How to leverage federal dollars to advance equity through community councils

Debbie I. Chang, Chet P. Hewitt, Tyler Norris, Robert K. Ross and Richard Tate, Special to CalMatters

The American Rescue Plan provides an unprecedented opportunity to build community resilience. California’s communities are in dire need of robust, long-term investments that are aligned with community priorities and needs. The tide is turning. As a result of years of developing trusted relationships, much-needed resources are now available to address challenges that were brought into focus over the past year. The stakes are high. The end result of such equitable and strategic investments is a down payment on the long-term equity that many communities have long been waiting for.

Implementation of this ground-breaking investment will require a different approach. An equitable recovery must center community power in the planning and implementation of this funding. As policymakers chart a course forward, they must ensure that the implementation of federal stimulus payments, as well as allocate resources, serve as an economic opportunity and career pathway.

For California’s communities, the American Rescue Plan provides an unprecedented opportunity to build community resilience. They have the key ingredients needed to do so. Most importantly, community voices must be included in a meaningful way so that residents from under-resourced communities help shape decisions about how these funds are spent. We believe such councils, which we call Recovery and Equity Councils (RECs), can be an effective mechanism for the community to play an active role in the decision-making process.

Recovery and Equity Councils, or RECs, can balance the need for responding to immediate needs at the local level while planning for the future. They can enable residents to design and align real solutions across different sectors and organizations. By way of example, policymakers can turn to the Accountable Communities for Health initiative, where 13 community-based demonstration sites possess the key ingredients needed for Recovery and Equity Councils. They engage residents through a variety of means with an eye toward ensuring that the solutions they identify, develop and implement are grounded in community priorities and needs.

The end result of such equitable and strategic investments is a down payment on the long-term equity that many communities have long been waiting for. Improved health, economic security and social determinants of health are critical to building resilient communities. By including community priorities and needs in the decision-making process, we ensure that residents from under-resourced communities help shape decisions about how these funds are spent. We believe such councils, which we call Recovery and Equity Councils, can be an effective mechanism for the community to play an active role in the decision-making process.

Importantly, community voice must be included in a meaningful way so that residents from under-resourced communities help shape decisions about how these funds are spent. We believe such councils, which we call Recovery and Equity Councils (RECs), can be an effective mechanism for the community to play an active role in the decision-making process.

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IN SUMMARY

The American Rescue Plan provides an unprecedented opportunity to build community resilience. California’s communities are in dire need of robust, long-term investments that are aligned with community priorities and needs. The tide is turning. As a result of years of developing trusted relationships, much-needed resources are now available to address challenges that were brought into focus over the past year. The stakes are high. The end result of such equitable and strategic investments is a down payment on the long-term equity that many communities have long been waiting for. Improved health, economic security and social determinants of health are critical to building resilient communities. By including community priorities and needs in the decision-making process, we ensure that residents from under-resourced communities help shape decisions about how these funds are spent. We believe such councils, which we call Recovery and Equity Councils, can be an effective mechanism for the community to play an active role in the decision-making process.

Thankfully, the American Rescue Plan provides the flexibility to do just that. And we should use these funds differently — to create enduring inclusive approaches to addressing structural inequities that were laid bare over the past year.

Moreover, as a result of years of developing trusted relationships, residents in California’s communities are in dire need of robust, long-term investments that are aligned with community priorities and needs. The tide is turning. As a result of years of developing trusted relationships, much-needed resources are now available to address challenges that were brought into focus over the past year. The stakes are high. The end result of such equitable and strategic investments is a down payment on the long-term equity that many communities have long been waiting for. Improved health, economic security and social determinants of health are critical to building resilient communities. By including community priorities and needs in the decision-making process, we ensure that residents from under-resourced communities help shape decisions about how these funds are spent. We believe such councils, which we call Recovery and Equity Councils, can be an effective mechanism for the community to play an active role in the decision-making process.

As a result, local, state and federal governments should work to ensure that the implementation of this funding adheres to the principles of equity and transparency. Accountability is critical to ensuring that the implementation of this funding is aligned with residents’ needs. As policymakers chart a course forward, they must ensure that the implementation of federal stimulus payments, as well as allocate resources, serve as an economic opportunity and career pathway.

However, we must not repeat some of the earlier relief efforts with short-term fixes. However, we must not repeat some of the earlier relief efforts with short-term fixes. We should use these funds differently — to create enduring inclusive approaches to addressing structural inequities that were laid bare over the past year.

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