewalks, Amenities and Transportation

- Despite significant recent upgrades to street lighting, sidewalks, parks, and green space, in order to bring equitable infrastructure to distressed neighborhoods, additional investment is necessary to continue to address all disparities

31 CDTA

MODEL PROJECTS/PROGRAMS



Resurgent Neighborhoods

Syracuse Home-builder/buyer Program

RNI employs a strategic process using infill construction to build on vacant lots where derelict structures have been removed. The cost of construction is partially subsidized by the City of Syracuse in order to make the purchase price meet the appraised value and associated mortgage attainable. The [Resurgent Neighborhoods Initiative](#) helps underserved populations gain access to the dream of homeownership, while improving and revitalizing neighborhoods.

Acquiring Capital & Capacity for Economic Stability & Sustainability (ACCESS)

CPC Minority Developer Loans

Funded with \$20 million from the Community Preservation Corporation (CPC), [ACCESS](#) was created with the goals of empowering Black and minority entrepreneurs who have disproportionately experienced barriers to entry within the development industry by providing funding, education and other resources to build their capacity to compete in the marketplace, while also targeting projects that bring high quality housing to communities of color.

Mortgage Revenue Bond Homeownership & Revitalization

[Mortgage-backed revenue bonds](#) are used by [states](#), housing authorities and municipalities to provide social benefits within the community. By backing the issuance with low-interest-rate mortgages, or a soft-second to provide down payment and closing cost assistance, municipalities can help low-income first-time homebuyers who may not otherwise be able to afford the monthly payments associated with a standard mortgage. Bond proceeds could also go toward financing other types of real estate development, such as affordable rental housing. In those cases, the developer makes interest payments funded by the rent collected on the property.





NEEDS ASSESSMENT: Supporting Small Businesses

Supporting Small Businesses

Overview Summary of Impacts of COVID-19

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Working Group reported that City of Albany's small businesses were steadily evolving and expanding, while being assisted by strategies, programs, and investments by supportive agencies. Local businesses reported increased business-to-business activity, MWBEs were increasing and benefitting from increased state contracting opportunities and regional collaborations, and there had been significant local investments both made and in the pipeline for renovations in vacant or underutilized buildings to bring new patrons to the businesses front doors.¹

When New York State went "on pause," revitalization project activity temporarily froze, program funding and state contracts were delayed, and small businesses struggled for survival. Further, the loss of foot-traffic and catering opportunities from early stay-at-home orders, the thousands of employees who shifted from downtown offices to remote work throughout the pandemic, and the continued severe drop in business and leisure visitors have exacerbated the impact on downtown and commercial corridor small businesses in particular.

In addition to lost sales volume, restaurants also struggled with inventory spoilage during the State-ordered closure and mandatory occupancy reduction periods, exacerbating losses. In some cases, businesses also experienced break-ins and theft from districts that were left substantially unoccupied or suffered system failures or damage due to buildings being left vacant for long periods of time, further damaging cashflow and profitability. Factors like these led to businesses reducing hours, making significant staffing cuts, scaling back their offerings or closing outright. This wide-sweeping reduction in sales exacerbated supply-chain issues and had dramatic impacts on municipal revenues like sales tax and parking fees throughout the state of emergency.

Small ventures were forced to adapt their business models to cope with these impacts and survive. The uncertainty in the early weeks of the emergency surrounding opening protocols and how long the restrictions would last caused many owners to delay making aggressive changes or to take additional time while closed to develop new product lines, new delivery methods or new ventures altogether.

Those businesses that embraced innovation were able to find the means to survive – some even thriving after adopting new models. There was an emphatic shift to online platforms in marketing, sales, and program delivery. Small businesses with an established online presence had an advantage over those that did not. Few funding sources (like Albany's Small Business Adaptation Program) developed and released throughout the pandemic, however, supported this type of flexible and innovative approach to business assistance.

Digital platform usage and online engagement were not, however, the only pre-existing inequities that exacerbated small business challenges. According to a 2020 Brookings study, minority-owned businesses make up only 20% of the country's 5.6 million businesses, despite representing 40% of the population.

This institutional disparity "limits entrepreneurship (and) is no less insidious than COVID-19's impact on small businesses." Minority owners continue to struggle to access start-up capital, it is still difficult to finance a project in a distressed neighborhood, and linguistic and cultural barriers hamper technical assistance delivery. This structural inequity, coupled with the fact that the types of businesses most negatively affected by the pandemic (food services, retail and accommodations) disproportionately employ women and minorities, deepened gaps and generated disproportionate impacts.²

This Working Group, consisting of small business owners and business support agencies, has highlighted the following challenges and inequities that must be addressed to help small businesses in Albany Build Back Better.

Challenges and Inequities

Gaps in digital/virtual/website presence and technical skills for small businesses

- Businesses without a social media presence and ability to sell online were unable to stabilize and pivot to the same extent as those with an existing foundation for online engagement
- Websites and Point-of-Sale (POS) systems are expensive and time-intensive to establish and maintain
- The National Main Street Center reports that more small businesses established an e-commerce presence between April 2020 and January 2021 – increasing from only 53% of businesses to 63%. Of those businesses, though, less than one third are conducting more than 10 percent of their sales online³

Disparate impacts of reopening guidance on certain businesses/industries and the individuals they employ, in particular, underserved populations

- Hospitality and restaurant industry businesses disproportionately employ traditionally underserved populations, and have had the most numerous/most recent reopening restrictions

Insufficient resources for unpaid rent and other financial obligations owed by small businesses

- Businesses that lease their space may suffer from a delayed ripple effect from commercial property portfolios that are foreclosed upon due to unpaid rent or taxes, or are not properly maintained due to revenue impacts on commercial property owners

¹[Brookings - Businesses Owned by Women and Minorities Have Grown](#)

²[ibid](#)

³[National Main Street Center](#)



- Commercial tenants that failed to negotiate deferrals or concessions throughout the state of emergency, or who failed to access operational assistance like the Paycheck Protection Program may be in insurmountable arrears once business goes "back to normal"

Access to qualified and diverse talent to reopen/maintain operations successfully

- Businesses encounter difficulty recruiting qualified and diverse talent

Gaps in eligibility of existing small business programs

- Several programs have deadlines by which a business must have been established to qualify for relief application (e.g. the Paycheck Protection Program requires operational status date of February 15, 2020)
- Not every business qualified for application to federal or New York State business assistance and recovery programs
- Some existing programs require applicants to demonstrate a certain level of pre-pandemic profitability or meet a specific threshold of financial losses to qualify for relief

Awareness/access to existing program information

- Existing businesses seeking to grow may not be aware of technical assistance, mentorship, or other training opportunities available
- Resources may not be multilingual or shared in a culturally sensitive manner

Limited access to capital for small businesses, and specifically to minorities

- The Self-Employment Assistance Program (SEAP), created to provide entrepreneurship opportunities for newly unemployed individuals, was inactive during a time which offered the opportunity to pursue new, creative endeavors
- Nearly 89% of respondents to a survey issued by the Support SmAlbany coalition in 2020 selected financial assistance as their top priority and biggest unmet need
- According to a 2019 report from the Small Business Credit Survey, nationally, large banks approve roughly 60% of loans applied for by White small business owners, compared to 50% of those sought by Latino or Hispanic owners and only 29% of those sought by Black owners⁴

Access to business development support for small business owners with limited capacity

- Business owners may not have the time or resources to pursue growth opportunities
- The location and schedule of programming offered may not meet the needs of interested participating business owners

⁴ Small Business Credit Survey

Escalation of inventory and supplies costs due to supply chain disruption

- Foreign and domestic imports (i.e. ingredients for a restaurant, inventory for a retail establishment) saw significant delays due to the cost of shipping a container of goods rising by 80% since early November and nearly tripling over the past year, according to the Freightos Baltic Index⁵
- There is not always a local supply-chain option
- Businesses relying on inventory and supplies that were in high demand and/or were limited in quantity have found that acquisition costs reduced their profit margins, reduced their ability to be competitive in their market, or eliminated their ability to participate in the market

Restricted/inflexible eligible uses of funding on many available programs (e.g. technology improvements, virtual presence, marketing eligibility)

- The Entrepreneurial Spirit Trendex survey found that 76% of small and mid-sized U.S. business owners have pivoted their business model since the pandemic began and 73% of those plan additional pivots within the next year⁶
- Businesses that pivoted to sustain operations as capacity and social distancing regulations were established may require funding to accommodate those needs (e.g. a brick-and-mortar retail establishment may have attempted to shift to a home delivery model to maintain profitability, but were unable to obtain financing for expanding distribution facilities)

Impact of work from home/hybrid schedules on the City's restaurants and retailers

- Local small business owners continue to report reduced revenues as many employers in the City established remote work policies and opportunities for employees
- With the U.S. Census Bureau reporting in 2018 that 85% of workers employed in the City of Albany lived outside the City limits, early stay-at-home orders and the prolonged shift to remote work would have disproportionate impact on Albany's daytime population – and its spending

Ongoing reduction in revenues due to continued social distancing regulations

- Certain businesses and venues were required to limit capacity – many for prolonged periods – thereby reducing opportunities for sales

Limited ongoing technical assistance/skills development for existing businesses

- The location and schedule of programming offered may not meet the needs of interested participating

⁵ The Washington Post – Pandemic Aftershocks Overwhelm Global Supply Lines

⁶ National Main Street Center

- business owners, creating limited opportunities for continuing education
- Programming may not be expansive enough for businesses to leverage the knowledge offered
- While mentorship opportunities have arisen for new entrepreneurs, there are limited formal opportunities for ongoing mentorship
- Many existing programs require cost-prohibitive application and registration fees

Expiration/pending expiration of flexible legislation/authorizations that supported small business

- Local establishments, BIDs and the New York Restaurant Association were vocal about the need for temporary “alcohol-to-go” permission, revoked with the expiration of NYS executive orders, to be re-enacted to aid with strong recovery
- Given its success during the State of Emergency, local legislation enhancing patio and outdoor seating has been extended, but has not been permanently adopted

Insufficient coordination/collaboration of organizations providing assistance to small businesses

- Numerous organizations offer various types of small business assistance, but not every organization knows about each other’s offerings

- Without consistent collaboration and check-ins, economic development partners may not always have the requisite knowledge to properly refer those seeking assistance

Insufficient resources to address gateway and commercial corridor improvements and public amenities

- Gateway and neighborhood improvements do not always occur equitably, so the most challenged neighborhoods remain disinvested, putting new businesses in these locations at a potentially severe disadvantage

Lack of access to commercial kitchen and light manufacturing space to start-up or expand operations

- Food producers, typically Main Street manufacturers such as bakeries, require establishment in a New York State Agriculture and Markets-certified kitchen in order to properly sell their products
- Access to shared space enables entrepreneurs to pursue start-up businesses without incurring significant start-up costs or risk
- The likelihood of retail footprints shrinking due to supply chain/inventory constraints and decreased foot-traffic volume, presents an opportunity to create “in-store pop-ups” to maximize space and drive foot-traffic without a business making additional investment of their own

MODEL PROJECTS/PROGRAMS

ALBANY IS BACK TO BUSINESS

SupportSmalbany.com

launched in 2020, bringing expertise from partner organizations to a one-stop-shop resource for local businesses impacted by COVID-19

www.CapitalizeAlbany.com

From Unemployment to Entrepreneurship

UA Albany SBDC

The New York Small Business Development Center (SBDC) has developed a special program, [From Unemployment to Entrepreneurship](#), an eight-session program designed to help people who have lost their jobs during the pandemic decide if owning their own business is right for them.

Self-Employment Assistance Program (SEAP)

NYS Dept of Labor

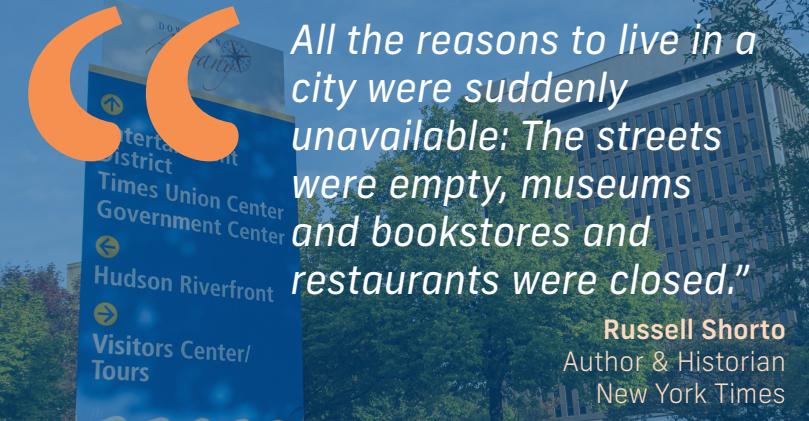
The [Self-Employment Assistance Program \(SEAP\)](#) gives individuals an opportunity to start a business while receiving unemployment insurance benefits. Program attendees will work full time at starting a business and will not be required to look for other work.

