

An Equity Profile Of Pinellas County, Florida: Summary

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Foreword

The benefits of a more fair and just society are evident throughout the world. Equity—full inclusion of all residents in the economic, social, and political life of Pinellas County, regardless of race/ethnicity, nativity, age, gender, neighborhood of residence, or other characteristics—is more than just the right thing to do, it is essential for sustained prosperity. Reducing inequity correlates with more stable economies, more capacity to rebound from economic downturns, growth in overall academic performance, increased life expectancy, reduced infant mortality, and increased civic participation. Equity IS the superior economic and social model.

Still, disparities based on race and ethnicity endure across a host of socioeconomic indicators in our county, indicating a persistence of racial barriers to opportunity. Typically, these barriers include discrimination as well as more subtle forms of exclusion that are embedded into institutions and systems. There is a disconnect between the brilliance and contributions of people of color in the United States and in Pinellas County and in the lived experience of many residents.

With the production of this equity profile, UNITE Pinellas aims to make the data clear and indisputable knowing that the goal is to produce fairness and social justice where race would no longer be a factor in the assessment of merit, or in the distribution of opportunity.

UNITE Pinellas is committed to increasing our community's capacity and will to achieve lasting economic and racial fairness. Specific and significant ways exist to reform systems that generated this unfairness:

- Dismantle public policies that create barriers to exclusion and develop policies that are more equitable.
- Eliminate institutional practices such as regulations and day-to-day decision-making in public and private institutions that generate biased outcomes.
- Change the narrative and modify the language, images, and cognitive cues that form the conventional understanding of poverty and race from one of “blame” to a deeper understanding of the systemic barriers in place that have created these inequities.

By increasing the knowledge of the local dynamics and conditions and exposing the root causes that underlie the disparities, our community can develop the capacity to influence these three areas. It is important to acknowledge that the success in impacting systems relies on the wisdom and co-creation of people most impacted by the policies, practices, and blame narratives that perpetuate inequity. This goal will drive who participates in decision-making and how decisions are made.

If there is a more just and equitable Pinellas County what difference will it make? Aside from the deep desire people hold for our world to be just and fair, there are concrete impacts that can be measured and seen. The research in this profile estimates that our local economy would be \$3.6 billion larger if there were no income inequities.

What happens if our community does not alter the systemic/ structural causes of inequity? If the community is unable to generate lasting systemic impact, we will continue to deny the contributions that people at the margins are ready and able to make toward the well-being of the whole. The community's potential will be unrealized. Inequities will continue to cost everyone.

This equity profile is an effort to increase awareness of how inequity is part of our reality in Pinellas County. This report, and future reports, will be enhanced as they include even deeper co-creation of solutions from residents who are context experts. Context expertise is a core value of UNITE Pinellas and it will generate a superior solution.

This report defines and launches an agenda for Pinellas County focused on an inclusive economy and justice that materially impacts the measures of equity. The next steps will include an ongoing effort to elevate the awareness of the realities of the current systems, advancing the institutional commitments to internal change, and exploring areas that are ripe for movement around policy and practice.

UNITE Pinellas

Overview

A Yale University study¹ showed that Americans significantly overestimate the progress that's been made toward economic equality. One of the co-authors said in an interview, "Instead of engaging with all of the problems inherent in a system that has a massive wealth gap...[i]t is simply easier to believe the wealth gap doesn't exist..."² In Pinellas County, Florida, like communities across the country, substantial disparities are evident across sectors including income, justice, education, and access to transportation, health care, and affordable high-quality housing.

These disparities are particularly important as the county undergoes significant demographic change. The number of residents in the county has been increasing, driven by communities of color. However, these same communities of color are frequently left out of Pinellas County's economic growth. As the share of people of color in the county continues to grow, persistent inequities diminish the county's economic potential. Embedding equity into decision-making and policy development is especially important given the range of disparities facing the people of Pinellas County in the areas of housing, economic development, justice, and more. The disproportionate impact of these issues on people of color has created two Pinellas counties.

The goal of economic equity is to ensure that all neighborhoods throughout the county are communities of opportunity where residents reach their full potential. As the National Black Child Development Institute states in the title of its seminal work, *Being Black Is Not a Risk Factor*.³ Yet, in the lives of people of color in Pinellas County, their economic opportunities have been inextricably linked to their race. Beyond economic outcomes, social, cultural, and political inequities also threaten the future of the county.

Thankfully, efforts to advance equity in Pinellas County do not have to start from scratch. Several noteworthy efforts are already underway that can serve as a launching point. Nearly two dozen areas in Pinellas County are designated as community redevelopment areas (CRAs), which is a revenue-generating tool that can be a springboard to support economic growth. For example, in south St. Petersburg, the recently designated CRA, in concert with the 2020 Plan, the One Community Plan, the convening around affordable housing, and several emerging neighborhood place-based efforts, can be leveraged for substantial improvement in economic well-being. These strategies demonstrate how residents, government, and businesses can advance long-term sustainable change. But more can be done and more should be done.

