



# Final Report: Covid Budget Equity Tool

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# Introduction

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On May 13, 2021, the City Commission directed the Office of Equity and Inclusion to develop an Equity Covid Budget Tool to assist with the equitable spending of the American Rescue Plan funding of \$32 Million. On May 27, 2021, the Commission reviewed and adopted the Equity Covid Budget tool and assigned the timeline for implementation. This report details the process of utilizing the Equity Covid Budget tool, gathering community feedback, and identifies opportunities to improve this process and future Budget Equity Tool processes.

## About the Equity Covid Budget Tool

### Purpose

The Equity Covid Budget tool was designed to integrate explicit consideration of racial equity in decisions addressing programs that would work to alleviate the impact of COVID-19 on our most impacted neighbors. The tool assesses proposals through a series of questions that use an equity lens. These questions focus on utilizing disaggregated data to define the disparity the program seeks to address. In addition, the questions help to identify performance measures and a plan to inform the community of the program's impact. Lastly, the tool is designed to assess individual programs and not an overall budget. To view the Equity Covid Budget Toolkit, please see Appendix 1.

### Rating system

The rating system was designed to assess if proposals are likely to advance equity. In addition to providing a rating, the OEI provided written feedback that identified the opportunities for equity as well as suggestions on how the proposal could be improved to advance equity. The proposals were reviewed on the following rating system:

- Good: the proposal includes at least one way to enhance resources or services to underrepresented communities.
- Better: the proposal includes at least two ways to enhance resources
- Best: the proposal includes at least two ways to enhance resources, is data based, and addresses a systemic problem or has a system-wide approach to building equity.
- Does not advance equity: Proposal was reviewed with staff, and department and concluded the proposal does not lend itself to an equity opportunity

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- Incomplete: 2 or more questions are not filled out, not including “Show data to demonstrate existing disparities and impact of COVID on the population identified, include local data if possible” OR overall responses do not provide sufficient context or details to determine impact on equity

In the process of rating the Covid Budget Equity toolkit proposals, the Office of Equity and Inclusion included the rating of "Incomplete" on some proposals. An "incomplete" rating means that there was not enough detail or context provided for the OEI to provide a rating. An "incomplete" does not mean that the proposal is a bad or harmful idea. The scoring system reflects the OEI's ability to assess proposals through an equity lens based on the information provided.

## Timeline and Implementation

The OEI evaluated 69 proposals from Commissioners and community applicants over a two week period, returning all applications with ratings and feedback on 6/25/2021 (six additional proposals were submitted after the deadline and were not evaluated, but are included in Appendix 7). While evaluating the proposals OEI staff developed a curriculum for community feedback sessions and partnered with Communications and Engagement staff to plan and promote four community feedback sessions. Below is the full implementation timeline:

- Proposals are submitted for evaluation (6/14)
- Evaluations completed and returned (6/25) \*Applicants may re-submit 6/25-7/2
- Four community engagement sessions (3 virtual, 1 in person) (6/28-6/30)
- Commission receives proposals, evaluations and community feedback via backup (8/11/2021)
- Commission provides guidance to City Manager to craft budget (8/19/2021)
- City Manager creates budget (Timing TBD by Commission)
- The Commission approves the proposed budget or gives further guidance if needed. (Timing TBD by Commission)

## Community Engagement

### About

The Covid Equity Budget Tool emphasized the importance of engaging the community, especially people who have been impacted by disparities exacerbated by Covid-19. The OEI hosted four community feedback sessions over three days. Three of the sessions were on zoom

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and one was in person. Each session began with a staff presentation on the ARP funding and the Covid Equity Budget Tool followed by breakout groups to discuss the proposals sorted into four categories: economic, housing, social services, and a catch-all group of proposals about health/broadband/transportation/ grocery/ capital improvement. Community members were given the opportunity to review summaries of proposals and then discussed the proposals using the following questions as a guide:

- How does this proposal align with the goal of advancing equity? Or, what community conditions will improve (ex. Housing, health, education, employment)
- How could this proposal be more impactful in advancing equity? (Is the funding adequate? Are there partnerships that could help support? Is this proposal duplicative of any work that is already happening in the community?)
- What else should commissioners know about this proposal?

In total, 100 neighbors signed up for the community feedback sessions. Of the sign ups, 41 neighbors provided feedback. Their feedback has been included in Appendix 2.