Support SmAlbany

Small business support-agency collaborative

In recognition of the significant impact the novel corona-virus (COVID-19) has had on the local and national economy, a [consortium of organizations](#) has joined together, convened by Capitalize Albany Corporation at the request of Mayor Sheehan, to provide a clearinghouse of information and resources to support businesses. The participating stakeholders have a variety of expertise, programs, and capabilities, to assist businesses in weathering this unprecedented public health crisis and prepare to emerge from it successfully.





NEEDS ASSESSMENT: Travel, Tourism, Hospitality & Arts

Travel, Tourism, Hospitality & Arts

Overview Summary of Impacts of COVID-19

The consensus in this Working Group reveals that the local hotel industry, the Albany Parking Authority, and major Arts/Cultural organizations/institutions, all saw their best year in 2019 prior to the pandemic shutdowns. Specifically, the local museums spoke to the success of 2019, which mirrored national trends.

"Museums are economic engines....pre-pandemic they contributed over \$50 billion to the U.S. [gross domestic product]. They employed about three-quarters of a million people" — as many as the aviation industry — "and they are often the tourist destination in cities large and small."¹ Similarly, in Albany County, 2019 Traveler Spending reached record highs with 2.6% growth over 2018, according to Tourism Economics, a division of Oxford Economics.

According to the members in this Working Group, growth had been driving specific, new work force training and arts/cultural engagement opportunities to create a more equitable sector. The pause caused by the state of emergency, along with concurrent national and regional movements, highlighted the need for more urgency around systemic equity issues and representation of cultural diversity.

Considering the statewide mandated closures in 2020, over the course of the pandemic, operating procedures were disrupted, and consistently reassessed; in-person event revenue disappeared; a pivot to digital content was necessary; and flexibility through space utilization and employment modification became essential to survival. This sector was reported to have been hit particularly hard when it comes to "staffing-up" in the recovery phase with revenue uncertainty threatening the ability to cover both capital and operating expenses.

The National Endowment for the Arts, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and Argonne National Laboratory reported, "for example, with well over half of revenue generated from earned income (e.g., ticket sales), reductions in personal disposable income or restrictions on gatherings and events would have a direct impact on these organizations. Similarly, the heavy dependence on philanthropy and individual giving—traditionally 30% of revenue, when taken together—will further expose organizations to major economic downturns and potential reductions in giving."² This ongoing uncertainty around revenue and cash flow was cited as a significant challenge in operational and programming planning.

Leisure and hospitality businesses providing support to arts and tourism (local hotels, arts venues, recreation,

¹NPR - [A New report Shows Museums Had a Bad Year, But Not the Worst Possible](#)

²Inside Philanthropy - [As Individual Giving Drops, Performing Arts Leaders Weigh in on the State of Fundraising](#)

restaurants, and bars) also saw dramatic impacts and are not anticipated to attain pre-pandemic occupancy and sales until 2023. According to a Brookings report, nationally, 52.1% of small businesses in the sector have been forced shut down entirely and 35.2% were forced to cut their workforce. According to the same report, "as with business owners, Black, Latino or Hispanic, and female workers are overrepresented in hospitality occupations, as are youth and workers with less education."³ Therefore, not only are the economic impacts of the pandemic deep within this sector, they also have disproportionate impact on some of the most vulnerable populations affected most deeply by the pandemic in other ways as well.

A second-quarter 2021 Joblist survey found that, nationally, half of former hospitality (hotel and restaurant) workers polled "wouldn't return to their old jobs, with a third... reporting that they weren't even considering reentering the industry."⁴ Coupled with revenue uncertainty, workforce concerns – could significantly lengthen recovery time.

Because this sector already struggled pre-COVID with retention of visitors (i.e. extending stays, encouraging multi-stop visits, and leveraging additional spending beyond the primary destination), prolonged recovery time for supportive businesses and prolonged closure of diverse venues has the potential to exacerbate the overall impacts of the pandemic.

This working group, led by arts, entertainment, hospitality and supportive agency leaders, identified the following challenges and inequities:

Challenges and Inequities

Limited conferences and events being scheduled

- Since the state of emergency began, the success of the hotel industry has been almost cut in half
- Effects of this decline in revenue will be lasting as conferences and other hotel-based events (weddings, proms etc.) are not projected to fully recover until 2023 or beyond
- While recovery is beginning (the Albany Convention Center Authority has held 85 events already this year with 145 scheduled through December), booking is still lagging behind pre-pandemic levels with 13% of meeting planners still not currently booking in-person events, according to Northstar Meetings Group's latest PULSE Survey⁵
- Of meeting planners surveyed, 40 percent were focused on hybrid events, although many in the industry are concerned that these in-person/virtual experiences will perform worse financially than live-only or

³Brookings - [Back to Work in the Flames the Hospitality Sector in a Pandemic](#)

⁴TravelPulse - [Half of Hospitality Workers Say They Won't Return to Their Old Jobs](#)

⁵Northstar Meetings Group - [Finally, Planners' Primary Focus is New Meetings](#)



- virtual-only events⁶
- Meeting planners cite inadequate staffing at hotels and venues as even more concerning, currently, than COVID⁷

Reduced single-day and overnight visitors to spend money locally

- There is overwhelming uncertainty of payroll and revenues for the lodging and accommodations sector. The federal unemployment assistance is seen as a limiting factor when attempting to hire staff during the recovery period
- Local institutions and organizations are cautiously staffing-up all the while understanding that another wave of COVID outbreaks could threaten to end their tenure indefinitely

Gaps in lighting, wayfinding, and pedestrian safety improvements that create public safety concerns

- Inherently, parking regulations and wayfinding practices can help fuel inequity
- Reliable, and affordable, public transportation is crucial and allows for visitors and residents alike to enjoy the available amenities and services that City of Albany organizations and institutions provide
- Lighting and pedestrian safety improvements have traditionally been invested in visitor/tourist areas, updating this practice to be more inclusive of surrounding residential areas will alleviate inequities and connect local residents to these amenities
- Implementing equitable wayfinding throughout the city can bring amenity awareness to disadvantaged and underrepresented neighborhoods

Limited connectivity between arts and schools/youth

- Youth exposure to the arts and culture with more accessible pathways is vital to achieving developmentally impactful connections
- Few programs are specifically curated to engage school age youth during school hours
- In the first-ever large-scale study of the academic, social and emotional outcomes of arts exposure in children, it was found over two years that students exposed to additional arts programming experienced a “3.6 percentage point reduction in disciplinary infractions, an improvement of 13 percent of a standard deviation in standardized writing scores, and an increase of 8 percent of a standard deviation in their compassion for others”⁸
- At the Rutgers Social-Emotional and Character Development Lab, arts exposure has been called the “secret weapon” for fostering positive mental health for kids, improving social/emotional health by building skills like empathy, self-awareness and self-management⁹

⁶ibid

⁷ibid

⁸Brookings - New Evidence of the Benefits of Arts Education

⁹Chalkbeat - Art Teachers Are a 'Secret Weapon' for Restoring Students'

Insufficient resources to provide equitable access for admission charges

- Organizations' financial safety nets have been exhausted, making them especially vulnerable to a second wave and unable to fund significant new programming
- There are challenges with offering more equitable reduced or free admission options as operating expenses increase with the need to produce digital content in addition to traditional offerings

Gaps in digital/virtual/website presence and technical skills for arts/tourism/cultural venues

- Utilizing advanced virtual/digital means of communication and event transmission are costly
- COVID amplified the need for organizations to have an online presence and those without were at a disadvantage in terms of both revenue generation/carrying out their mission

Mental Health

MODEL PROJECTS/PROGRAMS



Access to and awareness of resources for arts/tourism/cultural venue to under-resourced communities

- As education centers, economic drivers, and cultivators of collections, museums have a role in rebuilding and reimagining their role in communities and can be significant contributors to multiple initiatives designed to tackle economic, educational, and social justice goals
- Limited marketing and advertising budgets and cross-coordination among venues

Lack of a single public-facing resource for City of Albany-specific tourism/travel/hospitality/arts

- Existing resources do not provide destination-based recommendations that are informed specifically by geolocation, making it difficult to explore multiple local venues and attractions
- Smaller venues struggle to pay for inclusion in local marketing strategies
- Broader place-based marketing initiatives have failed to take hold or have not adequately represented the

local community. The current CapNY initiative is in early months and is still somewhat unknown locally

Ongoing reduction in revenues due to continued social distancing behaviors

- For the remainder of 2021, a UN study estimates a 37% reduction in domestic and regional tourism below normal levels¹⁰
- Albany International Airport continues to see a decline in the mid-60% range, although comparing favorably to the 80-85% throughout the state of emergency¹¹
- According to national data from Axios-Ipsos in June, 37% of adults still consider attending a concert indoors to be a “large risk”, while only 14% believe it to be no risk and Rolling Stone has projected a full-scale return to concerts and tours may not happen until 2022¹²

¹⁰ [UN Report - COVID-19 Impact on Tourism Could Deal \\$4 trillion Blow to Global Economy](#)

¹¹ [Times Union - Vaccines Start to Have Impact on Travel](#)

¹² [CNN - Can Indoor Concerts Ever Be Safe Again?](#)

Museum at Home

Albany Institute of History & Art

The Institute offers free admission for SNAP, EBT, and WIC cardholders during regular operating hours. The Museum offers free admission days throughout the year as well. The pandemic has identified new roles for museums and has expanded their reach into new digital worlds. Equity is achieved further through the use of technology by virtual visits and the [Museum at Home](#) program. Digital materials made available through their website provides teaching resources and fully online comprehensive exhibitions. These online exhibitions are supported by major gifts/grant funding currently.

Organizational & Individual Artist Recovery

New York State

Support will broaden individual artist assistance and deliver extremely [flexible funding for organizations](#) through a streamlined application experience. Grants offered in this round will greatly expand eligibility and encourage new applicants across a wide spectrum of artistic and cultural practices. Priority will be given to applicants that serve historically underrepresented communities.

1st Friday

Various Venues Throughout Albany

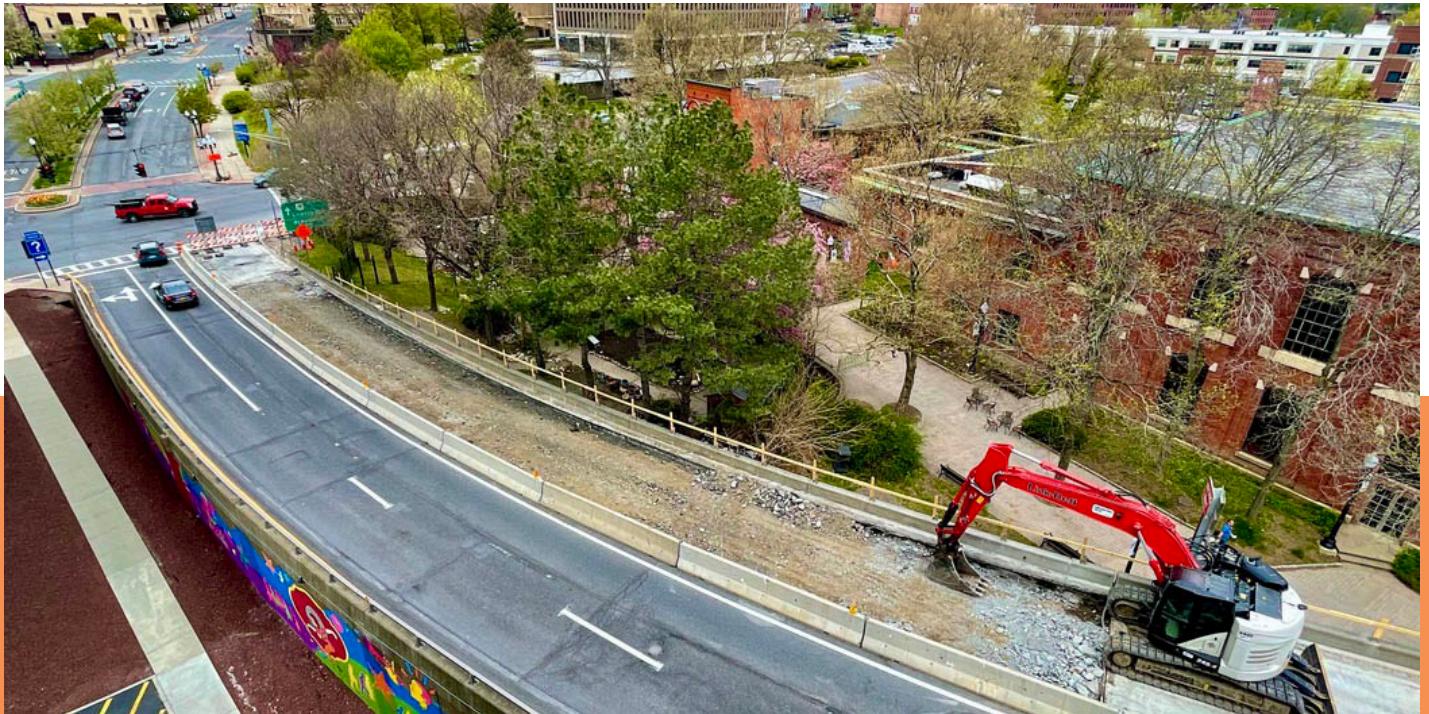
[1st Friday](#) is a long-standing tradition in Albany that was put on pause in 2020 due to mandated suspension of large gatherings in NYS. The first Friday of every month marked a community night of entertainment in Albany. Residents and visitors flock to downtown Albany for “1st Friday,” a highly anticipated celebration of arts and culture. Various neighborhoods throughout Albany host open houses, special events, live music, artist receptions, exhibitions, and more throughout the evening. Some restaurants, bars, clubs, and boutiques offered specials and discounts in honor of the event. It is recommended with strong support that the time is right to consider reinstating this monthly event, to kick-start local interest in local activities and events.

