

During this health and financial crisis, leaders must commit to a recovery that benefits all people, including people living in or near poverty and to restructuring our democracy and economy so it works for everyone. More than [100 million people](#), most of whom are people of color, have struggled to make ends meet even before this pandemic. Leaders must meet this crisis with the truth about what the nation needs to stabilize, rebuild, and prosper. We must change the rules of the game to reverse toxic inequality, remove the burdens and barriers of structural racism, and rebirth a just and fair nation for all.

The emergency triggered by COVID-19 lays bare the structural failures of an economy that devalues workers and so greedily commodifies the most basic necessities—health care, housing, clean water—that they are out of reach to many. Without centering racial equity, the survival packages Congress is passing will not act as levelers, equally protecting all. Tragically, they will be sweet deals for corporations and their executives, with little accountability. They will further concentrate wealth at the top and make human suffering and inequities worse unless local leaders commit unequivocally to meet the expressed needs and priorities of communities in greatest need. While the survival packages that does have some people-first elements, they are insufficient and continue the toxic pattern of previous bailouts, which never prioritized low-income people, working families, or struggling communities. Once again we are reminded that this is the United States of America, a country founded on stolen land and human bondage and which still operates according to a hierarchy of human value.

To realize the promise of equity—just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential—leaders must be dedicated to the following principles:

- **Center Racial Equity**
- **Put People First**
- **Invest in Community Infrastructure**
- **Build an Equitable Economy**
- **Protect and Expand Community Voice and Power**

This is not a list to follow sequentially or a menu from which to pick and choose. Rather, these principles, collectively, must guide leaders in developing plans and policies and executing on them to deliver equity results. This guidance emerges from a cross-section of people, the expertise of many organizations in the equity movement, and PolicyLink experience in partnering with local residents and leaders to chart a course toward equitable recovery after Hurricane Katrina and the 2008 financial collapse.

From this moment, every action — every policy and investment — must provide significant, sustained support to the people hurting most and serve as a bridge to creating an equitable economy, an inclusive and compassionate society, and a strong, accountable democracy. It is time to “Win on Equity”!

Yours in struggle and solidarity,

Michael McAfee
President and CEO, PolicyLink



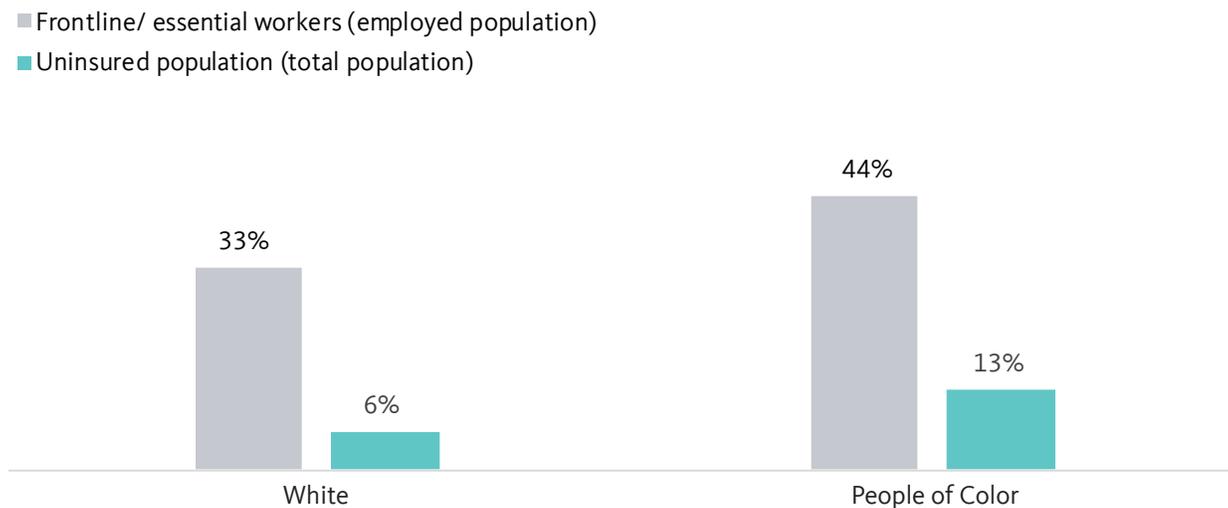
Decades of persistent racial and economic inequality have resulted in [100 million people](#)—or one in three of us—being economically insecure before the pandemic hit. People of color make up about 38 percent of the total US population, but account for more than half of those living in economic insecurity. While pundits like to say that the current crisis does not discriminate, the truth is that it exacerbates the underlying racial and socioeconomic issues that have long plagued our country. Black and Latinx populations are both overrepresented among those laid off as a result of business closures as well as those on the frontlines of essential work. And recent data show that African Americans account for [one-third of COVID-19 hospitalizations](#) while making up only 13 percent of the US population.

Native Americans also face a unique set of challenges that make them particularly vulnerable, including a high prevalence of health risks, lack of running water, and crowded living situations that make social distancing difficult. In New Mexico alone, Native Americans account for [25 percent](#) of confirmed COVID-19 cases. For Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, the lack of data by subgroups makes it challenging to understand the full story and where need might exist. In addition, the racist, anti-Asian rhetoric some conservative politicians have tied to the coronavirus has led to an increase in assaults against Asian Americans, presenting a need to combat such rhetoric and protect these groups.

The disparities in COVID-19 rates are no coincidence, but the result of enduring structural inequality. Decades of discriminatory practices produce multigenerational effects—such as the role housing discrimination has played in the racial wealth gap. Today, people of color, particularly Black people, [are more likely](#) to work in low-wage jobs with few benefits, spend a significant share of their income on housing, and attend poor-quality schools, and they are less likely to be insured or even receive proper medical treatment. People of color are also more likely than White households to live in neighborhoods with greater exposure to environmental hazards and less access to healthy foods. These barriers create a perfect storm, making people of color particularly vulnerable to the effects of the coronavirus.

