

# Coming Back Better: Leveraging Crisis-Response Task Forces to Advance Racial Equity and Worker Justice

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## Introduction

As the United States enters its third year of navigating the global Covid-19 pandemic, the coronavirus continues to disrupt the lives of millions of workers and their families. About a quarter of the US workforce—nearly 41 million workers—experienced at least one spell of unemployment due to the coronavirus.<sup>1</sup> As of February 2022, some 3 million fewer people are employed than before the pandemic.<sup>2</sup> While nearly all workers have been affected, yet these impacts are highly unequal: low-wage workers, Black workers, and other workers of color, particularly women of color, have experienced the greatest health and economic harms.<sup>3</sup> This lop-sided labor market recovery has done little to buoy low-wage workers of color who continue to face heavy burdens in terms of rent debt and childcare access.<sup>4</sup>

In response to the pandemic, during spring 2020 most state and many local governments convened task forces of cross-sector leaders to produce recommendations to address the immediate consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic and economic crisis. Task force members were usually appointed by city mayors or state governors and comprised primarily local business leaders and heads of major nonprofits, philanthropies, and labor groups. They were charged with advising their governments on how to address immediate needs caused by the Covid pandemic as well as developing long-term strategies for an inclusive recovery. Many task forces convened subcommittees around particular issues, such as the arts, climate, or small business, which met as frequently as weekly. They operated on fixed timelines, usually meeting for eight to 10 months. In spring 2021, many task forces published reports with recovery policy recommendations, which were passed directly to their jurisdictions' top government officials.

While these task forces were advisory bodies without policymaking authority or a public mandate, they reported directly to their governor or mayor. Therefore, they had the influence and power to shape the policy debate, set the boundaries of what is possible, and put forth bold and innovative solutions. With this power, the task forces had the potential to center local pandemic response and recovery efforts on the needs of low-income communities and communities of color who were disproportionately harmed by the crisis.

Formed just before the murder of George Floyd and the national policy debate about systemic racism precipitated by that event, the vast majority of task forces focused on restarting the state and local economy in their mandates and included no mention of equity. Texas's Strike Force to Open Texas task force, for example, was convened to “get Texans back to work” and “advise the Governor on safely and strategically reopening the state.”<sup>5</sup> But a few of the task forces were created with the explicit purpose of addressing the economic and health inequalities created by the pandemic. Rhode Island, for example, convened the Equity Council task force which aimed to “ensure that State’s emergency response and recovery strategies address the specific needs of the communities most impacted by the pandemic ... including communities of color.”<sup>6</sup>

As a research and action institute dedicated to advancing racial and economic equity, PolicyLink was both a participant in and avid observer of these recovery task forces.<sup>7</sup> To understand the promise and success of these task forces in relation to racial equity and worker justice, we analyzed the scope, approach, and early outcomes of Covid-recovery task forces, asking the following questions:

- Were labor and equity advocates represented on Covid-recovery task forces and, if so, to what extent?
- Where and how did Covid-recovery task forces advance more equitable policies for workers?
- What barriers did Covid-recovery task forces face in implementing equitable policies for workers?
- What lessons can be learned from the successes and failures of these task forces in advancing worker justice policies?

To answer these questions, we examined the inclusion of community and labor representatives on task forces in all 50 states and 70 cities; confidentially interviewed community advocates who participated in task forces and city and state officials who convened task forces in seven states; and analyzed 38 task force final reports and published research on Covid-recovery task forces in scholarly journals, policy briefs, newspaper articles, websites, and other media. (See the Appendix for more details on the methodology used.)