Capital Funding for the Arts

New York State

Support will assist organizations in making improvements to address health and safety issues in their spaces and venues among other needs. Any New York State non-profit arts and culture organization is encouraged to apply. Round 4 guidelines and [application portal](#) will open in September.





“

In 10 years, we may look back at this time and ask: Which places merely spent their money, and which places invested it?”

*-The Brookings Institution,
March 23, 2021*

RECOMMENDED EVALUATION PRIORITIES

- **Guiding Principles**
- **Operational Priorities**
- **Strategic Impact Area Priorities**

Building A Framework for Project/Program Evaluation

Overview of the Task Force's Approach

The Task Force's charge was not to pre-determine how the ARP funds should be spent or to select subrecipients. It was charged with assisting the ultimate decision-makers in developing a rationale for how to select projects and programs that can best meet the community's needs for recovery from the pandemic.

To this end, the Task Force has developed a series of universal guiding principles and 32 programming impact areas within the five Working Group sectors to be used as a framework for project and program evaluation – both for direct City initiatives as well as when soliciting and selecting subrecipient proposals.

While 245 programmatic recommendations are identified, the Task Force urges the City to invest its ARP funds in a limited number of highly-impactful projects and programs that foster collaboration among service providers and provide measurable, sustainable and equitable results. The intent of these recommendations is not to suggest using ARP to fund programming in each area, but to drive the broader public, private, nonprofit and institutional sectors to take collective action on these local priorities.

It should be noted that these recommendations are intended to supplement any final federal guidance on usage of the ARP funds. Interim guidelines already define a number of policies and parameters that must be complied with.

This includes the requirement that all expenditures must respond to the Covid-19 health crisis. In order to assess and document whether a program or service "responds to" the COVID-19 public health emergency will require the recipient to "first, identify a need or negative impact of the COVID-19 public health emergency and, second, identify how the program, service, or other intervention addresses the identified need or impact." The Needs Assessment conducted by the Task Force was designed to assist in determining this responsiveness.

The interim guidance provides numerous examples of potential programmatic uses of funds, but provides little in

the way of specific guidance on measuring responsiveness. Projects and programs included as examples in the Federal guidance have been indicated in the Task Force recommendations that follows. Because the examples are not a finite, exhaustive list of eligible activities, it should not be assumed that because a recommendation is not listed that it is not responsive to supporting "immediate economic stabilization for households and businesses and addressing systemic public health and economic challenges that have contributed to the unequal impacts of the pandemic on certain populations." It will be incumbent on final decision makers to ensure that each project or program's responsiveness is documented.

Following completion of the Needs Assessment, and in order to provide a framework for direct ties to emergency responsiveness, the Task Force developed program impact areas and programmatic recommendations designed to address each of the concerns raised by the community. These recommendations were then reviewed and amended by the public and prioritized in three categories: overall impact, level of urgency and level of unmet financial need.

These findings, coupled with the guiding principles are proposed as an evaluation rubric to assist in the City's budgeting process as well as in funding delivery.

Guiding Principles

General themes recommended to be addressed by all proposals

Throughout the Task Force's work, eight common themes continued to arise in every discussion. These themes were universal when discussing recommendations and desired outcomes across impact areas and for the ARP initiative as a whole, and are presented as guiding principles to be used for evaluation of any proposals for ARP funding.

The principles of equity, collaboration, sustainability, and impact were determined to be essential and must be required to be addressed by all proposals. Further themes of leverage, innovation, engagement, and scale are recommended as lenses through which proposals should be evaluated for their level of responsiveness to each principle. The eight principles are defined in more detail in the chart on the following pages.



Guiding Principles |

Key themes recommended for all competitive proposals

The Task Force views the ARP as a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to make dramatic change throughout the City of Albany. Beyond what is needed to replace lost revenue and be fiscally responsible, the City must select recovery projects and programs that truly change the future trajectory of the community.

To this end, the Task Force proposes the following list of guiding principles that the City's decision-makers should assess universally for all ARP funding proposals. The first four - equity, collaboration, sustainability and impact (highlighted in orange in the chart opposite) - are essential, and must be present in any forthcoming program guidelines, application questionnaires or screening tools/ evaluation rubrics developed by the City or its agents. Proposals that fail to meet these principles should not be considered for ARP funds.

The final four - leverage, innovation, engagement, and scale (highlighted in blue in the chart opposite) - are also critical, foundational themes that should be prioritized by decision-makers. The Task Force recommends that these themes be required to be addressed by funding applicants and sub-recipients and evaluated by decision-makers on how strongly responsive to each area the proposed program or project is.

These principles, together with how the proposals address COVID-19 impacts and how well-aligned proposals are with the impact area programmatic recommendations on the following pages, are presented as the evaluation framework for ARP-assisted projects and programs.



(The) perfect use of Rescue Plan dollars: one-time, proven impact and huge results for those at greatest risk."

*- Robert Gordon and Michele Jolin,
New York Times Guest Opinion, April 29, 2021*



COVID was a once-in-a-century pandemic. We should spend the money on once-in-a-century investments."

*- Public Survey Respondent,
June 2021*

Equity

Proposals that directly improve conditions for traditionally disadvantaged, underserved or marginalized populations

Collaboration

Proposals where multiple service providers partner to leverage their resources and increase capacity

Sustainability

Proposals that are able to feasibly complete their objective within the ARP timeline or are able to self-operate beyond the life of the funding

Impact

Proposals that will provide meaningful and measurable change in one or (preferably) more priority Impact Area program recommendations

Leverage

Proposals that maximize resources by bringing additional financial assistance or capacity from external sources

Innovation

Proposals that take an entrepreneurial or new approach to the priority Impact Area program recommendations

Engagement

Proposals developed through robust community involvement or designed to enhance communication between the public and service providers

Scale

Proposals that provide widespread benefits independently or are designed to be replicable and scalable across sectors or neighborhoods



Operational Priorities

Ensuring project implementation and program delivery
While internal/municipal operational considerations are outlined in the following section, it should be assumed that external organizations or partnerships will play a significant role in implementation. When evaluating potential external subrecipients, it will be essential to review their responsiveness to the guiding principles with additional depth in order to evaluate their capacity to deliver, to respond effectively to the community's needs and to transparently adhere to substantial federal regulations and documentation requirements.

The timeline for executing ARP programming and spending the funds is very short, considering the amount of funding that needs to be deployed and the complexity of the issues it has been designed to address. Subrecipients should be able to demonstrate an adequate staffing and resource plan to execute their proposal. This capacity plan should include the identification of key personnel and budgetary commitments.

Applicants for ARP funds should also be reviewed for both their track record of success in areas related to their

SUBRECIPIENTS

Operational Requirement Recommendations

- Capacity Plan
- Track Record
- Feasibility Demonstration
- Compliance Plan

proposal and with the execution of projects and programs similar in scale to their proposal. Potential subrecipients' history of equitably serving the community should also be taken into consideration.

While innovation and an entrepreneurial approach is highly encouraged, projects and programs proposed by potential subrecipients should also be evaluated on their demonstrable feasibility. Detailed budgets, proposed timelines, proof of external funding commitments and memoranda of understanding from identified project/program partners should be collected where applicable and reviewed as part of any application process for external projects and programs.

Proposals, where possible, should also include stated

goals and expected measurable outcomes related to the recommendations below (e.g. number of people served, percent increase in a key indicator, additional funding leveraged.)

Finally, applicants should demonstrate that they understand and are able to adhere to federal regulations and the rigorous reporting requirements that will be required by the ARP.

While operational requirements will add to the complexity of funding applications, these considerations are essential to ensuring that the funding is effectively deployed within the required timeline and that no funds will be required to be returned or recaptured from projects or programs that fail to be implemented.

Strategic Impact Area Priorities

From identifying needs to programmatic recommendations

The following pages contain priority impact areas and responsive programmatic recommendations within each of the Working Group sectors. These recommendations are designed to provide guidance for program/project enhancement or creation tied to addressing the community concerns identified in the needs assessment.

While the recommendations list takes a broad approach and includes more than 32 areas for potential programmatic impact, it is not the Task Force's intent to recommend using ARP funds in all of these areas. The Task Force strongly recommends ultimately funding a limited number of highly-impactful programs that can produce profound results, rather than thinly spreading resources among minimally-effective, un-scalable programs.

To this end, rather than define specific projects, programs or service providers and attempt to predetermine the use and recipients of the funding, the priorities identified are instead presented as the final lens recommended by the Task Force for evaluating potential programs and projects. They are designed to be inclusive and stimulate entrepreneurial concept creation from municipal departments and the wider community.

The task force recommends that both internal/municipal agencies seeking to use ARP funding and those external parties intending to respond to competitive solicitations for subrecipients refer to these recommendations and endeavor to tie their programs and projects specifically to one or (preferably) more of the identified programmatic recommendations.

Projects and programs that can be relied upon to deliver the most significant results in one impact area, or address multiple impact areas and programmatic recommendations should be evaluated most favorably.

When crafting a project or program proposal, potential subrecipients should take into consideration the City's goal of creating once-in-a-lifetime change with this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Proposals with limited reach or simply sustain initiatives that are already occurring should strive to expand their concepts to include partners in their impact area or additional services responsive to multiple programmatic recommendations.

Potential subrecipients are also encouraged to look for best-practice programs and projects in their area of expertise for expansion or replication locally. These best practices can include highlighted programs found in the needs assessment section, other local projects and programs that are currently achieving impressive results and are scalable, or imported concepts that have a history of proven results in other locations, but haven't yet been implemented in Albany. The recommendations herein are presented as a guide for finding and conceptualizing innovative and impactful projects and programs.

The recommendations are arranged by sector in the pages that follow, and each includes an overview of the rationale for their development as well as a summary of how the recommendations were prioritized through the Task Force's process. A summary table encompassing all 32 of the impact areas and their relative prioritization outcomes in the categories of overall priority, level of urgency and level of unmet financial need follows below.

While all of the programmatic recommendations are designed to "respond to the negative impact of the COVID-19 public health emergency," or "address systemic public health and economic challenges that have contributed to the unequal impact of the pandemic on certain populations," the final table also identifies those areas that were determined to have the most clear impact on the direct effects of the pandemic.

A number of programmatic recommendations and impact areas were highlighted consistently across working group categories as universal or cross-sector strategic priorities. These recommendations (in the chart at right and identified in the final table) have been determined by the Task Force to have the potential to have profound and lasting impact on the community and should be regarded with special consideration in any evaluation process.