People of color are more likely to be frontline or essential workers and more likely to be uninsured.

Frontline and essential workers and the uninsured population by race/ethnicity, United States



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, 2018 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates.

Notes: Worker data is for the civilian employed population 16 years and over. Uninsured data is for the total population. Frontline and essential occupations include service occupations (e.g., health-care support, protective services, food preparation, building and ground cleaning and maintenance); production, transportation, and material moving occupations; and health-care practitioners and technical occupations. The racial/ethnic category of White pertains to non-Hispanic White.

While elected officials have a responsibility to represent all people, equity calls on leaders to target interventions where they are needed most. Ensuring all people live in a society where they can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential requires recognizing that the path to getting there is different for different groups. Intentional investments in the 100 million economically insecure people in the United States, particularly for those who are people of color, will have [benefits that cascade out](#), improving the lives of all struggling people as well as regional economies and the nation as a whole. We cannot simply tinker around the edges of systems that were never intended to serve all people. In order to center racial equity, policymakers must:

- ✓ **Collect and use disaggregated data.**
- ✓ **Plan for the most vulnerable.**
- ✓ **Implement race-conscious approaches to counter persistent racial inequities.**

Collect and use disaggregated data

Racial and ethnic health disparities and inequities can only be eliminated if high-quality information exists to track immediate problems and underlying social determinants, as well as to guide the design and application of culturally specific medical and public health approaches. We need to begin tracking and reporting on COVID-19 testing, cases, and health outcomes using data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, primary language, gender, disability status, geographic location, and socioeconomic status. The most useful data on health outcomes is further disaggregated within broad racial groups such as the Asian population, to understand divergent experiences by ancestry. It is also critical to track the flow of federal spending by race, income, and place to ensure investments (or underinvestments) don't reinforce existing disparities.

Plan for the most vulnerable

Policymakers must focus on the compounding effects of race and other identities (gender, disability, age) or circumstances (citizenship status, homelessness, incarceration) in order to truly serve people of color and the barriers they face. For example, sheltering in place is not a safe strategy for people experiencing intimate partner violence or other forms of abuse, making it necessary to strengthen the economic and social infrastructure to support and ensure safe housing for survivors. And with schools closed, many children have lost a safe haven or the place where they received regular meals. An important example of planning around this vulnerable population is the recent announcement from the US Department of Agriculture that Michigan would be the first state to offer “[Pandemic EBT](#),” a supplemental food purchasing benefit for children eligible for free or reduced-price lunch at school. Such a program should be available nationally.

Another key challenge is protecting people living in institutional settings or other facilities, such as jails and prisons, mental health-care facilities, and homeless shelters, where an outbreak can spread rapidly. Many cities are turning to empty hotels as a solution to reduce the crowding of homeless shelters. We must also eliminate all barriers to people seeking proper medical attention, regardless of insurance, disability, language, or immigration status. Hospitals and health-care facilities must make it clear in all languages that immigration status will not be questioned, and should take steps to ensure immigration enforcement officials are not permitted to enter these buildings. Further, hospitals and health-care facilities must ensure all people—regardless of ability to pay or underlying health conditions—receive proper care. Now is the time to design solutions that meet people’s true needs and allow us to answer the fundamental question—Is anyone better off? This is common-sense, street-smart policy at its best.

Implement race-conscious approaches to counter persistent racial inequities

The coronavirus has upended every aspect of our society. In planning for recovery, we cannot simply return to pre-coronavirus conditions where inequality was tolerated. Instead, we need to champion race-conscious policies to overcome racial inequities in health; the digital divide; limited access to good, family sustaining jobs; and the racial wealth gap. Eliminating inequities will also require thoroughly analyzing proposed and existing policies to root out bias and promote equity. Modeled after environmental impact statements, [racial equity impact assessments](#) can help local leaders to understand the racial equity implications of an existing or proposed policy, program, or institutional practice, and to determine if it will ameliorate or exacerbate existing economic and social inequities.

Seattle’s [Race and Social Justice Initiative](#) is the longest-running and most comprehensive example of a US city utilizing racial equity impact assessments. The assessments have informed policy changes that helped the city triple the share of its contracting dollars going to women- and minority-owned businesses and mandated interpretation and translation services to help non-English-speaking residents meaningfully participate in civic life. State and local leaders should be required to use these tools to analyze their work for any unintended consequences for relief and recovery efforts. Addressing ongoing racial inequities is not only a moral imperative, but an economic one. According to the [National Equity Atlas](#), racial gaps in income cost the United States about \$2.5 trillion in 2015.

Conclusion

By collecting the right data and implementing an intersectional, race-conscious approach to policymaking, not only will we be able to get a better hold of this current crisis, but we will also be in a position to design a recovery that ensures we don’t return to the status quo. This time we will finally address enduring racial inequality. Make your voice heard by contacting your local, state, and federal leaders and demand they take these actions and center racial equity. Stay connected to our work by visiting policylink.org/covid19-and-race.

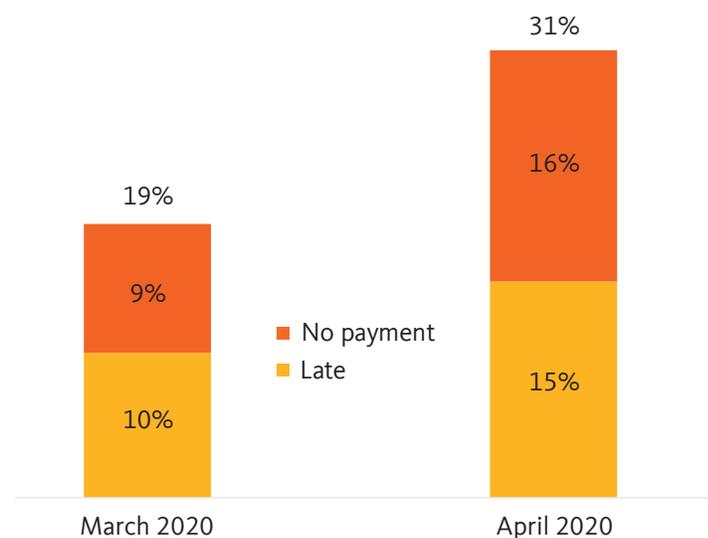


The emergency triggered by COVID-19 lays bare the structural failures of a country that operates with a [hierarchy of human worth](#) that devalues many workers and commodifies the most basic necessities, including health care, housing, and clean water. As businesses have closed their doors to follow stay-at-home orders, [more than 26 million people applied for unemployment](#) benefits in just over one month, completely erasing the job gains made since the Great Recession. At the same time, conservative congressional leaders have pushed hard to direct \$500 billion to corporate bailouts with little accountability, prioritizing profits over people.

