



# ALIGNING IN CRISIS: FINDING SHARED PURPOSE

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The triple crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020 economic downturn, and the ongoing impact of structural racism is encouraging organizations to work across sectors to meet residents' most pressing needs. With the recent influx of federal funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), cities, counties, and states have an unprecedented opportunity to reshape communities in ways that emphasize equity and resilience, addressing not only the effects of the pandemic, but also larger, systemic shortcomings that allow societal inequities to persist.

To fully maximize these investments, leaders from health care, public health, and social services can continue to leverage learnings from the past year to rebuild from the triple crisis; implement a comprehensive vision; and lay the foundation for an equitable, thriving, and sustainable future.

## KEY LESSONS FROM BALTIMORE HEALTH CORPS

The city of Baltimore, in partnership with the Rockefeller Foundation, articulated and is implementing a comprehensive vision for a more equitable future that addresses both the COVID-19 crisis and the challenge of unemployment. By defining a shared purpose, or "a mutual understanding and commitment to a vision and priority outcomes,"<sup>1</sup> the partners created the Baltimore Health Corps (BHC)<sup>2</sup> to employ residents experiencing a furlough, unemployment, or underemployment as community health workers to provide critical support services to their communities. Given their intimate knowledge of and connection to the community, BHC members were recruited from areas of the city most impacted by the pandemic. BHC's decision to (1) use equitable practices for recruitment, (2) create jobs with long-term career opportunities, (3) expand COVID-19 contact tracing availability, and (4) provide care coordination services to Baltimore residents,<sup>2</sup> demonstrates shared commitment to redress both immediate challenges and longer-term inequities in the Baltimore community.

<sup>1</sup> Georgia Health Policy Center. (2021). A framework for aligning sectors. Retrieved from [https://ghpc.gsu.edu/download/aligning-systems-for-health-a-framework-for-aligning-sectors/?ind=1617305979377&filename=1617305977wpdm\\_Aligning%20Systems%20for%20Health%20Glossary.pdf&wpdmdl=4755676&refresh=60ec7b69436731626110825](https://ghpc.gsu.edu/download/aligning-systems-for-health-a-framework-for-aligning-sectors/?ind=1617305979377&filename=1617305977wpdm_Aligning%20Systems%20for%20Health%20Glossary.pdf&wpdmdl=4755676&refresh=60ec7b69436731626110825)

<sup>2</sup> Roby, D. H., Sehgal, N. J., Pope, E., Seale, M., & Starr, E. (2021). Tackling the dual economic and public health crises caused by COVID-19 in Baltimore: Early lessons from the Baltimore Health Corps pilot. Retrieved from <https://www.rockefellerfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Baltimore-Health-Corps-Pilot-Early-Lessons-Full-Report.pdf>

Creating shared purpose is often preceded by a difficult challenge or circumstance.<sup>3</sup> COVID-19 and the economic downturn acted as catalysts for partnering organizations to combine resources and create BHC. BHC partners built upon existing relationships and aligned their efforts to strategize and mobilize quickly toward achieving shared purpose. By expanding the capacity and scope of their work, BHC was able to meet the immediate needs of Baltimore residents by creating short-term employment solutions for those most in need.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, BHC was able to direct energy and resources to long-term community investments that allow for community development and growth in the form of various training programs. For example, individuals who did not meet the requirements for hire through BHC were referred to an occupational training program which, when completed, will not only expand their skillset but also direct them to an alternative career path.<sup>2</sup> Supportive services for recruits and employees of BHC included career navigation services, legal services, and behavioral support services.

Investments such as these are critical to ensuring communities not only rebuild from the effects of the crisis but also thrive in ways that are equitable and sustainable. Those looking to maximize their ARPA funding might consider leveraging cross-sector collaborations similar to BHC that have established and articulated a shared purpose to create powerful strategies toward restoration and equity, utilizing resources to lift communities in ways that provide lasting change.



### Tips for Modeling Shared Purpose

Reflecting on lessons from BHC, states and local governments can model BHC's experience with aligning their shared purpose by:

- Building upon existing relationships and aligning efforts to act on shared purpose.
- Addressing the immediate needs of the community while also looking for ways to invest in long-term community infrastructure and capital to support development and growth.
- Centering equity in all cross-sector collaboration activities.

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<sup>3</sup> Aligning Systems for Health. (2020). Making aligning work: National experts reflect on purpose, data, financing, and governance. Retrieved from <https://ghpc.gsu.edu/download/making-aligning-work-national-experts-reflect-on-purpose-data-financing-and-governance/>

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