An Equity Profile of Pinellas County examines demographic trends and indicators of equitable growth, highlighting strengths and areas of vulnerability in relation to the goal of building a stronger, more inclusive county. It was developed by PolicyLink and the Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) at the University of Southern California, in consultation with UNITE Pinellas, and is designed to help move the county toward a fair and just community for everyone.

This summary document highlights key findings from the profile along with policy and planning implications. The full equity profile describes demographic and economic conditions in Pinellas County. In all cases, data is presented for the county as a whole. However, when more detailed data is available, it is shown along with census tract-level data.

The profile draws from a unique Equitable Growth Indicators Database developed by PolicyLink and PERE. This database incorporates hundreds of data points from public and private data sources, such as the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and Woods & Poole Economics, Inc. The database includes data for the 100 largest cities and the 150 largest metropolitan regions and all 50 states, and includes historical data going back to 1980 for many economic indicators as well as demographic projections through 2050. It enables comparative regional and state analyses as well as tracking change over time. Unless otherwise noted, data presented here are summarized from the full equity profile.

Profile Highlights

Like the rest of the country, and especially Florida, Pinellas County is undergoing a demographic shift. Pinellas County is growing, and its demographics are diversifying. Since 2000, the overall population has grown to almost 940,000. During the same time period, the share of residents who are people of color increased by 8 percentage points, rising from 17 to 25 percent of the population. Pinellas County is projected to become majority people of color in 2050. The nation will be majority people of color in 2044.

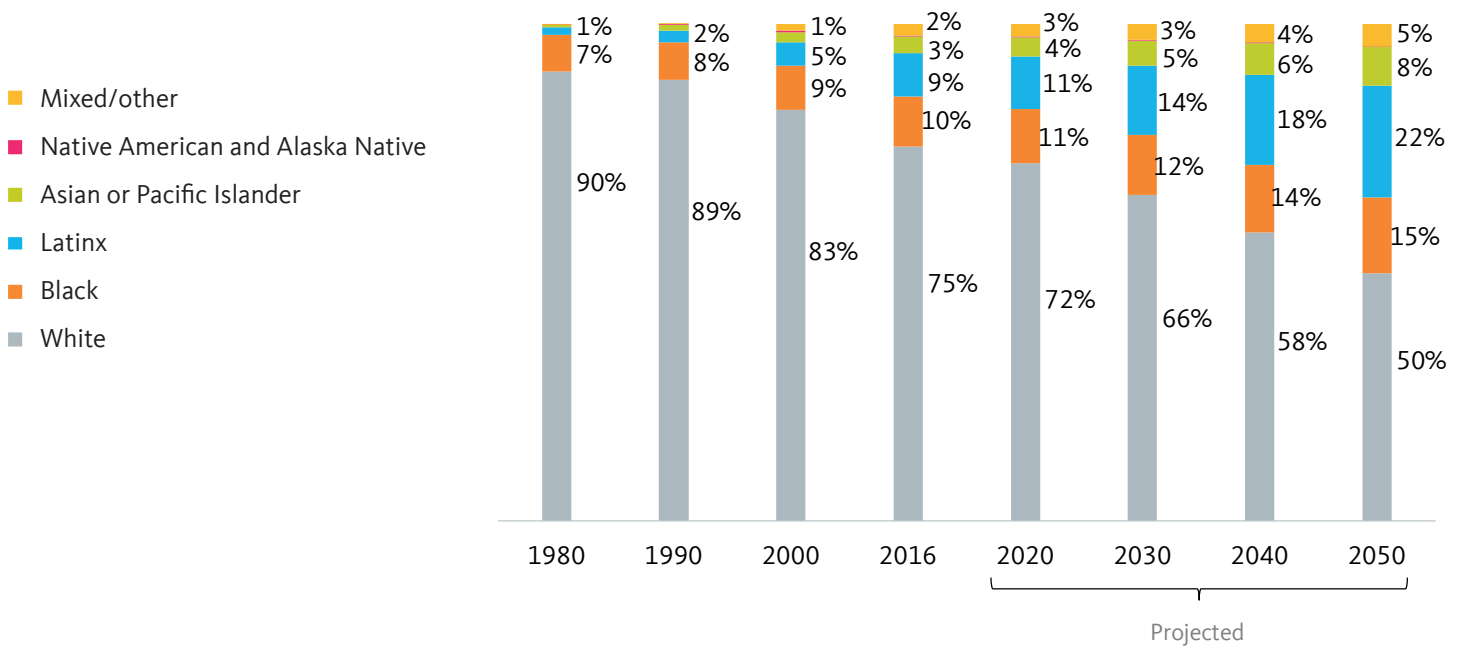
Communities of color—especially Latinx, African American, and Asian residents—accounted for all of the net population growth in the county since 2010, offsetting a decline in the White population. The Latinx population increased the most in numbers by more than 15,000 residents (22 percent), followed

by Asians, with a net gain of over 2,600 residents and a 9 percent growth rate. The African American population grew by roughly 3,100 residents (3 percent). For both Latinx and Asians, the U.S.-born population has grown at a faster rate than the immigrant population since 2010.