Over the past few decades, worker power has been undermined while economic gains have been concentrated into fewer and fewer hands. While profits soared, wages remained the same and working conditions only got worse. [Since 1978](#), as productivity has risen dramatically, wages for workers have increased 12 percent while CEO compensation has grown 940 percent. For workers without college degrees, the last economic recovery produced fewer good jobs that enable upward mobility and more precarious, lower wage jobs with limited prospects for advancement. At the same time, the basic cost of living has been steadily rising. The average share of household budgets used to cover medical expenses and work-related expenses like childcare has climbed over the past several decades. And the share of renters who are housing burdened—spending more than 30 percent of income on housing costs—has increased dramatically since 2000.

Renters are struggling amidst the COVID-19 crisis.

Share of renters who paid rent late or not at all



Source: [National Multifamily Housing Council](#).

Note: Data sourced from a survey of 11.5 million units of professionally managed apartment units.

While initial legislative survival packages included modest stimulus checks and unemployment benefits, economists and struggling people alike have pointed out the immediate need to get more cash into people's hands to stave off the crisis. Unless we put people first, the relief and recovery packages coming from Congress will only further concentrate wealth at the top and deepen inequities. In order to put people first, policymakers must:

- ✓ **Support essential frontline workers.**
- ✓ **Guarantee incomes.**
- ✓ **Freeze costs and protect people from losses.**
- ✓ **Prioritize people over corporations.**

Support essential frontline workers

Essential frontline workers are critical to our response to the coronavirus. Health-care workers and hospital staff, warehouse stockers, grocery clerks, food service workers, delivery drivers, waste management workers, and many others are risking exposure to the virus to keep our country running and ensure the public has access to essential goods and services. They are putting their health—and the health of those around them—at risk. Many describe working longer hours without access to gloves, masks, or sanitizer to keep them safe. Major supermarkets are starting to [report](#) employee deaths. We need to require companies that are operating at this time to provide essential workers with the proper protective gear, testing, paid sick leave, increased pay, and safe, reliable, and affordable childcare to help them care for their families. We should not only address their immediate needs, but ensure policies going forward restructure the economy to better serve frontline workers, and [incentivize companies to do their part](#) in advancing racial equity.

Guarantee incomes

Congress must prioritize replacing incomes lost and getting cash into people's hands. The federal government should temporarily cover the wages and salaries of impacted workers during the current economic shutdown. In California, Stockton's guaranteed income pilot has shown that residents use cash payments for important expenses, such as food, school activities for children, and housing. If distributed through employers, this would not only keep workers out of unemployment lines, but would help maintain employer-sponsored health benefits and cover business expenses including rent. Congress also needs to ensure that we are supporting the people most in need during this crisis by expanding the social safety net, including food stamps and unemployment insurance for anyone not kept on payroll. Such relief should not expire on a certain date, but when certain conditions are met, such as a low unemployment rate measured separately for each racial/ethnic group, to ensure that aggregate data is not masking an uneven recovery.

Freeze costs and protect people from losses

To prevent household budgets from being crushed in the case of declining incomes, we need to stabilize costs. This means suspending debt collection of student loans, medical costs, and credit card payments with no interest, fines, or fees. Many jurisdictions have also passed needed eviction and foreclosure moratoriums, which is a critical step to protect people from loss. Rent cancellation is also necessary to ensure renters are not responsible for months of back rent, which would likely cause mass evictions at a later date. Lastly, we must also prevent utility shut-offs, as dependable, clean water is critical to public health, particularly as households must wash their hands more frequently to fight the coronavirus. All of these measures also serve as an economic stimulus strategy because lower income households are more likely to spend remaining income on needed purchases, boosting the economy.

Prioritize people over corporations

During the last recession, corporations received massive bailouts while continuing with risky practices that undermine the strength of the economy. Private sector actors were also able to profit off of the crisis, exploiting marginalized people and making recovery more challenging. Congress has started down this path once again, creating a half-trillion dollar fund to bail out corporations impacted by the coronavirus. Congress must cease the corporate bailouts and create strong accountability measures and regulations for funds already directed toward these entities to support state and local recovery efforts, to ensure we don't further concentrate economic and political power at the top. Corporations are also using this moment as an excuse to exert pressure on elected leaders to roll back labor, health, and environmental standards to protect their bottom lines. These rollbacks put people's health and well-being at risk and should not be considered.

Conclusion

For the nation to fully recover and prosper, leaders must enact new possibilities that serve as a bridge to a more equitable nation. We can only do this by prioritizing people over profits. Make your voice heard by contacting your local, state, and federal leaders and demand they take these actions and put people first. Stay connected to our work by visiting policylink.org/covid19-and-race.

