

HoCo RISE COLLABORATIVE REPORT



Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive

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Letter from County Executive Calvin Ball



Last year, our community was shaken with the onset and spread of the COVID-19 virus. Even through the worst pandemic our nation, and world, has seen since the 1920s, causing a deep economic crisis, and as we engage in crucial conversations regarding race relations, we are determined to persevere through all our challenges and embrace our opportunities.

We saw our community come together to help our residents and businesses recover. Through food and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) distributions, donations, and providing vital resources to survive, our community stepped up to help friends and neighbors as need increased. We achieve our success by doing it the “Howard County” way – looking out for each other and uniting as one county when times are toughest.

We recognize that this is not enough to help our community prosper and it is why we established the HoCo RISE Collaborative; to help foster our long-term recovery. We remain data-informed, people-driven, and committed to recovering our economy as well as the physical and mental health impacts from this pandemic.

I’m grateful for the leadership of Ken Ulman who helped steer this initiative towards recovery. Special thank you to my senior staff, the Office of Emergency Management, and every community leader who helped contribute to this effort.

One thing remains clear - through every battle we face, we know that when we work together, we rise together.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read "Calvin Ball". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Calvin Ball
Howard County Executive

Letter from Ken Ulman, Chair of the HoCo RISE Collaborative



The COVID-19 pandemic has put us in a tough position; emotionally, physically, and mentally. We know that this is a difficult time and, unfortunately, the ramifications are going to be prevalent in the months to come. The pandemic has brought many disparities to the forefront from access to education, food and technology to promoting our economy and government response.

The goal of the HoCo RISE Collaborative is to evaluate these disparities and provide key metrics, recommendations, and guidance to advance our public health response and economic recovery. The Collaborative is comprised of five workgroups; Jobs and the Economy, Education and Workforce Development, Public Health Response, Family Opportunities, and Government Response. Each of these workgroups are comprised of community leaders and advocates in each relative industry – The subject matter experts who work on these initiatives every day. This report outlines the recommendations by each of these groups to help move our community forward.

Thank you to County Executive Calvin Ball for the establishment of this vital initiative. Most importantly, thank you to each member who was engaged in this effort to create a stronger and more resilient Howard County. It was truly my honor to serve as chair for this important endeavor, and as you read through this report, it is my hope you will gain a better understanding of how far we've come and how much farther we can go.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ken Ulman'.

Ken Ulman
HoCo RISE Collaborative Chair

Executive Summary

On January 21, 2020 the United States confirmed its first cases of the Coronavirus Disease 19 (COVID-19) in travelers arriving from China and those in their household. Starting in late February, reports of cases with no recent travel to affected areas or links to known cases signaled community spread in the United States. As early as January 2020, Howard County began to prepare and educate its residents regarding the threat of the COVID-19 virus, and its unfolding spread around the world. The County was the first jurisdiction in the State to hold a press conference in early March and upon Howard County's first confirmed case on March 15, 2020, County Executive Ball declared a State of Emergency and closed The Mall at Columbia and the Shops at Savage Mill.

By mid-March, it was evident that transmission of the COVID-19 virus had become widespread throughout the country. National, State, and local public health responses increased throughout March, as jurisdictions worked to stand up contact tracing, diagnostic testing, quarantine protocols, and mitigation measures. On March 30, 2020, Governor Hogan declared a stay-at-home order for Maryland residents. Between March 1 – May 31, 2020, 42 states issued mandatory stay-at-home orders. By April 1, 2020 more than 215,000 people in the U.S. were diagnosed with COVID-19, and more than 5,000 people died from the virus around the country. In Maryland, hospitalizations and cases began to decrease in May, leading Governor Hogan to shift from a stay-at-home order to an advisory and reopened some businesses at 50% or less capacity.

As the East Coast saw declines in cases throughout the summer, other areas of the U.S. were facing first waves of infection. In November, ahead of the holiday season and a pivotal point in the pandemic, County Executive Ball formed the HoCo RISE Collaborative, an extensive stakeholder group to provide input on continued COVID-19 response, and to strengthen the community for long-term.

As largely anticipated, the cooler fall and winter months drove a large surge of infection in Howard County, Maryland, and around the country. Maryland again reduced capacities at businesses, and Howard County implemented social gathering limits, recognizing a large contributing factor to increasing cases was small family gatherings. At its peak on January 8, 2021 more than 312,000 new cases were reported in the U.S., and that week an average of nearly 4,000 people died a day from COVID-19.

As of March 1, 2021, the U.S. seems likely past the winter surge, with cases declining or holding steady in most states. At the beginning of March, Maryland recorded a positivity rate of 2.8% and 10.5 cases per 100,000, down from a peak of 9.1% positivity and 48.8 case rate in January. However, new variants of COVID-19 that emerged in the United Kingdom, South Africa, and Brazil have all been diagnosed in Maryland. Some of these variants are more transmissible and concerns of another spike in cases places the U.S. at another pivotal point as vaccinations roll out around the country. Today, the U.S. continues to have a patchwork of mitigation measures and vaccine distribution, some states have already removed mask mandates and started to reopen indoor businesses, while less than 15% of the adults in the U.S. have been fully vaccinated.

As of March 10, 2021, 21.8% of Howard County residents have received their first doses of the Moderna or Pfizer vaccine, and 11.7% have been fully vaccinated. While production of the approved vaccines was slow at the onset of the year, the Biden Administration now anticipates enough vaccine doses for every adult in the U.S. by the end of May. Supply of vaccine has been the single largest bottle-neck for distribution and provides optimism that the U.S. will soon be able to stop the unmitigated spread of COVID-19.

Throughout the winter surge, the HoCo RISE Collaborative met to develop and provide key recommendations to the County Executive to ensure that every business, organization, and resident can thrive in every setting, as Howard County responds and recovers from the pandemic. Top business leaders were working through this pandemic to help prepare our community for the future, including leaders from our critical health entities, the Howard County Health Department, the Howard County General Hospital, and the Horizon Foundation. When making these recommendations, the Collaborative could not anticipate where the State and County would be regarding the pandemic.

Given the fluidity of the situation, County Executive Ball and Chair Ken Ulman dialogued throughout the development of recommendations and the Chair Ulman relayed recommendations that did not have to wait for the development and implementation of the report. Key recommendations have already begun for immediate implementation. Now, one year later from the onset of the pandemic, the State and County is experiencing an encouraging outlook. On March 9, 2021, Governor Hogan announced lifting capacity limits in major indoor venues with mandatory physical distancing and a mask order in place. Given Howard County's stability in positivity and case rates, County Executive Ball aligned with this action, with a commitment for continued monitoring of Howard County's data.

The Collaborative's recommendations are timely, with salient analysis and themes surrounding digital transformation, modernization and equity. The Collaborative was made of up five interdependent workgroups: Public Health Response, Government Response, Jobs and the Economy, Education and Workforce Development, and Family Opportunities. This 100 working day effort yielded key recommendations for the immediate, short-term and long-term for Howard County to emerge stronger from the pandemic. The workgroups provided the following recommendations:

Top 15 Workgroup Recommendations:



Public Health Response

1. Establish a COVID-19 Vaccine Communications Steering Committee.
2. Create and implement Vaccine Equity Outreach plan.
3. Recruit trust brokers and other key endorsers, provide training and necessary supports and manage to outcomes for vaccine outreach.



Government Response

4. Implement a digital visitor system.
5. Reduce fleet footprint to accommodate telework for the long-term.
6. Incorporate softphones to all County employees' computers to enable enhanced remote business.



Jobs and Economy

7. Modernize and streamline government processes that ensures that the County remains business friendly.
8. Establish an "opt-in" text message alert system for businesses to receive important information regarding any new changes with the County that may significantly affect their organizations.
9. Establish more applications (apps) that connect residents to local businesses.



Education and Workforce

10. Collaborate across industry sectors to generate an inventory of available training programs to identify gaps, duplications, and opportunities.
11. Leveraging industry data, retrain individuals who lost their jobs during the pandemic into new occupations.
12. Evaluate post-COVID-19 data to expand a pipeline for community college/career school training and workforce system in emerging areas of occupational need.



Family Opportunities

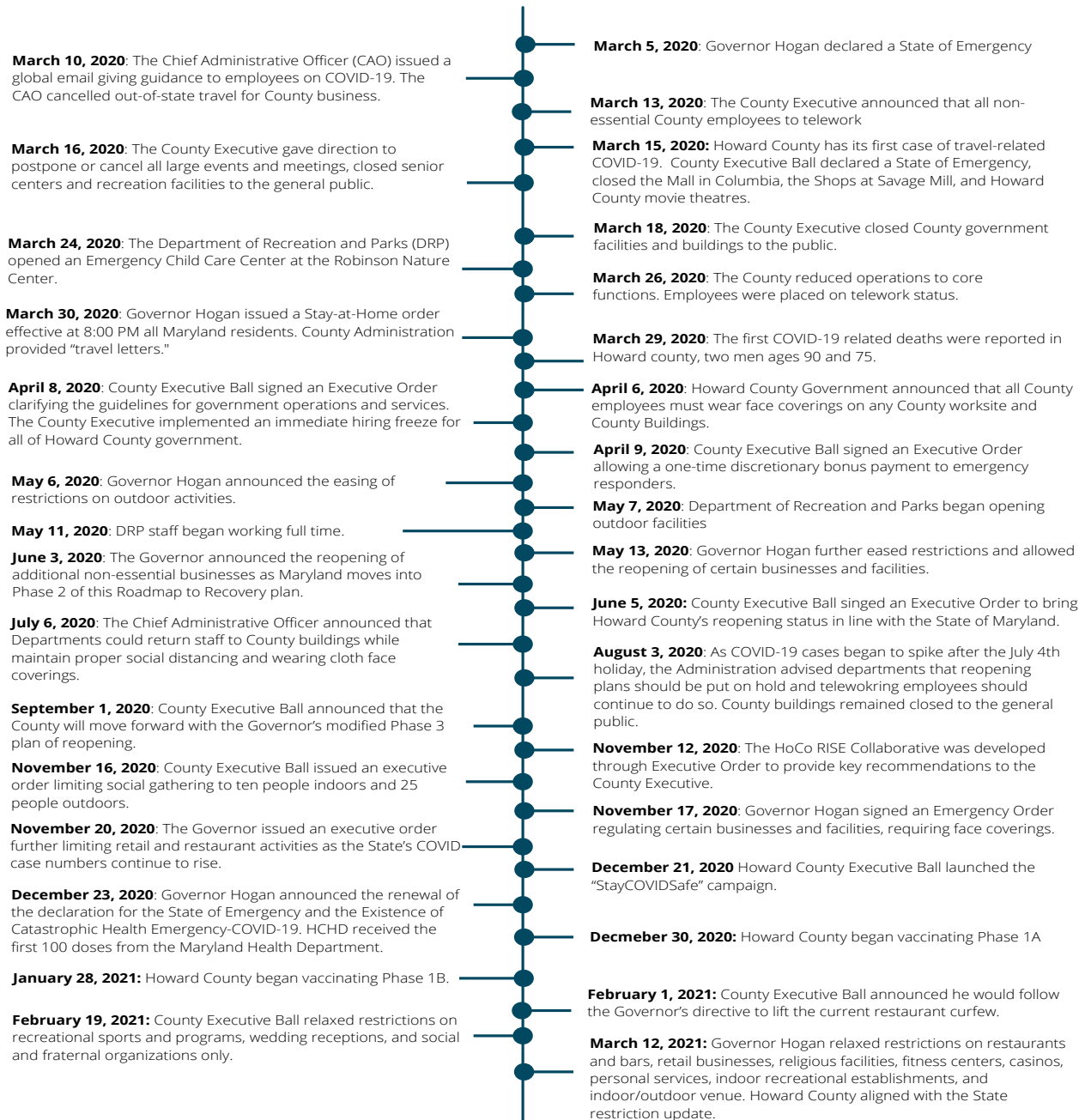
13. Create a one source landing page/flier translated into multiple languages for resources that contain food service location, times, and types of food to assist families.
14. Provide targeted support and incentives to close the digital divide and create a new long-term roadmap to meaningfully increase digital inclusion in Howard County.
15. Increase additional forms of transportation to vaccine clinics for those with significant barriers.

Introduction: The Evolution of the Crisis and Response

Howard County's Timeline

Howard County took a data-informed, people-driven approach to all COVID-19 actions pertaining to closures and reopening. The following timeline describes the impact of the crisis and the emergency and public health response. Even prior to Howard County's first case, Howard County Government took action to slow the spread of COVID-19.

March 2020



March 2021

Howard County's Framework for Reopening Innovatively, Safely and Effectively

In early March 2020, County Executive Calvin Ball created the HoCo RISE framework of Reopening Innovatively, Safely, and Effectively, complimenting the guidance laid out by Maryland Governor Larry Hogan.

At this time, the first set of available data points used to guide decision-making around reopening and, if necessary, when to maintain or bring back restrictions were established:

- The number of new cases.
- The number of new hospitalizations.
- The number of patients admitted to Intensive Care Unit (ICU).
- The number of tests conducted.
- The amount of available PPE.
- Surge capacity at Howard County General Hospital (HCGH).

See Appendix for the full framework.

At the end of May 2020, Howard County used these key data points to inform reopening decisions. The average daily case count, which was expected to rise as testing became more available, had declined an average of 27 cases per day after surging to an average of 33 cases for the two-week period and the end of April 2020. After spiking to 78.8% on May 15, 2020 the ICU utilization rate at HCGH decreased or stayed the same for 7 of 14 days, and as of May 23, 2020 was at its lowest level since April 1, 2020. The ventilator utilization rate for the same time period was 18.6%. Howard County increased the number of contact tracers from two people when the pandemic started to 35. Lastly, Howard County stockpiled a 30-day supply of PPE, and increased weekly diagnostic testing. Since July 14, 2020, Howard County has surpassed the goal of 6,500 tests per week for 31 weeks.

Evolution of Metrics

As the country and state evolved in its understanding of COVID-19, other metrics were also used and became critical in guiding reopening and closures.

- Positivity Rate
- Cases per 100,000
- Race data
- Age data

As diagnostic testing was being scaled up, the positivity rate was an important metric to monitor in conjunction with other data. The percent positive provides an indication of how widespread infection is in the area where the testing is occurring—and whether there was enough testing in the area.

Additionally, the cases per 100,000 residents allows areas of different sizes to understand the infection trends in a community. Guidance from the Center on Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) emphasizes that areas with a case rate over 10 per 100,000 are at a higher risk for increased community transmission.