Young people are leading the demographic shift in the county, and Pinellas County’s young residents are much more diverse than its seniors. Today, 41 percent of the youth (under age 18) in Pinellas County are people of color, compared with only 11 percent of seniors (65 and older) who are people of color. This 30 percentage-point racial generation gap has risen very quickly, almost doubling since 1980. This gap is an important trend to consider regarding policy development. Furthermore, the racial generation gap may also impact investments in the educational systems and community infrastructure needed to support the economic participation of youth.⁴

The county is experiencing a demographic shift.

Racial/Ethnic Composition, 1980 to 2050



Sources: U.S. Census Bureau; Woods & Poole Economics, Inc.

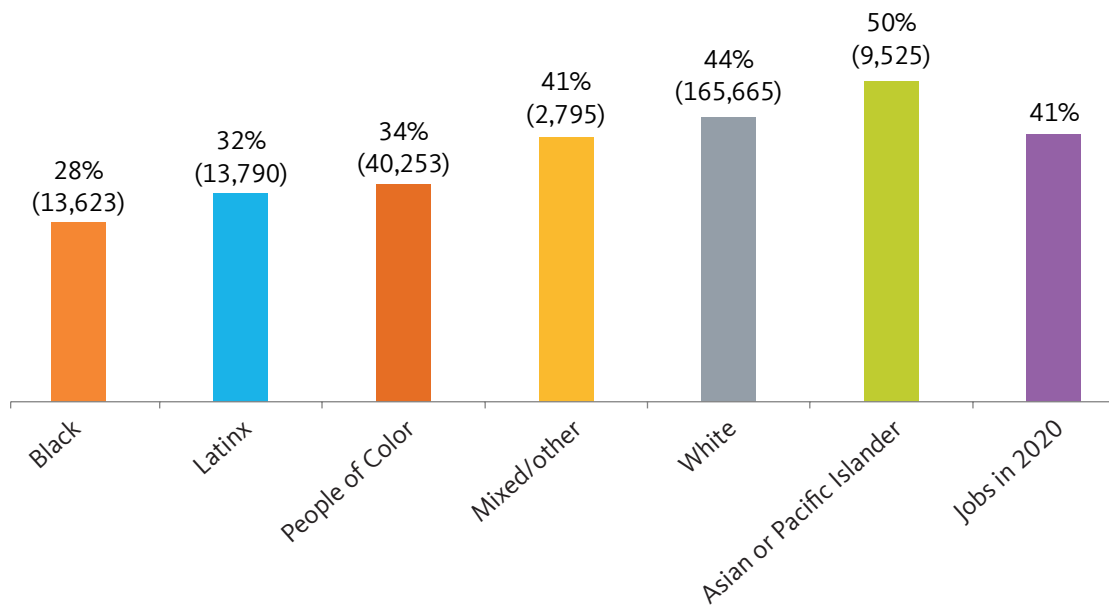
Note: Data for 2016 represent a 2012 through 2016 average. Much of the increase in the mixed/other population between 1990 and 2000 is due to a change in the survey question on race.

Training for jobs of the future

A strong education is central to labor market competitiveness in today's knowledge- and technology-driven economy, but a growing segment of Pinellas County's workforce lacks the education needed for the jobs of the future. By 2020, 41 percent of all jobs in Florida will require an associate's degree or higher. Today, only 32 percent of working-age Latinx people and 28 percent of African Americans in Pinellas County have the required level of education.

In 2020, 41 percent of jobs in Florida will require an associate's degree or higher.

Share and Count of Working-Age Population with an Associate's Degree or Higher by Race/Ethnicity, 2016 and Projected Share of Jobs that Require an Associate's Degree or Higher, 2020



Sources: Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce; Integrated Public Use Microdata Series. Universe for education levels of workers includes all persons ages 25 through 64.

Note: Data for 2016 by race/ethnicity represent a 2012 through 2016 average for Pinellas County; data on jobs in 2020 represent a state-level projection for Florida.