Because the depth and breadth of the community's need and recommendations outlined here clearly cannot be filled by the available ARP resources, the Task Force urges that all local stakeholders explore how their organizations and community groups can take action in these impact areas and help Albany not only recover, but thrive.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Cross-sector Strategic Impact Area Priorities

- **Access to quality, affordable childcare**
- **Retention, development and attraction of diverse and qualified workforce**
- **Increased, equitable homeownership**
- **Revitalization of distressed neighborhoods through impactful real estate projects**
- **Enhanced quality of place and connections through public infrastructure projects**
- **Supportive and accessible mental health services**
- **Flexible funding sources for a wide array of small business needs**
- **Increased awareness of (and accessibility of information for) existing resources and assets in all sectors**
- **Capacity-building and collaboration among service providers to deepen impact and leverage broader results**



Recommendations Summary

	Recommendation	Top Priority	Urgent Need	Need Level	Direct C-19 Response*	Cross-sector
Public Health	Promote access to healthcare for traditionally underserved individuals	*	!	+++	C	
	Support mental and emotional health	*	!	++	C	X
	Retain, develop, and attract a qualified and diverse workforce	*	!	++	C	X
	Support universal access to healthy food and nutrition education		!	+		
	Mitigate public health risk for essential workers			+	C	
Ed./Wkforce/Hum Svc	Expand access to affordable, high-speed broadband access throughout the City of Albany	*	!	+++	C	
	Increase awareness of, support navigation of and improve access to available services and financial resources			++		X
	Provide mental health support and address social-emotional impacts of the pandemic		!	++	C	X
	Retain/develop/attract a qualified and diverse workforce for emerging/expanding industries and job opportunities	*	!	++	C	X
	Create efficiency for or sustainability of existing programs producing impactful results	*	!	+++		
Housing/Transp./Comm. Revitaliz.	Increase access to and affordability of quality, holistic childcare options	*	!	++	C	X
	Invest in implementation of neighborhood revitalization strategies		!	++	C	X
	Target public infrastructure improvements in distressed census tracts and disinvested neighborhoods	*	!	+++	C	X
	Encourage use of and spending at local businesses		!	+		
	Retain, develop and attract a qualified and diverse workforce		!		C	X
Small Business	Increase awareness of, support navigation of and improve access to available services and financial resources			+		X
	Improve public safety		!	+		
	Support quality, affordable and diverse housing opportunities	*	!	+++	C	
	Support local real estate development that advances community revitalization goals	*		+++	C	X
	Enhance alternative transportation use and increase accessibility and equity in transportation options	*	!	++	C	
Arts/Hosp...	Provide flexible fin. assistance/tech. assistance/access to information for a diverse array of small business needs	*	!	+++	C	X
	Support entrepreneurship opportunities/start-up businesses, particularly for individuals unempl. due to pandemic			++	C	
	Focus on financial support for businesses with ongoing reopening challenges			+	C	
	Retain, develop and attract a qualified and diverse workforce		!	++	C	X
	Stabilize inventory costs resulting from supply chain disruption/market gaps			++	C	
	Encourage use of and spending at local businesses			+		
	Develop/embrace existing supportive/flexible legislation, regulations and code	*		++		
	Improve the quality of place in Albany's commercial districts, including gateways and all connecting streets	*	!	+++		X
	Provide flexible financial assistance and technical support for hospitality, arts & cultural entities	*	!	+++	C	
	Increase awareness of/equitable access to existing hospitality, arts & cultural destinations for residents of all ages	*		++		
	Focus on marketing and financial support for businesses and organizations with ongoing reopening challenges			+	C	X
	Enhance the connectivity and navigability from destination-to-destination and promote public safety	*	!	++		



"One criterion should be investing in projects/initiatives that have immediate, discernible, measurable results."

*- Public Survey Respondent
July 2021*

* Indicates that the recommendation was specifically listed among program examples in ARP fact sheets and other guidance. Lack of designation in this column does not mean that a recommendation is not responsive to COVID-19 impacts



PUBLIC HEALTH

Improving public health in Albany will require enhanced cultural and linguistic competency from providers, improved attention to mental health, and increased diversity of the public health workforce - all ensuring that at-risk populations have access to the care they need.

Prioritization

Through the Working Group discussion, a consensus was reached to merge improving access to healthcare for people experiencing homelessness into promoting access to healthcare for traditional underserved individuals, as there was significant overlap in the needs and programmatic examples. The Working Group then discussed the top priorities among the programming impact areas and a consensus was formed around the following three programming impact areas: promote access to healthcare for traditionally underserved individuals, support mental and emotional health, and retain, develop, and attract a qualified and diverse workforce. It should be noted that as a sector, Supporting the Public Health

Response was identified as a top sector for recovery assistance in the public survey.

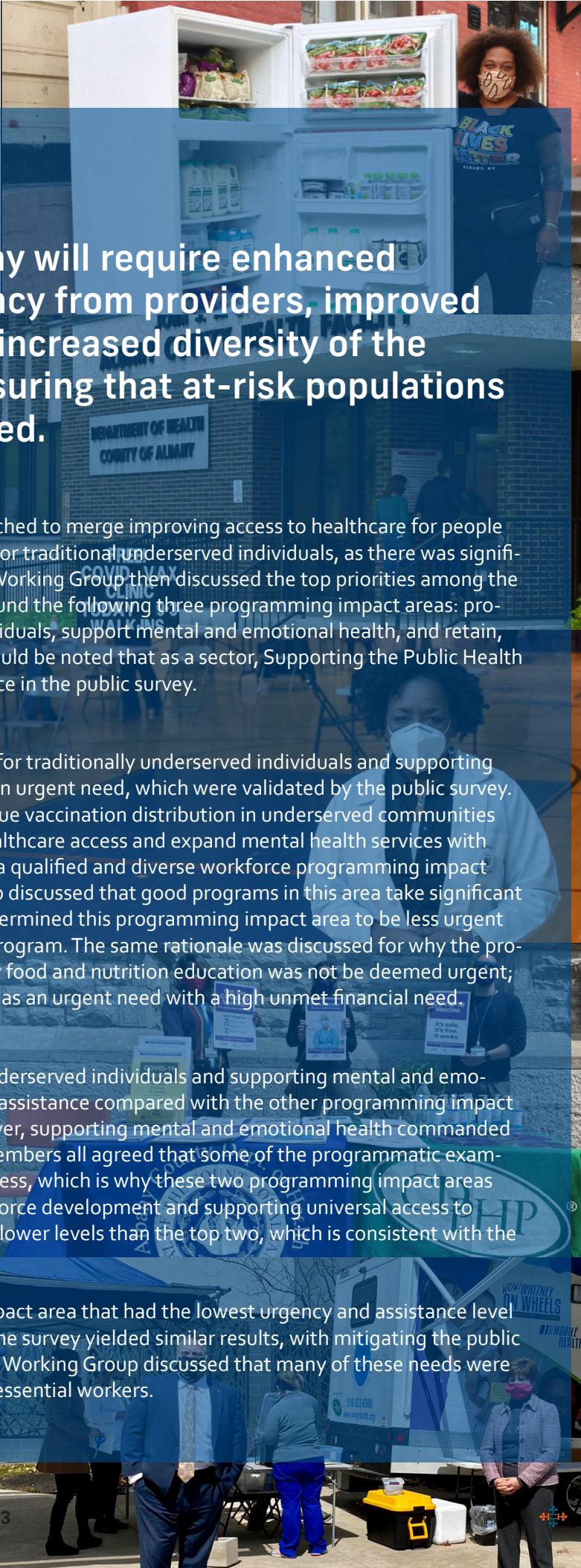
Urgency

Among this Working Group, promoting access to healthcare for traditionally underserved individuals and supporting mental and emotional health were also identified as having an urgent need, which were validated by the public survey. The discussion centered on some immediate needs to continue vaccination distribution in underserved communities and increase collaboration with local partners to improve healthcare access and expand mental health services with disadvantaged populations. The retain, develop, and attract a qualified and diverse workforce programming impact area was a top need identified as well, but the Working Group discussed that good programs in this area take significant time to execute properly and as such, the Working Group determined this programming impact area to be less urgent as proper time must be provided to ensure the success of a program. The same rationale was discussed for why the programming impact area to support universal access to healthy food and nutrition education was not be deemed urgent; however, the public survey results identified this impact area as an urgent need with a high unmet financial need.

Assistance Level

Similarly, promoting access to healthcare for traditionally underserved individuals and supporting mental and emotional health were identified as requiring the highest level of assistance compared with the other programming impact areas, which were also validated by the survey results; however, supporting mental and emotional health commanded the highest need overall in the survey. The Working Group members all agreed that some of the programmatic examples for these areas may require significant resources to address, which is why these two programming impact areas commanded the highest assistance levels. Funding for workforce development and supporting universal access to healthy food and nutrition education were funded at slightly lower levels than the top two, which is consistent with the survey results.

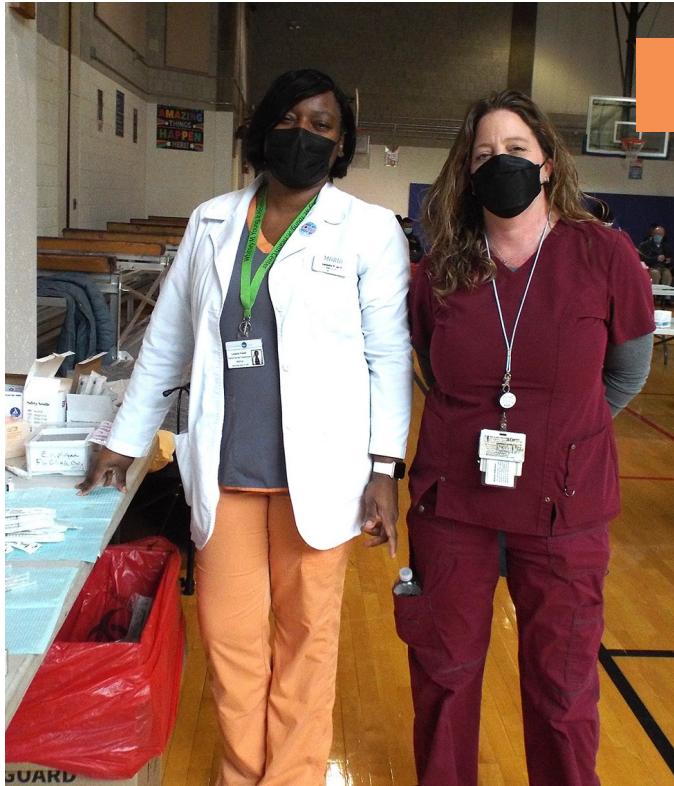
While it remains a top priority for the Working Group, the impact area that had the lowest urgency and assistance level was mitigating the public health risk for essential workers. The survey yielded similar results, with mitigating the public health risk for essential workers having the lowest need. The Working Group discussed that many of these needs were mitigated when the vaccine was rolled out which prioritized essential workers.



PRIORITIES: Supporting the Public Health Response

Impact Areas	Programmatic Recommendations
<p>PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that promote access to healthcare for traditionally underserved individuals</p> <p>CHALLENGE Access to trusted and culturally sensitive community health advocates and coordinators</p> <p>CHALLENGE Health disparities in communities of color and low-income communities</p> <p>CHALLENGE Access to bilingual medical and mental health specialists and staff</p> <p>CHALLENGE Low trust in government and institutions creating difficulties reaching minority communities about health issues</p> <p>CHALLENGE Ability to reach traditionally underserved individuals</p> <p>CHALLENGE Access to health care for people experiencing homelessness</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand programs to train culturally-sensitive community health advocates and coordinators • Promote cultural competency in program/resource delivery • Establish community case managers to act as coordinators/advocates and provide direct connections to and assistance with program navigation and resource attainment • Create or expand programs to address the structural inequities and systemic disadvantages experienced in communities of color and low-income communities • Support the delivery of healthcare services and programming in multiple languages and accessible to disabled populations including through workforce training, diverse hiring and translation services • Offer and incentivize flexible language-learning opportunities that align with organizations' and employees' needs • Enhance collaboration among local healthcare and human services organizations to host preventative healthcare clinics and educational programming • Continually assess and improve strategies of concerted and authentic governmental/institutional outreach efforts • Ensure vaccination services and healthcare services/programming are offered at flexible hours and convenient locations within disadvantaged neighborhoods • Coordinate efforts for broader information dissemination, program development, marketing resources • Create or expand programs to support local human services organizations in developing/expanding remote service/program delivery • Create or expand programs at drop-in community center utilizing wrap-around services model • Enhance marketing/community outreach efforts at established walk-in clinics to demonstrate accessible services for people experiencing homelessness • Communicate the complexities of homelessness throughout service providers to reduce stigma and create empathy • Provide formal training to healthcare staff to improve cultural understanding, awareness, and provider communication with the homeless • Enhance collaboration among local healthcare and human services organizations to host preventative healthcare clinics and educational programming • Create or expand an integrated clinic, providing primary care, mental health, substance abuse, and social services in one location • Conduct free clinics with less restrictive requirements
<p>PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that support mental and emotional health</p> <p>CHALLENGE Insufficient support for mental health issues</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand programs that support mental health education and awareness • Promote cultural competency in program/resource delivery • to address racial barriers to mental healthcare access • Create or expand programs to retain, develop, and attract mental health professionals that reflect socio-economic and cultural landscape of community • Create or expand programs that provide mental health services to disadvantaged populations to mitigate financial barriers to mental healthcare • Connect with schools and youth organizations, as well as organizations serving seniors to support mental health services to these populations

Impact Areas	Programmatic Recommendations
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that retain, develop, and attract a qualified and diverse workforce CHALLENGE Insufficient staffing in healthcare workforce, particularly in clinical nursing and entry-level employment CHALLENGE Low diversity representation across all levels in health care professions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand programs to retrain workers who lost employment and provide career counseling/advisory services for placement based on prior experience • Create or expand programs to promote and provide access to local certificate programs and post-secondary education • Promote awareness of diverse healthcare pathways for local high school and college/university students • Improve access to, retain and expand local branches of community colleges. Collaborate with these institutions to provide training for jobs in the new economy • Ensure that Albany's Career Center workforce services program and state and local agency partner training programs are customer-driven, competency-based, and focused on achieving results • Create or expand workforce development programs that serve traditionally underserved populations – specifically including populations aged 24+ years, seniors, immigrants •
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that support universal access to healthy food and nutrition education CHALLENGE Lack of universal access to healthy food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilize local resources to enhance community connections to local food providers • Create or expand initiative to share findings and implement suggestions included in recent local Food System Assessment • Continue school and local organizations' initiatives to deliver food to families
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that mitigate public health risk for essential workers CHALLENGE Inequities in the public health risk between essential and remote workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand programs to support additional workers to work remotely • Create or expand programs that supply personal protective equipment to essential workers • Encourage future public policy to be shaped by lessons learned throughout pandemic



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Top Priorities

- Promote access to healthcare for traditionally underserved individuals
- Support mental and emotional health
- Retain, develop, and attract a qualified and diverse workforce

Most Urgent

- Support mental and emotional health
- Retain, develop, and attract a qualified and diverse workforce
- Promote access to healthcare for traditionally underserved individuals
- Support universal access to healthy food and nutrition education

Most Significant Assistance Needed

- Promote access to healthcare for traditionally underserved individuals





ASSISTANCE TO WORKERS AND FAMILIES

To ensure Albany's residents are equitably prepared for the future - particularly to participate in and help grow regional industry clusters - they must be supported by quality, affordable childcare; access to universal high-speed internet; and skills-development training focused on the underserved.