We found that while several task forces advanced promising worker justice policies, the majority failed to center workers or racial equity in their efforts. Our key insights include the following:

- **Promising strategies to improve conditions for workers and communities of color emerged from some state and local task forces.** Some communities are now implementing job recovery programs that will create employment opportunities and provide relief for workers in sectors impacted by the pandemic. Some task forces proposed policy changes that could enhance long-term worker power and introduced new frameworks and processes that could advance racial equity and improve outcomes for low-income people of color.
- **Community advocates, labor representatives, and directly impacted communities were not adequately represented on most recovery task forces.** Instead, business and government representatives made up the majority of participants. Almost all task forces relied on community advocates and labor leaders to relay the needs of those most impacted by the pandemic.
- **Immediate pandemic response efforts dominated task force activities.** Most recommendations put forward by task forces focused on immediate public health needs. While still crucial, these recommendations did not address the long-term economic vulnerabilities of workers.
- **Task forces often lacked transparency externally as well as internally among members.** Most task forces failed to publish information about their convenings or recommendations process. Many community advocates we spoke with had challenges communicating with task force leadership as well as other members.
- **Worker advocates' recommendations were often sidelined by business interests, preventing meaningful progress on worker-focused policies.** Demands from business leaders often won out over those from worker and community advocates. As a result, only a small fraction of task forces adopted recommendations targeted at low-income workers and workers of color.

- **Equity-focused task force recommendations were usually results of labor and community representative advocacy.** Labor and community representatives successfully leveraged existing relationships with other task force members to advance worker and racial equity policies.

Significant changes in future crisis-response task force design and implementation are needed to strengthen the equity focus of task forces. We recommend the following strategies:

- Increase representation of labor and community representatives and ensure the demands of those directly impacted by the economic or public health crisis are included in task force recommendations.
- Reduce barriers to task force participation for labor and community representatives by providing meaningful supports such as adequate stipends, childcare, translation services, and scheduling assistance.
- Promote transparency and clear communication across task forces and subcommittees.
- Commit to addressing not only immediate impacts but also underlying structural inequities.

While the circumstances and challenges of each disaster are unique, the above strategies provide a useful framework that can be used to guide the development of more equitable recovery policies that benefit residents, workers, employers, and families. In doing so, we can leverage task forces to not only address inequities created in the immediate aftermath of a crisis but also build meaningful, long-term policy change for low-income workers and workers of color.

## Promising Practices in Advancing Worker Justice through Recovery Efforts

Our interviews, analyses of task force reports, and review of secondary sources revealed several promising practices put forward by task forces to advance an equitable recovery for workers. Many task forces proposed policies to advance health equity. As research by Dawn Hunter and Betsy Lawton found, some state and local Covid-recovery task forces successfully advanced initiatives to address long-term health inequities as well as immediate health needs—such as providing masks and Covid tests in underserved areas and publishing linguistically relevant and culturally competent health information regarding the pandemic.<sup>8</sup> In contrast, our research focused primarily on strategies that target low-income workers and workers of color. These strategies fall into three main categories: 1) economic stability strategies, 2) worker justice policies, and 3) just response and recovery frameworks. While these strategies are too early in implementation to fully evaluate outcomes, they demonstrate the potential for meeting the immediate needs of workers and residents most impacted by Covid-19 and could help create longer lasting impacts, such as increased worker power and economic security.

- **Economic Stability Strategies.** Several local governments implemented programs recommended by task forces to create employment opportunities and provide relief for workers in sectors impacted by the pandemic.
  - San Antonio launched the Covid-19 Workforce Recovery Program, which aimed to connect up to 10,000 residents with employment in a high-demand occupation by September 2021.<sup>9</sup> The program also provided wraparound support services to address employment barriers for marginalized workers, such as access to education and in-demand training opportunities. Participants received a stipend for time spent in job training, a model that has been shown to increase earnings and improve job retention rates for dislocated workers.<sup>10</sup>
  - Denver began an Artist Relief Fund that provided grants of up to \$1,000 to artists who have lost income during the pandemic.<sup>11</sup>
  - San Francisco initiated a basic income pilot, in which 130 artists received \$1,000-per-month stipends for six months as the economy continued to recover.<sup>12</sup>