Each breakout room had two city of Gainesville staff members, one facilitating and one taking notes. Following each feedback session participants were sent a form in which they could write additional feedback on the proposals and on the process. The Powerpoint presentation from community feedback sessions can be viewed in Appendix 3.

## Summary of feedback

The following section includes summaries of community feedback on each of the four groups (Economics, Housing, Social Services, Health/broadband/transportation/ grocery/ capital improvement) as well as feedback on the overall process.

**Economics:** Within these discussions, there was general support for job training and Youth Corp programs. Neighbors expressed the importance of job training initiatives because of the shortage of maintenance and trade jobs. There was an expressed desire to keep talent in Gainesville and job training was viewed as a way to do that. There were mixed responses on proposals addressing GRU debt relief. Some neighbors expressed support for the idea because it has been done before. The criticism of the GRU debt relief proposals was primarily due to how vague they were. Neighbors expressed that the proposals were unclear on who the money would help and that there did not seem to be prioritization. One neighbor provided feedback about residents not being able to access GRU payment plans. There were also concerns about

using this funding to pay GRU first. Lastly, neighbors expressed wanting to see support for small businesses. Overall, neighbors who attended these sessions continuously emphasized the importance of focusing on the most impacted neighbors as well as ensuring that relief is going directly to the neighbors first.

**Housing:** Neighbors who attended these sessions recognized the importance of the crisis of affordable housing. There was general support for the issues addressed in these proposals. Neighbors were in favor of keeping residents in their homes as well as providing homeless prevention. Standout proposals discussed included the Community Land Trust, Landlord Mitigation Grants, and Support for Low/Very Low income housing. The Community Land Trust was discussed as an excellent way to address equity because of the protection it would provide underserved neighborhoods against gentrification. There was mixed support for Landlord Mitigation Grants with questions on how much landlords would benefit. Neighbors expressed the hope that this funding would support nonprofits that worked in housing, naming Habitat for Humanity, Family Promise, and Catholic Charities specifically. Neighbors also expressed wanting to see more proposals for homeowners, specifically for people who have mortgages in foreclosure or forbearance. Lastly, neighbors expressed housing being addressed holistically and wanting to see clarity and collaboration in the grants for housing funds.

**Social Services:** Neighbors who attended these sessions expressed appreciation that nonprofit organizations (NPOs) were considered for funding. Neighbors expressed that funding money through established nonprofits was an ideal way to disburse funds to reach people and that collaborating with NPOs was a key way to advance equity. Participants asked for clarification around the process of NPOs accessing funding as well as specific dollar amounts in the proposals. Neighbors expressed interest in NPOs that included food access and local farmers, need prevention, language proficiency, disabled adults and mental health services. Participants in these sessions reiterated the importance of ARP funding meeting the needs of communities that are not being addressed by other city funds.

**Health/ broadband/ transportation/ grocery/ capital improvement:** The discussions for these sessions varied due to the diversity of the topics. Neighbors found payments for vaccinations to be lower priority and wanted more information around the logistics. In response to mental health vouchers, there were questions about the eligibility requirements for vouchers. Neighbors expressed that this program will benefit veterans, re-entry services, and African Americans. Neighbors expressed positive support for the CRP program and encouraged Commissioners to develop partnerships through the program. In response to proposals focused

on health centers, neighbors also expressed the need for partnerships and specificity on the services. Some suggestions included a mental health aspect as well as linking healthy foods from grocery stores. Neighbors mentioned the importance of connecting the mobility hub with other services such as the proposed grocery store and the medical center. There was recognition that transportation is a huge issue. Proposals including Vision Zero, Glen Springs, and improving downtown were not considered a priority. There was also conflicting support for the funding going towards climate justice. Broadband was a big topic for neighbors who attended these sessions. The issue of broadband brought conflicting views. Some neighbors thought that there were more important issues to address, especially as virtual learning decreases. There was concern about broadband being half of the APR funding citing that \$13-\$15 million might be too much. However, there were neighbors that urged the City to enter the fiber business as the internet becomes a utility. There was recognition that this could be important for equity and access if the investment is made in areas lacking broadband.

**The Engagement Process:** Within the sessions, neighbors provided feedback regarding the engagement and application process. The general consensus was there was not enough time to do thorough community engagement. Furthermore, there were concerns that neighbors most impacted by Covid did not have access to these sessions. Neighbors expressed disappointment that these sessions had low attendance and questioned the process of advertising. Some neighbors also found these meetings difficult to access and suggested gathering information in a variety of ways. Neighbors described the process as fast and found it difficult to bring thoughtful input forward. Some neighbors expressed distrust in the community engagement process because commissioners have already submitted proposals for projects they support. Many neighbors expressed disappointment in the vagueness of the proposals. Lastly, neighbors commented on the lack of transparency on the process of community members/organizations applying for the funding.