Prioritization

This Working Group first achieved consensus to revise the programmatic examples, with the recommendations primarily focusing on reaching/targeting specific portions of the population, realizing efficiencies and the creation/expansion of available programs and services. After an in-depth analysis, the three paramount programming impact areas were identified as: create efficiency for or sustainability of existing programs producing impactful results; retain, develop and attract a qualified and diverse workforce & emerging/expanding industries and job opportunities; and expand access to affordable, high-speed broadband throughout the City of Albany. The discussion centered on the consideration of which Impact Areas have the broadest scope of influence to address current needs with an ability to potentially target and positively influence the most City residents. It should be noted that public survey input prioritized the Assistance to Workers and Families – Education/Workforce/Human Services Impact Area as 'most important' overall in terms of recovery needs, and childcare specifically was consistently identified by the public as a priority.

Urgency

Given the necessity of high-speed internet connectivity (laid bare by the COVID-19 crisis) expanding access to affordable, high-speed broadband throughout the City of Albany was determined to be particularly urgent due to widespread access and affordability issues for City residents. Additionally, creating efficiency for or sustainability of existing programs producing impactful results, while broad in scope, was classified as an impact area of urgency. This is due to the numerous, existing programs involving children and education, in particular, that could be further supported/enhanced to impact more individuals in a meaningful way. Through the public survey, "access to mental health support to address the social/emotional impacts of the pandemic" was ranked as the overall program area with the most immediate urgency, while access to broadband, affordable childcare, and workforce development were also deemed urgent.

Assistance Level

Finally, the Working Group examined level of assistance for each impact area. While the Working Group allocated potential funds quite evenly across the six impact areas, the two impact areas deemed most urgent above were determined to require slightly higher assistance levels as a result of their urgency. The public survey similarly indicated that access to affordable, high-speed broadband was among the top three in terms of unmet financial need, while mental health support to address the social/emotional impacts of the pandemic and access/affordability to childcare emerged as requiring greater assistance levels as determined by the public.

PRIORITIES: Education, Workforce & Human Services

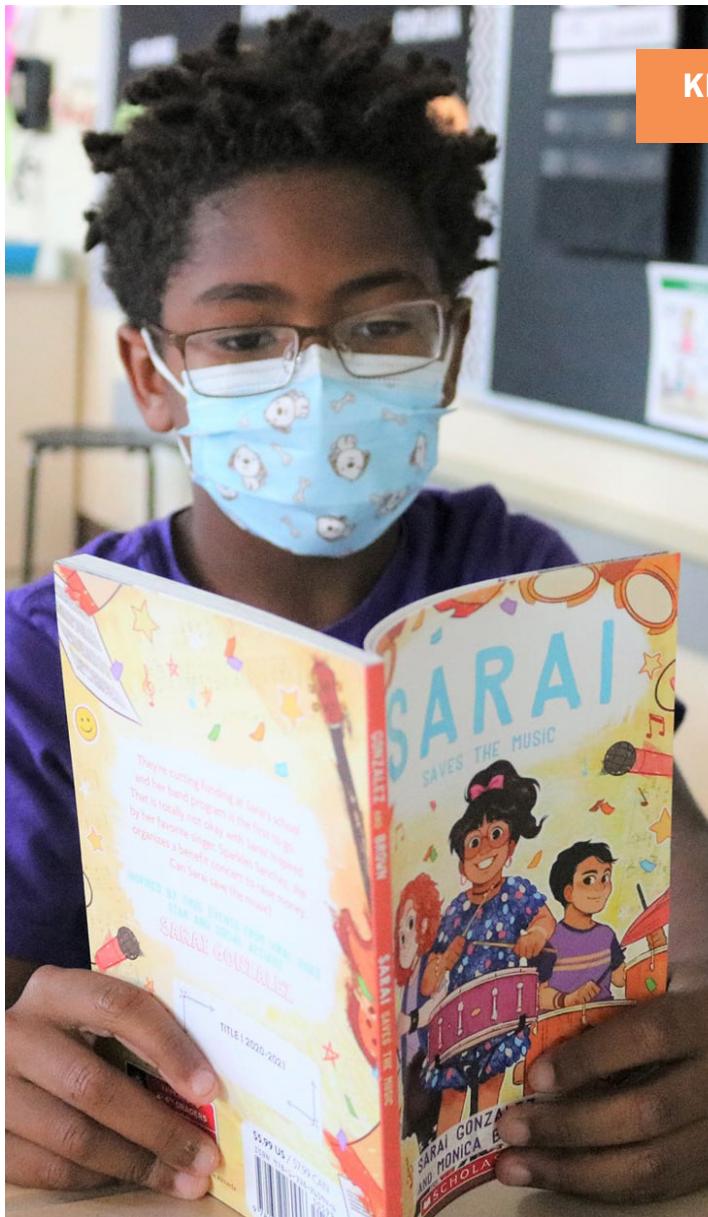
Impact Areas	Programmatic Recommendations
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that expand access to affordable, high-speed broadband throughout the City of Albany CHALLENGE Access to the internet/broadband (hardware and service)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand on the success of the City of Albany/Tech Valley partnership which aims to provide free wireless internet and digital literacy programs by supporting initiatives that work with City libraries, educational institutions, and neighborhood organizations to expand access Expand wireless internet service for commercial, institutional and residential use throughout Albany and the Capital Region by partnering with and leveraging existing resources like the New York State Office of Technology, communications service providers, the school district, and major institutions Create and expand programs that provide, or provide financial assistance for, up-to-date hardware for populations impacted by the digital divide (particularly focusing on seniors and low-income communities)
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that increase awareness of, support navigation of and improve access to available services and financial resources CHALLENGE Access to trusted and culturally-sensitive education, workforce and community service advocates and coordinators CHALLENGE Lost connections and confidence between service providers and historically underserved populations CHALLENGE Access to services/resources for undocumented community members CHALLENGE Awareness of and access to available services for newly unemployed or low-income individuals CHALLENGE Limited coordination among service providers to address impacts at scale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create and expand programs that offer multi-lingual and culturally-sensitive community caseworkers/outreach coordinators/translators Support the delivery of programming in multiple languages and accessible to disabled populations including through workforce training, diverse hiring and translation services Expand diversity of outreach opportunities for program creation and information/technical assistance supporting service delivery (e.g. hybrid in-person/online, multiple geographic access points, multiple days/times) Create and expand initiatives that focus on providing creative cultural programs and learning opportunities to community residents Support the co-location of human and social services agencies and share resources between organizations where feasible to reduce costs, leverage resources of multiple organizations, and mitigate potential inefficiencies. Assist with developing shared outreach materials for the City's social service agencies. Support programs that leverage multiple complementary partners to provide single-point-of-entry financial resources and support services Geographic specificity of programming will be of critical importance to serve targeted populations, as will tapping into the existing infrastructure and network of service providers Create or expand opportunities to engage smaller organizations in the conversation
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that provide mental health support and address social-emotional impacts of the pandemic CHALLENGE Insufficient/inaccessible Human Services support to address traumatic impacts of 2020 CHALLENGE Academic and social-emotional impacts on children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create and expand programs that offer multi-lingual and culturally-sensitive community caseworkers/outreach coordinators/translators Create and expand programs that improve and increase access to mental health and social-emotional wellbeing services, as well as improve the referral/qualification processes Create and expand programs that improve and increase education and support regarding nutrition and health risks Create and expand programs that provide resources to help address trauma resulting from or exacerbated by the pandemic Create and expand programs that coordinate the City of Albany School District, the City of Albany and local service providers to address the needs of Albany's school-aged children Create and expand programs that provide access to affordable and quality, holistic childcare Create and expand mental health programs for children, e.g. the Intensive Case Management Program (previously operated by NYS) Ensure that mental health response is provided in conjunction with policing; relationship building is critical



Impact Areas	Programmatic Recommendations
<p>PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that retain, develop and attract a qualified and diverse workforce and emerging/ expanding industries and job opportunities</p> <p>CHALLENGE <i>Access to workforce development and training programs to facilitate career advancement or career transitions</i></p> <p>CHALLENGE <i>Shortage of qualified and available workforce to meet employment demand across multiple sectors</i></p> <p>CHALLENGE <i>Low diversity in skilled construction trades professions</i></p> <p>CHALLENGE <i>Insufficient workforce development resources for individuals aged 25+</i></p> <p>CHALLENGE <i>Access to diverse employment opportunities/ industries</i></p> <p>CHALLENGE <i>Non-competitive salaries in fields critically in need of staffing, such as childcare and education</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support programs that involve the business community in planning for adult education and workforce training to match needed skills with education Establish and expand workforce development programs that provide professional development advancement opportunities, i.e. licensing fees, exam registration fees, etc. Develop and expand programs that create partnerships between the business community and schools in low-income neighborhoods to provide and identify career pathways and mentoring Support small and private businesses in the creation of flexible and creative benefits packages Support for an Apprenticeship Program to expand workforce and diversity in the Building Trades, enabling a pipeline that connects people to the building trades for training Create and expand programs that assist local businesses that utilize apprenticeships and other innovative job training techniques to build a local workforce with the appropriate skills for the workforce of tomorrow Ensure that Albany's Career Center workforce services program and state and local agency partner training programs are customer-driven, competency-based, and focused on achieving results Improve access to, retain and expand local branches of community colleges. Collaborate with these institutions to provide training for jobs in the new economy Create or expand workforce development programs that serve traditionally underserved populations – specifically including populations aged 24+ years, seniors, immigrants Create or expand wrap-around service providers to assist with affordability across the income spectrum, with particular focus on lower-wage employees with prohibitive needs (e.g. transportation, childcare) Support and expand programs that market live/work/play opportunities in the City and Capital Region that provide resources for diverse local residents, college and university students, and prospective talent to identify welcoming, equitable local career and lifestyle opportunities (e.g. CapNY, human resources packages) Support community development, housing, economic development and public infrastructure projects that create job opportunities and pathways to employment for local residents Create or expand programs to retrain workers who lost employment and provide career counseling/advisory services for placement based on prior experience Create or expand programs to promote and provide access to local certificate programs and post-secondary education Promote awareness of diverse career pathways for local high school and college/university students Additional areas of cooperation or facilitation recommended e.g. BOCES and the Albany City School District, City and Albany School District Create or expand programs to attract and retain additional new, emerging, and diverse industries to the City to grow the City's employer base, e.g. film production
<p>PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs that create efficiency for or sustainability of existing programs producing impactful results</p> <p>CHALLENGE <i>Lack of resources for operational activities for service providers</i></p> <p>CHALLENGE <i>Ability to re-start successful pre-pandemic initiatives</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support the co-location of human and social services agencies and share resources between organizations where feasible to reduce costs, leverage resources of multiple organizations, and mitigate potential inefficiencies. Create or expand financial assistance programs for ongoing operational activities beyond start-up or pilot phase Support service providers in re-building programs that were proven to be impactful pre-pandemic but were operationally impacted by negative financial, awareness or capacity impacts of COVID-19

