

ACT AUSTIN COMING TOGETHER

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March 30, 2022

AUSTIN FORWARD. TOGETHER. 2022 QUARTER 1

THE AUSTIN COMMUNITY PUBLISHED ITS FIRST QUALITY-OF-LIFE PLAN CALLED *AUSTIN FORWARD. TOGETHER. (AFT)* IN 2018. THIS QUARTERLY PUBLICATION DESCRIBES HOW AUSTIN COMING TOGETHER (ACT) IS SUPPORTING THE COMMUNITY TO IMPLEMENT *AFT* AND OTHER EFFORTS.



How the community is tackling barriers to equity toward a healthy, prosperous future

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COMMUNITY CAN GUIDE THE WAY **PAGE 3** | SUPPORTING PLAN IMPLEMENTATION YEAR FOUR **PAGE 4**
 A BEACON OF HOPE **PAGE 7**



Special thanks to these
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Since 2010, Austin Coming Together (ACT) has facilitated collaboration to improve education and economic development outcomes in Chicago's Austin neighborhood.

Today, we serve a network of 50+ organizations committed to improving the quality of life in the Austin community. Our strategic plan is called Thrive 2025 and outlines how we will mobilize our resources to achieve four impact goals by the year 2025: Quality Early Learning, Safe Neighborhoods, Living Wage Careers, and Stable Housing Markets.

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We're hiring!
AustinComingTogether.org

ACT MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

A House in Austin

Academy of Scholastic
Achievement

Austin Childcare Providers
Network

Austin Community Family
Center

Austin Weekly News
(Growing Community
Media)

Be Strong Families

Beat the Streets Chicago
Because I Care

Bethel New Life

Beyond Hunger
BUILD Inc.

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Erikson Institute

Friends of the Children

Friendship Community
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Greater West Town
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Development Project

Housing Forward

i.c.stars

IFF

Institute for Nonviolence
Chicago

Jane Addams Resource
Corporation

Kids First Chicago

KRA Westside American
Job Center

Legal Aid Chicago (fka LAF)

Manufacturing Renaissance

Mary Shyrese Daycare

Maryville Academy

Mercy Housing Lakefront

New Moms

OAI, Inc.

Oak Park Regional Housing
Center

Open Books

PCC Community Wellness
Center

Project Exploration

Renaissance Social Services,
Inc.

Sarah's Inn

South Austin Neighborhood
Association

St. Joseph Services

St. Leonard's Ministries

Stone Community
Development Corporation

The Catalyst Schools

The Journey Forward

The North Avenue District,
Inc.

Towers of Excellence

UIC Jane Addams College of
Social Work

VOCEL

Westside Health Authority

West Side Forward

Worldvision

Youth Guidance

Community can guide the way

By Darnell Shields

*Executive Director,
Austin Coming Together*

We can no longer wait to address racial disparities. Minority communities like Austin are struggling with the compounded impact of decades of disinvestment and recent crises, but fortunately, Chicago is taking steps to once again prioritize equity.

Mayor Lightfoot and the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) declared racism a public health crisis in 2021 after data showed a 9.2-year life expectancy gap between Black and non-Black Chicagoans that had increased in the past 10 years.

Then, to build on CDPH's Healthy Chicago 2025 and to continue improving anti-racist policies, \$9.6 million in COVID-19 relief funding was allocated to enact the Healthy

Chicago Equity Zones, “six geographic areas covering the entire city that will be led by regional organizations” to “create community-based stakeholder coalitions to develop targeted strategies to improve community and individual wellness.”

The lead for the west region of the Healthy Chicago Equity Zones is Rush University Medical Center and West Side United who are working to reduce the racial life expectancy gap by allowing community expertise to guide the training of health professionals in community engagement.

COMMUNITY-LED IS BEST

In addition to focusing on health disparities, another focus should be on empowering Austin and other heavily impacted communities. When people feel heard, they have power. That power then becomes motivation to get and stay involved.