## Challenges & Opportunities

The Office of Equity and Inclusion have identified several challenges during the implementation of the Equity Covid Budget Tool. Below is a list of challenges, opportunities to improve this process and opportunities to ensure success for future Budget Equity Tool processes such as the yearly budget.

## Challenges

1. **Insufficient time:** Several steps in the process could have been more successful if afforded more time. Neighbors expressed that the two-week time period to submit applications was not long enough for organizations and individuals to write and submit proposals. One community member expressed a minimum of 30 days would have been needed. An extended timeframe would have benefited OEI staff to review proposals. More time would have allowed commissioners to work with staff to gather data across departments to make the proposals more complete. A longer timeline would have also supported a clearer implementation plan and defined roles and responsibilities from key stakeholders.
2. **Limited Access to Disaggregated Data:** Data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, income, and geography is often incomplete or unavailable making it difficult to demonstrate existing disparities while evaluating proposals. It is difficult to measure the success of a tool/program without the ability to measure against adequate baselines or later measured to show improved community results.

## Opportunities to Improve the Equity Covid Budget Tool Process

If allotted more time, the Equity Covid Budget Tool process can still be improved. Below are some suggestions that could make this process more impactful and produce proposals and a final budget that will be more likely to advance equity:

1. **Define the community results that are most important to address with ARP funding:**
  - a. Using available data and community feedback, the City Commission can collectively decide what community results are most urgent and important to address with ARP funding - What conditions of well-being are we trying to improve for the community? (Ex. Housing, healthcare, employment) For more on community/population results, see Appendix 4. Existing proposal ideas can then be assessed for alignment with these top priorities. Feedback from community members most impacted by disparities made worse by Covid should inform these priorities.
2. **Update incomplete proposals:**
  - a. City staff can support data collection as needed. When data is unavailable, proposals can specify an implementation plan, measures of success and a plan to report back to the community to support accountability.
  - b. City staff can help clarify any known legal or logistical restrictions on ARP funding, and remove proposals that aren't possible.

### 3. Expand community engagement:

- a. Expanding community engagement will ensure that we have heard from the communities that have been impacted the most by existing disparities made worse by Covid on: 1) What community results are most urgent and important? and, 2) What strategies do our most impacted neighbors endorse/prioritize to achieve these results?
- b. The Commission may determine if a new call for proposals is an option after community results are defined. If this is an option, we recommend a 30-day period based on community feedback.

## Opportunities to Improve Future Budget Equity Processes

### Improve Data Collection Systems and Create a Data Development Agenda

Whenever possible, the City should be collecting data that is disaggregated by race, gender, ethnicity, income, and geography. The City Commission can create a policy directing the types of data that need to be collected and disaggregated. Standardized categories for demographics can be found in Appendix 5. The Office Equity and Inclusion, Strategic Initiatives and the City Attorney's Office can provide guidance on best practices for collecting and centralizing disaggregated data while maintaining anonymity for our neighbors.

When it is discovered that sufficient data doesn't exist, the missing data should be added to a Data Development Agenda and directed to the relevant department to work with OEI staff to plan for new data collection. Twice a year the Office of Equity and Inclusion can produce a memo updating the Commission and Charters on progress on the Data Development Agenda.

### Define Performance Measures and Expectations for Implementation

The implementation process of a Equity Budget Tool is as important as the tool itself. Future Equity Budget Tools, and equity review processes will be more successful if Commissioners and staff have shared expectations on the tool *and* the implementation process. The following questions can be asked by commissioners and/or staff to help clarify expectations and define performance measures:

1. What are the community results the Commission is hoping to impact by using this tool/process? (Community results=conditions of well being for the community. Ex. housing, food security, economic prosperity).

2. What is the implementation plan for using this tool? What is the timeline for each step? Who are the stakeholders who will be involved? What are the key roles and responsibilities?
3. What performance measures are there for the process? What deliverables are expected? By when?
4. Have all stakeholders agreed that the timeline and resources needed are adequate to ensure success?
5. What is the purpose of community engagement? What do we want community members to know? What are we hoping to learn from the community? What's on the table for the community to decide? How will community engagement impact decision making? What level of engagement will staff use on the spectrum of public participation?
6. Are there any legal or logistical restrictions or limitations on what can or can't be done?