Impact Areas	Programmatic Recommendations
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that increase access to and affordability of quality, holistic childcare options CHALLENGE <i>Insufficient access to affordable, enriching childcare options to allow individuals to return to the workforce</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand programs that focus on strategies for preparing low-income children for K-5 schooling through educational curricula and social-emotional support • Create or expand the availability of childcare outside of the traditional/corporate 9-5 schedule • Create or expand projects that increase diverse geographic access to childcare within and throughout all of Albany's neighborhoods • Create or expand resources for training, curriculum development, certification and physical upgrades for home-based childcare providers • Create or expand the availability of culturally sensitive and multilingual childcare opportunities through workforce training, diverse hiring • Create or expand access to wrap-around services to assist low-wage employees with prohibitive needs (e.g. transportation, childcare) • Create or expand programs that allow for drop-in childcare opportunities • Support local companies in creating in-house childcare options • Create or expand mentorship programs for interested childcare providers

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS



Top Priorities

- Expand access to affordable, high-speed broadband throughout the City of Albany
- Retain, develop and attract a qualified and diverse workforce for emerging/expanding industries and job opportunities
- Increase access to and affordability of quality, holistic childcare options
- Create efficiency for or sustainability of existing programs producing impactful results

Most Urgent

- Expand access to affordable, high-speed broadband throughout the City of Albany
- Create efficiency for or sustainability of existing programs producing impactful results
- Increase access to and affordability of quality, holistic childcare options
- Provide mental health support and address social-emotional impacts of the pandemic
- Retain, develop and attract a qualified and diverse workforce for emerging/expanding industries and job opportunities

Most Significant Assistance Needed

- Expand access to affordable, high-speed broadband throughout the City of Albany
- Create efficiency for or sustainability of existing programs producing impactful results



ASSISTANCE TO WORKERS AND FAMILIES

Targeted, deliberate and meaningful action to reverse neighborhood disinvestment resulting from a history of systemic racism and creating supportive and accessible pathways to increase equitable homeownership are critical to Albany's revitalization.

Prioritization

After considering which Program Impact Areas would have the most impact on the City of Albany, this Working Group made the determination that the top impact areas were target public infrastructure improvements in distressed census tracts and disinvested neighborhoods, support local real estate development investments that advance community revitalization goals, and enhance alternative transportation use and increase accessibility and equity in transportation options. The discussion centered around the need to address underutilized and blighted properties and the need to increase minority homeownership opportunities. The Working Group also primarily focused on expanding transportation options in an equitable manner. Through public input, quality affordable housing opportunities emerged as a consistent priority as well.

Urgency

Due to the recent spike in gun violence in the City, improving public safety was identified as one of the most urgent impact areas. There was also significant discussion regarding the need for more homeownership opportunities, particularly among communities of color. Therefore, the support quality and affordable housing opportunities was also identified as urgent. Similarly, targeting public infrastructure improvements in distressed census tracts and disinvested neighborhoods, as well as enhancing alternative transportation use and increase accessibility and equity in transportation options were determined to be urgent, along with encourage use of and spending at local businesses. These impact areas have been historically underfunded and affected by inequitable access, which was exacerbated by COVID-19. Through the public survey, improving public safety; targeting public infrastructure improvements in distressed census tracts and disinvested neighborhoods; implementation of neighborhood revitalization strategies; and supporting quality, affordable housing were likewise deemed priorities in terms of urgency.

Assistance Level

After much consideration, the Working Group determined the highest assistance level would be required by the following three areas: support for quality and affordable housing opportunities, support local real estate development that advances community revitalization goals, and targeting public infrastructure improvements in distressed neighborhoods. The Group's discussion focused on the scale of the investments required and the significant costs to make sizable impact in these areas. The public survey results generally aligned with the conclusions of the working group, indicating that public infrastructure improvements in distressed census tracts, support for quality, affordable housing, and implementation of neighborhood revitalization strategies had the highest level of unmet financial need. Although the latter was not in the top three in terms of assistance level by the Working Group, it was agreed that it was of high importance and interconnected with supporting local real estate development projects that advance community revitalization goals.

PRIORITIES: Housing, Transportation & Community Revitalization

Impact Areas	Programmatic Recommendations
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that invest in implementation of neighborhood revitalization strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand programs that provide demolition and/or rehabilitation funding citywide, with emphasis on traditionally disadvantaged neighborhoods • Create or expand programs that provide gap financing for housing development projects in distressed Census tracts and traditionally disadvantaged neighborhoods • Create or expand programs that specifically support and target increasing homeownership opportunities for minority populations and increasing homeownership rates in neighborhoods with traditionally low homeownership rates • Create or expand programs that prioritize vacant and abandoned property acquisition and redevelopment • Create and expand programs that provide financial support to property owners for upgrades, code compliance, and improvements • Leverage existing resources – like the NYSDOS Brownfield program - to fund projects in neighborhoods with a high level of architectural and/or historic character and with a large number of vacant or abandoned properties • Create and expand community support programming like youth and senior activities and services • Create and expand programs and projects that increase food access—particularly targeting areas that are “food deserts” • Create and expand programs that highlight, expand or create community events and activities • Create or expand programs to ensure access to healthcare, housing, food assistance and any other services to everyone in need • Create or expand programming that allows for easier and more equitable access • Create or expand projects/programs that provide quality and affordable rental housing opportunities • Create or expand programs that assist homeowners with supportive upkeep and maintenance of their homes, as well as related infrastructure improvements e.g. lead service line replacement
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that target public infrastructure improvements in distressed census tracts and disinvested neighborhoods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invest in pedestrian and other connectivity infrastructure in disinvested neighborhoods, ensuring these neighborhoods are fully connected – particularly to job opportunities, environmentally-friendly green space, and other neighborhoods e.g. connect South End to Downtown and Delaware Ave. • Invest in multi-generational and accessible parks, playgrounds and open spaces in disinvested neighborhoods • Create or expand programs for gateway improvement projects in traditionally disadvantaged neighborhoods • Develop a design guidelines manual of suggestions including pattern books for each City neighborhood • Create development incentives to promote the use and application of design enhancements for rehabilitation and new construction projects • Leverage existing resources to make amenity and infrastructure investments in disinvested neighborhoods
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that encourage use of and spending at local businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand programs to encourage workers to work from the office • Create or expand programs to attract commercial office tenants to the City's commercial corridors • Create or expand programs that encourage college and university students to explore the City's commercial corridors • Create or expand programs providing financial assistance and technical support for marketing and advertising for small businesses or commercial corridors • Create or expand financial resources and regulatory solutions to address rent delinquency • (See additional small business support programs in Small Business section)
CHALLENGE Impact of work from home/hybrid schedules on the City's restaurants and retailers CHALLENGE Insufficient resources for payment of unpaid rent and other financial obligations	



Impact Areas	Programmatic Recommendations
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that retain, develop and attract a qualified and diverse workforce CHALLENGE <i>Access to qualified and diverse talent</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that Albany's Career Center workforce services program and state and local agency partner training programs are customer-driven, competency-based, and focused on achieving results • Improve access to, retain and expand local branches of community colleges. Collaborate with these institutions to provide training for jobs in the new economy • Convene a coalition of Albany's business and education leadership (from both primary and secondary schools), including Albany Workforce Investment Board (WIB), Capital Region Board of Cooperative Education Services (BOCES), and other workforce agencies, to strategize mutually beneficial initiatives and address real and perceived issues, including increasing opportunities for recent high school and/or college graduates to work nearby • Work with local employers to improve recruitment by identifying opportunities for "trailing" spouses (person who follows a spouse who takes a new job in different city) • Offer financial/tax incentives to local businesses that utilize apprenticeships and other innovative job training techniques to build a workforce with the appropriate skills for the workforce of tomorrow • Support for an Apprenticeship Program to expand workforce and diversity in the Building Trades • Create or expand workforce development programs that serve traditionally underserved populations – specifically including populations aged 24+ years, seniors, immigrants
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs that increase awareness of, support navigation of and improve access to available services and financial resources CHALLENGE <i>Awareness/Access to existing resources for support and funding</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish community case managers to act as coordinators/ advocates and provide direct connections to and assistance with program navigation and resource attainment • Support the creation of "one-stop shop" platforms that aggregate and can co-market complementary programming • Promote cultural competency in program/resource delivery • Support the delivery of programming in multiple languages and accessible to disabled populations including through workforce training, diverse hiring and translation services
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that improve public safety CHALLENGE <i>Public safety concerns including an escalation of gun violence, pandemic-related restrictions on community policing and anti-recidivism initiatives</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support community policing initiatives • Encourage and expand positive interactions between police and children/young adults in the community • Prevent truancy and ensure all children are attending school • Support or expand programs to assist people with mental health or substance abuse issues outside of the criminal justice system • Continually assess and improve strategies of police interactions with homeless and at-risk populations • Promote public safety enhancements, including design improvements, to ensure that the public feels secure throughout the City • Coordinate with the County on community and holistic policing, especially for at-risk populations

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Top Priorities

- Target public infr improvements in distressed census tracts and disinvested neighborhoods
- Support local real estate dev investments that advance community revitalization goals
- Enhance alt transportation use & increase accessibility
- Support quality & affordable housing opportunities

Impact Areas	Programmatic Recommendations
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that support quality, affordable, and diverse housing opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand financial resources and regulatory solutions to address rent delinquency • Improve and enhance the dissemination of information related to existing programs – like ERAP – to address rent delinquency • Provide financial support for the creation of additional homeownership opportunities, particularly for minority homebuyers • Create and expand technical support programs for first-time homebuyers • Create or expand homelessness assistance grant programs • Create or expand an emergency assistance fund to help prevent evictions by providing short-term financial assistance and housing stabilization services • Provide access to legal services, foreclosure and eviction crisis counseling • Create or expand programs that provide rental assistance • Create or expand first-time homebuyer and financial management education • Create or expand programs that provide education on, and financially support, effective property management and maintenance for first-time homebuyers i.e. create savings/match programs similar to existing first-time homebuyer down payment assistance programs
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that support local real estate development investments that advance community revitalization goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand programs that provide gap financing to real estate development projects with particular emphasis on implementation of revitalization strategies and distressed neighborhoods • Create or expand municipally-guaranteed real estate loan fund • Support of community development financial institutions (CDFIs) • Create, expand or promote the use of financial assistance for new and minority contractors and developers • Conduct or update multi-sector market studies to understand post-pandemic demand for commercial, residential, retail and hospitality projects • Support the training and development of a pipeline of local labor for the construction trades • Support the marketing of opportunity sites throughout the City of Albany • Encourage and expand the use of existing real estate development tools and resources (e.g. industrial development agency, mission-based lenders, land bank) to support local redevelopment projects
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that enhance alternative transportation use and increase accessibility and equity in transportation options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase marketing of alternative transportation options (e.g. transit, bike-share) including safety, health and wellness improvements and benefits • Create or expand programs that encourage employers to provide transit benefits for their employees • Bring to market additional mobility options currently under development • Support the enhancement of online/digital platforms for increased efficiency in public transportation • Implement projects/strategies identified in the City's Bike Master Plan • Implement street calming measures to increase traffic calming and pedestrian/cyclist safety, particularly on motor vehicle-dense corridors such as Central Ave. • Support programs/projects that provide more equitable access to all modes of public transportation e.g. fare reductions corresponding to income levels • Enhance connections to employment centers and necessary services

Most Urgent

- Target public infra improvements in distressed census tracts and disinvested neighborhoods
- Encourage use of and spending at local businesses
- Improve public safety
- Support quality & affordable housing opportunities
- Enhance alt transportation use & increase accessibility
- Invest in implement'n of neighborhood revit strategies

Most Significant Assistance Needed

- Target public infr improvements in distressed census tracts and disinvested neighborhoods
- Support quality & affordable housing opportunities
- Support local real estate dev investments that advance community revitalization goals



SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT

Flexible assistance and quality of place are essential for Albany's small businesses to successfully pivot operations to meet the demands of a dynamic new environment and attract and retain customers.

Prioritization

Through discussion, the Working Group determined the top three programming impact areas for Small Business Recovery: provide flexible financial assistance, technical assistance (TA) and access to information for a diverse array of small business needs; develop supportive and flexible legislation, regulations, and code; and improve the quality of Albany's commercial districts, including gateways and all connecting streets. Recurring throughout the conversation was a significant emphasis on leveraging existing programming to expand its respective offerings, or make investments to both better advertise the existence of and provide resources in a more accessible manner. The discussion also focused on investments not just in commercial districts, but in their gateways and connecting areas. Overall, the public ranked the Small Business Support sector as a lower priority in terms of recovery need than all but one of the five other Working Groups; however, the public mirrored the sentiment of the Working Group that flexible financial assistance and business development support should be a high priority for this sector.