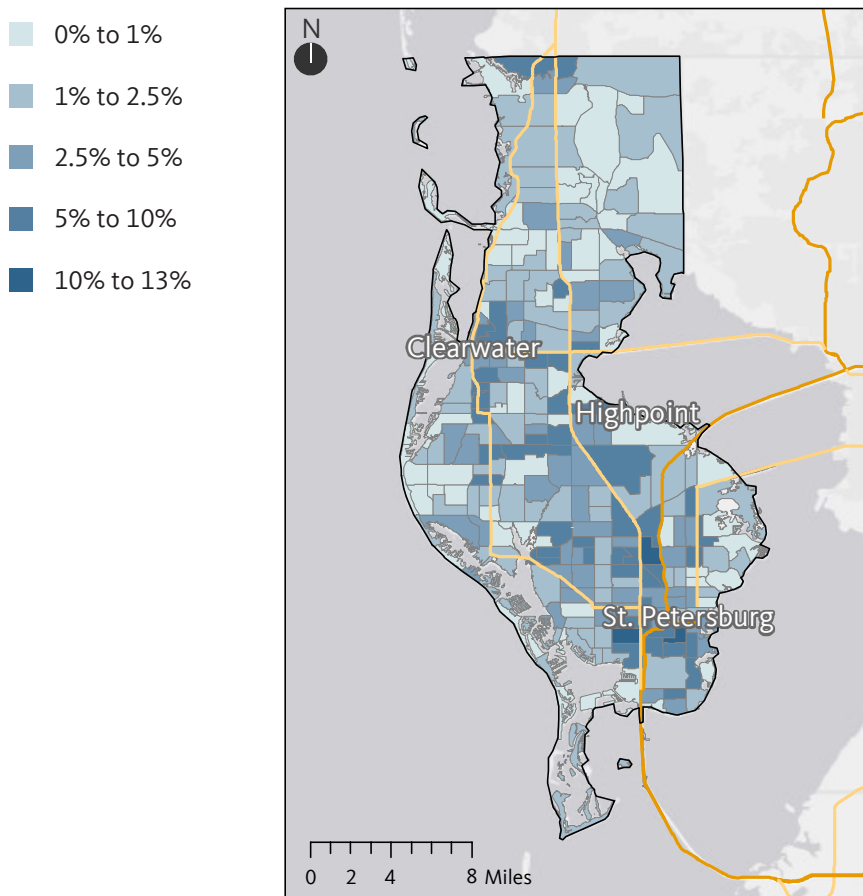
Housing insecurity impacts many families

Stagnant or declining wages and rising housing costs are straining household budgets across Pinellas County. In several areas of the county, the majority of homeowners are spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing. Low-income families are forced to stretch their incomes to balance growing household expenses such as childcare, health care, transportation, and housing. This growing income inequality also impacts the rental market by increasing the demand for units that are

affordable to low-income families. Landlords seeking to capitalize on this increased demand are incentivized to increase rents and may seek to push out low-income families in order to bring in tenants who are able and willing to pay higher rents. This trend is playing out in cities and counties across the nation and creating an eviction crisis. In Pinellas County, 4,000 homes received an eviction judgement in 2016 ordering renters to leave. The highest concentration of evictions is in the southern half of the county, concentrated in the St. Petersburg area.

There are evictions in nearly every neighborhood in Pinellas County.

Eviction Rates of Renter Homes, 2016



Sources: Eviction Lab, Princeton University, www.evictionlab.org; TomTom, ESRI, HERE, DeLorme, MapmyIndia, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS user community. Universe includes all renter-occupied households.

Note: The eviction rate is calculated as the number of homes receiving an eviction judgement ordering renters to leave divided by the total number of renter-occupied units in a given area.

Racial economic inequities persist in Pinellas County

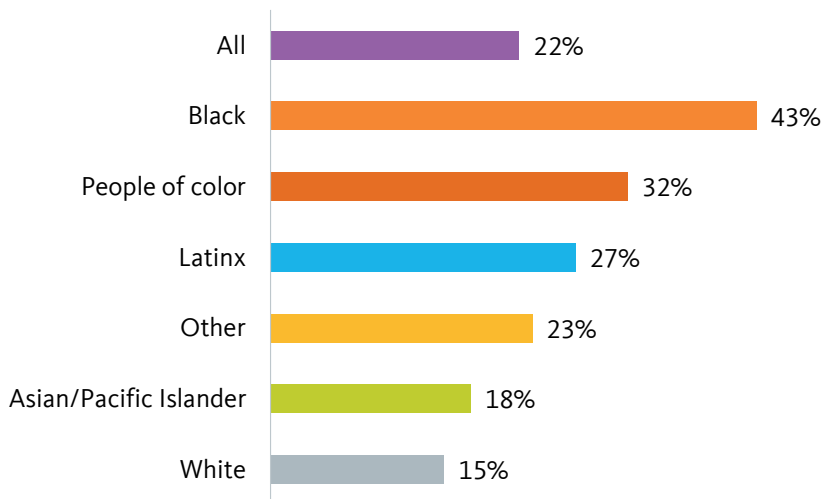
An Equity Profile of Pinellas County highlights a number of racial inequities in several economic indicators, such as employment, wages, and poverty. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Pinellas County overall had a relatively low unemployment rate in December 2018 (3.1 percent) compared to the state of Florida (3.3 percent) and the U.S. (3.7 percent). While such recent data on unemployment is not available by race/ethnicity, 2016 shows that while the overall unemployment rate was 7 percent, the rate for Black workers was 10 percent while the rate for workers with other and mixed racial backgrounds was 8 percent—notably higher than the 6 percent unemployment rate for White workers. Furthermore, these disparities in unemployment rates and wages persist even among people with the same level of education. Black workers face higher unemployment rates than their White counterparts at every education level, and both Black and Latinx workers

earn lower wages than White workers at every education level. College-educated (bachelor's degree or higher) African American and Latinx workers earned about \$6/hour and \$4/hour less than their White counterparts in 2016, respectively.