Race and age data were also analyzed to provide additional insight to populations most impacted by COVID-19. Age data confirmed that the highest case rates are among working adults 25-49, making up more than 40% of the cases in Howard County but 2% of deaths. Whereas the 65 and older population have made up 11.5% of cases, but nearly 85% of deaths.

Case Rate per 100k March 2020 – March 2021



Positivity Rate March 2020 – March 2021



Overview of the HoCo RISE Collaborative

On November 12, 2020, County Executive Calvin Ball established the HoCo Rise Collaborative by Executive Order. Prior to the holiday season and a pivotal point in the pandemic, the Collaborative was established. This extensive stakeholder group met to provide input on continued COVID-19 response, and to strengthen the community for long-term. The charge of the HoCo RISE Collaborative was to develop and provide key recommendations to the County Executive to ensure that every business, organization, and resident can have the opportunity to thrive in every setting. Made up of five interdependent workgroups, the following sections provide key recommendations.

Charges of Each Workgroup:

1. Public Health Response

Recommend policies and practices that will fill remaining systems gaps that exist in other COVID-19 response efforts, such as testing; increase timely access to a vaccine; enable efficient and equitable distribution of a vaccine; ensure safe storage of a vaccine; optimize community engagement; promote partnerships and alignment within the healthcare community; and, align research with the Family Opportunities Workgroup.

2. Government Response

Continue oversight of all government activities, including responding to and leading emergency operations for the County; reopen the government to employees and the public; prepare for a possible second wave of COVID-19; and, oversee all Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act funding activities.

3. Jobs and the Economy

Recommend policies and practices that will leverage collective assets within industries; identify key needs in different industries; assist businesses with accelerating their technical capabilities, namely small and minority-owned businesses; and, determine how to prepare for the long-term.

4. Education and Workforce Development

Recommend policies and practices that will identify new occupations that may arise as a result of COVID-19 and explore workforce training programs to prepare the workforce for those occupations; address technology training and infrastructure needs that are needed for workers who are now expected.

5. Family Opportunities

Recommend policies and practices that will sustain food access across the County; reduce barriers to accessing social services; increase coordination and information sharing amongst all social services providers; systematically address childcare challenges; ensure that individuals of all backgrounds can travel freely, safely, and comfortably; increase housing opportunities, including home ownership and foreclosure/eviction avoidance; increase digital equity and inclusion for all residents; and increase availability of affordable, robust broadband internet service and access to devices and digital literacy training.



Public Health Response

COVID-19 has put pressure on public health systems across our nation to respond nimbly amidst uncertainty and to deliver critical services timely. This was the case with testing, PPE distribution, among other tasks. In addition, the disproportionate health effects that COVID-19 has had on specific populations prompted the need to respond on a community- and population-level. This required the involvement and collaboration of multiple stakeholders.

The Public Health Response workgroup focused on the following two questions to articulate the components of an equitable and coordinated vaccination program.

- What information about the vaccine do people and communities need?
- What supports will people and communities need to enable vaccine registration?

Workgroup Goals

The workgroup focused on the following goals based on the key questions tackled.

- Adopt 'One Source of Truth' approach. Use the same messaging and be the community's objective partner in peoples' decision-making process. Address common misperceptions about the vaccine and acknowledge the uncertainties and what is unknown, both about the distribution of the vaccine and its health effects. Build long-term credibility and communication pathways within communities
- Use trusted and reliable channels of communication. Identify a variety of appropriate outlets that is representative of all populations.
- Continue to provide pertinent information beyond the vaccine. Continue to promote CDC guidelines and provide appropriate information on other public health challenges that emerge from the pandemic. Foster a public health communications and education system so that people have the ability to assess risk and act in their own best interest.
- Address barriers to vaccination registration and receipt. Make the vaccine available where people are and form community partnerships to provide transport to vaccination sites and to provide language and cultural support. Create evening and weekend options for vaccine receipt and work with businesses to serve as vaccine sites once supply increases. Account for community-specific indicators such as insurance coverage rates, immigration status, digital and internet access.
- Actively facilitate vaccination registration at the community level. Establish a community-specific ground game that is staffed by community health workers who are equipped with the necessary technology to create easy sign-up. Build on the county's strong sense of community as a motivator to keep others safe.

Where We Are Today

The Howard County Health Department (HCHD) began receiving a limited supply of vaccines in December 2020. Other groups receiving vaccine supplies have included the Howard County General Hospital (HCGH) and federally contracted pharmacies. Vaccines in Maryland are currently provided to local jurisdictions on a per capita basis. It is expected that supply will eventually increase and will exceed demand.

Once this occurs, it will be the role of governments, public health systems, hospitals, and other relevant stakeholders to ensure that all residents have the information they need to make an informed decision about whether to receive the vaccine. These entities will need to determine what information to communicate and how to effectively communicate it at the community- and population-level.

As of this writing, given the fast evolution of vaccine availability, the supply chain is beginning to open up with the approval of Johnson & Johnson for Emergency Use Authorization. This one-shot vaccine is a game changer to the overall landscape as Moderna and Pfizer added additional complexity with the coordination of second doses. Since the rollout of vaccine, the HCHD has been one of the most efficient jurisdictions in the state with its supply, administering 100% of first doses within one week of delivery.

COVID-19 VACCINATION PHASES

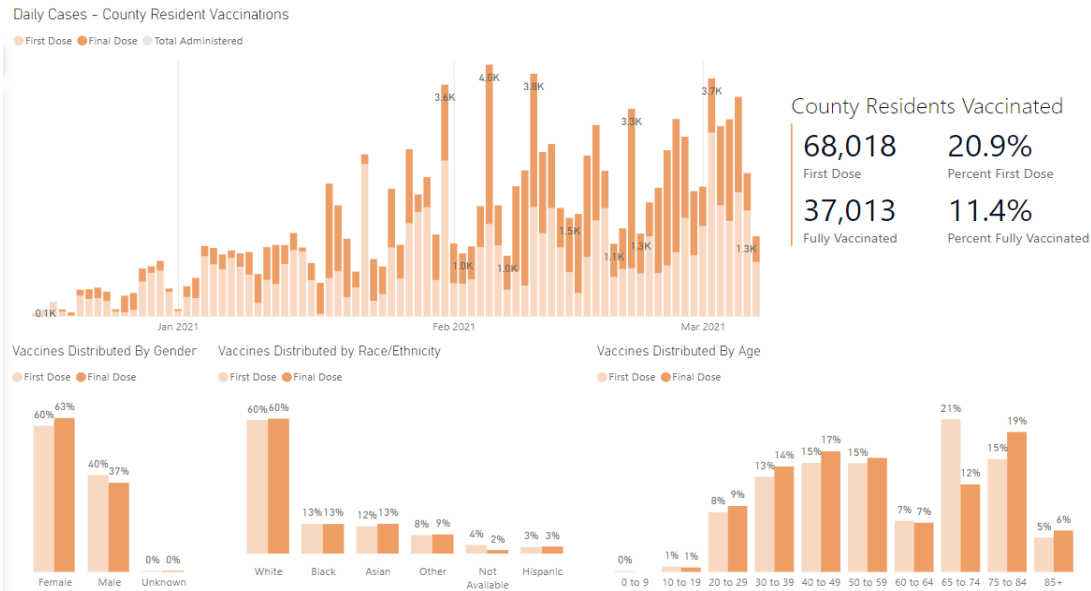


Stay**COVID**Safe



Pre-Register at <http://Vaccine.howardcountymd.gov>

Vaccine Data to Date



For more information regarding vaccination data, please visit the Howard County Health Department’s Dashboard and Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC) Recovery Dashboard.

A Focus on Vaccine Acceptance

While we have the aforementioned data, it is evident that this first wave of those getting vaccinated also represents early adopters. As public health systems move into the stage of vaccinating its residents from the virus, they will confront disparities in vaccine acceptance and trust. The importance of an equitable vaccination program is highlighted in a 2018 study from the University of Maryland on influenza vaccine behaviors. Survey data from the study showed that African Americans are 10 percent less likely to get their flu shot and have less trust in organizations, such as governments, that administer vaccines.

The study also found that a virus like COVID-19 poses greater health risks to minority communities due to limited ability to reduce exposure and increased rates of complications from the virus due to existing chronic health conditions. (Quinn, 2018) Hispanics in the United States face similar challenges, and are three times more likely to be infected, five times more likely to be hospitalized, and twice as likely to die of COVID-19 than white Americans. (Senate Joint Economic Committee, 2020) Therefore, an inclusive vaccination program can be used as a critical tool to keeping people safe in the ongoing COVID-19 response effort.

¹University of MD School of Public Health, Dr. Sandra Crouse Quinn, “Understanding Dynamics Underlying Racial Disparities in Influenza Vaccination”, February 7-8, 2018. <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/quinn-understanding-dynamics-underlying-racial-disparities-in-influenza-vaccination-remediated.pdf>

²Joint Economic Committee, Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, Vice Chair, “The Economic State of the Latino Community in America”, October 15, 2019. https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/f16b51b0-5f61-43a6-9428-8835d0ad6a7c/economic-state-of-the-latino-community-in-america-final-errata-10-15-2019.pdf#:~:text=Latino%20immigrants%20have%20an%20important,than%20the%20native%2Dborn%20population.&text=Hispanics%20are%201.7%20times%20more,%242.3%20trillion%20in%20economic%20activity.

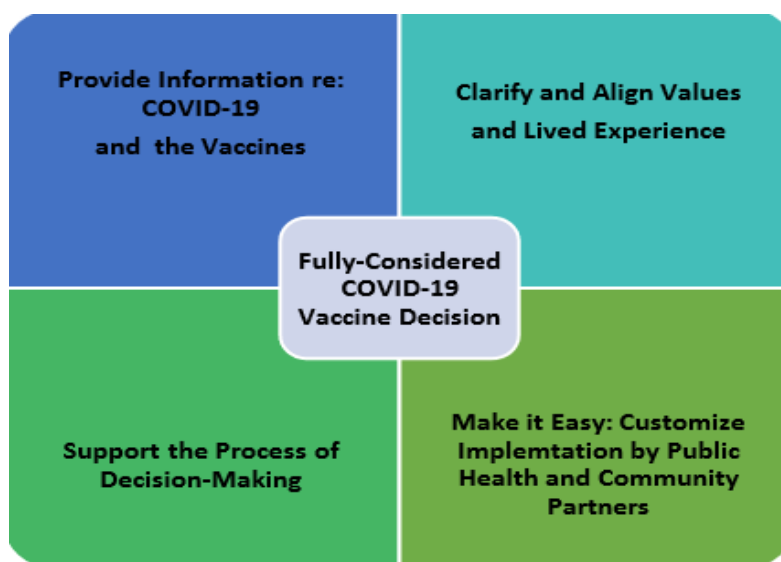
Spotlight: The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO) Findings

The National Association of County and City Health Officials (NACCHO), in partnership with other organizations, conducted a survey between November 1, 2020 – December 21, 2020 and generated findings from the results to help prepare local jurisdictions for the point in time when the vaccination is readily available. The survey questions focused mainly on peoples’ confidence and trust in the vaccine, and their responsibility toward receiving it.

- Approximately 50% of respondents indicated they would not want the vaccine if offered to them today.
- Approximately 10% indicated they would not receive the vaccine.
- Approximately 40% indicated they would wait and learn more.

This study coined the term “Wait and Learn” population that consists mainly of Native Americans, African Americans, and Latinx individuals. Peoples’ primary concerns around receiving the vaccine related to lack of available information needed to make an informed decision, risk perceptions, and mistrust in government institutions. (NACCHO et al., 2021)

The NACCHO study endorsed a set of principles that local jurisdictions could adopt to address these concerns, which is provided below. The principles can help jurisdictions work toward making the vaccine accessible to all people with a focus paid to the barriers that inhibit access. (NACCHO, 2021) This requires an alignment between the communications methods that facilitate vaccine registration and the activities associated with administering vaccines to people.



³NACCHO, NIH, AIM, ASTHO, “Understanding Diverse Communities and Supporting Equitable and Informed COVID-19 Vaccination Decision-Making”, January 2021

On a local level, the Horizon Foundation sponsored a series of community conversations in Howard County with African American, Latinx, and Asian American residents that also included informal polling of the attendees. The purpose of the conversations, ongoing through March 2021, was to give Howard County's public health system community input on the factors impacting peoples' decision-making regarding the vaccine. The conversations and polling data brought to light several observations.

The survey showed that:

- A higher percent of Black and Latinx individuals are willing to accept vaccine safety only after millions are vaccinated, which is similar to the 'Wait and Learn' group identified in the national survey.
- Less than one third of participants in the African American and Latinx groups indicated they would get vaccinated now if it were available and free to them.
- Asian Americans had the highest percentage of vaccine confidence; however, it is important to note that there are many Asian subgroups not disaggregated in this survey, and vaccine confidence is likely not uniform across these subgroups.
- For the Latinx community, Horizon's survey revealed multiple barriers to receiving the vaccine.
 - o This included lack of medical insurance, the cost of receiving the vaccine, and immigration concerns.
 - o They were also found to have limited access to information that relates to vaccine safety and the believed implications of registering for the vaccine with the government.
 - o Importantly, results also indicate that for the African American and Latinx community, despite there being a greater level of hesitancy and mistrust, there is a strong sense of community and a desire to keep them safe.



Top Recommendations

The following are the recommendations of the Public Health Response workgroup:

1. Establish a COVID-19 Vaccine Communications Steering Committee

The purpose of the COVID-19 Vaccine Communications Steering committee will be, but not limited to:

- Establish a charter with goals, membership, roles, responsibilities, expectations;
- Develop inventory of necessary communications materials;
- Make assignments as needed to develop materials (e.g. messaging, talking points, flyers, videos, town halls, paid ads, etc.);
- Deploy a social media team or identify a party responsible to monitor and address all COVID-19 vaccine related concerns and issues (e.g. – vaccine supply, appointments, etc.)
- Staff a call-center to assist residents with vaccine appointment troubleshooting and to answer vaccine-related questions;
- Identify key community leaders (formal and informal) to provide feedback on materials;
- Develop implementation plan with objectives and timeline, determine expected outcomes and make assignments;
- Identify lead agency/group per area/community of focus (e.g., DCRS (Senior population), Targeted Population Subcommittee (African American/Latinx populations), Chamber of Commerce (Essential workers) etc.) and,
- Monitor progress, create new content, clarify prior content, and adjust strategy and roll out as needed.

