



Board of Supervisors Memorandum

September 20, 2022

**Regional Prosperity Task Force to Address Poverty, Improve Opportunity,
and Create Community Wealth**

Background

On April 19, 2022, the City of Tucson's Mayor and Council heard a presentation from Bonnie Bazata, Pima County's [Ending Poverty Now](#) Program Manager, on the issue of poverty in the City and County and the impact of the pandemic. After the presentation, Mayor and Council voted in favor of creating a City/County poverty task force to better understand the issue and develop recommendations to include both a long-term focus to move people out of poverty, as well as short-term actions. On June 7, the Board of Supervisors heard a similar presentation from Ms. Bazata. The Board requested that staff return with more details about the purpose of the proposed task force, involve other cities and towns and tribes on the task force, and consider including the Pima Association of Governments (PAG) as the convener or participant. This memorandum addresses the Board's request and presents a formal proposal for the task force, its mission, its makeup, and next steps.

Problem

Like most communities, Pima County and the City of Tucson have individuals and families who are unable to afford basic necessities, resulting in homelessness, hunger, lack of health and education, and incarceration. Initial data shows the pandemic had an unequal impact across income levels, educational attachment, race, ethnicity and gender. In addition to the moral and social equity cost to those living in poverty, there is a large financial cost borne by the community to provide emergency and crisis management services, as well as unrealized economic and workforce gains. Research shows that that certain policies and investments not only directly assist those in need, but also reduce costs to the community as a whole and return greater long term value. This is especially so when focused on families with children, and in particular single mothers and families of color.

Multiple efforts to address early education, workforce development, affordable housing, homelessness, health and criminal justice are underway across the region. As these are related to poverty, they should be addressed in a consolidated manner through a strategic and tactical framework, realigning limited resources to maximize gain. Many existing efforts focus on alleviating the suffering of those in poverty. While motivated by compassion and often effective in their narrow goal, they are not enough to move people out of poverty. This is not an argument to reduce the safety net, but to use this opportunity to think and plan for the longer-term with the focus on breaking the cycle of poverty. In the context of a food bank, this is analogous to "shortening the line" while continuing to meet the basic needs for food.

Within this framework, strategic initiatives could be aimed at addressing the root causes of barriers preventing individuals from achieving generational opportunities and wealth, thereby providing long-term sustainable solutions. Tactical initiatives are also needed to provide short-term solutions to address immediate needs and crisis situations until such time that the benefits from longer-term strategic solutions can be realized.

The Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors

Re: **Regional Prosperity Task Force to Address Poverty, Improve Opportunity, and Create Community Wealth**

September 20, 2022

Page 2

While we still have a lot to learn about the impact of the pandemic, it is clear that it has overall, further disadvantaged low income families, impacted student learning, strained our health care system, and shuttered or stressed local businesses. The Federal Reserve recently issued a report on the effects of COVID-19 on low- to moderate-income people and communities and the entities serving them. Across almost all categories, half the respondents estimated it will take one to three years to return to pre-pandemic conditions. Almost a quarter of respondents noted that it would take four or more years for housing stability to return to pre-pandemic conditions. Now is the time to put long-lasting policies in place that help our most vulnerable families move out of poverty, which will have significant payback years and generations ahead, not only for these families, but for our region as a whole.

Proposed Mission of Task Force (Phase 1)

The formation of a Regional Prosperity Task Force is proposed as Phase 1 of this overall effort.

The Task Force's mission could be to recommend a limited set of regional policies for adoption or adaptation by local and tribal governments that will guide long-term efforts to strategically address generational poverty, improve opportunity, and create community wealth, while also tactically addressing the immediate needs of those currently experiencing poverty.

Pima County, City of Tucson, and other partner jurisdiction staff, with input from experts and practitioners, will draft an initial list of policies for the Task Force to review, discuss and refine with community input. The focus will be on evidence-based policy options that have a high return on investment. The focus will also be on policies that can guide implementation at the local level, as opposed to the State or Federal level. For example, income tax related credits are extremely effective at reducing poverty, but local governments in Arizona do not have the legal authority to levy income taxes.