The percentage of people in poverty has been on the rise in the county since 2010, and the percentage of workers who are both working full-time and still have income below 200 percent of the poverty level has shown no signs of improvement. More than one in four Black residents now live below the federal poverty level, compared to 12 percent of White residents. Although working-poverty rates for Latinx and Asian or Pacific Islander workers decreased, they are still significantly higher than their White counterparts, as are the rates of working poverty for Black workers and workers of other or mixed races which have not changed since 2010. In addition, 43 percent of Black children live in poverty—nearly three times the rate of White children (15 percent).

Black and Latinx children have the highest poverty rates.

Child Poverty Rate by Race/Ethnicity, 2016



Source: Integrated Public Use Microdata Series. Universe includes the population under age 18 not in group quarters.

Note: Data represent a 2012 through 2016 average.

IMPLICATIONS

The equity profile affirms what is already known by many people in Pinellas County: the lived experience of the residents here can vary significantly, and people of color are disproportionately economically isolated and experience disparities related to health, housing, employment, and more. How does that change? How can the efforts that are underway to generate fairness and justice in our community be amplified and gain the traction that will generate systems that enforce and reinforce equity?

The most promising efforts to catalyze systems change focus on public policy, institutional practices, and changing the narrative. The strategies listed below concentrate on topics that seem most likely to impact those three approaches. Nevertheless, the intention of this summary is to raise up promising practices that are especially suited to the local environment or are already happening here in Pinellas County.

Finally, it is critical to mention that the priorities and possible solutions cannot be the domain of “content” experts alone. In fact, without the real-life knowledge of “context” experts, the likelihood of significant impact is reduced. This speaks to the need for deep engagement of the people most impacted by issues of equity—not for “buy-in” but for earnest co-creation and “truth testing.”

Create pathways to high-quality jobs for workers facing barriers to employment

- **Ensure public investments in roads, transit, sewers, and other community infrastructure are made in ways that create job opportunities for people who are underemployed and unemployed.** This can be done through rigorously drafted community benefits agreements for projects, such as the impending redevelopment of the Tropicana Field, by targeting investments in the surrounding neighborhoods where unemployment is high and incomes are low, and by implementing local and targeted hiring and training strategies. For example, an organized group of community stakeholders in New York was able to negotiate a multimillion-dollar community benefits agreement around the redevelopment of a military armory in the Bronx. The agreement includes an array of benefits such as \$8 million toward the creation of community space, and a commitment that at least 25

percent of all employees must be local residents who were formerly incarcerated, currently unemployed, or underemployed.⁵

- **Remove barriers and implement strategies to help people-of-color-owned businesses expand.** This can create employment pathways for people who are jobless because these firms tend to hire more employees of color and people living in the community. The Local and Regional Government Alliance on Race and Equity refers to this concept as contracting equity, which entails strategies such as growing the capacity of businesses owned by people of color and fostering a race- and gender-conscious policy environment that explicitly encourages the use of these businesses.⁶
- **Leverage the economic power of large anchor institutions, like hospitals and universities, for community economic development.** These anchors can develop intentional strategies to hire jobseekers facing barriers to employment, create on-the-job training opportunities, and purchase more goods and services from local- and minority-owned businesses that provide local jobs. In 2015, Johns Hopkins University and Johns Hopkins University Health System in Baltimore publicly committed to aligning their purchasing and hiring efforts to better support the surrounding community. By the second year of the initiative, they had increased their spending with local businesses by \$20.5 million or 23 percent.⁷ The Johns Hopkins All Children’s Hospital in St. Petersburg could undertake a commitment similar to their counterpart in Baltimore and have a significant impact on local businesses. This is also true for the other hospital systems and large institutions that are anchored in Pinellas County.

Support communities of opportunity throughout the county

Coordinating transportation, housing, and economic development investments over the long term will foster more equitable development patterns and healthier neighborhoods across the county. Addressing lingering racially discriminatory housing and lending practices and enforcing fair housing laws are also critical to expand opportunity for all. These principles are particularly important given the potential development in those areas of Pinellas County that have been designated as Opportunity Zones. Sixteen census tracts in the county have received this designation, including the Gas Plant district that currently houses Tropicana Field. As investors begin to contemplate development in these Opportunity Zones, advocates and policymakers must ensure that an equity lens helps guide decision-making.