Multi-agency groups should be small enough in size to drive to outcomes and have a direct line back to the Health Department and County. To be effective, this group must steer clear of just pushing out content via regular large meetings. The members of this group need to be decision makers and have the ability to effectively engage with formal and informal community leaders.

The Committee should also consider creating a speakers' bureau comprising of health experts and community leaders to serve as vaccine information ambassadors. An alternative to a speakers' bureau could be the establishment of a community health advocacy group that involves trained trust brokers who tailor communications and messaging on other important public health issues and who will deliver the information and necessary supports within the community.

Finally, it is important that the Committee have the ability to establish targeted population subcommittees and explore how the County might prioritize populations who are most affected by COVID-19 within each vaccination delivery phase. Particularly, it is recommended that a subcommittee be formed to focus on the African American and Latinx communities given the disparate health effects that COVID-19 has had on these populations and the higher prevalence of vaccine hesitancy in these populations as evidenced in the workgroup's findings. A framework for this subcommittee is provided in the appendix and can be replicated for other subpopulations as determined by the Steering Committee.

2. Create and implement a vaccine equity outreach plan.

The Vaccination Implementation Plan should contain, but not be limited to, the following elements:

- Identification of budget needs, including:
 - o Community health workers;
 - o Technology;
 - o Literature;
 - o Canvassing;
 - o Mobile vaccine units;
- Community-specific strategies that address biases and barriers;
 - o Utilization of existing home visitation programs, such as Mobile Integrated Community Health (MICH), among others;
- A focus on 2nd dose follow-through;
- Be scalable as supply/demand changes
 - o Quantify what resources are needed as new vaccine sites emerge;
 - o Have a plan for mobile vaccine administration;
 - o Work with community locations that have offered to serve as sites (e.g., churches, employers, community centers); and,
 - o Develop and prepare expectations and checklists to prepare potential sites.

The workgroup identified the County's Department of Community Resources and Services' work around U.S. Census participation as an effective model that can be mimicked with vaccine rollout plan. The Plan shall also be used as a resource by the Communications Steering Committee and Subcommittees.

3. Recruit trust brokers and other key endorsers, provide training and necessary supports and manage to outcomes for vaccine outreach.

The workgroup identified the credibility that community trust brokers can bring to the decision-making process for individuals and communities. Trust brokers can create an environment where procedural biases can be identified and corrected. It is imperative that these individuals represent different community perspectives, deliver key information to residents, and be supported with the right level of materials. Local Health Improvement Coalition (LHIC) should engage with a variety of organizations to assist with recruitment (list below provides examples but is not an exhaustive listing):

- Howard County Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD);
- County Executive community groups;
- Columbia Community Care;
- Philanthropic community;
- Y of Central Maryland;

- African American Community Roundtable;
- Faith-based organizations; and,
- Other organizations as identified by LHIC and the community.

Effective endorsers could be physicians, healthcare providers, and mental health workers. And LHIC should consider working with local and State colleges and universities to dedicate instructors and students to serve as ambassadors. Trust brokers could rely upon these ambassadors to communicate relevant facts about the vaccine. LHIC should prepare a budget to cover materials expenses and interface routinely with the Communications Steering Committee and Subcommittees. This effort could also be used to foster relationships with primary care providers and draw people into care.



Government Response

At the conception of the HoCo RISE Collaborative, County Administration was aware that the fall and winter cold weather would most likely bring about a spike in cases. Throughout the HoCo RISE Collaborative duration, the County was actively responding to the second round of COVID-19. Administration continues to monitor the COVID-19 metrics, CDC guidance, and the Governor's and County Executive's Executive Orders to determine whether to continue the current status of operations or to further reduce operations to core functions. This analysis is an ongoing process of evaluating the metrics and guidance in conjunction with the safety protocols the County has put in place for our employees and the public's safety.

This report will describe the efforts of the County took to ensure the safety of employees while maintaining all core government operations, such as development and implantation of a digital visitor system, reducing fleet footprint, and incorporate softphones to all County employees' computers. The report also details how the County is preparing to allow for further reopening of County facilities to additional employees and eventually the general public. The report will discuss how County government has become more flexible, is prepared to continue telework as necessary, provide more services online and virtually as the pandemic sees a future rise in new cases, and detail the efforts the County takes to document and record CARES act expenditures.

Workgroup Goals

The HoCo RISE Collaborative Government Response workgroup has developed a detailed action plan driven by two innovative, effective, and efficient goals.

- **Determine and evaluate data points to guide decision-making around reopening** by working towards recovery which is not simply to return to a pre-pandemic posture but to come back better able to adapt to the new possibilities of creating a more nimble and responsive government with systems in place to address capacity gaps as a result of providing services within a hybrid process.
- **Harness the opportunities coming out of the pandemic** through versatility in our abilities as a local government. The opportunity is how we can continue to focus on a more resident-centric design and adapt the necessary infrastructure around that and shift organizational priorities towards focusing on our human capital with consideration towards a 'greener' Howard County.

Where We Are Today

The following efforts made it possible for the County to return employees safely to the buildings and worksites, open some Department of Recreation and Parks (DRP) programs to the public, and continue providing governmental services to the citizens of Howard County.

Human Capital

- **Increased teleworking by 34%** for County employees. Based on 1% of employees teleworking, pre-pandemic and 35% teleworking employees at the peak of the pandemic. This integration of newly teleworking employees was completed in a 3-month timeframe.
- **The County created a flexible workforce** through the integration of a more robust teleworking which enabled the County to possibly **reduce fleet footprint by 15%** due to enhanced telework. That is approximately 75-100 underutilized vehicles that the County won't have to replace.
- Implemented monthly **virtual fitness classes** beginning April 2020 and a total of **1,881 individuals** participated to date and began virtual pain night sessions for stress relief. Offered 500 codes for Fitness Trackers through Motion Connected, sponsored by Step Challenges.
- **Created a safe work environment for employees.** The County limited employees on work sites, created and required self-assessment screenings, monitored and tracked COVID-19 cases and exposures to quickly quarantine.
- Conducted **1,135 COVID-19 specific trainings** for County employees
- Created a **new virtual employee onboarding** process.
- **297 employees participated in Roving Radish discount** for healthy meal planning.
- **Held weekly compassion calls** for employees and family members through Aetna.

Technology

- **Deployed a Cross-Functional Security Cooperation Team** to focus on security across the County and continue to update the security platform and structure to align with industry standards.
- Conducted **28,744 remote internal meetings** and **1,500 public meetings**. With over 174,000 total participants have attended meetings to date.
- The County facilitated 207 WebEx meetings in February 2020, and at **the height of the pandemic, the County had conducted an average of 2,680 WebEx meetings**, which include internal and external meetings.
- **Implementation of digital services.** The County added applications such as VMWare, DocuSign, Adobe PDF, Microsoft Teams, and WebEx. Strategically moved data to the Cloud.
- **Implemented a more robust security training** for all County employees.
- **More than 900 laptops have been procured** and distributed to County employees.

Facilities

- **Upgraded HVAC systems.** Air filters were upgraded to a **MERV 13 system** where possible or the highest level of filtration that would work with existing HVAC systems in County facilities.
- The County is **installing UV disinfection lighting** in all HVAC system's airstreams.
- **COVID-19 measures were taken on more than 90 County buildings.** The County decreased building occupancy and installed plexiglass barriers, hand sanitizer, and posted signage throughout public facing areas and reception areas, and workstations.

Emergency Management

- The **County's Emergency Operations Center (EOC)** has been **activated virtually since March 2020 to support COVID-19 operations.** At the beginning of the Pandemic, OEM stood up a COVID-19 Taskforce with relevant County departments and non-governmental agencies and developed and **distributed 58 COVID-19 Situational Reports to date** to keep stakeholders up to date with general information and government response actions surrounding the pandemic.
- **Developed a new Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)** that serves as an annex to the Comprehensive Emergency Response and Recovery Plan (CERRP) to reflect changes in emergency operations and safety protocols during COVID-19.
- OEM worked and continues to work in coordination with the Office of Procurement and Contract Administration to track and facilitate the distribution of resources.
 - **101,654 units of PPE** were distributed to County Departments to date.
 - **6,081 units of face coverings** to date were distributed to County Departments to date.
 - HCHD distributed over **1.2 million units of PPE** to Howard County Healthcare Entities.
- OEM has worked in coordination with various Howard County departments and external agencies to support a number of specialized planning efforts including but not limited to:
 - Childcare sites for first responders;
 - Alternate care sites;
 - Expanded homelessness housing;
 - Quarantine/isolation; and,
 - Vaccine planning.



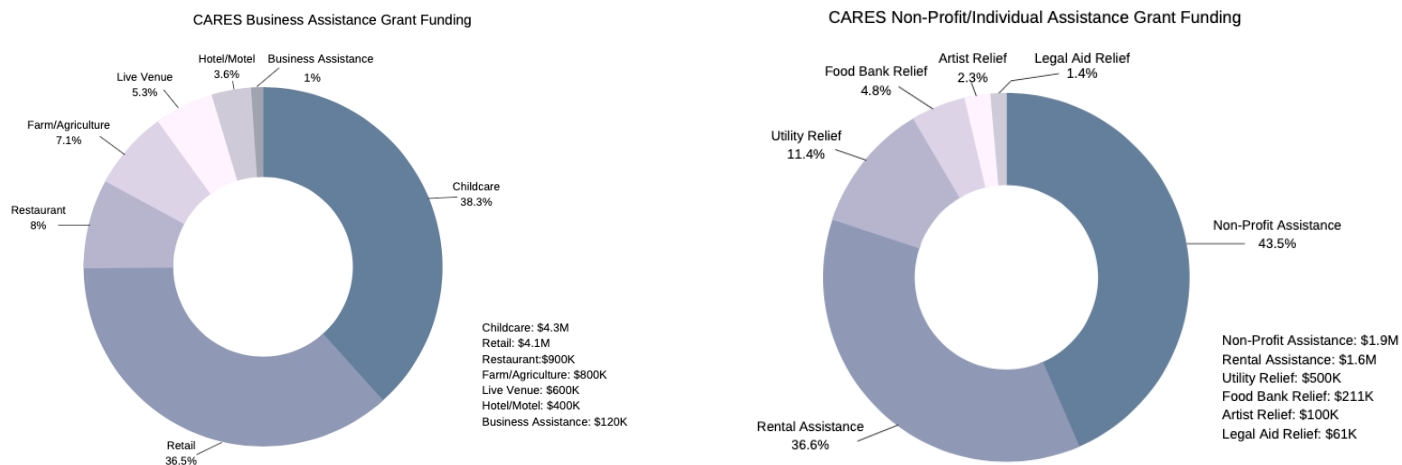
- In September 2020, **OEM transitioned to the State’s WebEOC Systems**. In order to further improve virtual communications during response.
- **OEM activated the COAD** for the first time since their inception in November 2019 to support unmet community needs.
 - o The COAD has had over **3,200 volunteer hours** since the start of the pandemic in March 2020;
 - o Created and delivered over **7,000 homemade masks** in the community;
 - o Assisted coordinating and hosting over **60 Pop-Up-Pantries**; and,
 - o Held over **25 COVID-19** specific meetings to discuss ways to continue response efforts.

Overseeing CARES Funding

The CARES Act provided, among other assistance, \$150 billion in assistance to State, Local and Tribal Governments. The \$150 billion was divided among the 50 states. In Maryland, the larger counties, including Anne Arundel, Baltimore, Montgomery, Prince George’s, and Baltimore City, received assistance directly from the United States Treasury. In total, these counties receive \$691 million in assistance. An additional \$362 million was provided to the State of Maryland to distribute among the smaller counties. **Howard County received \$56.8 million in CARES Act assistance.**

The Act mandates that the CARES funds go toward necessary expenditures incurred due to the public health emergency that was not accounted for in the budget and were incurred since March 1, 2020. Local jurisdictions have some discretion and latitude on how the funds are spent, but they must meet the reimbursement guidelines laid out by the Department of Treasury.

Howard County directed the assistance to grants for businesses, grants to individuals and non-profits for rental assistance, utility relief, food banks, assistance to Howard County Public School System, and purchases of PPE and facilities upgrades. The County is tasked with tracking and accounting for these grants and purchases and submitting the necessary documentation to the federal government to substantiate the CARES act allocations.





Top Recommendations (continued)

The following are the top recommendations of the Government Response workgroup:

4. Implement a digital visitor system.

The Department of Public Works (DPW) will implement a digital visitor management system. A digital visitor management system will enable the County to increase the accuracy of contacting tracing of those who have been in and out of County buildings. This system has been under development and is anticipated to be ready for deployment when the County reopens.

5. Reduce fleet footprint to accommodate telework for the long-term.

Howard County is now looking at a 15% reduced fleet footprint due to enhanced telework. That is approximately 75-100 underutilized vehicles that the County won't have to replace. This reduction is largely correlated with the expanded telework capabilities throughout County departments. The post-pandemic workplace (with increased telework) means that Howard County can fully transition to a fully electric shared motor pool. Fleet will also determine where fully electric vehicles can be plugged in on the service side. These efforts will help us on our greenhouse gas emission and propel us towards fully reaching a zero emissions fleet well before 2050.

6. Incorporate softphones to all County employees' computers to enable enhanced remote business.

The Department of Technology and Communication Services (DTCS) will incorporate softphones for all County employees (via Jabber) to allow employees to receive and make calls remotely from their computers. As a result, the County will be developing a strategy for removing desk phones once employees start to return to the office to minimize touchpoints. Furthermore, the County will be moving towards a one-cost phone stipend across the board for eligible employees to save the County money.



Jobs and the Economy

Howard County is home to more than 10,000 businesses, with 86% of those businesses representing companies with fewer than 10 employees, many of which were the hardest hit during the COVID-19 pandemic. In March 2020, after the statewide stay-at-home order, our non-essential businesses were closed for months. Restaurants, retail, hotels, and child care had to lay off staff and experienced reduced revenue and cash flow.

Throughout the pandemic, the County continues to work with our Federal, State, and local partners to provide Howard County businesses with support and resources. Over the past year, our business community adapted and persevered through this pandemic's many challenges and hardships. The economic impacts have been seen and continues as public, private, and non-profit entities grapple with how to attenuate losses and adapt to their new environment. As the County and its businesses progress through these uncertain times, the Howard County government will continue to work with our Federal, State, and local partners to ensure Howard County businesses have the support and resources needed to thrive.

This report will describe the efforts the County has taken to mitigate the negative economic effects of the pandemic; discuss how the County has redoubled its efforts to promote local business initiatives and improve communication with industry; and provide recommendations to further improve its efforts in coordination with local businesses.