- **Worker Justice Policies.** Some task forces proposed policy changes that could enhance long-term worker power.
  - In Philadelphia, the local recovery task force collaborated with union leaders to help pass an ordinance that ensures that hospitality workers laid off during the pandemic had the right to return to their former workplace when it reopened.<sup>13</sup> As the hospitality industry accounts for around 40 percent of Philadelphia’s workforce and is predominantly made up of Black women, this policy directly supports equitable recovery.
  - Along with labor leaders, the New York City task force pushed forward a measure prohibiting fast-food employers from firing workers without “just cause,” or showing the employee failed to meet specific job duties or harmed the employer’s business.<sup>14</sup> This policy provides an opportunity to create lasting change for vulnerable workers and raise the bar for employment standards across sectors.
- **Just Response and Recovery Frameworks.** Finally, a few task forces leveraged their pandemic recovery strategies to institutionalize frameworks and processes that advance racial equity and improve outcomes for low-income people and people of color.
  - California’s task force developed a Health Equity Metric that the state used to assess whether a county can move to a less restrictive shelter-in-place tier.<sup>15</sup> The metric compares test positivity rates across neighborhoods. The county was also required to demonstrate targeted investments to eliminate disparities in levels of transmission to advance to the next tier. This use of racially disaggregated data to guide policymaking is a practice that should be permanently adopted.
  - Los Angeles County announced a program in which workers from frontline sectors can form public health councils to help enforce Covid safety guidelines in their workplace.<sup>16</sup> The program was initially brought forward by labor leaders on the California task force. A coalition of Los Angeles labor and community leaders then successfully advocated for its adoption at a local level. While employer engagement with these councils is voluntary, they have the potential to provide workers a venue where they can organize and advocate for a safer work site.
  - Iowa’s task force also aimed to include the demands of those directly impacted by Covid-19 in the recovery process.<sup>17</sup> The task force created a “Submit an Economic Recovery Idea” function on their website, in which the public can directly propose a recovery policy. This effort to incorporate the voices of those directly impacted is a critical element for advancing an equitable policy strategy.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned from Recovery Task Forces

Task forces faced key barriers in advancing racial and economic equity policies. While some labor and community representatives in task force membership successfully pushed forward equity policy proposals, many faced significant barriers. Business interests dominated the majority of task forces we analyzed. At the same time, most task forces failed to meaningfully engage community and labor representatives, preventing the advancement of worker justice and racial equity policy change.

Community advocates, labor representatives, and directly impacted communities were not adequately represented in state and local Covid-recovery task forces.

Across all jurisdictions, business and government representatives made up the majority of participants on Covid-recovery task forces, and community and labor advocates were not adequately represented. This underrepresentation of community members and labor leaders created a power imbalance that often left the voice and needs of workers out of critical task force deliberations.

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### Community and labor representatives comprised less than 10 percent of membership in the majority of cities with public task force rosters.

Percent of community representatives out of total membership in cities with public task force rosters.

|    | City              | Percent of community and labor representatives |
|----|-------------------|--|
| 1  | Columbus, OH      | 38%  |
| 2  | Minneapolis, MN   | 30%  |
| 3  | San Diego, CA     | 20%  |
| 4  | New York City, NY | 20%  |
| 5  | Flint, MI         | 15%  |
| 6  | Oakland, CA       | 14%  |
| 7  | Portland, OR      | 14%  |
| 8  | Newark, CT        | 11%  |
| 9  | Maui, HI          | 11%  |
| 10 | Anchorage, AK     | 9%   |
| 11 | Los Angeles, CA   | 8%   |
| 12 | Denver, CO        | 8%   |
| 13 | Durham, NC        | 7%   |
| 14 | Chicago, IL       | 6%   |
| 15 | Philadelphia, PA  | 6%   |
| 16 | San Antonio, NM   | 6%   |
| 17 | Washington, D.C.  | 5%   |
| 18 | Seattle, WA       | 4%   |
| 19 | Louisville, KY    | 4%   |
| 20 | San Jose, CA      | 3%   |
| 21 | Atlanta, GA       | 3%   |
| 22 | Boise, ID         | 0%   |
| 23 | Omaha, NE         | 0%   |
| 24 | Sioux Falls, SD   | 0%   |
| 25 | Billings, MT      | 0%   |
| 26 | Charlotte, NC     | 0%   |
| 27 | Topeka, KS        | 0%   |

Source: PolicyLink analysis of 2021 task force composition data.