One massive effort centered around empowerment is Austin's first quality-of-life plan called *Austin Forward. Together. (AFT)*.

AFT is a four-time award-winning roadmap for transformation created by and for Austin to address barriers to quality of life by the end of 2024 by successfully implementing 84 total actions across seven issue areas. The plan serves as a tool for building equity, as evidenced by its Equity with Impact Award from The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning, and the Opportunity & Empowerment Award from the American Planning Association of Illinois.

An *AFT* action that shows how effective even a small segment of leaders can have when they come together is the Austin Eats Initiative. As a collection of more than twenty groups, Austin Eats is strengthening Austin's food access infrastructure by supporting the growth of food pantries, emergency food distribution, community gardens, education, culinary entrepreneurship, and more.

The plan and the projects stemming from it are prime examples of just how powerful community-led investment can be, especially for an area as historically disenfranchised as Austin.

EQUITY STARTS WITH EMPOWERMENT

Austin Coming Together (ACT) was chosen to steward the *AFT* plan, from creation through implementation, due to our experience and expertise incorporating the perspectives of community members into our work.

ACT has advocated for systemic and equitable solutions since its inception in 2010, but now that the community has its own concrete vision in the form of the *AFT* plan, Austin is better positioned to take on the deeply rooted causes of the racial disparities it is facing.

In early 2021, ACT activated its Policy division of the Strategic Initiatives department. The Policy team draws on insights from ACT's Austin Community Hub and the *AFT* plan to advance systemic change through capacity-building and organizing.

In its first year, the Policy team has met with Austin residents and stakeholders to identify which structural barriers are most urgent, researched the policy landscape in Chicago to identify opportunities that will address these barriers, and advocated for racial equity and justice within the city's policy development processes.

As a lifelong resident and business owner, I see the immeasurable potential for Austin to be a thriving community and am dedicated to doing all I can to help achieve it.

Austin is on the path toward health equity because we are seeding collaboration and leveraging community-driven solutions along the way. However, we must ensure that new citywide policies are informed by the lessons of the past and fully integrated with racial equity.

We have made some strides, but it won't be until access to resources becomes equitable that we will see long-term change. ■



Austin Forward. Together. Focal Projects Maps

Focal Projects

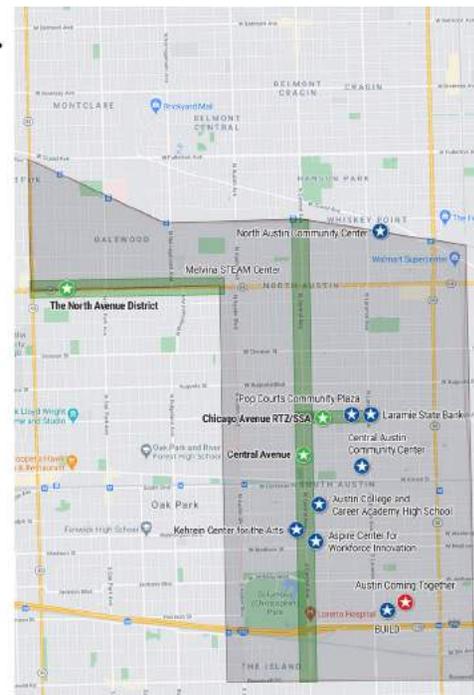
- ★ Austin College and Career Academy High School (previously listed as ACCA)
- ★ Aspire Center for Workforce Innovation
- ★ BUILD
- ★ Central Austin Community Center
- ★ Kehrein Center for the Arts
- ★ Laramie State Bank
- ★ North Austin Community Center
- ★ Pop Courts Community Plaza

Commercial Corridors

- ★ Chicago Avenue
- ★ Central Avenue
- ★ The North Avenue District

Community Anchor

- ★ Austin Coming Together



ACT awards over \$150K

Supporting Plan Implementation Year Four

Austin’s quality-of-life plan, called *Austin Forward. Together (AFT)*, is a set of goals created by and for the community designed to address 23 strategies with 84 total actions across 7 Issue Areas between 2019 and 2024: Community Narrative, Education, Housing, Youth Empowerment, Economic Development, Public Safety, and Civic Engagement.