Workgroup Goals

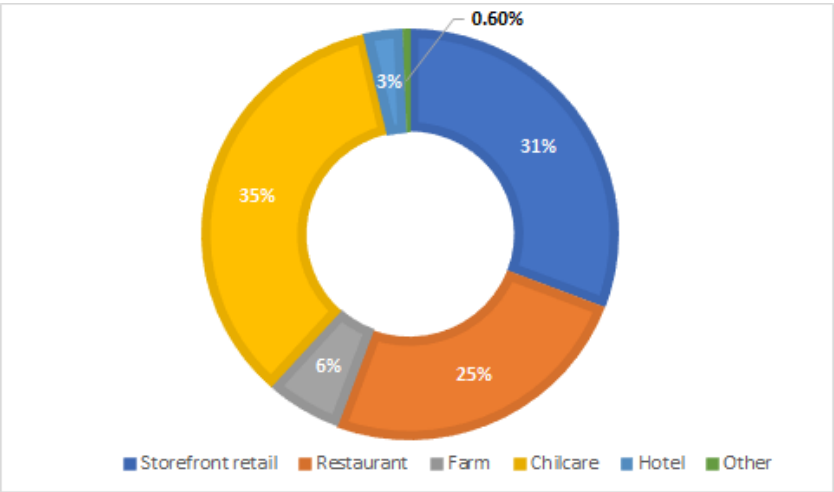
- Increase social cohesion within industries by opening the line of communication;
- Ensure industries have access to support, if needed (i.e., training capabilities, workshops, etc.); and,
- Develop a survey and/or virtual town hall to establish the needs of various industries.

Where We Are Today

The following efforts were made by the County in coordination with its partners to ensure Howard County businesses had the ability to fund their operating expenses while reduced capacity restrictions were in place.

Business Grant Support

In response to COVID-19, Howard County initiated the HoCo RISE Business Assistance Grant Program in June 2020 to support businesses and organizations whose operations were impacted by the pandemic. Howard County Economic Development Authority (EDA), in partnership with the Howard County Department of Finance and the Howard County DCRS, administered grants to provide financial assistance to Howard County businesses in targeted sectors that have been most impacted, and plan continue operations or to re-open.



During the rounds 1 and 2 of the HoCo RISE grants, the County dispersed more than \$13.55 million in grants to 1,483 Howard County Businesses. This funding consisted of:

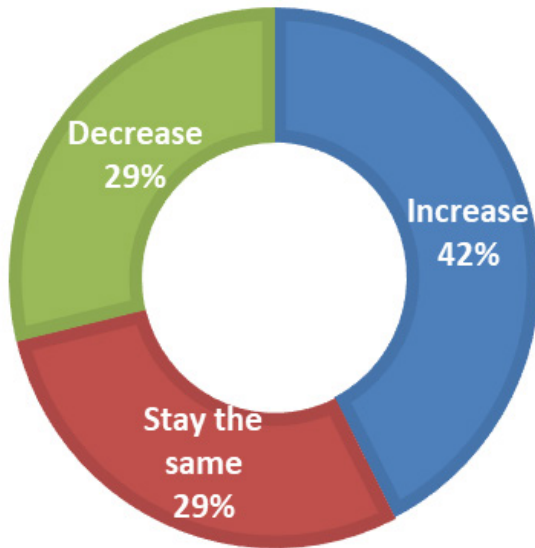
- \$2.51 million in State of Maryland Rainy Day funds for restaurants; and
- \$11.04 million in CARES Act funding designated by Howard County for HoCo RISE Business Grants.

Limited funding availability prompted the decision to distribute these funds to the most impacted sectors, rather than on a first-come, first-served model open to all businesses regardless of the level of impact. The funding was distributed in two rounds. There were 674 business that received Round 1 funding and 809 businesses that received Round 2 CARES funding.

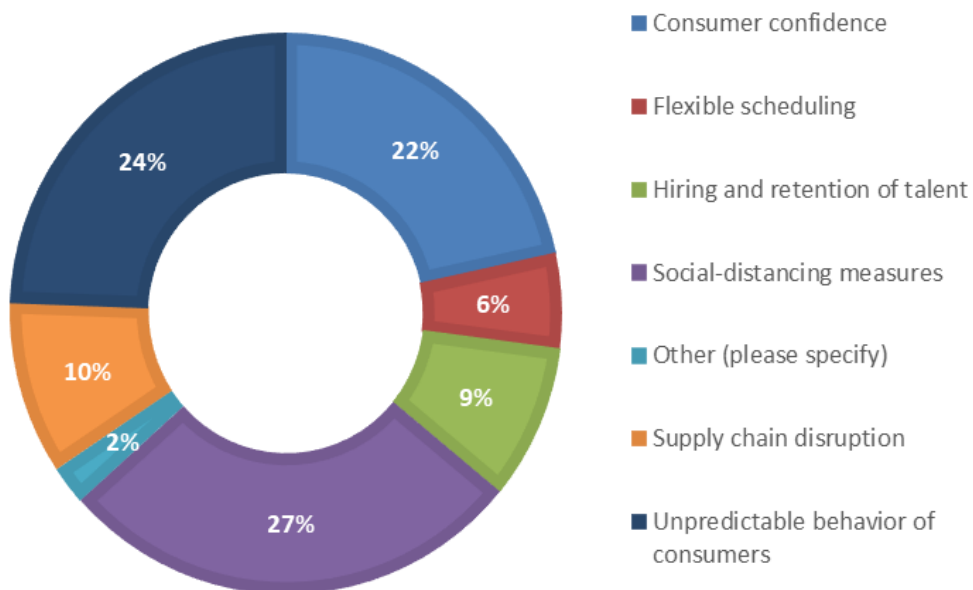
Survey Results

The workgroup distributed a survey to the business community to get feedback on business outlook and the expected challenges ahead. Additionally, the business assistance grant application also included a questionnaire asking companies about the County’s COVID-19 response and support. Almost 900 businesses were surveyed. Highlights include:

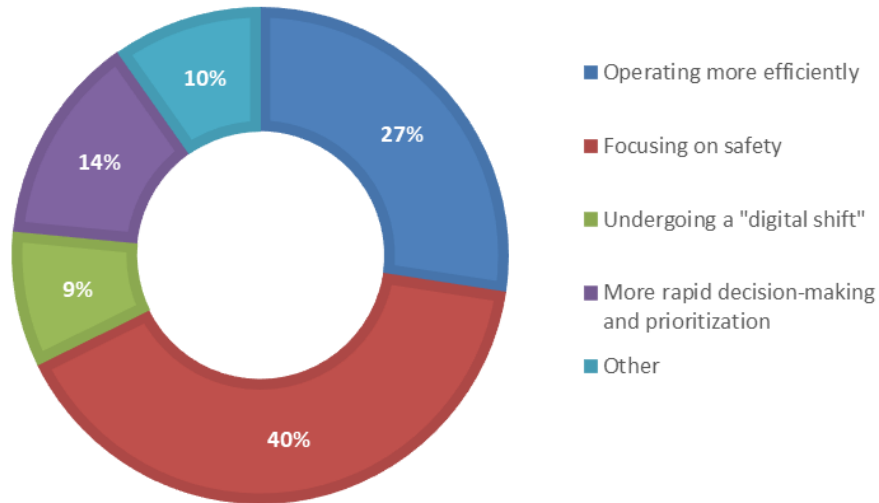
In the next 12 months, you expect business sales to:



In the next 12 months, what is your biggest challenge?



What are the primary action(s) your business is taking to strategically pivot or change its business model during the pandemic?



Restaurant Wizard

In an effort to streamline information regarding how to open a restaurant in the County, we launched the “HoCo Restaurant Wizard.” This tool enables potential restaurant owners to answer a few simple questions about the restaurant they are looking to start and be provided with a personalized plan regarding how to move forward through the county’s permitting process. The wizard brings together information from the Department of Licenses and Permits, the Department of Planning and Zoning, and the Health Department regarding their respective permitting processes. This wizard will help prospective restaurant owners find what permitting processes pertain to their specific situation, making for an easier process overall.

Shop Local Campaign

Howard County rolled out a shop local campaign through social media and signage around the county. The County featured and highlighted businesses, farms, and farmers markets throughout 2020.

In the fourth quarter of 2020, Howard County advocated for Small Business Saturday / Shop Local during the holiday season, an important sales period for many of our businesses. Through Howard County social channels and through partnerships we encouraged residents to “Shop Small, Shop Local” throughout the holiday season and onward.





Top Recommendations (continued)

7. Modernize and streamline government processes that ensures that the County remains business friendly. The workgroup recommends that:

- The County should develop an application process that streamlines the permitting processes for the Department of Licenses and Permits, the Department of Planning and Zoning, and the Health Department. This will help the restaurant industry that has been hit hard by the pandemic over the past year.
- The County should develop a fully digital development review and approval process for development plans. For years, approval of development plan submissions has required ink signatures by reviewing agencies. This process became increasingly cumbersome as the pandemic hit and in-person staffing was limited. This improvement will streamline the signature approval process and make it more efficient.

8. Establish an “opt-in” text message alert system for businesses to receive important information regarding any new changes within the County that may significantly affect their organizations.

The County can leverage platforms already in use, such as Constant Contact. The County should work with internal and external partners to determine the best platform to disseminate such information.

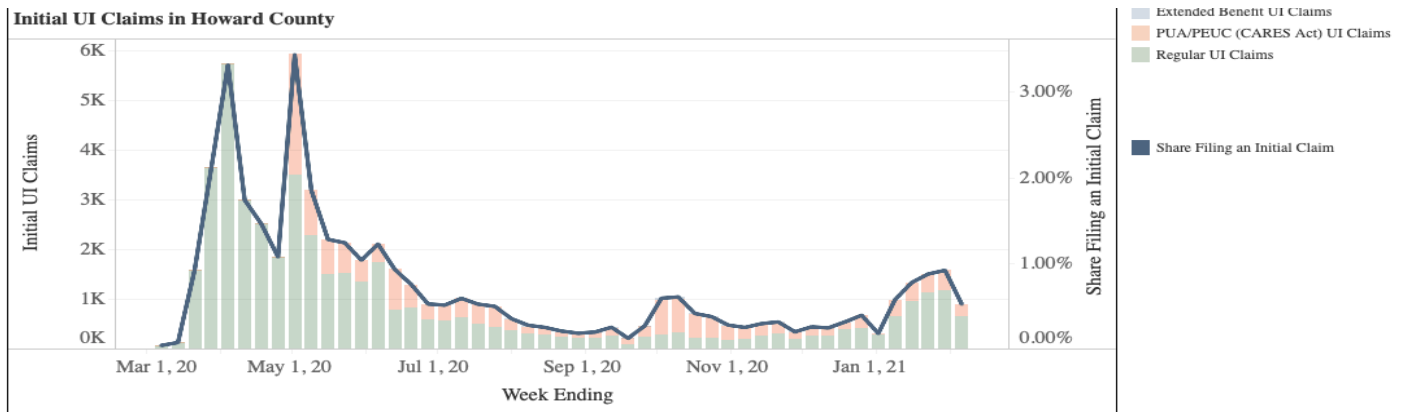
9. Establish more apps that connect residents to local businesses.

At the height of the pandemic, the County launched an innovative map for restaurants and bars to list their delivery and carryout options. This allowed businesses to connect directly with consumers. The County should continue developing applications for small businesses that encourage Howard County residents to shop local, find new goods and services that they otherwise may have now known about, and stimulate the Howard County economy. Additionally, it will enable small businesses to promote their business, showcase their offerings, and increase commerce.



Education and Workforce

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted almost every area of daily life for Howard County residents and businesses. Unemployment rates rose to levels we had not seen in many years as businesses were forced to close their doors. At the height of the pandemic the unemployment rate rose from 2.4% in April 2019 to 8.1% in April 2020. As of December 2020, the unemployment rate has decreased to 4.5% but many people continue to struggle with unemployment.



via Baltimore Metropolitan Council

The primary purpose of the Education and Workforce Development group was to develop key recommendations regarding policies and programs that could assist residents in Howard County with obtaining meaningful employment. The group focused specifically on people who are unemployed, underemployed, face barriers to employment, or fall into the group of disconnected youth.

Workgroup Goals

The goals of this workgroup are to:

- Recommend practices and policies that will help unemployed or underemployed individuals in Howard County connect with workforce training services;
- Address technology training and infrastructure needs that may be exaggerated by workers who are now expected to apply for and work remotely.
- Ensure that workforce training services are available and aligned with the new post-COVID-19 economy; and,
- Foster institutional partnerships between the workforce and educational systems.

The workgroup examined existing solutions to the workforce and education impacts of the pandemic and identified impact areas needing to be addressed. There are occupations that are expected to grow, and we need to ensure that there is adequate training available to support the growth occupations. Individuals who have lost their jobs may need retraining to obtain competitive employment in other fields.

Where We Are Today

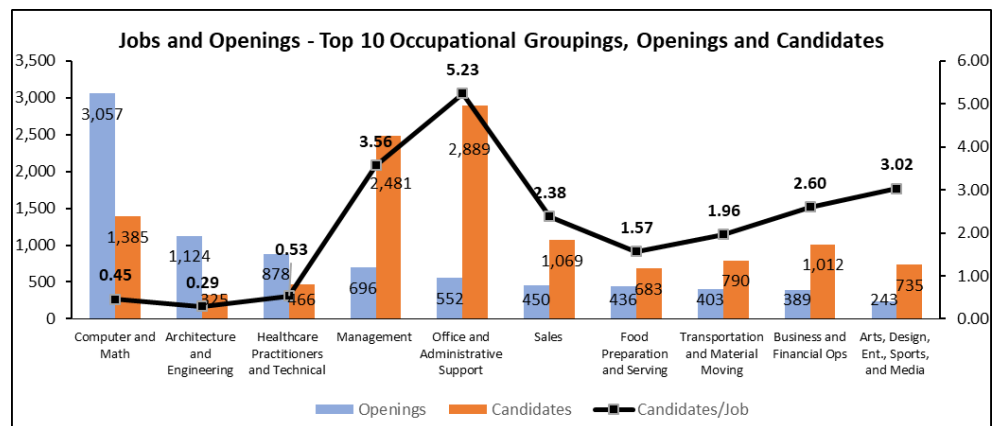
Unemployment and Underemployment in Howard County

Howard County has traditionally been one of the most educated counties in the state, rich with a highly educated population and jobs that pay well above a family-sustaining wage. However, as is true in every locality, there are still thousands of people either unemployed or underemployed that rely on workforce training services to help them gain meaningful employment.