At the conclusion of the Task Force, the governing bodies for the County, cities, towns and tribes could choose from a menu of Task Force recommended policies and adopt those in full or adapt them to the unique needs of their community. Addressing poverty should not be a one size fits all approach. In addition, some policies may be more effective when implemented in conjunction with other policies.

To the extent possible, each policy should contain both strategic and tactical elements to address causal, long-term issues, as well as provide short-term relief from the effects of poverty.

Drawing from recent research, staff will likely recommend policies focused on 1) ensuring the availability of jobs that will economically support a household, 2) providing an effective social safety net, and 3) building individual and community assets. These areas provide the most opportunity to break the cycle of poverty and contribute to growing the wealth and prosperity of the overall region.

The Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors

Re: **Regional Prosperity Task Force to Address Poverty, Improve Opportunity, and Create Community Wealth**

September 20, 2022

Page 3

Sample Policies

Below are two sample policies for purposes of illustration only. Neither of these examples are intended to supplant policy options informed by the proposed Task Force, experts and practitioners.

Integrate affordable and multifamily housing options within middle to higher income neighborhoods and areas planned for future growth.

Strategic element: Research shows that the neighborhood you grow up in has a significant impact on your future wealth and well-being, and Pima County has lower rates of upward mobility compared to other regions across the nation. Deconcentrating poverty, reducing segregation, and increasing social connectedness, improves opportunity and provides lasting family and community benefit.

Tactical element: Provides housing to those unable to afford.

Support and invest in high quality early childhood education, especially for children from economically disadvantaged families, children of color, and dual language learners.

Strategic element: Children with access to quality early childhood education are more likely to graduate from high school, have higher incomes, be healthier, and less involved in the criminal justice system. These investments also provide lasting benefits to families, schools, employers, taxpayers and the community.

Tactical element: Children are better prepared for Kindergarten, health and cognitive problems are caught and addressed earlier, and parents/other caregivers have the ability to work or further their education and training.

Each policy statement would be accompanied by an explanation of its value based on research and applicability to our region, and framed within the scope of local government authority.

Relation to Affordable Housing Task Force/Future Commission

The County's Affordable Housing Task Force concluded their recommendations, which focused on specific action items regarding organization and implementation, the majority of which are directed at increasing the supply and access to affordable housing, which is a critical need, but will not in and of itself move people out of poverty. The Task Force did, however, also articulate the goal of de-concentrating affordable housing. Unlike the other recommendations, this goal is a core policy recommendation directly related to moving people out of poverty, and reiterated above as a sample policy for consideration by the Regional Prosperity Task Force. Even though, ideally, policy comes first and then programs and actions, we cannot put everything on hold, especially when there are immediate actions the County could undertake in this area. This is similarly true for the County's Pima Early Education Program, which is rooted in a wealth of research proving the benefits of investing in early childhood education.

The Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors

Re: **Regional Prosperity Task Force to Address Poverty, Improve Opportunity, and Create Community Wealth**

September 20, 2022

Page 4

Regarding the Affordable Housing Task Force recommendations, the Board continued the item to the October 18, 2022 meeting and directed staff to consider Board input specific to the make-up of the future Housing Commission.

Task Force Membership

It is proposed that the Task Force be made up of 12 members as follows. The members do not need to be experts in poverty, but should represent and regularly consult with the local governing body that appoints them. Each jurisdiction could host public meetings of the Task Force in order to facilitate input from those communities.

Pima County – 2 members, 1 appointed by Chair of the Board, 1 by County Administrator

City of Tucson – 2 members, 1 appointed by the Mayor, 1 by City Manager

City of South Tucson – 1 member appointed by City

Town of Marana – 1 member appointed by Town,

Town of Oro Valley – 1 member appointed by Town,

Town of Sahuarita – 1 member appointed by Town

Tohono O’odham Nation – 1 member appointed by Chairman

Pascua Yaqui Tribe – 1 member appointed by Chairman

Pima Association Governments - 1 member appointed by PAG

State of Arizona – 1 member appointed by the Governor (policy level/related department)

The final membership of such a Task Force would be ratified by the Board of Supervisors as well as the City of Tucson Mayor and Council, as has occurred with other joint committees.