Today, there are more than 45 dedicated volunteer members across seven Task Forces, one for each Issue Area. In partnership with ACT, these Task Forces have signed on over 70 unique organizations as implementation partners and together have initiated more than 40% of the plan’s total actions so far!

One of the many ways ACT helps catalyze local development is by working to attract investments in the Austin community as a whole. To that end, ACT has secured funds from several sources that desire to support *AFT*.

In 2018, ACT’s ability to apply community-driven solutions to foster economic opportunity resulted in a \$1 million Vital Communities grant from The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation. Part of that investment was utilized to support necessary infrastructure and the remainder was allocated to ACT Core Members implementing activities in the plan.

We are proud to announce these nine organizations were selected during this last funding cycle, for which \$150,131 total funds will be distributed.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The goal of the Economic Development Task Force is to create economic revitalization in Austin and by Austin. We will support new and existing local businesses, entrepreneurs, and the workforce; improve our commercial corridors; and attract new investment to build a stronger, more dynamic local economy.

FUNDED ACTION: Expand and support local resources like bootcamps and apprenticeships in high demand economic sectors.

\$12,500

will support **New Moms’** job training and job-readiness program that includes career planning and coaching on critical life and parenting topics for young, unemployed women ages 16-24 in Austin, many of whom face homelessness or have dropped out of school. The program has been in place since 1996, and over the past 5 years, has placed 378 young moms into permanent employment, of which 57% have retained employment for 12+ months, and 70% increased their educational levels while enrolled.

NEW MOMS
HOMES · JOBS · STRONG FAMILIES



MANUFACTURING RENAISSANCE

Building Partnerships. Creating Future

\$16,891

will be allocated to **Manufacturing Renaissance (MR)**

for their Young Manufacturers Association Career Pathway Services program that offers ten weeks of technical training and career development for Austin residents aged 18-29 to start a living-wage career in the high-demand manufacturing industry. Participants also receive professionalism training, job interview coordination and placement, job retention supports, and on-the-job coaching.

Successful YMA Grads



Anthony Holman

Sharnia Walker



JANE
ADDAMS
RESOURCE
CORPORATION

FUNDED ACTION: Build a new Manufacturing Training Center in Austin.

\$14,000

will help **Jane Addams Resource Corporation (JARC)** continue their manufacturing training programming. JARC’s training in welding and computer numerical controls means more residents, many of whom are justice-involved or experiencing housing insecurity, can increase their capacity to provide for their families and invest in their community.



PUBLIC SAFETY

The goal of the Public Safety Task Force is to collaborate and create programs that increase a sense of safety, community and quality of life to build a healthy and resilient neighborhood.

FUNDED ACTION: Increase restorative justice activities in the community.

\$22,500 will allow **BUILD Inc.** to make more Restorative Justice (RJ) activities available to Austin. Creating a greater sense of community among residents will mitigate conflict, address injustice and trauma, deter crime and violence, and generate resident buy-in for RJ, a philosophy that focuses on repairing harm with value placed on empathy, learning, collaboration, mediation, and the ability to have brave conversations. Funds will also help recruit and train youth, residents, and community partners as Restorative Justice Community Ambassadors/Advocates and Circle Keepers.

BUILD
HOPE · LIVES · FUTURES

FUNDED ACTION: Engage and connect neighbors.



\$16,500 will allow the **Institute for Nonviolence Chicago** and Hope Community Church to expand their public safety work. Funds will help train residents in Nonviolence Principles and Steps to better prepare them for peacekeeping activities and to build relationships with street outreach workers and high-risk individuals, encouraging greater inter-generational social cohesion and helping break the cycle of violence.

EDUCATION

The goal of the Education Task Force is for our local educational system and partners to provide the services, opportunities and support to help all our students stay on track, enrich their education and serve their needs, from early childhood through high school, to job and career readiness.