Increase and protect resources for affordable housing

Florida is in the throes of an affordable housing crisis. The state has the third-highest homeless population in the nation,⁸ and the second-highest share (80 percent) of extremely low-income renter households who are paying more than half of their income toward rent.⁹ This lack of affordable housing is forcing many families to choose between having a place to live and basic needs such as food, health care, transportation, and education. Housing insecurity also has broader impacts on the entire neighborhood as housing cost-burdened families are especially vulnerable. Multiple options can help stem the affordable housing crisis facing Pinellas County and various strategies are being explored throughout the nation.

- **Ensure affordable housing resources are appropriately allocated.** In 1992, the Florida legislature established two trust funds to provide dedicated support for the development and preservation of affordable housing: the State Housing Trust Fund and the Local Housing Trust Fund.¹⁰ However, since 2001, state legislators have redirected \$2.2 billion out of these funds for other purposes—from tax breaks to spending. In fact, in 2018 Florida spent less on affordable housing than it did in 1996, despite continued population growth and rising housing costs.¹¹ Redirecting these funds each year is not just counterproductive for addressing the state's severe affordable housing

Pinellas County's effort to spur long-term economic growth

The emerging [One Community Plan](#) is a cross-sector 10-year comprehensive economic development plan for a targeted 25-square-mile section of south St. Petersburg. The One Community Plan leverages existing economic development efforts such as the [Grow Smarter](#) initiative that aims to build the capacity of local small businesses, and the South St. Petersburg Community Redevelopment Area that uses tax increment financing to reduce blighted conditions through residential and nonresidential development. The collaborative and targeted nature of the plan offers a prime opportunity to incorporate a more equitable approach to neighborhood revitalization. Learn more at https://www.stpete.org/economic_development/redevelopment/south_stpetersburg.php.

shortage, but also a missed opportunity for more robust economic development. For example, if the entire \$272 million that was generated for the two trust funds in 2017 was used to support housing, it would have leveraged \$3.8 billion in positive economic impact into the state's economy and 28,700 jobs.¹²

- **Improve the supply of housing.** Many active local efforts throughout Pinellas County are working to improve the supply of housing—these efforts include housing development programs and efforts to influence public commitments to increasing resources committed to affordable housing. Examples include the Housing Committee of the New Deal, the countywide convening by the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg, and the effort to have a dedicated revenue stream for affordable housing supported by Faith and Action for Strength Together (FAST). Furthermore, the place-based initiatives of the United Way Suncoast and Lake Maggiore Shores include housing efforts.

Examples of affordable housing policies

- **Inclusionary zoning:** This approach increases the supply of affordable housing by using municipal and county planning ordinances that require a given share of new construction to be affordable by people with low to moderate incomes. Montgomery County, Maryland, is the oldest example of inclusionary zoning in the country. Since launching the program in 1974, more than 12,500 units have been produced.¹³ While transit-oriented development and inclusionary zoning present opportunities to increase resources for affordable housing development, anti-displacement strategies should be incorporated into development plans (both residential and commercial) in areas targeted for revitalization.
- **Zoning:** Jurisdictions throughout Pinellas County can explore ways to foster more equitable development opportunities, such as eliminating single-family zoning. In December 2018, the Minneapolis City Council voted to eliminate single-family zoning citywide.¹⁴ Property owners will now be able to develop up to three dwelling units in homes previously restricted to one, without major changes to the permitted scale of buildings.
- **Evictions:** Just cause eviction protections and rent control, along with other measures to protect tenants from retaliation, have been implemented in several U.S. cities to help prevent displacement. New York City guarantees an attorney to all residents with housing court cases. While this resource required an initial outlay of city funds for legal services, there are cost savings in the long run by keeping families out of shelters and preserving affordable housing units. Kinder, gentler eviction process laws would also help residents. In 2013, a group of housing advocates in Jackson County, Missouri, came together to develop a solution to a marked increase in evictions. They established the Kansas City Eviction Project, a collaboration of researchers, community organizers, neighborhood leaders, lawyers, and policymakers tracking eviction filings across the county to inform local housing policy. Thus far, their data have revealed that low-income Black renters are the most likely to be evicted and they have identified landlords with the highest volume of filings. These findings will help to inform a broader housing policy agenda that includes tenant protections, such as a right to counsel in housing court.
- **Funding sources for affordable housing:** Since passing enabling legislation for a construction excise tax 13 years ago, the city of Bend, Oregon, has been able to raise an additional \$80 million in funds and create 770 units of new affordable housing.¹⁵ Similarly, Boulder, Colorado, has successfully implemented a linkage fee on new construction permits for nonresidential projects.¹⁶ Nonprofit developers and projects with affordable commercial space are eligible for reduced rates.
- **Anti-speculation tax:** The City of Richmond, California, is considering an anti-speculation tax intended to discourage “house flipping.” When these speculative investors flip houses, it inflates demand above the interest in that market that normally drives demand, forcing families to compete and pay higher prices, increasing rents and evictions.¹⁷ This can make it more difficult for moderate-income families to buy or rent a home. It is worth noting that Richmond, California, is also working to develop a Community-Owned Development Enterprise (CDE), an organization that is governed and owned by affected community members.¹⁸ A CDE carries out economic development projects based on a mission of creating resilient, prosperous and healthy neighborhoods in its home community.