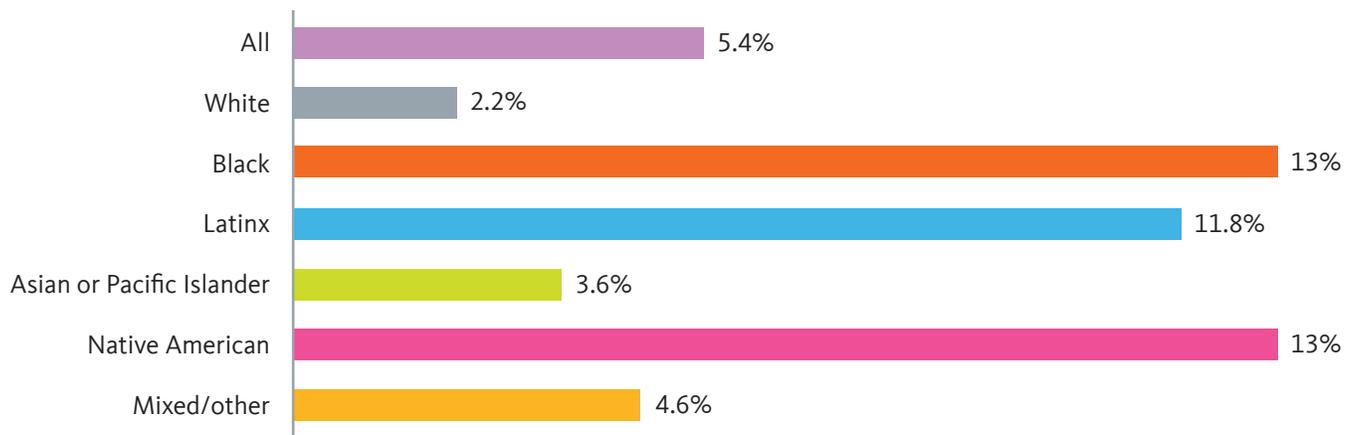


As shelter-in-place orders went into effect across the country in response to COVID-19, school districts scrambled to implement distance learning, businesses closed their doors, and the inequities in critical community infrastructure became even more apparent. Low-income people of color are far more likely than affluent White people to live in neighborhoods that lack the most basic characteristics of safe, healthy places, such as

safe drinking water, clean air, quality schools, grocery stores, parks, libraries, and services. These disparities are no accident, but stem from years of discriminatory land use planning, inequitable investment, and neglect at all levels of government. Such underinvestment has created persistent health and economic disparities which have left many low-income people and people of color particularly vulnerable to our current crisis.

Communities of color suffer from systemic disinvestment that produces health and economic inequities.

Percent living in high-poverty neighborhoods by race/ethnicity, 2015



Source: [National Equity Atlas](#).

Note: High-poverty neighborhoods are defined as neighborhoods where at least 30 percent of residents live in poverty.

For an equitable and lasting recovery from the coronavirus crisis, we must rebuild our physical infrastructure—food systems, water, housing, transit, and roads—as well as our social infrastructure—the trusted network of nonprofit, cultural, philanthropic, and local institutions that help our communities function. Both types of community-building infrastructure will play a critical role in helping communities recover and thrive. Resourcing this infrastructure sufficiently is critical, and investments must be made with an equity lens, prioritizing programs and policies that focus on those most impacted by COVID-19.

Now is the time to ensure that all people—regardless of race, income, or zip code—live in healthy communities of opportunity. This requires the following policy and investment actions:

- ✓ **Fortify community-based organizations.**
- ✓ **Provide financial support for state and local governments.**
- ✓ **Invest in physical infrastructure in high-need communities.**

Fortify community-based organizations

Community-based organizations serving and located in distressed communities are central to making an equitable recovery a reality. A top-down recovery will not capture the knowledge, wisdom, and experience that residents and community leaders bring to identifying challenges and designing innovative solutions to build inclusive, vibrant communities. Government and philanthropic leaders must invest in the sustainability of community-based organizations and strengthen their availability to serve their communities.

In addition, federal infrastructure policy has too often short-changed communities of color, leaving them disconnected from opportunity to generate and lead recovery efforts. Policymakers and funders must invest resources in community-serving nonprofits to generate inclusive policy responses and allow communities to define their own recovery and rebuilding efforts. Using a racial equity impact analysis to determine who is being most burdened and harmed by the virus and its economic consequences will ensure that response and recovery practices and policies will benefit those most impacted.

For example, out of the devastation of Hurricane Katrina, many residents started community-based organizations dedicated to rebuilding New Orleans. The 9th Ward Neighborhood Empowerment Network Association (NENA) was created shortly after the storm to take charge of the Ninth Ward's future. This meant counseling families, coordinating actions, and challenging the state to distribute resources more equitably. NENA began working with the New Orleans Redevelopment Authority to transfer land for redevelopment, bringing back the entire neighborhood blocks at a time by making sure homes were clustered in certain areas, securing infrastructure to support the neighborhood, and supporting community businesses to ensure money remained in the community. Developers began adopting this strategy across the most damaged and blighted portions of the city.

Provide financial support for state and local governments

State and local governments must be well-positioned to support residents and partner with communities to ensure the [100 million people](#) who are economically insecure in this country emerge from this crisis stronger. The pressures on state and local budgets from addressing the current public health and economic crisis are expected to be significantly worse than those they experienced during the Great Recession. Already, a record number of people are turning to states for Medicaid, unemployment benefits, and other forms of public assistance all while state revenue streams, such as sales taxes, are declining. Experts estimate that state budget [shortfalls could total \\$500 billion](#) over the next year. Because state and local governments must balance their operating budgets, even during a recession, these increased costs will likely lead to cutting programs and laying off public employees, including teachers. While federal policymakers have provided some emergency fiscal relief, states urgently need more substantial funding through both Medicaid and flexible funding streams. Congress should also give direct aid to local governments for critical public services, such as public transportation and utilities, which are seeing huge losses in revenue.

Responses should also recognize the unique challenges that arise in different geographic areas. Urban areas are already experiencing overburdened public health systems and challenges to social distancing that may be particularly acute for people of color, frontline service and health-care workers, and immigrants, who are more likely to live in crowded housing, use public transportation, and face water shutoffs. Smaller cities and lower income suburbs lack the infrastructure of their larger counterparts and will likely see fewer resources and diminished giving. And more rural areas have less access to critical public infrastructure (e.g., broadband internet, health services, high-quality water systems).