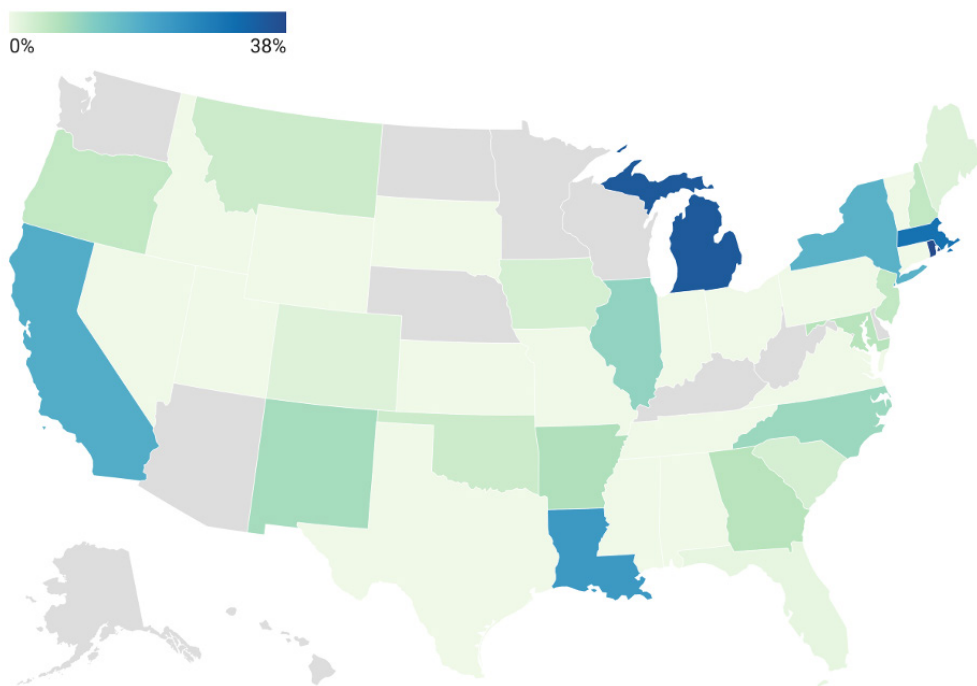
Among the 39 state task forces with publicly available rosters, nearly half (17 states) had no community representation whatsoever. Cities performed better, but 6 of the 27 task forces we examined still had no community representatives. Community representatives and labor leaders comprised less than 10 percent of the total membership in 32 state task forces and 18 local task forces. Rhode Island had the largest share of community representatives and labor leaders out of the state task forces analyzed, with 17 out of 45 task force members

(38 percent). Michigan, Massachusetts, Louisiana, California, and New York were the other states with the highest community and labor representation (35 to 17 percent). Among the city task forces analyzed, Columbus, Ohio, had the largest share of community and labor representatives at 38 percent (9 out of 24 members). Minneapolis, Minnesota, followed closely behind with 30 percent, while San Diego, California, and New York, New York both had a 20 percent community representation.

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**Among states, Rhode Island's task force had the most community and labor representation: 38 percent of its members were community and labor advocates.**

Percent of task force members that represent labor and community-based organizations.



Gray regions indicate no data available.

**Source:** PolicyLink analysis of 2021 task force composition data.

### **Low-income workers most impacted by the pandemic were not meaningfully engaged in task force decision-making**

Nearly all task forces we analyzed failed to include in decision-making the people with lived experience of the pandemic's inequitable impacts, such as frontline workers. The community representatives working for direct-service nonprofits we interviewed noted that they were not equipped to serve as proxies for low-wage and essential workers. They noted that the voices of those directly impacted by the economic crisis and union representatives needed to be included to adequately meet the needs of this population. While union leaders, who are elected by workers and therefore provide a better proxy to worker-demands, were sometimes included in task forces, many task forces lacked union representatives. After task force members called attention to the lack of worker representation, the City of Durham, North Carolina, addressed this challenge by setting up a "workers roundtable" where workers were able to discuss issues they faced and propose solutions to the task force membership.