FUNDED ACTION: Improve the early learning environment in Austin by helping providers become accredited and more deeply prepared for child development.

\$20,000 will help **Austin Childcare Providers Network** provide academic assistance for ten early care professionals as they pursue higher education to become eligible for child care credentials.



COMMUNITY NARRATIVE

The goal of the Community Narrative Task Force is to revitalize the image and spirit of Austin by promoting assets such as our historic housing, creating a healthy community and building a more robust environment for local arts and culture.

FUNDED ACTION: Build a sense of community through activities such as creating and maintaining community gardens.



\$16,740 will fund **South Austin Neighborhood Association (SANA)**'s Veterans Peace Garden; monthly meetings of the Austin Veterans Community Organization; the Farm-To-Table Summer program; and the Austin Garden Collective. SANA helps create and maintain environments that foster health and wellness through events that engage residents in safe green spaces.



FUNDED ACTION: Bridge the gap between residents' experiences and how they are reflected by media outlets.

\$16,000 will support the expansion of the Austin Has The Mic (AHTM) training program, a collaboration between **Westside Health Authority** and BUILD. AHTM will teach 20 Austin youth the basics of broadcasting, videography, photography, and journalism in order to cultivate strong relationships and amplify resident voices through multiple mass media platforms. The program empowers youth to lead social media campaigns that include a weekly podcast to promote and discuss issues like social injustice in Austin.



YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

The goal of the Youth Empowerment Task Force is for Austin to have healthier and more engaged youth who are able to reach their full potential.

FUNDED ACTION: Create paths for youth interactions with mentors and role models.

\$15,000 will support staffing for **St. Joseph Services'** Youth Mentoring Program at St. Angela's Catholic School which provides a safe mentoring environment to teach youth the crucial life, social, and emotional skills needed to cope with trauma, peacefully resolve conflicts and sustain positive behaviors. Plus, successful Austin professionals are brought in as guest speakers to inspire youth.





AUSTIN
FORWARD.
TOGETHER.
Plan Leaders

Community Narrative

TASK FORCE CHAIRS

Briana Shields
Briana Janeé Arts

Kenneth Varner
Healthy Schools Campaign

Dearra Williams
Community Resident

STRATEGY LEADS

Lasondra Kern
Community Resident

Suzanne McBride
Austin Talks

Michael Romain
Austin Weekly News

Alicia Plomin
Austin Coming Together

Cindy Schneider
Spaces-n-Places

Economic Development

TASK FORCE CHAIRS

Jerrod Williams
South Austin Neighborhood Association

Heather Sattler
Community Development Consultant

STRATEGY LEADS

Erica Staley
Manufacturing Renaissance

Emily Peters
Jane Addams Resource Corporation

Tina Augustus
Austin Chamber of Commerce

Roxanne Charles
West Side Forward

Education

TASK FORCE CHAIRS

Crystal Bell
Ella Flagg Young Elementary School (retired)

Charles Anderson
Michele Clark High School

STRATEGY LEADS

Ruth Kimble
Austin Childcare Providers Network

Madelyn James
Austin Childcare Providers Network

Pam Price
Chicago Public Schools

Natasha Dunn
VOCEL

Cata Truss
Community Resident

Sean Schindl
Kids First Chicago

Housing

TASK FORCE CHAIRS

Athena Williams
West Cook Homeownership Center

Allison McGowan
Community Resident

STRATEGY LEADS

Shirley Fields
Hunters Realty

Rosie Dawson
Westside Health Authority

Athena Williams
West Cook Homeownership Center

Public Safety

TASK FORCE CHAIRS

Bradly Johnson
BUILD Inc.

Marilyn Pitchford
Heartland Alliance

STRATEGY LEADS

Adam Alonso
BUILD Inc.

Bradly Johnson
BUILD Inc.

Edwina Hamilton
BUILD Inc.