Federal investments must direct state and local officials—governors, legislators, agency heads—to create governance tables that include the informed perspectives of nonprofit and community leaders of the most-impacted communities, and enable these leaders to hold the government accountable for addressing community needs. Federal investments should allow states and localities to engage effectively in channeling funds where they are needed most and effectively prioritize longer term recovery and rebuilding efforts.

Invest in physical infrastructure in high-need communities

This moment spotlights the need to bolster national investments in public health and community infrastructure, particularly in communities hit worst by health inequities. Investing in physical infrastructure is critical to achieving health and prosperity for communities. Developed with a focus on racial equity, such investments can ensure that historically underserved and marginalized communities can be healthy and safe, and can offer the resilience needed for all to recover and thrive. Investing in the physical infrastructure of disinvested communities can restore the aging systems of water, transportation, housing, and toxic remediation that have outsized impacts on community health, and can create new pathways for work and business opportunities in the communities most impacted by COVID-19 job losses.

Investing in long-term community infrastructure is a highly efficient mechanism for bolstering community health and a strong economy while providing needed services and supports. As the economy continues to falter, millions more Americans will face ongoing economic and health challenges. An equitable approach to reviving the economy and rebuilding from this crisis includes:

- Reinvesting in public goods including public health and health-care infrastructure
- Improving and expanding resilient water and stormwater systems, broadband connectivity, transportation systems, and other community infrastructure
- Providing robust acquisition funds to secure land and housing for community-controlled affordable housing, and to stave off predatory land grabs and transfers of wealth
- Setting aside 1 percent of all infrastructure investments to cultivate a new generation of inclusive workforce and small-business development systems for residents and firms in the most-impacted communities

A focus on physical infrastructure investment can address crumbling systems, deferred maintenance, and the health risks associated with substandard infrastructure, laying the foundation for healthy communities of opportunity where all can thrive. An estimated [\\$2 trillion in infrastructure](#) is needed in the US by 2025 to address failing systems. Rebuilding this infrastructure in an equitable way can deliver significant economic benefits to low-income communities.

Conclusion

Investing in the strength of our community infrastructure and ensuring state and local governments engage frontline leaders in prioritizing community needs is the best path to guaranteeing the health of our communities and their economic recovery. Make your voice heard by contacting your local, state, and federal leaders and demand they take these actions and invest in our community infrastructure. Stay connected to our work by visiting policylink.org/covid19-and-race.

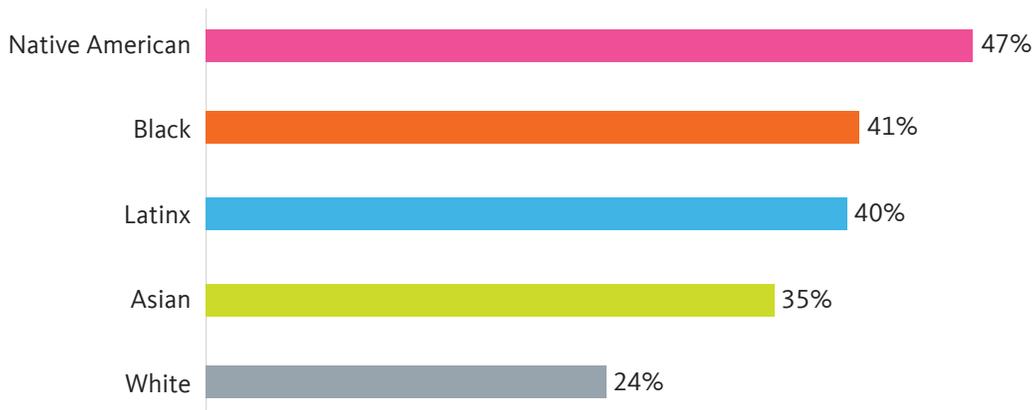


The economic fallout of the pandemic is already catastrophic: [a quarter](#) of businesses shuttered to protect public health and [more than 26 million workers filed for unemployment](#) during the first five weeks of the partial shutdown. This economic shock hit at a time when low-wage workers were already struggling with flat paychecks and exorbitant costs for basic needs like housing and health care, and the vast majority have

little or no savings to weather an emergency. Just like the health crisis itself, the economic crisis is hitting workers of color hardest. They are experiencing [more layoffs](#) and greater financial hardship than White workers, and are disproportionately among the [essential workers](#)—grocery store clerks, bus drivers, health-care aides, and others—who risk exposure to the virus while earning low wages, few benefits, and often no sick time.

Communities of color are being hit hardest by the economic crisis.

Percent of adults whose financial situation has been devastated or severely hurt by the coronavirus crisis



Source: [J.D. Power COVID-19 Survey, April 2020](#).

COVID-19 has shown the extreme vulnerability of an economy built to reproduce racialized inequality rather than ensure economic stability and security for all. Sheltering-at-home further exposed the gap between college-educated, primarily White, knowledge economy workers who can easily work from home via computers, and lower wage, predominantly Black and Brown, service sector and gig economy workers whose work puts them face-to-face with the public. It revealed our lingering digital divide that excludes millions of students from online learning, makes working from home impossible, and poses a hurdle to job seeking. And it put a spotlight on uniquely American policy failures: while most developed countries guarantee paid sick days for all workers and provide universal health care, in the US only [30 percent](#) of the lowest-paid workers have any sick days and a legion of newly unemployed workers are about to lose their employer-provided health insurance during a pandemic.

Out of this crisis must emerge a new policy framework to create an equitable economy—one in which prosperity is broadly shared and working-class people and people of color have good jobs, dignified and rising standards of living, and increased voice, power, and ownership. The inability of our pre-pandemic economy to deliver economic security to all was no accident, but the result of policy choices that eroded supports and protections for a diversifying population while enriching corporations and the elite. Over the past three decades, policies have withered the safety net, strangled worker organizing and protections, held the minimum wage at a poverty level, and allowed for a growing invisible workforce of care workers, gig workers, domestic workers, and others excluded from even the most basic protections. At the same time, our policies have facilitated wealth accumulation for a largely White elite through deregulation, financialization, and the hyper-commodification of basic necessities. It is time to make [solidarity economics](#) our reality.