### **Recovery task forces focused on immediate pandemic response efforts**

Many task forces focused primarily on addressing immediate public health needs and monitoring and reducing the disparate spread of the coronavirus. Community and labor advocates pushed for increased access to personal protective equipment, as employers failed to provide many essential workers with adequate protection. As noted by a representative from the California task force, the gains made through this advocacy were crucial for ensuring workers on the frontlines remained safe. However, the need to respond to immediate health inequities left less time to address the structural barriers facing low-income workers and workers of color, such as access to affordable childcare or consistent scheduling.

### **Recovery task forces lacked transparency**

Another recurring theme was limited transparency regarding task force activities, both internally across subcommittees and externally with the general public. This lack of transparency inhibited potential collaboration with practitioners or community-based organizations from focusing on improving outcomes for low-income workers and people of color. Just 66 of 74 states and cities we analyzed opted to make their task force rosters publicly available. Many of their websites were difficult to navigate and required significant searching to find information about the task force beyond a brief description. Some task forces, such as the Resilient Louisiana Commission,

published agendas and video recordings of every task force meeting on a public website. However, most task forces published little to no material about their meetings or activities.

### **Task force members faced barriers communicating with task force leadership and membership**

Interviewees also noted that challenges in communication occurred on multiple levels. Several of the community representatives we spoke with often felt their demands were not heard within the task force given the outsized role of business representatives. Several described insufficient information-sharing within task forces. Subcommittee members, for example, were often unaware of the progress or challenges impacting their colleagues on other subcommittees. This lack of communication impeded coordination and the potential to amplify impact.

### **Recovery task forces rarely pursued worker-focused policy**

Across nearly all task forces reviewed, the primary policy effort to support communities of color was providing financial assistance for small businesses, Black business owners, and other business owners of color. Of the 43 task force reports analyzed, only three included recommendations that targeted Black residents, and just eight had recommendations that targeted residents of color. All but two of these recommendations were for additional resources and supports for Black entrepreneurs and entrepreneurs of color.

Very few task forces implemented policies that directly supported low-wage workers, even though people of color are overrepresented in low-wage jobs.<sup>18</sup> As a community representative noted, this lack of worker-focused recommendations is a direct result of the outsized representation of business leaders in the task force membership. Due to this imbalance, business advocates would attempt to push through recommendations that directly threatened worker interest. Therefore, much of the focus of community and labor advocates was directed to preventing these recommendations from gaining traction.

### **Demands from worker advocates and union leaders were often overlooked by recovery task forces**

In addition to unequal representation between worker representatives and business interests, structural power inequities between workers and business owners were also barriers to advancing more equitable policies. In Arkansas, for example, policy advocates noted that the makeup of the advisory council is “completely, completely skewed towards giant corporate folks.”<sup>19</sup> Many interviewees also called attention to the outsized role of the business sector on their task forces, leading to the demands of workers, particularly workers of color, often being underrepresented. For example, one interviewee from a city task force indicated that the demands of worker advocates were frequently sidelined.

At the time of our interview, temporary paid sick leave provisions instituted at the outset of the pandemic were about to expire. Worker advocates on the task force had repeatedly called for the extension of these benefits but found it challenging to get large employers on the task force to agree on the correlation between this action and economic recovery from the pandemic. These advocates attributed their lack of success to the close relationship these employers had with city government, which made it easier for them to have their recommendations for recovery taken into consideration. Worker advocates, however, felt like outsiders whose demands were taken less seriously. Even a city official acknowledged that the needs of the business community often dominated the conversation. They noted that this discord could be because many of those coordinating the task force had business backgrounds.

Another community representative interviewed noted that despite their task force’s promised focus on equity, attempts to include the needs of workers in the conversation were minimized or dismissed. For example, when a task force member asked to give a presentation on the impact of Covid on workers, they were given just a three-minute time slot. The representative concluded that “the task force was not a good platform to solve issues faced by workers.”