The County already has a robust workforce training infrastructure that includes employer-based training, workforce preparedness training, skills training, and education offered by world-class institutions like Howard Community College and the Howard County Office of Workforce Development. Unfortunately, information about programs and services available at these institutions is decentralized, making it more challenging for people in need of the services to access them.

Workforce Training Aligned with the New Post-COVID-19 Economy

The need to better align our economic and workforce development systems has been identified as an imperative for the nation to reach its full economic potential, especially in the post-COVID-19 economy. The current workforce development system has been described as a “patchwork quilt of programs” consisting of diverse training providers serving different populations, developed piecemeal from industry to industry and region to region.



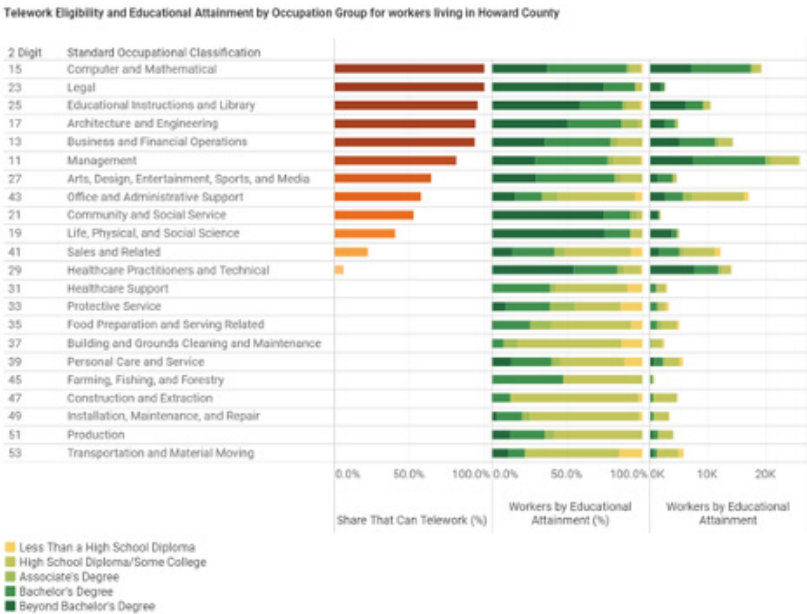
The need to better align workforce and economic development is real not only at the national or state level, it is needed at the county level as well. Businesses often face a mismatch between the supply and pipeline of talent available and employer occupational demands. This can impede economic development as well as diminish outcomes for the substantial government investments made in education and training.

This is true in Howard County, where despite the employment losses related to the current COVID-19 pandemic, employers have open postings for almost 20,000 job openings across skills, educational, and experience levels (according to EMSI). According to the Maryland Workforce Exchange, in February 2021 there were 13,619 job openings in Howard County and 14,817 registered candidates, or 1.09 candidates per job. The problem is that there is a disconnect between the jobs that employers are seeking to fill

and the candidates available to fill them. For example, there are over 3,057 job openings in computer occupations and 1,124 in architecture and engineering occupations, but only 1,385 and 325 registered candidates respectively, in the in the County for these jobs.

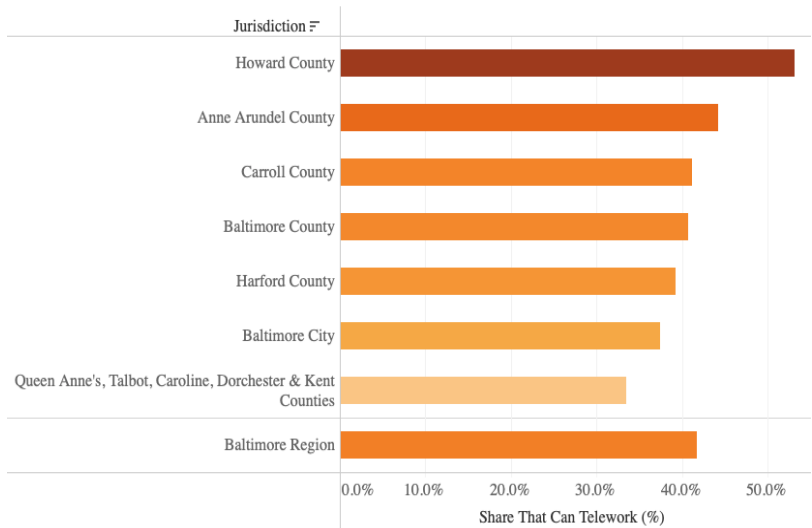
Technology Training and Infrastructure Needs

Even in a resource-rich jurisdiction like Howard County, there exists a digital divide between those who have access to computers and reliable internet, and those who do not. This is already a serious hardship in today’s increasingly digital world. In a society that now relies almost entirely on technology due to COVID-19 restrictions, not having access to reliable internet with sufficient bandwidth and computers is the difference-maker in the lives of many Howard County citizens. Without these tools, most children cannot access schooling or activities, and adults are unable to work remotely, fill out job applications, or attend virtual job interviews.



via Baltimore Metropolitan Council

Narrowing this digital divide in the context of workforce needs will require training, adequate infrastructure, and working with businesses and other organizations to ensure their tools are optimized for mobile viewing to increase access to more people. *To gather additional information and data, please refer to the Baltimore Metropolitan Council Recovery page.*



via Baltimore Metropolitan Council

Fostering Institutional Partnerships between the Workforce and Educational Systems

The ideal workforce development environment features cohesion across the full spectrum of the talent pipeline, starting from early education running through to the future of industry and workforce, and focusing on connecting talent to areas of opportunity and need. Establishing this environment requires close alignment between several local entities, including workforce agencies, chambers of commerce and education systems, with the collective goal of developing pathways to future careers. The primary format for partnership between workforce and educational systems are work-based learning opportunities (i.e., internships, apprenticeships), and expansion of these opportunities is an important outcome of better partnership and alignment between workforce and educational systems.

Howard County is well-situated to provide employment opportunities in post-COVID-19 growth industries with a larger share of tele-workable jobs (53.1 percent) than any of its peer jurisdictions. Better fostering partnerships between County workforce and educational systems will allow the development of pathways to growth industries as Howard County emerges from the pandemic.



Top Recommendations (continued)

The following are the action items and recommendations developed in consultation with the stakeholders of the Education and Workforce workgroup. The actions below are proposed recommendations that require collaboration between all facets of the community. Amongst these action items, three steps register as the most critical and should be prioritized.

10. Collaborate across industry sectors to generate an inventory of available training programs to identify gaps, duplications, and opportunities.

While the workgroup recognizes the array of excellent trainings that are currently available in Howard County, accessing these trainings can be challenging for residents and service providers. Generating an inventory of available training programs in the county will facilitate faster access to trainings for those in need.

In addition, the inventory will highlight training duplications and gaps in the county. Where there is duplication, the County should evaluate the demand and opportunity associated with the trainings being duplicated. Where demand and opportunity exist, multiple training providers can be an excellent way of addressing the need for providing trained individuals to targeted industries. In such cases, the training providers can maximize their resources and reach through coordination and sharing of resources to generate a synergistic result.

With the gaps that exist in training, whether it be absence of training or absence of a pathway (i.e. first and third level of training is offered, but not the second), the information will provide an opportunity for training providers to do an environmental scan of the existing employers in the county and examine

the viability of a new program, especially in the areas of new and revised job skills needed in the post-COVID-19 economy.

11. Leveraging industry data, retain individuals who lost their jobs during the pandemic into new occupations.

The goal would be to utilize existing systems such as, Howard County Community College, Office of Workforce Development, etc., for performing aptitude assessments for jobseekers in various industries. Also, to establish linkages between areas with unmet occupational needs and dislocated workers (e.g., potential advertising employment opportunities in Howard County's food production and distribution cluster to dislocated restaurant workers). Then, advertise openings to dislocated workers using multiple avenues.

12. Evaluate post-COVID-19 data to expand a pipeline for community college/career school training and workforce system in emerging areas of occupational need.

The goal would be to utilize existing systems such as, Howard County Community College, Office of Workforce Development, etc., for performing aptitude assessments for jobseekers in various industries. Also, to establish linkages between areas with unmet occupational needs and dislocated workers (e.g., potential advertising employment opportunities in Howard County's food production and distribution cluster to dislocated restaurant workers). Then, advertise openings to dislocated workers using multiple avenues.



Family Opportunities

Howard County is at a pivotal point in providing critical resources that deliver equitable family opportunities to our constituents. The County median income is \$120,941 and more than 30% of adults have advanced degrees. However, there are socioeconomic divides. A single parent with two kids needs to make \$32.37 an hour to survive. Just over 24,000 households have an annual income of less than \$60,000. COVID-19 exacerbated these divides with unprecedented increases in unemployment, food insecurity, and other social needs. African American and Latinx communities are still disproportionately affected by COVID-19. As the immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic transitions to vaccine distribution and re-establishment of former patterns, left behind is the devastation felt to our community and the large divides created by this crisis.

To meet these challenges, the Family Opportunities workgroup focused on five critical areas of need heightened by the pandemic: food access; childcare; housing; transportation; and digital inclusion.

Workgroup Goals

The Family Opportunities Workgroup acknowledged that Howard County has a strong infrastructure to assist vulnerable families. The members agreed that with this foundation, the goals were to increase and improve:

- Accessibility and affordability of food;
- Availability of affordable, quality childcare;
- Access to equitable, affordable, and secure housing opportunities;
- Access to transportation so that all individuals can travel freely, safely, comfortably, and efficiently;
- Data sharing and analytics to ensure access to efficient constituent services; and.
- Digital inclusion across the Howard County community.

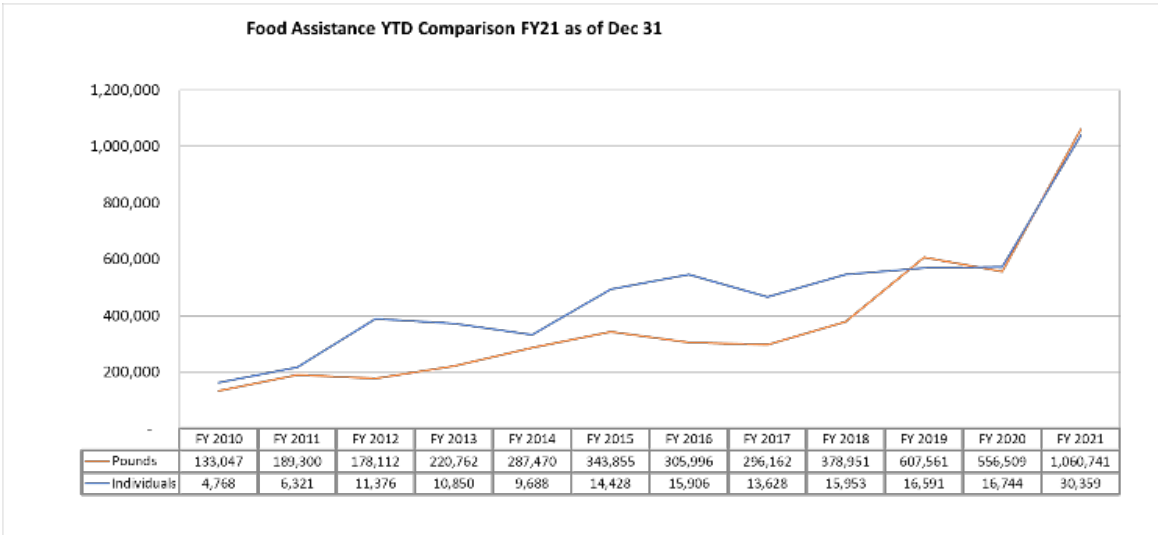
Where We Are Today

Howard County Government has significant reach with partners across sectors. The County took a collective impact approach to intentionally collaborate with our school system; police, health, and housing departments; Howard County Economic Development (HCED) and business community; local hospital system; non-profits; and environmental organizations. The workgroup recognized traditional methods of engagement are insufficient. There is a new need to centralize and collaborate with these stakeholders changing the cultural mindset and establishing a unified, systematic approach to reach all our families in need.

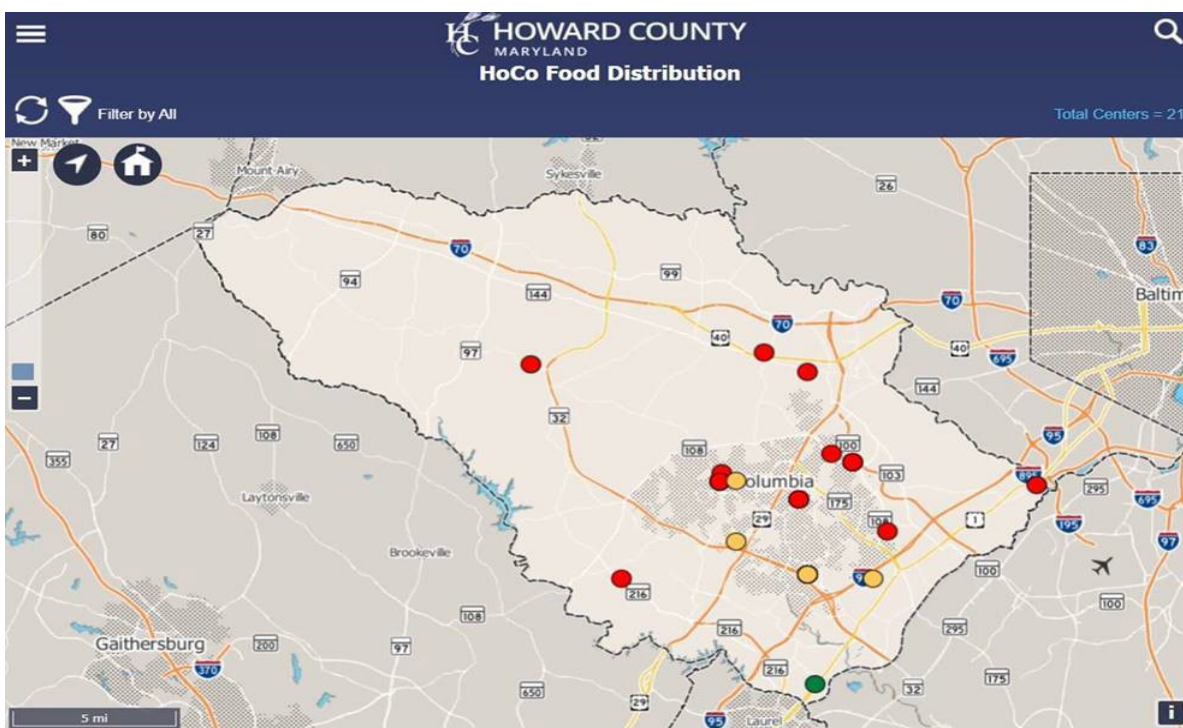
Food Access

In 2020 Howard County saw a tremendous increase in the needs for food assistance. In response to this increased demand, many organizations leapt into breach. From long-established community food banks to the creation of Columbia Cares and dozens of pop-up food pantries, our neighbors got the help they needed. However, this increasingly diversified net of resources can be confusing for residents to navigate and an inefficient use of resources. Now, with so many organizations responding so well, is the time to create points of coordination and centralization across the county so residents find help faster and economies of scale are realized.