The lessons from past recessions are clear: We need early, sustained, and race-conscious policies and investments to stabilize people during the crisis and bridge to a more equitable future. To build an equitable economy, policymakers must:

- ✓ **Ensure economic security during the crisis.**
- ✓ **Use stimulus funds to build the next economy.**
- ✓ **Forge a new social contract that enables shared prosperity.**

Ensure economic security during the crisis

Providing direct support to workers and households and helping small businesses preserve jobs during the mandated shelter-in-place orders are the most critical economic policies at this time. Congress has taken important steps to provide relief, and must do everything possible to keep frontline and essential workers safe, prevent job losses, and stabilize household balance sheets. This includes protecting and fairly compensating essential workers, guaranteeing income through payroll protection and expanded unemployment insurance, increasing food stamps and other safety net supports, and freezing costs as described in [Put People First](#). The policies employers set in place now to [support frontline workers](#) should translate into shifts in their business models to lead with racial equity and ensure economic mobility for workers.

Use stimulus funds to build the next economy

While doing everything possible to minimize the economic crisis during this time of social distancing, the federal government must also take steps to get the economy moving again after the immediate health risk subsides. Already some predict unemployment could reach a record [32 percent](#) by the end of June—superseding the [25 percent](#) unemployment rate at the apex of the Great Depression. Many won't have jobs to return to: some businesses have already permanently closed, and the longer the partial closure, the more businesses will be forced to shut down.

It will take a significant stimulus to restart the economy, and this public investment must be a downpayment on the next economy. That means focusing our resources on the sectors of the economy that we need to strengthen and directing resources to the people and places we need to bring along to ensure shared prosperity:

- **Catalyze green sector growth:** We cannot build the next economy without addressing the existential threat of climate change, which disproportionately impacts low-income, communities of color. Stimulus funds should accelerate our transition away from fossil fuels and build community infrastructure through investments that make our buildings more energy efficient, expand green infrastructure and transportation options like electric buses, lay broadband in rural and urban communities lacking fast internet connections, increase clean energy production, and more—with a focus on creating millions of good jobs, supporting environmental justice communities, and expanding public and employee ownership as described in the [Green Stimulus plan](#).

- **Deliver good jobs and equitable business opportunities:**

The stimulus investments will create an incredible opportunity to deliver good jobs and business opportunities to Black, Latinx, and Native American workers and entrepreneurs of color. An analysis of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 found that of the \$45 billion in direct federal contracts, [less than \\$2.4 billion](#) went to Black-, Latinx-, and women-owned businesses. Policymakers must take a race-conscious approach on the front end to ensure that public investments create equitable opportunities rather than reinscribe inequities. Four policies are critical: 1) Dedicating 1 percent of infrastructure investments to a fund for inclusive job and contracting supports such as pre-apprenticeship and first-source hiring programs, small business development, and bonding; 2) setting aside a share of jobs for local and targeted hires (including people who face barriers to employment, such as having a criminal record); 3) setting aside a share of contracts for businesses owned by people of color, to mirror area demographics; and 4) prioritizing projects that meet resident needs in historically disinvested neighborhoods.

- **Foster inclusive growth:** Economic opportunity has become more and more concentrated since the last recession, and one driver of that is the increasingly uneven geography of business growth. Between 2010 and 2014, [half of all new businesses were located in just 20 large counties](#), home to 17 percent of the population. To ensure economic opportunity for the [100 million people](#) living in or near poverty—who live in every county—we must focus on making contracting opportunities available to entrepreneurs and would-be entrepreneurs living outside the small number of high-performing counties.

Forge a new social contract that enables shared prosperity

In the course of just a few weeks, the pandemic created a once-in-a-generation economic shockwave. The sudden surge of unemployment—and the widespread loss of health insurance, housing, and food security that accompanied it—exposed the deep structural flaws of our social contract. The erosion of basic labor protections and the social safety net was harming low-income communities and communities of color long before COVID-19, but the pandemic brought this neglect into stark relief. Congress mustered rare bipartisan support for interventions that were unthinkable just a few weeks ago, such as direct cash transfers and trillion-dollar investments.

Measures to guarantee that all people can meet their most basic needs, to protect workers' rights, and to support economic democracy should not be limited to the short term of crisis management: they should be the foundation of a [new social contract](#) that supports an economy in which everyone can thrive.

- **Enact a federal job guarantee:** By creating a public option for a good job—with dignified wages, benefits (including health care), safe working conditions, and full worker rights—a [job guarantee](#) would immediately get people back to work on projects to meet community needs and strengthen [community infrastructure](#), serving as a cornerstone for a more equitable economy. Originally proposed by FDR in his Economic Bill of Rights and later a key demand of the Civil Rights movement, a job guarantee has gained traction over the past couple of years because of its ability to solve for several fundamental challenges in our labor market. It would address the failure of our economy to provide jobs for all in even the best of times. It would reduce working poverty: [40 percent of workers earn less than \\$15 per hour](#) and a job guarantee would both provide them with an alternative and set a higher standard for wages, benefits, and hours in the private sector. And it would shrink racial inequities by guaranteeing good jobs for Black, Latinx, and Native American workers who [continue to face hiring discrimination](#) and are disproportionately [relegated to low-wage jobs](#).