### **Leveraging existing relationships and member advocacy were successful strategies for advancing worker justice policies**

Despite these multiple barriers to advancing equity policy, several task force members used their positions to force dialogue on a more robust set of issues. For example, recent local data had documented an increase in Durham’s Latinx population, and Durham leaders attempted to account for this shift by including advocates from the Latinx community on the city task force. However, task force members rightly highlighted that the city’s Black population had persistent and unique challenges that also needed to be addressed and demanded more representation from this community. As a result of this member advocacy, the Durham task force was expanded to include additional representatives from the Black community. Other worker justice policy wins were also brought about through advocacy from community representatives. For example, demands from union representatives in New York City’s task force membership led to the adoption of a “just cause” firing policy for fast-food workers.

In some instances, the task force structure capitalized on existing professional dynamics in ways that supported more progressive policy change. Many interviewees were concomitantly participating in several state or regional task forces, or had previously worked closely with other task force members, which allowed for more efficient communication and expedited decision-making. Interviewees from the New York State and New York City task forces noted that these task forces worked well in part because everyone knew each other and had worked together over the years. This familiarity allowed community representatives to more easily advance policies that directly assisted workers, such as expanded unemployment insurance benefits to gig workers and undocumented workers.

Similarly, Philadelphia task force members also attributed their success in advancing worker justice policies to these preexisting relationships. For example, the task force adopted the Getting Talent Back to Work Certificate Program, which trains human resources professionals on how to recruit and hire formerly incarcerated or returning workers.<sup>20</sup> This was the only policy action that addressed the specific needs of formerly incarcerated residents out of all task forces we analyzed. Multiple task force members noted that such decisions were possible due to trust established between members prior to the task force’s convening.



## **Significant Changes in Future Crisis-Response Task Force Design and Implementation Are Needed to Advance Worker Justice**

Recovery task forces have the potential to bring together important business leaders and community advocates, providing a unique opportunity to generate innovative policy recommendations. Yet, our research revealed that these task forces are not designed to advance worker justice or racial equity. Through key changes that ensure procedural equity and create pathways for task force ideas to be translated into policy, we can better leverage these advisory bodies to surface meaningful, long-term policy recommendations for low-income workers and workers of color. We recommend the following.

### **Ensure voices and demands of those directly impacted are included**

While task forces must include advocates for marginalized communities, direct representation of those most impacted by crises and preexisting structural inequities is also crucial. Workers on the frontlines of a crisis or those laid off during an economic downturn and their union representatives must have a seat at the table to ensure their needs are heard. Task force conveners must also understand underlying inequities in their communities, through resources like the National Equity Atlas,<sup>21</sup> to know which communities and neighborhoods are most vulnerable to economic and environmental shocks. Representatives from these communities must be included in task force membership. Prior to crises, governments must build relationships with these communities and ensure that they have leaders who are adequately prepared to participate in task forces by investing in local civic infrastructure, such as resident-led neighborhood associations or youth leadership development programs.

### **Account for power imbalances within task force membership and uplift worker policies**

Task forces must address the structural inequality between workers and business owners to ensure that the needs of both of these groups are met. Task forces should ensure that workers and business owners are equitably represented within task force membership and that both groups are given equal opportunities to present their perspectives and recommendations. Task force members should be compensated for their time to ensure all are able to participate. Any policies or programs advanced by the task force should be vetted to ensure that the interests of workers, and not just those of business owners, are reflected. Insights from worker advocates and union leaders should be incorporated into the task force operations on an ongoing basis.

### **Promote transparency and clear communication**

Providing task force members with accessible and clear information on task force operations is an equity imperative. Task force leadership must inform members how to submit recommendations and feedback and provide regular updates on activities across subcommittees. Opportunities for cross-sector collaboration should also be provided to amplify impact. City and state governments should create accountability mechanisms to ensure that the public can track the progress of recommendations put forward by task forces. For example, task forces should create accessible public-facing websites with regularly updated information, including meeting recordings, membership rosters, and recommendation proposals. Information should be available in multiple languages and formats.