PAG’s Executive Director, Farhad Moghimi, was consulted regarding the suggestion by members of the Board of Supervisors that PAG convene this Task Force. Mr. Moghimi prefers that the City and County convene the Task Force while ensuring regional representation because the nature of PAG’s grant funding is such that grantors must approve additional activities and introduces additional time delays.

Timeline

It is proposed that the Task Force begin meeting in November 2022, and conclude its work by May 2023.

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| April 19 | City of Tucson M&C approved creation of a joint city/county task force |
| June 7 | Pima County BOS discussed and directed staff to return with more details |
| Sept 20 | BOS agenda item to approve task force |
| October | Appoint members to task force |
| Nov-Dec | Task force holds two meetings, initial meeting and a second meeting to receive the Ms. Bazata’s Understanding Poverty training |
| Jan-May | Task force meets regularly and concludes by May. |

The Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors

Re: **Regional Prosperity Task Force to Address Poverty, Improve Opportunity, and Create Community Wealth**

September 20, 2022

Page 5

Staff and Task Force Support

County and City employees will serve as staff to the task force, with the opportunity for staff from any of the other member jurisdictions to collaborate. Staff will:

- Prepare for task force meetings;
- Research and develop policy options for a number of policy areas at the strategic and tactical level for task force consideration;
- Engage researchers, practitioners, and those experiencing poverty particular to each policy area;
- Include communities across Pima County, including unincorporated communities;
- Provide regular updates to related City/County committees and seek their input; and
- Consider the need for and most effective use of a cost of poverty study to inform Phase 2.

Bonnie Bazata, Ending Poverty Now Program Manager and local expert on poverty issues, will be the staff lead for Pima County, with support provided by the County Administrator's Office, Community and Workforce Development, and other departments with subject matter expertise (Health Department, Behavioral Health, Economic Development, Justice Services, etc.)

Cost Estimate/Budget for Phase 1

There may be need in certain policy areas for expert input from those requiring compensation. In addition, there may be a need for facilitation services. Staff is proposing a budget not to exceed \$50,000, to be co-funded with the City of Tucson. If staff recommends the development of a separate cost of poverty study, this budget may need to be increased.

Phase 2

At the conclusion of Phase 1, County staff will organize the Task Force recommended policies into a formal Board Policy for adoption by the Board of Supervisors. Ideally, city, town and tribal councils will also adopt a version of the policies that meet the needs of their communities. In Phase 2, City of Tucson and Pima County staff will assess current programs and services within the framework of the newly adopted policies, and recommend re-alignment, the development of metrics, and other actions to ensure the policies are implemented as intended. This will likely include periodic community feedback sessions, and a process for City and County departments to routinely consider impacts of their activities on low-income families with a social equity lens. It is anticipated that this could lead to the recommendation of substantial changes to current programming as the focus shifts to moving people out of poverty.

The Honorable Chair and Members, Pima County Board of Supervisors

Re: **Regional Prosperity Task Force to Address Poverty, Improve Opportunity, and Create Community Wealth**

September 20, 2022

Page 6

Recommendation

It is recommended that:

1. The Board of Supervisors approve the formation of a Regional Prosperity Task Force as detailed in this memorandum,
2. The Chair of the Board and County Administrator make appointments to the Task Force as soon as possible,
3. The County Administrator, in coordination with the Tucson City Manager, solicit appointments to the Task Force by cities, towns, tribes, PAG and the State for ratification by the Board and Tucson Mayor and Council, and
4. County staff be directed to begin working with City of Tucson staff, experts and practitioners to research and develop policy options, and prepare for initiation of the Task Force.

Sincerely,



Jan Lesher
County Administrator

JKL/mp – August 31, 2022

- c: Michael Ortega, City of Tucson Manager
Francisco Garcia, MD, MPH, Deputy County Administrator & Chief Medical Officer
Carmine DeBonis, Jr., Deputy County Administrator
Steve Homes, Deputy County Administrator
Dan Sullivan, Director, Community and Workforce Development
Andrew Flagg, Deputy Director, Community and Workforce Development
Bonnie Bazata, Ending Poverty Now Program Manager
Nicole Fyffe, Senior Advisor, County Administrator's Office
Yves Khawam, Senior Advisor, County Administrator's Office