Enhance education and career pathways for all youth

Ensuring that all youth in the county, particularly African Americans and Latinx youth, can access a good education that leads to a career is critical to developing the human capital to power the county's economy in the future. The relatively high share of Black and Latinx youth without high school degrees signals the need for intentional strategies to ensure that young people have the supports they need to successfully complete high school and enter college or another training program that leads to a job.

- **Replace overly harsh “zero tolerance” school discipline policies with strategies focused on positive behavior support and restorative justice.** Changing policies can work to lower suspension and expulsion rates and reduce the number of disconnected youth. For example, Denver public schools incorporated restorative practices into their citywide disciplinary policy in 2008. Within five years, the schools saw a reduction in the overall suspension rate, and the narrowing of the racial disparities in suspensions between Black and White students.¹⁹
- **Increase the availability of apprenticeships, career academies, and other education and training supports.** Providing work experience and connections can keep more youth on the track to graduation, college, and careers.
- **Implement a restorative practice model.** The Pinellas County School District (PCSD) has already begun to implement this type of model. In close collaboration with the Concerned Organization for Quality Education for Black Students, Inc. (COQEBS), PCSD launched a professional development plan called Bridging the Gap in August 2017. Bridging the Gap includes training for all school-based and district staff on restorative practice protocols. After only one year of implementation, student referrals, suspensions, and arrests for all students have already been reduced as well as the disparities between Black and White students across these indicators.

Promote justice and public safety through policy reform

Florida relies on incarceration to achieve public safety more than most states in the country. Currently, the state has the third-largest prison population in the nation, and the 10th highest incarceration rate.²⁰ This prison population is disproportionately composed of African American and Latinx residents serving sentences for nonviolent infractions. Furthermore, supporting the expansive corrections industry is costing Florida taxpayers \$2.3 billion per year, and both the prison population and corresponding costs are projected to grow if the state does not change course.²¹ This trend is troubling given that empirical research has demonstrated that lengthier prison sentences are not associated with lower recidivism and achieve very little or no improvement to public safety.²²

Examples of justice policies

- **Increase access to alternatives to incarceration, such as pretrial intervention and drug courts.** While Pinellas County has already implemented a local diversion program, it currently only targets misdemeanor offenders. Access to these programs could be extended to all nonviolent offenders.
- **Reduce the impact of mandatory minimum sentences.** In Florida, 108 offenses carry mandatory minimum sentences, 47 of which are drug offenses.²³ Judges should be empowered to impose alternate sentencing. For example, in their report *Data-Driven Solutions to Improve Florida's Criminal Justice System*, the Crime and Justice Institute proposes a “safety valve” where judges can impose a sentence of no less than 25 percent of the mandatory minimum if certain criteria are met, such as if the offense did not result in injury or if the defendant is not the leader of a criminal syndicate.²⁴
- **Expand the use of risk and needs assessments to guide incarceration, supervision, and treatment decisions.** The Florida Department of Corrections has made some positive strides in this regard by authorizing the use of these assessments for drug offender probation and creating a voluntary Alternative Sanctions Program. However, the proven utility of these efforts should be underscored by implementing them as a system-wide policy. Policymakers could also consider utilizing racial impact assessments prior to the passage of any public safety legislation or ordinances. The City of Seattle has developed a useful model with their “Racial Equity Toolkit to Assess Policies, Initiatives, Programs, and Budget Issues.”²⁵
- **Eliminate the use of fines and fees as a revenue strategy.** Florida currently charges prisoners a variety of fines and fees to defray some of the costs associated with incarceration. However, because many offenders are economically insecure or in poverty, the state only collects about 20 percent of the fees charged. In fact, using fines and fees can actually cost the government more money than it receives due to the expenditures associated with the administration and processing of fees and collection efforts. In 2018, San Francisco, California, became the first city and county in the country to waive administrative court fees levied on residents as they exit the criminal justice system.²⁶ Suffolk County, Massachusetts, has explored the impact of connecting indigent defendants to job training, mental health, and/or addiction programs. Their 2008 pilot demonstration confirmed that those who completed the program had a notably lower recidivism rate than the general incarcerated population (19 percent vs. 50 percent, respectively).²⁷
- **Eliminate the use of bail.** The cash bail system disproportionately impacts people with low incomes and results in criminalizing poverty. Regardless of guilt or innocence, those suspects who can afford to pay bail are able to go home to await trial, while those who cannot are forced to languish in jail for months, possibly years, before their trial is heard. In 2018, California became the first state in the country to eliminate the use of the cash bail system for suspects awaiting trial. Instead, each local jurisdiction will develop its own criteria to decide whom to keep in custody and whom to release.²⁸
- **Reform the child protection investigative process to reduce trauma and stop penalizing low-income parents.** Referrals to child protective services for “neglect” can be made for a range of conditions, many of which are endemic to families living in poverty, such as inadequate housing or lack of food or clothing. However, circumstances that are solely the result of poverty and not representative of any ill intent on the part of the parent should not be conflated with abuse. Unclear definitions of neglect forces caseworkers to rely on their own discretion in assessing referrals. However, research analyses of abuse complaints have found systemic bias among people who report children to the child welfare system.²⁹ The Fresno County Department of Social Services addressed this challenge by identifying, training, and ultimately paying residents to become “cultural brokers” that accompany social workers when they respond to a referral in order to assist with family engagement and support culturally appropriate family assessments.³⁰