The below table illustrates the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the increased need for food.



Howard County Government created an interactive tool for residents to know where HoCo Food Distribution sites were located.



Food Access Spotlight

Through the Rise to the Challenge grant, organizations were provided funding to organizations to continue critical services to families.

"Korean-American Senior Association (KASA) was able to distribute the foods and materials to the community members on Oct 10, Nov 14 and Dec 12, 2020. This has been done by drive through at the location of 3300 N. Ridge building. We were able to distribute more than 190 people on Oct 10 and 260 members in Nov and Dec 12.

Also, we dropped food at the senior apartments who have a lot of Korean seniors. They are Own Brown and Longwood garden apartment. Some of seniors who live alone and experienced physical limitations, we delivered the foods and materials. The foods would include Rice, Rice cake, Seaweed, Korean noodles, Eggs, Korean cookies, Korean traditional candies and Korean cabbage Kimchi among other things. The materials would include sanitizers, mask, translated materials about the information about COVID-19 include testing site information and supplies for using technology information."



Childcare

As workplace response to the pandemic has been mixed and schools and childcare centers were forced to close, the availability of affordable, quality childcare became a primary concern even for families who didn't previously have a need. According to the Maryland Family Network, regulated/legal childcare centers in Howard County had a pre-pandemic capacity to care for roughly 16,000 children (this figure includes family childcare providers and OCC licensed group programs). At the outset of the pandemic, the Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC) developed estimates for potential need due to the closure of schools and regular childcare facilities. In Howard County, BMC estimated that 14,000 children under the age of 12 lived in homes where no working adult could telework. That number alone nearly meets Howard County's pre-existing childcare capacity. Additionally, BMC estimates that 38,000 children reside in homes where at least one adult had the option of teleworking. This figure includes, nearly 14,000 children under the age of six. The fact that an adult can telework does not guarantee that they can tend to the needs of a child during their work day. As schools reopen, there is still an increased need, particularly in communities where workplace flexibility is difficult or impossible. Howard County must identify gaps in services, including the need for sick care, quality of care, 24-hour availability; identify geographic locations with gaps in providers or services; and examine infant and early Head Start numbers and need. Howard County recognizes the need to establish a public site to quickly locate childcare information and available resources. Families dealing with staggered school days, teleworking or in-person careers, caring for elderly parents, and other day-to-day stressors need a reliable source for determining childcare centers, age restrictions, hours, locations, and availability in one easy to navigate site for our government and partnering providers.



Spotlight on Childcare Resources

Support for childcare needs: Maryland Family Network (*see appendix*) has an online locator and intake form

Support for providers: TX Childcare Tools (*see appendix*) is an online resource for child care providers provides "access to hard-to-find child care management resources that help build quality child care programs and sustainable child care businesses."

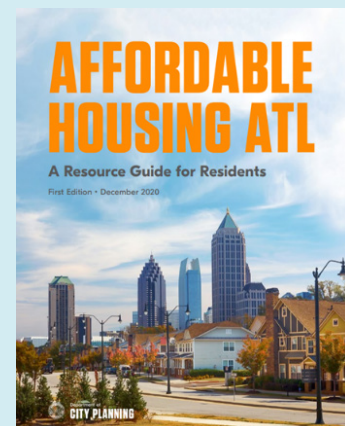
Housing

The State of Maryland created short-term pandemic solutions, including rental assistance funding to prevent evictions and forbearance for mortgage loans to prevent foreclosure. However, these sources of funding have an end date. In 2020, the Department of Housing distributed \$2.4 million of COVID-19 rental assistance funds to households making up to 80% of the median household income. Howard County recognizes the importance of long-term planning to keep constituents in their housing and begin closing the gaps that remain. Creating a current database of available rental units with monthly rent cost information would be a good first step to help constituents have access to up-to-date housing resources that could meet their needs and their budget.

Spotlight on the City of Atlanta

The City of Atlanta created an Affordable Housing guide (*see appendix*) which looks similar to our DRP guide. This guide provides information and resources for residents in one location. The guide covers legal rights, housing programs, homebuyers' assistants, specialized housing, homelessness resources, shelters, and funding opportunities.

Creating a Housing Affordability Plan similar to Atlanta, Georgia would provide Howard County with a strategic plan to ensure equitable housing using a multitude of methods from a Housing Innovation Lab, private-public investments, and creation of affordable living in Howard County.



Transportation

During the pandemic, public transportation was curtailed and ridership plummeted. Even as services have begun to be restored, ridership remains below expected levels, and at the beginning of January 2021, fares were reinstated. However, there is a known community need for transportation to food banks and vaccine clinics. Creating a centralized repository for transportation data could help inform other decisions in the county that need to be made including, location of food banks, distribution of transportation lines, where would last mile assistance be most beneficial, and ensuring bus routes are customer friendly in the areas that have the most need. Further, the placement of immediate service centers, like vaccine clinics, should take availability of transportation into account. The workgroup recommends Howard County increase access to bus route times, locations, and arrival information. A best practice to exemplify is Atlanta's Simply Get There (*see appendix*), "a one-stop trip planning resource that makes it easy...to find personalized transportation options." The online tool provides residents with tailored trip options based on services available in their area.

Transportation Spotlight: The Regional Transportation Agency (RTA) Transit Mobile App

The Office of Transportation work in collaboration with the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) and the Baltimore Metropolitan Council (BMC), released a new application for digital bus fares, which are now available to Regional Transportation Agency (RTA) of Central Maryland riders through the Transit mobile app. Riders will now plan and pay for their trip in one application, a very first in Maryland. Offers a touch-free method of fare payments with visual validation by drivers. Implementation of fare-capping; once one-way fares total the amount of an unlimited pass (daily or monthly), the rider automatically upgrades and refunds the difference. Furthermore, it offers free transfer within the system for 90 minutes.

Digital Inclusion

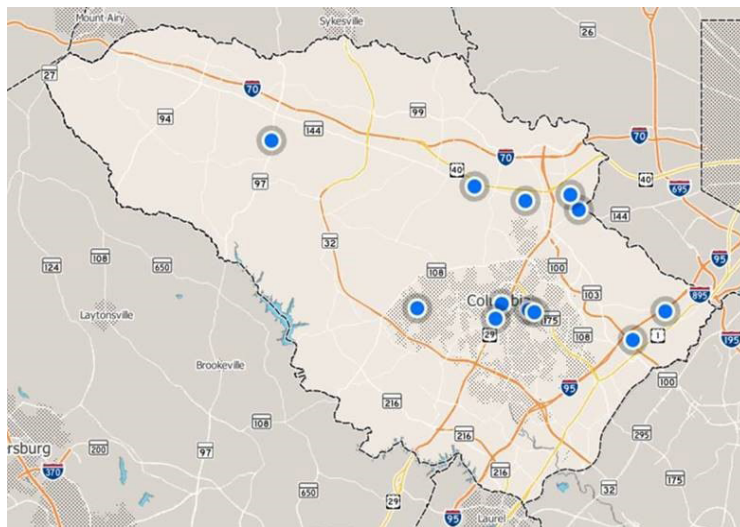
Much of the pandemic response has been essentially reactive, as families in need reach out to providers when on the cusp of a crisis. Moving forward, Howard County needs proactive intervention, finding those families at risk before a crisis hits and funneling them towards available resources. To accomplish this, Howard County government must develop better data collection, centralization, and analytics, using this information to guide services and inform other community stakeholders of needs.

Each of the Family Opportunities Subcommittees identified the ability to quickly view and analyze cross functional data as a critical action. By overlaying many disparate datasets within Howard County, providers and other resources can align to actual community requirements and begin bridging gaps in services. These analytics can also assist with potential decisions points around resource allocation and predicting long-term impacts. With this ability, Howard County will collect, centralize, and analyze data real-time, allowing proactive interventions via data-driven decisions. Maryland Department of Human Services (DHS) has a similar goal with Total Human-services Integrated Network (MD THINK) (*see appendix*) which “will offer a ‘no-wrong-door’ approach to clients as well as improve service delivery by reducing application processing time, thus eliminating redundancies within the eligibility determination process.”

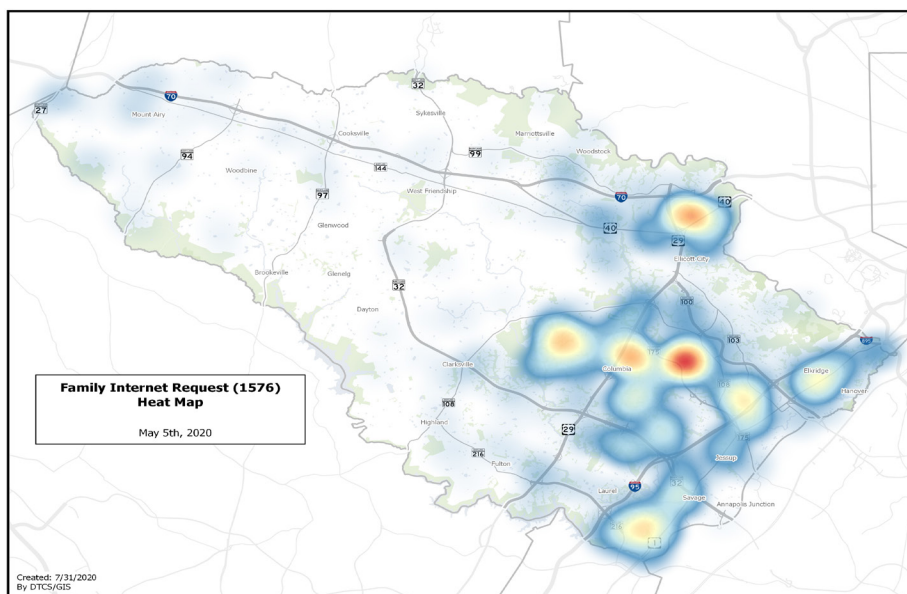
Howard County has made significant strides in addressing immediate needs stemming from the pandemic, including working with Bright Minds Foundation to ensure every Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) student had a device to learn from home; coordinating with Comcast to provide Comcast Essentials internet service at no or low-cost for students in need; and providing twelve areas of county-provided outdoor Wi-Fi, including Long Reach Village Center. The below is a map of county-provided free wireless internet access, where residents can get online with any internet-enabled device. The locations include park comfort stations, libraries, and community centers.

Howard County Wi-Fi Locations:

- Old Ellicott City Lot D
- Columbia Lake Front
- The George Howard Building
- Fire Station One
- Fire Station 14
- Middle Patuxent Environmental Area
- Troy Hill Park
- Gary J. ARthur Community Center
- Kiwanis Park
- Blandair Park Comfort Station 2
- Blandair Park Comfort Station 3
- Ellicott City 50+ Center



To better understand the need for student internet access, the workgroup used the results of an HCPSS survey to create a heat map where areas of concentrated need are shown in red. Although many of these families received hotspots to support remote learning, their need will remain even after the return to hybrid and in-person learning. Students will still need to access online learning platforms like Canvas; be able to independently research topics from home; and communicate with teachers via email or chat. This data will continue to guide our digital equity efforts to ensure all students have continued equitable access to the tools required for success after the pandemic has abated.



Digital Inclusion Spotlights Equipping Students to Thrive Virtually

Through a RISE to the Challenge grant, Bright Minds provided HCPSS School Supply Kits for targeted middle schools. Bright Minds provided funding to purchase math and English supplies for Harpers Choice, Oakland Mills, Lake Elkhorn and Mayfield Woods middle schools. Additionally, the following partners also distributed additional supplies and needs to students: Assist Our Kids (A-OK) Mentoring and Tutoring, Oakland Mills Online, Pearl Foundation, Tau Phi, and The Kindness Pantry. The support helped to ensure that economically disadvantaged students had the tools they need for English and math.

- 915 students received supplemental math materials to support academic needs; and,
- 485 students received key supplies (such as ruler, colored pencils, paper, sketchbook, backpack, and other items) to succeed in virtual learning.

Community Action Council (CAC) also received a \$50,000 Rise to the Challenge grant to implement critical technology for children in the Head Start program.

“CAC is grateful to be awarded the Rise to the Challenge funding. The onset of COVID-19 quickly forced us to rethink how we could effectively serve our Head Start students both in the class and virtually at home without having to increase staffing levels or scramble to find a parallel online curriculum. This funding allows CAC to seamlessly integrate classroom learning and virtual learning via a unified tech platform, ensuring the children of our low-income residents have access to high quality education regardless of their physical location.”





Top Recommendations (continued)

13. Create a one source landing page/flier translated into multiple languages for resources that contain food service location, times, and types of food, would assist families planning visits and relieve stress.

Early in the pandemic, many families struggled with finding locations, times, and transportation that suited their schedules. Now, with so many organizations stepping up, it is time to create points of coordination and centralization across the county so residents find help faster and economies of scale are realized.

14. Provide targeted support and incentives to close the digital divide and create a new long-term roadmap to meaningfully increase digital inclusion in Howard County.

Even as the pandemic recedes, the need for access to online learning, work, and services will only continue to grow. Howard County must conduct a gap analysis to show both the on-the-ground nature of community disparity, as well as the barriers that are preventing true digital equity in Howard County. This can be used to create a strategic roadmap and define the work that needs to be done to create a truly digitally inclusive community.

The [Internet for All Seattle Report](#), alongside the [Internet for All Seattle Resolution \(31956\)](#) (IFA) lay out models for Howard County to follow, particularly with using community surveys and research to establish a ground truth as we pursue a similar mission of “enabling all Seattle residents to access and adopt broadband internet service that is reliable and affordable.”