Urgency

The Group determined that the providing flexible financial assistance, technical assistance and access to information for small businesses impact area; the impact area for placemaking in Albany's commercial districts and surrounding streets; and the workforce development impact area share the highest level of urgency. The discussion centered on the perception that while there are existing small business assistance programs, additional marketing or funding for marketing could increase public awareness of these resources. Regarding placemaking, several Working Group members expressed their belief that enhanced placemaking and infrastructure investments at Albany's gateways surrounding districts/streets has the potential to improve socioeconomic conditions in disinvested areas, creating jobs, and generating local activity. In terms of urgency from a public perspective, only the workforce development impact area made it into the top ten overall.

Assistance Level

Similar to the Prioritization and Urgency determinations, from the Working Group perspective, the flexible financial assistance, TA and access to information for small businesses impact area was determined to require the highest assistance level. Improving the quality of place in Albany's commercial districts achieved a close second in terms of assistance level. The qualified and diverse workforce impact area rounded out the top three. The discussion focused on the costs of marketing and expanding existing technical assistance programming, both in terms of available programs and accessibility of programming by location and timing of operation. Placemaking was recommended to receive the second highest assistance level, with several members noting that some infrastructure improvements that could be initiated may become costly. Similar to the Task Force, from the public perspective, financial support was paramount in terms of highest unmet need. Encouraging use of and spending at local businesses and supporting entrepreneurship opportunities rounded out the top three in terms of required assistance level.

PRIORITIES: Small Business Support

Impact Areas	Programmatic Recommendations
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that provide flexible financial assistance, technical assistance, and access to information for a diverse array of small business needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand programs that provide flexibility for eligible uses of funding • Create or expand programs that specifically support and focus on minority, women, and veteran-owned small businesses (SEED, SBDC Inclusivity Project) • Enhance access to traditional lending resources for minority, women and veteran-owned businesses and other traditionally un-banked or under-banked populations • Advocate for and create programs that provide for inclusive and/or flexible business eligibility (i.e. size, viability)
CHALLENGE Gaps in eligibility of existing small business programs	
CHALLENGE Limited access to capital for small businesses, and specifically to minorities	
CHALLENGE Insufficient resources for unpaid rent and other financial obligations owed by small businesses	
CHALLENGE Restricted/inflexible eligible uses of funding on many available programs (e.g. technology improvements, virtual presence, marketing eligibility)	
CHALLENGE Limited ongoing technical assistance/skills development for existing businesses	
CHALLENGE Access to business development support for small business owners with limited capacity	
CHALLENGE Gaps in digital/virtual/website presence and technical skills for small businesses	
CHALLENGE Insufficient coordination/collaboration of organizations providing assistance to small businesses	
CHALLENGE Awareness/access to existing program information	
CHALLENGE Access to commercial kitchen space to start-up or expand operations	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand financial resources and regulatory solutions to address rent delinquency • Support programs that encourage commercial property owners to incentivize small business tenants • Focus programs on business adaptation to meet current market demands • Create and expand programs that provide financial relief for utilities and infrastructure • Provide programs/support to meet the needs of businesses that have not qualified for other prior assistance • Create or expand scholarship programs to enable additional and more equitable access to existing technical assistance and training programs i.e. Chamber's Entrepreneur Boot Camp • Increase awareness and access to 8a Business Development program, HUBZone program, SDVOB, other federal programs • Ensure technical assistance programming is offered at flexible hours and locations to serve businesses when owners are available i.e., bring the resources to the business owners and work around their limited hours • Enhance collaboration among local economic development organizations to host technical assistance seminars/training • Provide continuing mentoring and business support beyond start up, including funding/training for effective marketing and online sales • Support business-to-business collaborations, partnerships and mentoring to strengthen operations • Continue regular meetings and collaboration of local/regional economic development organizations, such as Support SmAlbany • Coordinate efforts for broader information dissemination, program development, marketing resources • Highlight local business success stories and best practices • Promote cultural competency in program/resource delivery • Support the delivery of programming in multiple languages and accessible to disabled populations including through workforce training, diverse hiring and translation services • Create or expand programs to support small businesses in developing an online presence and digital sales platform • Prioritize and support enhancements/expansion of successful, existing programs to be more flexible e.g., programs operated by SBDC, EAC, CEG, SCORE, VBOC etc. • Identify and develop a more effective means of disseminating information and opportunities for MWBE businesses e.g. MWBE Bootcamp, MWBE Expo • Address lack of awareness of resources by providing a dedicated resource for small businesses • Develop a commercial kitchen incubator • Connect existing businesses with available and usable commercial kitchen space with new and expanding ventures in need of part-time kitchen access • Create or expand existing programs for interior fit-up, equipment purchase or space rental • Connect existing businesses with available and usable light industrial space with new and expanding ventures



Impact Areas	Programmatic Recommendations
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that support entrepreneurship opportunities and start-up businesses, particularly for individuals unemployed due to the pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand programs that provide path from unemployment to entrepreneurship (e.g. Self-Employment Assistance Program (SEAP)) • Identify needs in the supply chain for new and rapidly expanding industries • Create or expand programs to support start-ups or expansions that pursue gaps in market/growth sectors to promote recovery • Create or expand programs that support brick-and-mortar start-ups through rent assistance, fit-up support and marketing (e.g. Downtown BID's free retail space for entrepreneurs) • Promote awareness of entrepreneurial pathways for local high school and college/university students • Identify storefront opportunities in local commercial corridors and create or expand programs to fill them • Create or expand programs that support home-based businesses
CHALLENGE Limited resources for entrepreneurship	
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that focus on financial support for businesses with ongoing reopening challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand near-term assistance programs for businesses still unable to open at full capacity, or newly able to open at full capacity • Create or expand programs that encourage college and university students to explore the City's commercial corridors • Create or expand programs providing financial assistance and technical support for marketing and advertising for small businesses or commercial corridors • Encourage future public policy to be shaped by lessons learned throughout pandemic • Create or expand programs that support the diversification of small business operations and offerings • Assist small businesses with developing or enhancing their online presence
CHALLENGE Disparate impacts of reopening guidance on certain businesses/ industries and the individuals they employ, in particular, underserved populations	
CHALLENGE Ongoing reduction in revenues due to continued social distancing behaviors	
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Projects and programs that retain, develop, and attract a qualified and diverse workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that Albany's Career Center workforce services program and state and local agency partner training programs are customer-driven, competency-based, and focused on achieving results • Improve access to, retain and expand local branches of community colleges. Collaborate with these institutions to provide training for jobs in the new economy • Create or expand workforce development programs that serve traditionally underserved populations – specifically including populations aged 24+ years, seniors, immigrants • Create or expand wrap-around service providers to assist low-wage employees with prohibitive needs (e.g. transportation, childcare) • Support small businesses in the creation of flexible and creative benefits packages • Increase awareness of existing workforce incentives and the diversity of industries/ distinct career pathways in Albany (see Education, Workforce, And Human Services Working Group) • Create or expand programs to market Albany opportunities, attract and retain larger capacity MWBE General Contractors to the City, as well as other large private employers • Create or expand marketing opportunities to support small businesses seeking to contract with local MWBEs
CHALLENGE Access to qualified and diverse talent to reopen/maintain operations successfully	
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that stabilize inventory costs resulting from supply chain disruption/market gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote local sourcing of supplies and inventory whenever possible • Conduct a leakage study to determine what suppliers are missing from the local marketplace that could serve supply-chain needs of local small businesses • Create or expand programs to support start-ups or expansions that pursue gaps in the local supply chain
CHALLENGE Escalation of inventory and supplies costs due to supply chain disruption	

Impact Areas	Programmatic Recommendations
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that encourage use of and spending at local businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand of programs to encourage workers to work from the office • Create or expand programs to attract commercial office tenants to the City's commercial corridors • Create or expand programs that encourage college and university students to explore the City's commercial corridors • Create or expand programs providing financial assistance and technical support for marketing and advertising for small businesses or commercial corridors
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that develop supportive and flexible legislation, regulations, and code	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand programs that increase the amount of outdoor space available to conduct business • Create or expand flexible authorizations for business activity permission (e.g. alcohol to-go sales, hours of operation, flexible parking zones) • Support small business initiatives that pivot operations to increase resiliency and diversification
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that improve the quality of place in Albany's commercial districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand programs and projects that invest in wayfinding • Create or expand programs for gateway improvement projects in traditionally disadvantaged neighborhoods • Create or expand public events and activities that promote foot traffic • Investments in pedestrian and other connectivity infrastructure in commercial corridors
CHALLENGE <i>Impact of work from home/hybrid schedules on the City's restaurants and retailers</i>	
CHALLENGE <i>Expiration/pending expiration of flexible legislation/authorizations that supported small business</i>	
CHALLENGE <i>Insufficient resources to address gateway and commercial corridor improvements and public amenities</i>	



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Top Priorities

- Provide flexible financial assistance, technical assistance, and access to information for a diverse array of small business needs
- Develop supportive and flexible legislation, regulations and code
- Improve the quality of place in Albany's commercial districts, including gateways and all connecting streets

Most Urgent

- Provide flexible financial assistance, technical assistance, and access to information for a diverse array of small business needs
- Retain, develop and attract a qualified and diverse workforce
- Improve the quality of place in Albany's commercial districts, including gateways and all connecting streets

Most Significant Assistance Needed

- Provide flexible financial assistance, technical assistance, and access to information for a diverse array of small business needs
- Improve the quality of place in Albany's commercial districts, including gateways and all connecting streets



Leisure, lodging and cultural recovery will require enhanced connectivity to visitors through creating better awareness of local offerings, more equitable access to local communities, and quality of place investments that connect venues and neighborhoods.

Prioritization

As identified by the Working Group, the top three programming impact areas included in the Recommendations are as follows: provide flexible financial assistance and technical support for hospitality, arts & cultural entities; increase awareness of and equitable access to existing arts and cultural venues for residents of all ages; and enhance the connectivity and navigability from destination-to-destination and promote public safety. Of the four total programming impact areas, these three were prioritized due to the estimated existing resources for the remaining impact area. Further, in this impact area, expansion of programs is seen as more likely the best use of resources, bringing initial expenses down with opportune lack of startup costs. Overall, the public ranked the Tourism sector as lowest priority in terms of recovery need than all of the five other Working Groups; however, the public survey data supports the Working Group's determination that wayfinding and access/awareness of resources were high priorities for this sector.

Urgency

In terms of urgency, the following programming impact areas were identified as top tier: providing flexible financial assistance and technical support for hospitality, arts & cultural entities; and enhancing the connectivity and navigability from destination-to-destination and promote public safety. The two remaining impact areas were deemed slightly less urgent due to the perceived existing resources for these impact areas. In terms of urgency, public input did not deem any of the Tourism-specific impact areas to be among the top impact areas overall.

Assistance Level

The conclusion based on the discussions within the Working Group was that providing flexible financial assistance and technical support for hospitality, arts & cultural entities merits the highest level of assistance. This level was marginally greater than the two impact areas of increasing awareness of and equitable access to existing arts and cultural venues for residents of all ages and enhancing the connectivity and navigability from destination-to-destination and promote public safety. As the Group discussed prior, due to existing available resources to address this impact area, the least amount of assistance was designated to focus on marketing and financial support for businesses and organizations with ongoing reopening challenges. Similar with respect to assistance level recommendations made by Task Force members, public survey input indicated that the enhancing the connectivity and navigability from destination-to-destination impact area has the greatest need overall, but providing flexible financial assistance and technical support for hospitality, arts & cultural entities has the second greatest need.