- **Provide for the common good:** The tolls of the coronavirus crisis have cut across the economy, public health, and social institutions. Now is the time to invest in building systems that protect the common needs and interests of all: universal health care, to ensure our collective and individual well-being is not tied to any particular employer; paid sick leave, to guarantee that no worker has to choose between paying their bills and recovering from illness; universal family care, to support all families who need access to high-quality, dignified care for their loved ones young and old; a \$15 per hour minimum wage for all workers, to ensure that no worker earns poverty wages; a [homes guarantee](#) to provide safe, affordable homes for all; and income supports to ensure basic stability, food, and water for every household.
- **Rebalance power in the economy:** A resilient economy begins with empowered workers. Policymakers should take bold steps to increase [worker power](#) and reduce the outsized influence of corporations in our economy and democracy. This includes guaranteeing workers' right to organize at scale, promoting worker voice in corporate governance and decision-making, increasing opportunities for public and worker ownership, creating a more equitable tax code (including an excess profits tax to prevent profiteering from the pandemic and invest in the new social contract programs described above), and holding corporations accountable for their impact on workers, communities, and the environment. Regulators and corporations alike need to take action to reform practices such as stock buybacks that prioritize investor profits over workers and other stakeholders.
- **Advance equity as a business strategy:** Business leaders themselves have called on corporations to focus on delivering value to all stakeholders—including customers, workers, suppliers, and communities—and not only shareholders. It is time for this intention to become the new corporate reality, and for corporations to [adopt racial equity as a value and a business strategy](#) to guarantee a successful recovery and to drive innovation over the long term. Corporations must apply an equity lens across every aspect of their operations and value chain, including their workers, products, services, marketing, governance, investments, and policy positions.

Conclusion

Out of this crisis, we need a new path forward to an economy in which prosperity is truly shared and can be passed down for generations to come. In addition to exposing our extreme inequality, the pandemic has also revealed our interconnectedness: we are only as safe as the least protected among us. This mutuality may be less palpable during normal times, but it is still omnipresent. In a diversifying country, dismantling structural racism and ensuring economic security for all is the right thing to do and the necessary thing to do. Equity is our path to a strong next economy. Make your voice heard by contacting your local, state, and federal leaders and demand they take these actions and put people first. Stay connected to our work by visiting policylink.org/covid19-and-race.



Protect and Expand Community Voice and Power

As low-income communities, communities of color, and low-wage workers across the country are hit hard by the effects of the coronavirus, it is critical that the response to the pandemic centers their voice, wisdom, and experience. And yet, corporations are using this moment to exert pressure on elected leaders to roll back labor, health, and environmental standards to protect their bottom lines, while demanding billions in bailouts. A just response to this pandemic must prioritize community power and voice.

Generations of policies and practices—such as breached treaties, voter suppression, erosion of workers' right to organize, and mass criminalization—have excluded vulnerable people from decision-making, resulting in government systems that don't meet the needs of the people they purport to serve. This is not only a moral concern, but also a social, cultural, and economic liability. When entire populations are unable to fully participate in society, the enormous loss of potential affects the whole nation.

With the coronavirus thrusting the country into a public health and economic crisis, our racial and structural inequities have become even more pronounced. To foster greater inclusion and self-determination, federal policymakers must:

- ✓ **Center community voice in policymaking and spending.**
- ✓ **Protect the right to vote and increase access to the ballot box.**
- ✓ **Remove barriers to organizing and include labor unions in pandemic response planning.**

Center community voice in policymaking and spending

In times of disaster, state and local leaders often forgo community engagement for the sake of expediency, spending millions in federal relief without community oversight. This approach is flawed. Community engagement is more important than ever as residents are uniquely positioned to be the agents and owners of community change. A top-down recovery will not capture the long-term knowledge, wisdom, and experience that residents and community leaders have to offer. Excluding them will only make long-term, sustained recovery harder and will reinforce existing inequities. Congress should direct state and local policymakers to work with community leaders to ensure spending goes to the highest

needs that community members have expressed. Even while social distancing, local leaders are demonstrating [innovative approaches](#), including utilizing digital platforms, and tried-and-true methods, such as relying on the existing relationships of neighborhood leaders, to keep community members engaged. Policymakers should leverage these assets to ensure that they have effective processes in place that allow community leaders to shape how COVID-related investments are deployed, to reimagine programs to better serve the people who need them most, and to develop stronger and more effective government-community relationships.

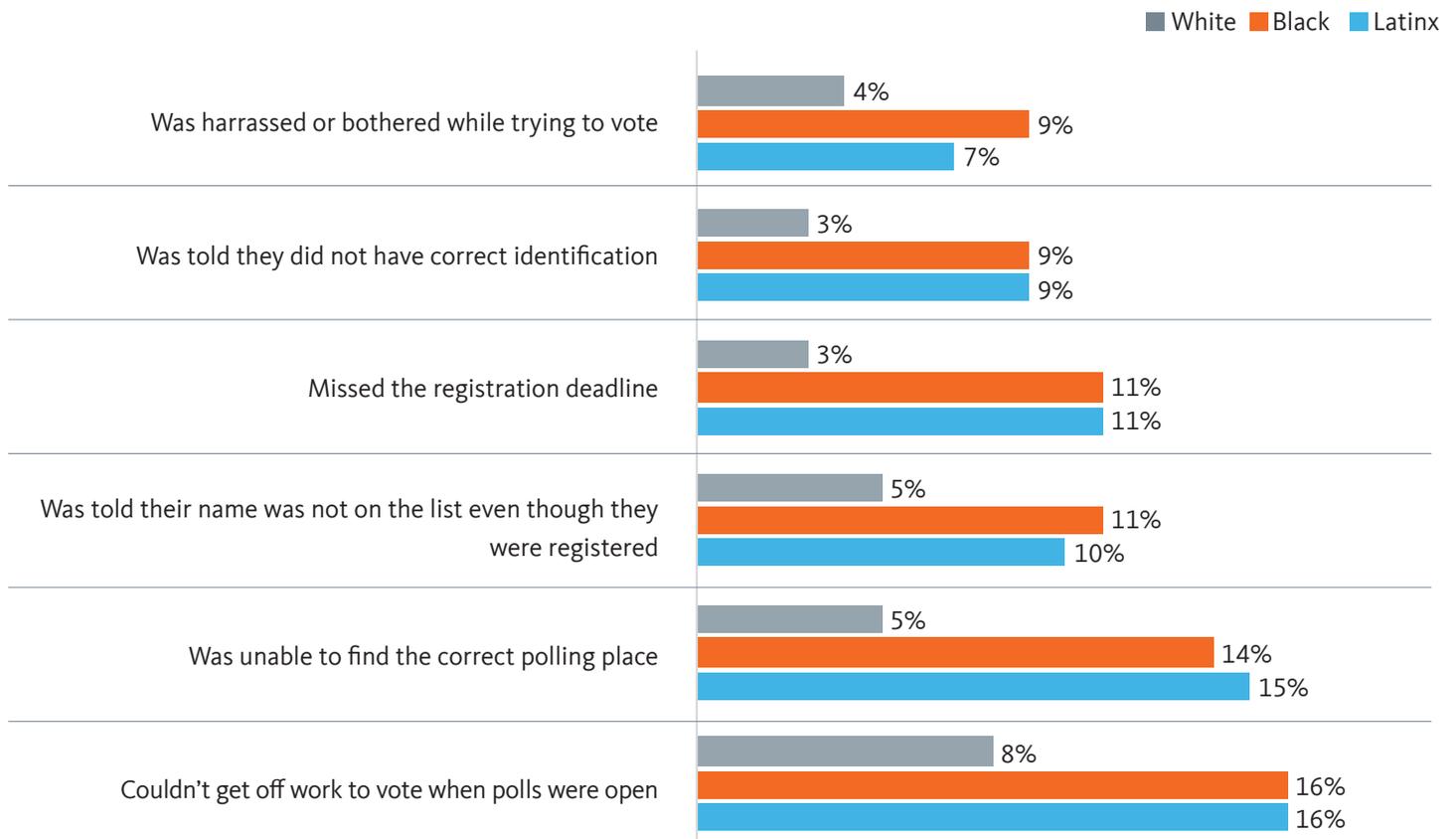
The solutions to the nation’s problems lie with those closest to the challenges. When the wisdom, voice, and experience of those traditionally absent from policymaking are fully integrated into the process, more effective solutions that truly address the needs of community members can be identified