15. Increase additional forms of transportation to vaccine clinics for those with significant barriers.

The workgroup has identified systemic problems concerning transportation throughout the County; these existing issues have been amplified during the pandemic. Related to the COVID-19 vaccination, it is important to determine an equitable mobile approach to vaccine distribution, such as implementing a “meet you where you are” program. Howard County was one of the first jurisdictions to implement a mobile vaccination clinic for those residents with mobility needs by developing the Mobile Integrated Community Health (MICH) team. To date, MICH has administered COVID-19 vaccinations to more than 115 residents and nearly 300 independent and congregate living facilities. Additionally, at Howard County vaccination sites, healthcare professionals have been administering the vaccine to individuals who have mobility needs in their cars to ensure a smoother experience. The workgroup recommends that the County continue collaborating with partners such as the MICH team, NeighborRide, and community Faith-based entities and explore the possibility of leveraging public-private partnerships to increase vaccination access throughout the County.

Acknowledgements

A special thank you to all those involved in this Collaborative. Without your input, expertise, and insight none of this would have been possible.

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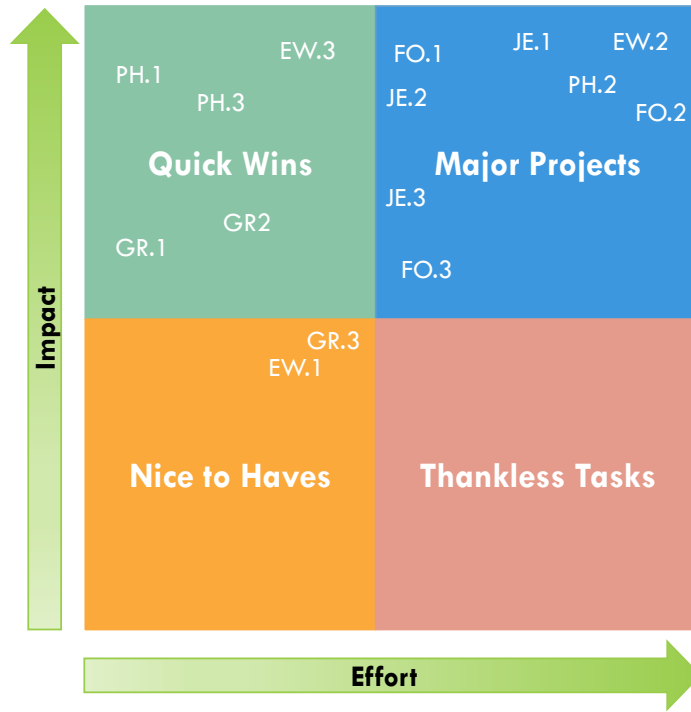
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APPENDIX A: Top 15 Workgroup Recommendations

Public Health Response		
Recommendation	Effort	Impact
Establish a COVID-19 Vaccine Communications Steering Committee.	Medium	High
Create and implement Vaccine Equity Outreach Plan.	High	High
Recruit trust brokers and other key endorsers, provide training and necessary supports and manage to outcomes or vaccine outreach.	Medium	High
Government Response		
Recommendation	Effort	Impact
Implement a digital visitor system	Medium	High
Reduce fleet footprint to accommodate telework for the long-term.	Medium	High
Incorporate softphones to all County employees' computers to enable enhanced remote business.	Medium	Medium
Jobs and Economy		
Recommendation	Effort	Impact
Modernize and streamline government processes that ensures that the County remains business friendly.	High	High
Establish an "opt-in" text message alert system for businesses to receive important information regarding any new changes within the County that may significantly affect their organizations.	Medium	High
Establish more web apps that connect residents to local businesses	Medium	High
Education and Workforce		
Recommendation	Effort	Impact
Collaborate across industry sectors to generate an inventory of available training programs to identify gaps, duplications, and opportunities.	Medium	Medium
Leverage industry data, retain individuals who lost their jobs during the pandemic into new occupations.	High	High
Evaluate post-COVID-19 data to expand a pipeline for community college/career school training and workforce system in emerging areas of occupational need.	Medium	High
Family Opportunities		
Recommendation	Effort	Impact
Create a one source landing page/flier translated into multiple languages for resources that contain food service location, times, and types of food would assist families plan visits and relieve stress.	Medium	High
Provide targeted support and incentives to close the digital divide and create a new long-term roadmap to meaningfully increase digital inclusion in Howard County.	High	High
Provide targeted support and incentives to close the digital divide and create a new long-term roadmap to meaningfully increase digital inclusion in Howard County.	High	High
Increase additional forms of transportation to vaccine clinics for those with significant barriers.	Medium	High



APPENDIX B: Additional Recommendations

The following are the additional recommendations produced by the HoCo RISE Collaborative workgroups. Timeline information is delineated by continuous (C) an ongoing process, immediate (I) can be accomplished in the next 90 days, short-term (ST) can be accomplished within one-two years, and long-term (LT) can be accomplished in two or more years.

Public Health Response		
Action	Timeline	Recommendation
1.1	LT	<p>Establish a framework for a county-based multicultural health promoter program. The framework shall include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An outreach strategy to identify people and stakeholders who could serve as effective promoters; • A strategy to build strong connections with all communities, and cultivate these relationships thereby establishing a network that equips them with necessary information and guidance; • An effective training program for the promoters; and, • An update to Howard County’s medical reserve corps model to incorporate community health workers, promoters, and advocates. The Health Promoter Program could ensure that it maintains stable capacity for when it needs to be deployed. <p>The promoters should be actively encouraged to register with LHIC to solidify the public health network that this series of recommendations is trying to foster. The Public Health Infrastructure Advisory Group should ensure that the elements of the framework are consistent with its recommendations.</p>
1.2	ST	<p>Convene public health infrastructure advisory group. Howard County does not have a pandemic-ready public health system, and public health infrastructure has not been adequately funded for years. Much of the funding and resources are mainly available to prepare for short-term weather-related emergencies or biological or chemical attacks.</p> <p>The advisory group will convene for 90 days to develop specific recommendations to ensure appropriate and sustainable support for public health infrastructure, including workforce, education, communications, and policy interventions. Recommendations shall be culturally relevant and contain a timeline for action from County Government (e.g., what can be taken now, what actions are a priority but require intervention from the State, what actions require support from other community stakeholders, etc.).The Advisory Group shall be administered by an entity such as the Board of Health, a local government steering committee, or another appropriate body as determined by the County.</p>
1.3	I	<p>Establish a COVID-19 Vaccine Communications Subcommittee to Address the Needs of Communities with Access Challenges and Lower Vaccine Confidence. This subcommittee will include representatives from the Horizon Foundation, Howard County Health Department, Howard County General Hospital, and County Government. The goals of the subcommittee should be, but not limited to, the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a charter with goals, roles, responsibilities, expectations; • Create and execute a comprehensive social marketing campaign targeting African-American and Latinx community members to help inform vaccine decision-making; • Create and distribute culturally relevant materials for use in ambassador training; • Host and support community forums around vaccine development, safety concerns, vaccine distribution, history of vaccines, etc. specifically for African American and Latinx communities; • In coordination with the LHIC, recruit and train community leaders from African American and Latinx communities to serve as vaccine information ambassadors; • Recommend ways for the County to increase easy access to vaccination for African American and Latinx residents (e.g., mobile clinics, mass vaccination sites, etc.) once vaccine supply increases; • Regularly monitor racial and ethnic vaccine distribution disparities; and, • Fully coordinate with and share messaging, materials, approaches, etc. with the COVID-19 Vaccine Communications Steering Committee.

Government Response		
Action	Timeline	Recommendation
2.1	C	OEM will continue to evaluate the feasibility of conducting such operations virtually. At the same time, OEM acknowledges some incidents call for the need for in-person staff. OEM continues to learn from various operations and disasters that are concurrent with the COVID-19 event by staying vigilant with the changing environment of the pandemic while conducting response efforts to other hazards.
2.2	C	OEM continues to evaluate working conditions within the EOC to ensure they are conducive to COVID-19 practices (i.e., barriers, social distancing, masking, etc.) and will update the SOP as necessary.
2.3	C	OEM will continue to work in coordination with HCHD, HCPSS, Howard County Police Department (HCPD), Department of Fire and Rescue Services (DFRS), DCRS, DRP, County Administration, Howard County Community College (HCC), and others to plan and support logistics for vaccination distribution for the County. Adjustments will be made as new information is available and as vaccine supply increases.
2.4	ST/LT	Make Howard County more resilient by applying lessons learned during the pandemic in future response efforts. When lessons learned, or success is noted in the County's COVID-19 response efforts, it is documented through a County COVID-19 survey. The conclusion of the incident will be integrated into the County's After-Action Report (AAR). The AAR will help OEM and other departments learn how to utilize their strengths and improve upon response efforts during a pandemic.
2.5	I/ST	The County will assess the full complement of workplace flexibility through flexible work schedules, reviewing AWS policies, compressed work weeks, shift flexibility, flexible work locations, job sharing, and telework. County Government will expand telework capabilities by convening a workgroup to review the first draft of a suggested policy and craft a procedure that will be utilized upon reopening of the government. Any changes made will be implemented and updated in the Employee Handbook. Through telework evaluation, flexible schedules, compressed workweeks, shift flexibility, etc., will enable the county to decrease its environmental footprint. This will allow departments to integrate and adopt virtual/digital practices to decrease facility energy, mitigate paper usage, reduce commuting miles, and reduce fleet footprint. Remote work will be critical for those working parents with young children due to children returning to hybrid school schedules or those still completing school full time virtually. The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates there is approximately 60% of families where both parents are working.
2.6	I	Department of Public Works (DPW) will now be developing a maintenance and replacement schedule for newly installed HVAC system upgrades.
2.7	ST	DPW is planning a wide-range evaluation of space needs for the County workforce. The goal of such study would be to appraise the feasibility, costs, and benefits of reducing the amount of space occupied by County employees. DPW expects to define substantial blocks of workspace and possibly even buildings that could be leased or subleased to businesses or other non-County entities.
2.8	C	The taskforce recommends diligence to ensure that all allocated CARES Act funds are spent.
2.9	C	The taskforce further recommends monitoring the status of any additional Federal or State legislation that may allocate additional funds or resources. The County may use additional funds to address the continuing pandemic and the effects of the pandemic on our residents and on our government operations.
2.10	I/ST	Ensure that future meeting include virtual opportunities to enhance accessibility and opportunities for the public to attend. In order to deliver more accessible information for our County residents, the integration of hybrid meetings throughout the County will enable residents to have multi-modes of communication avenues to acquire essential and valuable information.
2.11	ST	To acknowledge employee disorientation from the loss of traditional office culture as telework expands and supports County employees' mental health needs, Human Resources (HR) will continue to provide wellness resources and programs to employees and encourage management to create a culture of recognition. It aims to create "connectedness" through an online magazine that will host an employee news forum, voluntary sharing of anniversaries, community service work, sharing coping mechanisms, etc.
2.12	LT	HR will partner with other County departments to procure a modernized and efficient Human Resources Information System (HRIS). HRIS will allow HR and County employees to proficiently manage employee information, provide employees access to an enhanced self-service platform, and enable departments to make informative operational decisions with the enhanced employment metrics and reporting capability. In addition, HR will develop and implement a digital records management imaging solution. A digital records management imaging solution will increase HR's efficiency by decreasing the costs associated with storing paper and manual filing processing time. Furthermore, HR will implement a robust employee training program that will incorporate remote learning and course completion tracking and reporting through a learning management system.

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2.13	ST	Review policies and procedures and leverage technology and lessons learned from the pandemic to adopt a hybrid communications and remote processing platform. This hybrid platform will provide virtual and eventual in-person communication avenues, public access, and remote payment opportunities to increase accessibility and equitable opportunities to the Howard County residents while being mindful of employee engagement/wellness and maintaining a high level of customer service to our residents.
2.14	C	The Department of Technology and Communication Services (DTCS) will further integrate and increase digital services, such as Adobe Acrobat and DocuSign, that allow for electronic signatures. DTCS will also work with departments to analyze printing needs and remove printers throughout the building where necessary to mitigate paper usage and improve the County's environmental footprint. Furthermore, with the decrease in printers, the County will be installing eFax to further reduce paper usage.

Jobs and Economy

Action	Timeline	Recommendation
4.1	ST/LT	Build stronger partnerships with local businesses and banks. Additionally, workshops and webinars should be created for local businesses and sectors requiring assistance with processing documents and applying for grants/loans.
4.2	I	Establish and filter all Howard County organizations/entities and businesses into one communication platform. This platform will host COVID-19 information, create a forum for local businesses to communicate to one another, establish a communication hub between the County and businesses to ensure all Howard County businesses are receiving information in a timely and efficient manner.
4.3	ST/LT	Train and support retailers with e-commerce transactions. This applies for County-based retailers as opposed to franchisees. The main goal is to provide support to small, local businesses with these efforts to be more resilient and with the times.
4.4	I	Find "County Influencers" who can help send information to various groups and individuals, which can then be disseminated quickly to reach more residents in a short span.
4.5	ST	Centralize PPE purchasing from local vendors and establishing a credit process for PPE equipment needed for compliance. Currently there is a approved vendors list, but processes should be made clearer on how to access these resources and provide purchasing power to businesses to access. It may provide the opportunity to buy in bulk at a more discounted rate, especially with the scarcity of PPE.
4.6	ST	Develop a certified 'Safe' program, which can be objective to each type of retail – essentially creating a certifying mechanism that shows certain establishments are considered safe. Given certain criteria met, this program would give a "stamp" of approval that it is safe to eat/shop at specified locations. Helps consumers feel a sense of security.
4.7	ST	Establish protections for businesses in the case of a cyber-attack. The workgroup recommends doing this is to partner with Cyber Association of Maryland, Inc. (CAMI) Cyber SWAT Team, where initial triage support is at no cost. Additionally, engage and partner with Veteran-Owned or similar cyber-security firms to assist small, local business with cyber-security needs. Furthermore, create a fund where if an organization or company experiences a cyber-attack, they would be eligible to receive a grant/fund to help them recover. These funds should go directly to local businesses in need.
4.8	I	Put together a comprehensive list of business owners and organizations who meet certain demographics and status which can help streamline communication within small, minority businesses.
4.9	ST/LT	Establish businesses on ShopLocalHoCo as the one-stop-shop for all information (i.e., location, offerings) on small businesses and restaurants and it may be in line with 'HoCo Food Go'. This plat form would determine who to communicate to, and how (i.e. tailored for retailers/businesses, consumers, or both). This would be an additional way local business can help each other.
4.10	LT	Expand health guidelines more long-term and not just through COVID-19. To assist with this, it would be advantageous to create a partnership between local businesses and the HCHD to ensure businesses are updated on safety measures and procedures.
4.11	ST	Partner with companies who can help fill deficiencies where retailers can't necessary fill. For instance, services like NeighborRide may be able to help with food delivery.
4.12	ST/LT	Launch a program to connect agriculture businesses and local businesses/restaurants to make food and distribute it to residents, school lunches, etc., connect the HCPSS and local restaurants to begin a partnership to help Howard County students and families who may receive Free or Reduced Meals (FARMS). Shift the large "big-box" suppliers to more local entities.