### **Route Engagement Directives through the Office of Communications and Engagement**

Requests to engage with the community can be routed first through the Office of Communications and Engagement. The Engagement manager can work with the lead department to assess the timeline and feasibility of the engagement. If the project and timeline are feasible, an engagement plan can be created and presented to Commissioners to ensure that staff and elected officials have a shared understanding of:

- What community results are being considered by the commission? (Community results = conditions of well being for the community.)
- What is the purpose of this engagement?
- What do we want community members to know? What are we hoping to learn from the community?
- What's on the table for the community to decide?
- How will community engagement impact decision making?
- What level of engagement will staff use on the spectrum of public participation?
- Which community members are most impacted and how will we prioritize their feedback?
- What is the engagement plan? How long will engagement be advertised? How many sessions? What is the timing for community engagement? How will we report back to neighbors who participate?

### **Increase the Timeline and Resources to Ensure Success**

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A longer timeline will allow Commissioners to build a shared understanding of the community results that are most important, and ultimately craft proposals that are best designed to meet the needs of the community. A proposed implementation process for future Equity Budget Tools is below:

1. City Manager, City Attorney's Office and other staff subject matter experts provide guidance on restrictions and limitations to funding uses.
2. Community engagement to: 1) Inform the community on eligible and ineligible uses of funding and 2) Define the most important community results and community endorsed strategies.
3. Commission meets to review community results and strategies and build shared understanding of which community results are high priority.
4. Inform the community of high priority community results and upcoming workshops.
5. Equity Budget Tool workshops for commissioners and community members to prepare for writing proposals.
6. Open period to submit proposals that align with community results that are identified as high priorities by neighbors who are impacted the most. Commissioners are encouraged to coordinate to avoid duplicate proposals.
7. OEI staff rate and return proposals with notes. City Manager, City Attorney and other staff review proposals for eligible use and legal concerns.
8. Share proposals and ratings with the public to prepare for community engagement including public information campaigns. (Remove proposals that are ineligible or not legal)
9. Community engagement sessions on proposals.
10. OEI staff writes summary of community engagement for the commission to review.
11. Commission meeting to provide direction to the City Manager to craft a budget.
12. City Manager crafts a budget based on Commission guidance.
13. Commission approves the budget or gives further guidance if needed.

### **Learning Resources for Neighbors**

A shared understanding of key terms and ideas related to race and equity is critical to have meaningful conversations about what makes a proposal equitable. Workshops, pre-recorded videos and other materials for neighbors on the difference between equity and equality, the history of racism and existing inequities in Gainesville will help neighbors and Commissioners share ideas and provide needed feedback on how the City can operate in a more equitable way.

Additionally, workshops for neighbors on how to fill out a Budget Equity Tool will encourage those without experience to bring their ideas to the table.

### **Workshops for Commissioners**

There are two areas of focus that can support Commissioners:

1. **Equity Workshops** - Workshops that support Commissioners to create shared understandings of key terms such as equity, equality, diversity, inclusion, race and racism. These workshops also include history on race and racism in Gainesville and an understanding of systemic and institutional racism.
2. **Results Based Accountability** - Results Based Accountability or RBA is an ends to means decision making process that is data driven, and helps move from ideas to action quickly. This system helps develop ideas that are most likely to have the desired impact and creates performance measures to ensure accountability. Integrating a RBA approach to all City processes will make equity tools more successful.

## List of Appendices

1. Equity Covid Budget Toolkit
2. Community Engagement Feedback
3. Community Engagement Powerpoint Presentation
4. Defining Community/Population Results
5. Demographic Categories
6. Tracking Spreadsheet - American Rescue Plan Proposals
7. Rated and unrated Proposals
8. Proposal Matrix

## Acknowledgments

The Office of Equity Inclusion is grateful to everyone who made the Equity Covid Budget Tool possible. Our thanks to all the staff who helped with facilitation and note taking during community engagement sessions: John John, Mo Deel, Laura Rawson, Shakayla Birch, Leslie Ladendorf, Phimetto Lewis, Cary Williams, Anne Wolf, Brian Franklin, Shelby Taylor, Elizabeth Chazule and PJ Jones. Special thanks to the whole team at Communications and Engagement who supported with developing the website, advertising, curriculum development, facilitation, note taking, recording and editing videos and general consultation throughout the process. Lastly, we are grateful for the City Commission for their vision and direction to include an equity lens in consideration of the American Rescue Plan Funding.