and implemented. Unfortunately, as a result of the current crisis, those most marginalized in traditional political contexts face a new set of barriers that limit their meaningful participation in decision-making. As policymaking has transitioned to virtual spaces that require digital engagement, many community members and leaders have found that they lack the infrastructure, and in some cases technological literacy, to participate in processes that will have profound impacts on their future.

Federal legislation must include investments in state and local governments’ capacity to build out the appropriate digital infrastructure to specifically address the digital divide facing low-income communities and people of color, deploy state and local digital policymaking platforms that do not exclude those with limited access, and implement initiatives to promote inclusivity, privacy, and safe usage.

Common barriers to voter participation disproportionately impact Black and Latinx Americans.

Percent of eligible voters who report they or someone in their household experienced problems the last time they tried to vote, by race/ethnicity, 2018



Source: [PRRI/The Atlantic 2018 Voter Engagement Survey](#).

Protect the right to vote and increase access to the ballot box

The most vulnerable people in this country—specifically Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color, as well as those living in poverty—have always lacked equal access to the ballot box. Because of an array of discriminatory laws and practices such as voter ID laws, purging voter rolls, restricting access to polling places, disenfranchising citizens with a conviction history, and many other undemocratic actions, people of color face persistent barriers to exercising their right to vote. The pandemic has made this election season [uniquely vulnerable](#) to tampering, suppression, and low turnout due to health and safety precautions, social distancing, and stay-at-home guidance. During this period, the federal government, states, counties, and cities throughout the country have an obligation to ensure no voter is disenfranchised due to this public health crisis. The next federal legislative response must include resources to help state and local governments expand access to voting while also ensuring the health and safety of citizens. All-mail elections, automatic voter registration, same-day voter registration, extended voting periods, and partnerships with community organizations serving historically marginalized groups are all solutions to build an equitable democracy that values every voice.

Remove barriers to organizing and include labor unions in pandemic response planning

The pandemic has reminded America that strong labor unions are critical to the health and welfare of all. Unions for frontline workers have been instrumental in ensuring workers have robust protections and can continue to provide essential services to their communities. Nurses across the country [protested](#) the lack of critical personal protective equipment. Whole Foods employees organized a [sick out](#) to demand increased pay. And in Detroit, the United Auto Workers [pressured carmakers](#) to close their factories until social-distancing protocols were established.

The [frontline workers](#) now deemed essential are disproportionately people of color and women. Their jobs often lack the basic protections labor unions successfully negotiate for their members in collective bargaining agreements, including paid sick leave, workplace protections, and the job security needed to speak out about unsafe working conditions. As this pandemic has swept across the country, frontline

workers have been thrown into situations where they risked and lost their lives. When more workers have a voice and power on the job, workplace standards are raised, and we all benefit. Legislators must ensure all workers can exercise the right to organize a union and collectively bargain.

Across the country, policies that community organizers and advocates have long called for are finally being recognized as necessary to safeguard our health and economic security. In California, Governor Newsom, in partnership with labor, took the unprecedented step of providing [additional sick leave benefits](#) to all workers along the entire food supply chain—from agriculture to grocery to delivery. While many local jurisdictions are making great strides toward a more equitable society, action at the federal level is required to support the transformational shifts necessary for a just recovery from this crisis.

Conclusion

Leaders at all levels must reimagine the way in which we invest in our most vulnerable people and build their power in our economy and democracy. This pivotal moment is our chance to build a nation where all participate, prosper, and reach their full potential. This is what winning on equity looks like. Make your voice heard by contacting your local, state, and federal leaders and demand they take these actions and ensure community voice and power guide our recovery. Stay connected to our work by visiting policylink.org/covid19-and-race.



Lifting Up What Works®

Headquarters

1438 Webster Street
Suite 303
Oakland, CA 94612
t 510 663-2333
f 510 663-9684

Communications

75 Broad Street
Suite 701
New York, NY 10004
t 212 629-9570

Washington, DC

1301 K Street, NW
Suite 300 W-414
Washington, DC 20005

policylink.org

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