Education and Workforce		
Action	Timeline	Description
3.1	-	Promote more private and non-profit workforce development collaborations.
3.1.1	I	Effectively address workforce demand, understanding the needs of industries and building trainings to satisfy those needs are critical for success.
3.1.2	I	Collaborate partnerships between private industries and non-profit workforce development training providers should be encouraged by offering resources and incentives to support public private partnerships.
3.2	-	Create a more robust training network with resources to support long-term employer needs.
3.2.1	I	Commission a workforce study to assess the linkages between the County/Regional Workforce Development System and the needs of the employer community: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify areas of industry workforce need; • Prepare asset map of County workforce development capacity; and, • Identify areas of potential employer/workforce development system collaboration to create career pathways. Assess alignment of labor market supply and demand.
3.2.2	ST	Based on assessment, ensure alignment of workforce supply and demand conditions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify areas of industry collaboration with training providers and workforce system on targeted areas of occupational need. Assess need for expanded Apprenticeship programs (with HCC and HCPSS).
3.2.3	LT	Pursue expansion of Howard County’s training infrastructure into areas of high occupational demand: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Higher Education linkages in IT/business; • Expanded Community College Workforce Programming; • Need for additional targeted career training programming; and, • Partnerships with third party training organization.
3.3	-	Narrow the digital divide through ensuring access to technology training
3.3.1	I	Complete matrix of technology training providers and services county-wide (additional implementation needed beyond this).
3.3.2	ST	Increase support for adults seeking technology training opportunities like childcare access and transportation (crossover with social determinants group).
3.3.3	ST	Creating a campaign to emphasize technology businesses/cyber-networking and tech certifications (tech-focused career fair).
3.3.4	ST	Explore creation of technology apprenticeship opportunities and funding models to support.
3.4	-	Narrow the digital divide through ensuring adequate technology infrastructure
3.4.1	I	Coordinate with the Howard County Digital Equity Committee to explore additional grant funding/organization partnerships to secure laptops and hotspots for students and certification/job-seeking adults.
3.4.2	ST	Enhancing business support options to assist with operations during the pandemic such as website design and app development.
3.4.3	ST	Assess current free Wi-Fi services. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review current services and analyze utilization and impact; and, • Recommend areas of opportunity.
3.4.4	LT	Creation of community hubs to provide more opportunities for public internet access. Those that already exist need to be more heavily promoted and agencies serving impacted residents need to be aware of the hubs.
3.4.5	LT	Continue exploration of bill reduction opportunities for low-income families through conversations with Comcast and Verizon.
3.5	-	Assist organizations that do not have mobile-friendly applications become mobile-friendly.
3.5.1	ST	Identify funding for grants and develop requirements for applications.
3.5.2	LT	Provide grants to assist those organizations with developing mobile applications.
3.6	-	Generate an inventory of available training programs (i.e., employer-based training, workforce training, job training, education training) to identify gaps, duplications, and opportunities.
3.6.1	I	Compile information that should be collected in the inventory.
3.6.2	ST	Contact Howard County companies to research training opportunities. Identify what studies are already occurring, i.e., Children’s Board, Office of Workforce Development.
3.6.3	LT	Creating an interactive web tool that summarizes all of the information gathered. Career pathways connects people to jobs in the County.

3.7	-	Identify services that are most needed to support disconnected youth and unemployed and underemployed individuals.
3.7.1	I	Create a survey to service providers to find out what the most requested services are and if they are able to meet the demand. Identify who should own the survey and which service providers should receive the survey.
3.8	-	Identify a model, using best practices, of how to communicate information to the public and the providers and develop a communication campaign to reach disconnected youth, unemployed and underemployed individuals.
3.8.1	ST	Research and draft a model that will be adopted by the county which defines what makes a good communications campaign with steps in place to ensure that it will be sustainable.
3.9	-	Create short-term, intensive trainings with incentives for those who complete to remove barriers for those that need training.
3.9.1	I	Leverage current resources (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) training funds, community college scholarships) and target marketing to deliver training to unemployed and underemployed residents.
3.9.2	LT	Determine and craft ways to implement incentives for employers be it via policy, tax credits, or grants, and/or for students such as a stipend for completion or free access to community college for reskilling.
3.10	-	Expand apprenticeships with K-12 pathways and incentives.
3.10.1	I	Curate a marketing campaign to highlight and promote existing pathways (educational awareness).
3.10.2	ST	Launch a campaign to recruit more employers to sponsor apprenticeship programs to strengthen and create new pathways from high school into post-secondary to employment.
3.10.3	ST	Create a communication campaign to educate parents, students, and staff on apprenticeship as a good pathway into careers.
3.10.4	LT	Create county incentives/ requirements to expand apprenticeships. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Incentives for businesses to hire apprentices; and, • Require apprentices on big county projects.
3.11	-	Expand Internship programs (high school and college levels).
3.11.1	I	Create an inventory of internship opportunities available within the county by public and private institutions for easy dissemination to interested students.
3.11.2	ST	Collate existing resources and create a best practices handbook in running a successful internship program (for interns, mentors, and companies).
3.11.3	LT	Expand company participation of internship programs through county incentives such as matching funds for paid summer internship programs.
3.12	-	Promote more private and non-profit workforce development collaborations.
3.12.1	ST	Create an inventory of current private and non-profit workforce development trainings available and analyze for gaps such as type of training or demographics that need to be reached.
3.12.2	ST	Build a communication plan to ensure that these opportunities reach hard to reach populations.
3.12.3	ST	Build a process to better identify occupation gaps that exist and build workforce programs to support companies (i.e., bring together several companies with the same need to support a cohort of participants to go through the training with an opportunity for employment for those who successfully complete the program, also known as an industry sector partnership).
3.12.4	LT	Highlight best practices and showcase model programs to generate more interest in private and non-profit workforce development collaborations.
3.12.5	LT	Offer grants for innovative private – nonprofit partnership start-ups with clear delineations to avoid duplication of effort to maximize resources.
3.13	ST/LT	Identify a model, using best practices, of how to communicate information to the public and the providers and develop a communication campaign to reach disconnected youth, unemployment, and underemployed individuals.

Family Opportunities		
Action	Timeline	Recommendation
5.1	LT	Collect, centralize, and analyze data real-time, allowing proactive interventions via data-driven decisions
5.2	I	Survey organizations to find opportunities for digitization (forms, workflows, payments, etc.), as well as to find key entry points and systems that need to be coordinated.
5.3	LT	Using the results of 6.2, focus county resources on improved digitization across application processes.
5.4	ST	Create an improved Resident Services Portal design for centralization of information and services to providers and the public. Centralizing access to key (food, housing) services (currently spread across many subpages). Making information and applications centrally located and easy to find for constituents. Key agencies that are customer-facing need to be part of design process/key stakeholder. Improved constituent-focused design and feedback opportunities within website redesign.
5.5	I	Creating a one source landing page/flyer for resources that contain information on food services location, times, and types of food.
5.6	LT	Creating one overseeing centralized/consolidated body for food distribution, procurement, and operations. A central body will provide the ability to consolidate and provide efficient food distribution; allow for resources and food to be allocated more efficiently to the population; combine procurement to take advantage of economies of scale; and data to be collected efficiently to determine greatest need. In order to do more than naming an organization, it will require changing the culture mindset of food access to emphasize collaboration and goal achievement over individual organization’s effort.
5.7	ST	Create a portal that is easily accessible to parents searching for childcare providing information about providers, client ratings and feedback, availability of services, specialties, etc., much like current physician portals. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop criteria/categories of information needed for the portal: location, transportation accessibility, accepting vouchers, any health or safety infractions, spaces available, specialties, etc. • Create online form or portal for people to upload/input information. • Work closely with DTCS on current county website and community resources portal goals so as not to duplicate efforts.
5.8	LT	Proactive intervention via better data collection, centralization, and analytics.
5.9	ST	Create centralized site for “one-stop shopping” around digital literacy resources, similar to the StayCOVIDSafe site.
5.10	LT	Despite a robust broadband infrastructure, including public- and private-owned fiber options, there is a digital inclusion gap in Howard County. Using the results of the roadmap developed in Action 6.8, develop County-subsidized broadband access for the digitally underserved.
5.11	ST	Increase access to bus route times, location, and arrival information by leveraging voice-enabled software and other mobile applications.
5.12	I	Use a multi-modal approach to vaccine clinics placement, with at least some placed in walkable areas that serve at-risk populations. Use these as models to deliver and decentralize services in ways that can be reached without reliance on a car
5.13	ST/LT	Create a housing affordability plan, leveraging best practices in the nation.
5.14	LT	Use the results of Actions 6.10 and 6.11 as models to deliver and decentralize services in ways that can be reached without reliance on a car.
5.15	LT	Create a proactive system that initiates/mitigates response of resources before the crisis grows insurmountable.
5.16	LT	Create a housing trust fund with County general fund budget line item to allow for flexibility to address housing issues as they present. Recovery post-pandemic, long-term planning after the short-term pandemic solutions, potentially seeded by federal government response to pandemic – advocate for better flexible use of federal resources to create long-term systemic response.

APPENDIX C: HoCo RISE Framework

What is HoCo Rise? HoCo RISE is Howard County Executive Calvin Ball's plan of Reopening Innovatively, Safely, and Effectively within the framework laid out by Maryland Governor Larry Hogan.

HoCo RISE uses data to inform decision-making

Data points currently used to guide decision-making around reopening and, if necessary, when to maintain or bring back restrictions:

1. The number of new cases.^[1]
2. The number of new hospitalizations.
3. The number of patients admitted to ICU.
4. The number of tests conducted.
5. The amount of available PPE.
6. Surge capacity at Howard County General Hospital (HCGH).^[2]

HoCo RISE follows the Governor's guidance on the **building blocks** for reopening^[3]

Expanded Testing Capacity

Best Practices: The American Enterprise Institute^[4] estimates that a national capacity of at least 750,000 tests per week would be sufficient to move to case-based interventions when paired with sufficient capacity in supportive public health infrastructure (contact tracing). The Center for American Progress suggested that 2.6 million tests per day are needed nationally,^[5] which would amount to approximately 2,575 tests per day in Howard County.^[6] Harvard University's Safra Center for Ethics estimated 5-20 million tests per day are needed nationally,^[7] which would amount to approximately 5,000 tests per day in Howard County.^[8]

Howard County Current Testing Capacity: Currently testing 1,300 people per week at 7 sites across the county.

Goal: The goal is to test 6,500 people per week.^[9]

Sufficient Surge Capacity

Best Practices: According to the American Enterprise Institute, hospitals should have 5-7 critical care beds per 10,000 adults, 5-7 ventilators per 10,000 adults, and at least 30 acute care beds per 10,000 adults in the setting of an epidemic.^[10]

Howard County General Hospital Current Surge Capacity: Howard County General Hospital has 133 staffed acute care beds (89% utilization), 33 staffed intensive care unit beds (67% utilization), and 38 ventilators (21% utilization). Additional capacity is available as needed in medical tents.^[11] Additional capacity is available as needed in medical tents.

Goal: The goal is to ensure that capacity always exceeds utilization, which we currently meet. An additional goal is to have an adequate alternate care site plan in the event our utilization exceeds our capacity. Howard County Government and Howard County General Hospital are currently working on the alternative care site plan with the state.

Ramping Up the Supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Best Practices: In order to determine the amount of PPE needed for government and hospital use, the following factors are considered: the number of COVID-19 patients per day, number of workers in

contact with positive patients, expected duration of patient stay, estimated number of patients sharing rooms, reusability of PPE, available modeling, and other factors as needed.

Howard County Current Supply of PPE: Howard County Health Department has secured 54,559 N95s, 100,480 surgical masks, 10,807 gowns, 9,176 face shields, approximately 310,000 gloves and other PPE to date. Currently, Howard County has enough PPE to cover EMS workers, the Howard County Health Department, nursing homes, and Howard County General Hospital for 30 days.^[12]

Goal: The PPE goal is to have enough on hand for 30 days, which the county currently has. However, the amount of PPE needed is constantly changing based upon the forecasted number of COVID-19 cases. To increase supply, the County will continue securing donations, decontaminating masks for reuse, and partnering with manufacturers to develop innovative solutions.

Robust Contact Tracing Operations

Best Practices: The Center for Health Security at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health estimates 15 contact tracers per 100,000 population are needed.^[13] Estimates from the NGA indicated a range from 4 – 81 contact tracers per 100,000 population are needed based on the level of illness.^[14]

Howard County Current Contact Tracing Capacity: Howard County has 11 staff dedicated solely to contact investigation and contact tracing, and 15 staff dedicated to outbreak investigation.

Goal: While 45 contact tracers is the initial goal based on the estimated need per 100,000, we believe we will exceed this goal. The Health Department will eventually have more than 60 contact tracers available.

As Governor Hogan continues to move through the phases of the Maryland Strong Roadmap to Recovery, County Executive Ball will use HoCo RISE to...

- Balance state guidelines with what is best for Howard County, including keeping restrictions as needed
- Take a phased approach to reopening government safely, following the recommendations of the internal **HoCo RISE Working Group**
- Provide guidance to non-governmental entities, as needed
- Use the HoCo RISE metrics to ensure the timeline laid out by Governor Hogan is appropriate for Howard County

Additionally, the internal **HoCo RISE Working Group** is in the process of developing guidance to assist county departments with safely bringing back employees and reopening government facilities.

HoCo RISE is also focused on long-term recovery, including but not limited to the following initiatives...

- Rental Assistance and Eviction Relief
- Job Training
- Behavioral Health Resources
- Food access
- Business Support

APPENDIX D: QR Codes for Websites



[Atlanta's Affordable Housing](#)



[Atlanta's 'Simply Get There'](#)



[BMC Recovery Dashboard](#)



[Howard County CARES ACT Dashboard](#)



[Internet For All Seattle Resolution](#)



[Internet Seattle Report](#)



[Maryland Family Network](#)



[MD Think](#)



[TX Childcare Tools](#)