### **Provide task force members with adequate supports**

To ensure that task forces are able to advance equitable policies and programs, community and labor advocates must be provided with access to adequate resources for optimal participation. Given that many of these advocates lead organizations whose members and target communities are on the frontlines of economic and public health crises, they must receive adequate financial and logistical support to ensure they are able to devote time to task force participation. This support includes not only stipends but also potentially childcare, translation services, and scheduling assistance.

## Adopt equity-focused tools to guide decision-making

As task force members assess the breadth of challenges and potential strategies necessary for an equitable recovery, they should adopt equity frameworks and tools to ensure equity is considered throughout their deliberations and decision-making. Equity principles are one valuable tool that can help orient and align task force members from diverse backgrounds on how they can incorporate an equity lens into their decision-making. These principles can also serve as a screening mechanism for various proposals and ideas generated throughout the process. The Principles for Equity and Inclusion adopted by California's task

force under Governor Newsom, for example, provided a standard that community and labor advocates were able to reference when evaluating recommendations.<sup>22</sup> As one California task force member noted, these principles could have been further strengthened by combining them with high-level goals to ensure that the task force made progress toward improving conditions for workers. Adopting equity principles aligned with long-term task force goals could better allow task force members to advance policies that support an economy that works for all, particularly people of color, low-income workers, and immigrants.

## Governor Newsom's Task Force on Business and Jobs Recovery: Principles for Equity and Inclusion

California has been a wealthy state, but our resources have not been distributed equitably. The historic investment in COVID-19 recovery presents a transformational opportunity to remake our economy and advance racial, economic, geographic, and gender justice.

California can emerge as a more just and prosperous state by prioritizing the needs of those who are most vulnerable, particularly Black, Native, and Latinx people and subgroups of the Asian Pacific Islander community; immigrants; women; people with disabilities; people who are immunocompromised; and the elderly. The success of our recovery is dependent on the ability to center the needs, strengths, and aspirations of California's most valuable asset: our people.

The following principles and guiding question can be used by subcommittees to develop recommendations that reinvigorate our economy through equity and inclusion.

### Put People First

California's people are struggling. Displaced workers aren't sure how they will pay the rent or put food on the table. And frontline workers, the majority of whom are underpaid women and people of color, are putting their lives on the line without the support they need to be safe and healthy.

▶ *How will your recommendations center vulnerable people and their jobs so we recover better than we entered this pandemic?*

### Explicitly Address Racial and Ethnic Discrimination and Disparities

The racial disparities in COVID-19 deaths are not a coincidence, but a result of structural inequalities and policy choices. California's true potential will be unlocked through recovery strategies and practices that are conscious of racial realities.

▶ *How will your recommendations seek to eliminate the continuing impact of past and current discrimination?*

### Expand Opportunity in Places Facing Extreme Poverty and Inequality

The stark disparities in coronavirus infection and death rates for people of color can be mapped to the combination of race, poverty and place. Recovery strategies can bring opportunities to the places of concentrated poverty that need them most in both rural and urban areas.

▶ *How will your recommendations ensure that ZIP codes don't predict health and economic destiny?*

### Prioritize Shared Prosperity and Economic Inclusion

COVID-19 recovery efforts can serve as a path to prosperity for historically disadvantaged small business owners of color who face barriers, as well as workers who remain in poverty despite working and who experience obstacles to advancement.

▶ *How will your recommendations create more ladders of opportunity so that California becomes a stronger, more prosperous and resilient state?*

**Source:** Governor Newsom's Task Force on Business and Jobs Recovery, "Principles for Equity and Inclusion," May 8, 2020, and later referenced in the task force's final report as "[principles to guide the work](#)" of the task force.

## Conclusion

Covid deepened existing inequities along the lines of race, class, and gender. Recovery response task forces were convened at the state and local levels to address the immediate public health crisis brought about by the coronavirus pandemic and to develop economic recovery strategies. Through our interviews and document analysis, we found that community and labor representatives on a few task forces succeeded in advancing policies that will benefit low-income workers and workers of color. However, we found that task forces too often failed to meaningfully engage with labor and community representatives or advance recovery solutions that centered equity. To ensure that future crisis-response task forces advance policies that build an economy that works for all, we must adopt key procedural changes, such as meaningful supports to allow advocates and directly impacted community members to participate in decision-making guided by equity principles.