Foster diverse civic participation and co-creation of solutions

Given Pinellas County's rapid demographic shifts that are being driven by the increasing diversity of the youth population, it is important that communities of color and youth are co-creators in the decision-making at all scales and sectors. All neighborhoods located throughout the county can be seedbeds for residents to collectively produce their own well-being.

The advocacy organization Voices for Racial Justice says that authentic community engagement is "...the intentional process of co-creating solutions to inequities in partnership with people who know through their own experiences the barriers to opportunity best. Authentic community engagement is grounded in building relationships based on mutual respect and that acknowledge each person's added value to the developing solutions."³¹ It is critical that the priorities and possible solutions not be left to subject matter experts alone. People most impacted by inequities are vital "context experts" and real-life knowledge is crucial for solutions to have significant impact, not to just buy-in to solutions but to co-create them.

- **Create a durable countywide equity network or collaborative across race, age, issue areas, and geography to advance equitable growth strategies and policies.**

The engagement structure of the City of St. Petersburg's 2020 Plan and One Community Plan provide helpful examples.

- **Facilitate active engagement by all racial and ethnic communities in local planning processes.** Best practices for multicultural engagement should be implemented.

- **Support youth leadership development programs.**

Programs such as the Pinellas County Urban League's Young Leaders Program and others should be supported in order to position neighborhood residents to become organizational and civic leaders and to serve on government decision-making bodies.

- **Increase civic capacity by investing in community organizing.** Sustaining the robust network of community advocates at the deep level of engagement will require ongoing support for efforts such as door-to-door engagement and relationship building. This is an ideal opportunity for local institutions to demonstrate their commitment to achieving systems-level change and improving outcomes for residents with low incomes and residents of color by

The New Deal for St. Petersburg aims to empower change in neighborhoods

Over the past two years, the People's Budget Review surveyed over 1,400 St. Petersburg residents to better understand their needs and develop an agenda of priority issues. Residents identified the need for more affordable housing, stronger early education and apprenticeship opportunities, community wealth building, and the passage of a citywide living wage ordinance as their most pressing needs. In May 2018, representatives from People's Budget Review met with city officials at the FY19 Budget Open House to share their agenda and recommendations. Learn more at <https://www.facebook.com/peoplesbudgetreview>.

supporting community organizing. A collaborative of funders at The Foundation Center have created a useful guidebook with strategies to accomplish this.³²

- **Develop an equity fellowship.** It is important to create a potent grassroots capacity to organize people in communities who are most impacted by issues of equity *and* to prepare and mobilize them to influence local policy makers. A recent Brookings Institution blog post says that "...potential residents who are priced out of restrictively zoned communities exert no political influence over local governments."³³ This is what the equity fellows could aim to change. Fellows could develop skills in the following areas: data and community research, civic journalism/change narrative, policy, institutional practices (e.g., banking, police, etc.), facilitation, public speaking, and community organizing.

CONCLUSION

The public, private, and nonprofit sectors are already taking steps to generate educational employment and economic opportunities targeted at residents with low incomes. To secure a prosperous future, Pinellas County needs to implement a growth model that is driven by equity—just and fair inclusion into a society in which everyone can participate and prosper. Concerted investments and policies for and developed from within communities of color will be essential to ensure that the county’s fastest-growing populations are ready to lead it into the next economy.

The examples and possibilities referenced in this summary demonstrate that some communities are trying out strategies specifically aimed at impacting equity. They are predominantly in the public policy environment. Because there is no single solution to inequity, these strategy examples have tended to be targeted at certain areas such as housing or justice. In every instance, it will be important to learn much more about the realities of a given topic so that the local context determines the local solutions.

The next steps will focus on residents and others identifying a small number of opportunities and diving deep into those few topics in order to locate potential solutions that will move the equity needle. Co-creating solutions that have lasting impact on Pinellas County is the goal, using processes that are grounded in experience, persuasion, and data.

Notes

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