PRIORITIES: Travel, Tourism, Hospitality & Arts Recovery

Impact Areas	Programmatic Recommendations
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that provide flexible financial assistance and technical support for hospitality, arts & cultural entities CHALLENGE Gaps in digital/virtual/ website presence and technical skills for arts/tourism/cultural venues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand programs to offset initial set-up costs related to upgrading or enhancing organizations' technology infrastructure • Provide training and/or technical support to entities developing or expanding an online presence or digital viewing/exhibit platform
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that increase awareness of and equitable access to existing hospitality, arts & cultural destinations for residents of all ages CHALLENGE Limited connectivity between arts and schools/youth CHALLENGE Insufficient resources to provide equitable access for admission charges CHALLENGE Access to and awareness of resources for arts/tourism/cultural organizations, businesses, and foodways CHALLENGE Limited marketing and advertising budgets and cross-coordination among venues CHALLENGE Lack of a single public-facing resource for tourism/travel/hospitality/arts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand existing partnerships between schools and arts and cultural organizations • Enhance collaboration and marketing partnerships among local arts and cultural destinations, businesses, and other organizations to coordinate complementary events and programming, implement mutual promotion for events and reach a broader audience, e.g. First Friday, Juneteenth, and similar events • Create or expand programs to offset costs related to reduced/free admission for disadvantaged populations e.g. sponsor another guest/attendee, suggested donations • Coordinate efforts for broader information dissemination, program development, marketing resources, and include smaller venues in this outreach • Utilize existing attraction campaign(s) such as CapNY and provide support to enhance its reach and impact • Expand existing public-facing resource(s) for tourism/travel/ hospitality/arts to enable City of Albany-specific entertainment/events/dining/shopping/accommodations/etc. recommendations based on location • Create or expand programs that encourage college and university students to explore the City's hospitality, arts and cultural destinations • Highlight local organization success stories and best practices • Evaluate and modify marketing efforts to better connect initiatives to minorities, e.g. work with community anchors, existing neighborhood associations, and CANA • Create additional opportunities for temporary, pop-up arts and cultural programming/initiatives, particularly within traditionally disadvantaged neighborhoods • Create new or enhance existing events to achieve more consistency with recurring events/programming • Invest in infrastructure necessary for the implementation of successful events/programming in city parks e.g. power and water supply
PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that focus on marketing and financial support for businesses and organizations with ongoing reopening challenges CHALLENGE Limited conferences and events being scheduled CHALLENGE Reduced single-day and overnight visitors to spend money locally CHALLENGE Ongoing reduction in revenues due to continued social distancing behaviors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand programs that provide flexibility for eligible uses of funding • Advocate for and create programs that provide for inclusive and/or flexible business eligibility (i.e. entity/venue type, viability) • Focus programs on business adaptation to meet current market demands • Create or expand programs providing financial assistance and technical support for marketing and advertising for hospitality, arts, and cultural organizations • Create or expand a marketing campaign to highlight enhanced health and safety precautions and increase public and private comfort with large-scale events • Create or expand programs that provide incentives to vaccinated individuals to encourage greater attendance at events • Create or expand public events and activities that promote foot traffic • Encourage future public policy to be shaped by lessons learned throughout pandemic



Impact Areas	Programmatic Recommendations
<p>PROGRAMMING IMPACT AREA Programs and projects that enhance the connectivity and navigability from destination-to-destination and promote public safety</p> <p>CHALLENGE <i>Gaps in lighting, wayfinding, and pedestrian safety improvements that create public safety concerns</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create or expand programs and projects that invest in wayfinding and increase walkability • Create or expand programs for connectivity and gateway improvement projects within traditionally disadvantaged neighborhoods and to adjacent neighborhoods or commercial districts, as well as between arts and cultural destinations • Invest in pedestrian and other connectivity infrastructure in commercial corridors • Create or expand programs that provide financial support to employ high school or college students for mural tours or mural maintenance activities • Create an apprenticeship program for future murals through a partnership with local arts organizations such as the Albany Center Gallery and the Albany Barn



KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Top Priorities

- Provide flexible financial assistance & technical support for hospitality, arts & cultural entities
- Increase awareness of and equitable access to existing arts and cultural venues for residents of all ages
- Enhance the connectivity and navigability from destination-to-destination and promote public safety

Most Urgent

- Provide flexible financial assistance & technical support for hospitality, arts & cultural entities
- Enhance the connectivity and navigability from destination-to-destination and promote public safety

Most Significant Assistance Needed

- Provide flexible financial assistance & technical support for hospitality, arts & cultural entities





“

We have a really outstanding team doing really impactful work, but they're at capacity. We need to ensure that we understand and prepare the capacity to deliver.”

*-Mayor Kathy Sheehan,
July 1, 2021*

MANAGEMENT & IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

- Capacity-building & Evaluation Framework
- Implementation Principles
- Monitoring, Measurement & Compliance
- Closing

Building Capacity and a Framework for Project/Program Evaluation

Operationalizing the ARP Opportunity

In execution of its charge to develop a needs assessment and recommendations for the City as Albany recovers from the pandemic, the Task Force has sought to develop a functional evaluation framework for policy makers and ultimate ARP funding decision-makers.

The sections above outline thematic and programmatic priorities for policy creation and the use of the economic recovery portion of the ARP funds. The mechanics of how those funds are deployed, administered, and monitored also demands careful consideration, support, and capacity-building to ensure effective and efficient management.

The City is taking a smart first step in soliciting external contractors for specialized financial advisory and grant management services to support the City with project management oversight and ensure accountability, transparency, and compliance with all federal requirements. The Task Force supports the maintenance of necessary consulting services throughout the life of the ARP to supplement in-house resources.

The Task Force recommends that the selected professional service firm(s) be managed by a dedicated, interdepartmental team prepared to administer the general ARP initiative. This team should have strong project management skills and focus on financial management and accounting, communications, federal grants management and compliance, and auditing and fraud prevention. This team would be responsible for developing the proposed ARP budget for the Common Council, designing the implementation protocols and timeline, drafting, and submitting progress reports to the federal government, measuring outcomes, communicating progress to the public and ensuring compliance with regulations. The City should be encouraged to bring on additional or contract personnel to maintain existing levels of general service while also executing new ARP initiatives.

Delivering Results

Adequately staffing the administration of the ARP will build a solid foundation for implementation of impactful recommendations. In order to fully program and realize the potential of the economic recovery portion of the ARP

funding, the City should employ an agile and dynamic approach to implementation.

The Task Force anticipates that addressing the programmatic recommendations described in the previous section of the report will require diverse service providers with creative solutions. Many of the recommendations will best be directly handled by City departments and agencies. Consideration should be given to which City divisions can best address specific recommendations and these divisions should be provided with budget, staffing, time, and other resources to develop and execute specific projects and programs responsive to the report within their areas of expertise.

Beyond direct City service delivery, Albany's deep private, nonprofit, and institutional sectors should be provided ample opportunity to design equitable, collaborative, sustainable and impactful projects, and programs to maximize results during the brief ARP timeline. The broader community should be engaged through multiple competitive opportunities to become sub-recipients of the City's ARP funds.

Each of these solicitations should include program guidelines in alignment with the needs assessment and recommendations above and give critical attention to the General Principles outlined by the Task Force. Sub-recipients should have sufficient capacity to adhere to the compliance requirements and timeline mandated by the federal government. The City should, however, endeavor to make the application and reporting process as streamlined as possible in order for subrecipients to focus the bulk of their energy and funding on delivering results. In order to accomplish this, the City should ensure that any department or agency administering a subrecipient program have sufficient capacity to provide technical assistance and compliance support in cooperation with the dedicated administration team.

Implementation Principles

Similar to the guiding principles for use of ARP funds, the Task Force is proposing four guiding principles – capacity, engagement, flexibility, and compliance - for the City's internal management and operations throughout the ARP's implementation period.



Implementation Principles |

Key considerations for the City's ARP management and operations

The Task Force acknowledges that, while a tremendous opportunity, the operational reality of budgeting, awarding, spending, documenting and monitoring \$80.7 million by 2026 poses significant challenges to a small municipality emerging from significant, pandemic-created budgetary shortfalls in a disaster response environment.

Because of this context, the Task Force recommends that the City focus - and budget support for - administrative capacity to execute on the promise of the ARP funding. Key areas of focus should include capacity, engagement, flexibility, and compliance (described in the chart opposite.)

The Task Force recommends bringing on additional staff and consulting experts to assist with financial management, program design, solicitation for external proposals, program/subrecipient award administration, monitoring and compliance, community engagement and communications.

Additionally, because baseline City operations are expected to continue or restart concurrent with the execution of ARP initiatives, the City agencies directly tasked with implementing ARP recommendations should be encouraged to budget for and retain additional administrative items and project management personnel to take on additional ARP initiatives.



Now is a moment for a sweeping strategy, not just a shopping list. With wise investments in the next generation, we can prove the value of smart government for generations to come."

*- Robert Gordon and Michele Jolin,
New York Times Guest Opinion, April 29, 2021*

* Capacity

The City should immediately seek to retain additional staffing resources in two distinct areas:

- General ARP program administration for financial management, proposal solicitation, grants management and compliance
- Project management including project and program design and implementation for agencies charged with direct ARP use

Sub-recipients should also be encouraged to add administrative capacity

* Engagement

Effective and transparent two-way communications should be a hallmark of the City's ARP initiative.

Consideration and resources should be given to soliciting innovative proposals from diverse subrecipients, constant contact with the community regarding changing needs and priorities, and measuring outcomes so that successes can be celebrated and replicated and shortcomings can be addressed and retooled.

This effort should be supported by dedicated City staff whose role is focused on community outreach.

* Flexibility

The full impacts of the pandemic continue to unfold, final Federal regulations for ARP funds have not been released, and Albany's innovative nonprofit, private and institutional sectors will need time to develop and refine projects and programs responsive to the City's needs.

For all of these reasons, when crafting the 2022 Budget, designing program guidelines, and application solicitations, the City is encouraged to be broad, dynamic and agile in its approach.

* Compliance

While the final ARP regulations are not yet defined, significant parameters, restrictions and oversight requirements should be expected. It is of paramount importance that the City engage substantial resources to ensure that all ARP expenditures adhere to final compliance requirements.

Every effort should be made to place the bulk of the administrative burden on internal resources vs subrecipients to maximize ease of use and application.



Monitoring, Measurement & Compliance

The tremendous opportunity posed by the ARP comes with comparable responsibility both for fully maximizing results and for ensuring that every dollar of the public funding is spent appropriately. The Task Force recommends transparent documentation of the City's ARP progress toward both of these expectations, leaning on the support of the administrative and project management structure proposed here.

It should be acknowledged that, as in the rest of the country, the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to unfold. In response to these changing conditions, solutions to the community's needs continue to be developed in real time through new collaborations, public-private partnerships, replication of best practices and community engagement. In addition to this, the federal government has not issued final guidance on the full regulations for how the funding can be spent. These factors require that the City take an agile and flexible approach – particularly when budgeting the funding and soliciting proposals from potential subrecipients. Rather

than propose a specific and rigid line-by-line pre-emptive determination of funding, it is recommended that the City continue to monitor changing regulations, community needs and innovative/time sensitive opportunities for impact, and instead propose a funding breakdown by general impact or recommendation area so as not to limit the scale of positive results, pre-determine subrecipients or to run afoul of forthcoming regulations. This continuous monitoring will also allow the City to adapt mid-course if additional attention is found to be needed in specific areas.

The ideal method for this ongoing monitoring is to set metrics and targets for how success will be measured in each impact area and to report no less than twice annually to the Task Force on the City's progress. These progress measurement reports can draw from and coincide with the required federal reporting and should be made available publicly. The Task Force has committed to reviewing these reports and providing continued guidance and assistance where practicable. Efforts should be made to ensure the public is engaged in and aware of progress as well as

SUGGESTED TIMELINE

TASK FORCE REPORT

results of needs assessments and priority recommendations released from 41-member Task Force

ARP FUNDS BUDGETED

program categories and funding amounts for 2022 identified in City Budget and discussed/approved by Common Council

ROUND 1 PROGRAMS FUNDED

agencies with 2022 budget allocations will release program guidelines and solicit proposals for funding, making awards to programs/projects addressing needs/priorities outlined in Report



now



by Q4 2021



by Q1 2022

opportunities for funding and programming that come out of the ARP.

All of this will assist with documenting results and ensuring compliance of the overall ARP initiative and its funded projects and programs.

Meticulous care must be given to ongoing financial management, reporting, documentation, and monitoring. By focusing on and documenting monitoring, measurement, and compliance throughout every phase of the initiative, the City will be on stronger footing to prove compliance and achievement of the ARP goals.

Closing

The above Report is provided to the City of Albany based on the collective expertise of the 41 community leaders comprising the Task Force and the hundreds of community members that weighed in throughout the process. The Task Force encourages everyone within the Albany community to determine how they can take part in Albany's recovery and collaborate to make sustainable and equitable

impact in the Capital City.

The Task Force would like to thank the Mayor for the opportunity to represent its members' constituents and offer a framework of guiding principles, programmatic recommendations and operational considerations for administration and evaluation. The members look forward to the City's recovery with optimism for the future and dedication to be of continued assistance in building back better.

ADDITIONAL FUNDING

ROUNDS COMPLETE

agencies release final programs and final solicitations for funding

ARP FUNDS OBLIGATED

all ARP program funds must be allocated to eligible projects/ programs and all contracts must be executed. Any un-obligated funds must be returned

FUNDING COMPLETE

all funds must be expended and all funded projects/ programs must be complete or self-sustaining. Ongoing monitoring may be required



by Q4 2023 — **by Q4 2024** — **by Q4 2026**

PROGRESS REPORTS DUE

progress reports, including proof of payments made and results achieved due quarterly to Federal government, and bi-annual progress reports due to the Task Force





ALBANY
NEW YORK | EST. 1686

CITY OF ALBANY
MAYOR KATHY SHEEHAN
CO-CHAIRS
MICHAEL WHALEN | JAHKEEN HOKE