## Appendix: Methodology

To get the most comprehensive perspective of the range of ways that cities and states were approaching recovery, we drew upon data from four sources.

### Compositional Analysis

To understand community advocate representation across geographies, we completed a composition analysis of task force rosters in all 50 states, as well as 70 major cities. We chose to include the largest city in each state, as well as 20 additional cities where PolicyLink is in deep partnership with organizations working to advance racial equity and worker justice policies.

After selecting these geographies, we confirmed which jurisdictions had a Covid-recovery task force. We focused our analysis on task forces that were cross-sector, working with or on behalf of the city government, and charged with developing an economic and public health recovery plan for the jurisdiction. Of the geographies analyzed, 43 states and 31 cities had task forces that met these requirements. We then identified the roster of participants for each task force. Of the 43 states and 31 cities with task forces, only 39 states and 27 cities had rosters publicly available. Finally, we calculated the percentage of community representatives on those task forces for which rosters were publicly available.

We defined “community representative” to include all task force members who work for nonprofits, advocacy groups, faith-based organizations, or labor unions. We found that 22 states and 21 cities included community representatives on their task force. A complete table of city task forces analyzed can be found [here](#) and a complete table of state task forces analyzed can be found [here](#). Note that this analysis was completed in March 2021. Any task force rosters that became available following this time are not included.

### Interviews

To better understand the experiences of task force members and how, if at all, worker justice and/or racial equity were incorporated into their scopes of work, we completed eight interviews with community advocates from task forces across seven states and cities. We also completed four interviews with city and state officials who convened task forces. Please note that, given the sensitive nature of the activities of these task forces, we agreed to maintain confidentiality and not to publish the names of interviewees.

### Task Force Report Analysis

We supplemented our interview findings with an analysis of the publicly available final reports and a list of recommendations that task forces put forward. These reports were reviewed to evaluate the list of priorities elevated by task forces and whether racial equity or workforce development were among them. We focused our efforts on task force reports in the 22 states and 21 cities that included community representatives on their task force. However, only 38 of these 43 task forces published such reports.

### Secondary Sources

Finally, we also analyzed additional published research on Covid-recovery task forces, including scholarly journals, policy briefs, newspaper articles, websites, and other media. The amount of timely public information available on task force activities varied across jurisdictions. Task forces published a range of materials; some posted a broad array of material, such as the agendas and video recordings of all task force meetings on a public website, while other task forces posted no materials or information about activities at all.

## Notes

- 1 Avie Schneider, "40.8 Million Out Of Work in the Past 10 Weeks — 26% of Labor Force," *NPR*, May 28, 2020, <https://www.npr.org/sections/coronavirus-live-updates/2020/05/28/863120102/40-8-million-out-of-work-in-the-past-10-weeks>.
- 2 Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "The COVID-19 Economy's Effects on Food, Housing, and Employment Hardships," February 10, 2022, <https://www.cbpp.org/sites/default/files/8-13-20pov.pdf>.
- 3 Jocelyn Frye, "On the Frontlines at Work and at Home: The Disproportionate Economic Effects of the Coronavirus Pandemic on Women of Color," Center for American Progress, April 23, 2020, <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/women/reports/2020/04/23/483846/frontlines-work-home/>.
- 4 Opportunity Insights, "Track the Economic Impacts of COVID-19 on People, Businesses, and Communities across the United States in Real Time," June 27, 2021, <https://tracktherecovery.org/>; National Equity Atlas, "Rent Debt in America," accessed November 10, 2021, <https://nationalequityatlas.org/lab/rent-debt>; Columbia Mailman School of Public Health, "The Childcare Crisis Is a Threat to Our Nation," June 14, 2021, <https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/public-health-now/news/childcare-crisis-threat-our-nation>.
- 5 Office of Texas Government, "Governor Abbott Issues Executive Order Establishing Strike Force to Open Texas," April 17, 2020, <https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/governor-abbott-issues-executive-order-establishing-strike-force-to-open-texas>.
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