Gina Young
Catholic Charities

Bertha Purnell
Mothers On A Mission28

Jose Abonce
The Policing Project

Ruby Taylor
Taproots, Inc.

Youth Empowerment

TASK FORCE CHAIRS

Carmen Scott-Boria
BUILD Inc.

D'elegance Lane
Community Stakeholder

STRATEGY LEADS

Deonna Hart
BUILD Inc.

Gina Young
Catholic Charities

Aisha Oliver
Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

Helen Slade
Territory NFP

Civic Engagement

TASK FORCE CHAIRS

Deborah Williams-Thurmond
Habilitative Systems Inc.

STRATEGY LEADS

Arnold Bearden
South Austin Neighborhood Association (SANA)

Crystal Gardner
Community Resident

Sharif Walker
Bethel New Life

INTERESTED IN JOINING AN IMPLEMENTATION TASK FORCE?

Contact ACT's Lead Organizer, Ethan Ramsay at 630.474.4016 or eramsey@austincomingtogether.org for more information



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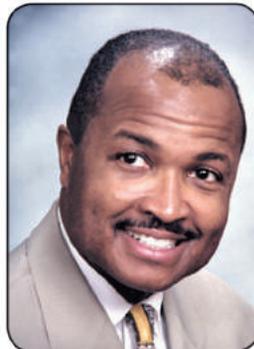
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A beacon of hope

By Alicia Plomin

*Marketing & Development Manager,
Austin Coming Together*

Robert Emmet Elementary School in Chicago's Austin community has been a bitter reminder of disinvestment in Austin since it closed in 2013. But that will soon be changing.

Austin is an incredibly resilient community that is leading its own vision for a neighborhood renaissance. An initiative born of the *Austin Forward. Together.* (AFT) quality-of-life plan, called ASPIRE, is expected to spur economic growth.

The ASPIRE team is preparing to break ground on one of its key development projects, the Aspire Center for Workforce Innovation, in 2022. This will mark the beginning of a large-scale effort that will create conditions for resident empowerment, health, prosperity, and happiness.

ADDRESSING AUSTIN'S NEEDS

Madison and Central is one of the most important intersections in Austin. The architecture and history of Madison Street make the site a gateway to Chicago, and Central Avenue is a spine that connects Austin's many smaller neighborhoods. Therefore, developing or enhancing existing assets in this densely populated area directly reflects the community's needs.

ASPIRE is led by Austin Coming Together (ACT), Westside Health Authority (WHA), and By the Hand Club for Kids (BTH). It is a set of Initiative Projects that includes a new state-of-the-art early learning, health and recreation center called The Aspire Education & Wellness Campus; new programs and support to increase enrollment at the Austin College and Career Academy; renovation of

the vacant Emmet School into the Aspire Center for Workforce Innovation; and Aspire Housing, a multi-tiered approach to provide homeownership assistance, plus new or renovated units for sale.

As part of AFT, ASPIRE has been supported by the community for years. In fact, the Aspire Center for Workforce Innovation is one of two specific physical development focal projects identified in the AFT plan.

ANCHORING SYSTEMIC CHANGE

By being part of the collective AFT vision for a powerful and highly collaborative community, ASPIRE will build the capacity of Austin to create a high quality cradle-to-career educational system and a revitalized economy by and for Austin. Through its development, the location is primed to become the physical embodiment of "collective impact" and a vital community anchor for systemic change.

"The value of working together has been proven. An Austin renaissance is underway, sprouting from a well-tended foundation of existing plans and assets," said Darnell Shields, Executive Director of ACT.

In 2020, ASPIRE was one of six finalists for the \$10 million Chicago Prize grant from The Pritzker Traubert Foundation and although not chosen as the winner, the initiative still received nearly \$800K in planning and pre-development support from the foundation and other partners. The spotlight on ASPIRE also helped to generate deep commitment towards its realization from the community and technical assistance partners like IFF and the Lamar Johnson Collaborative.

As the AFT plan made progress and grew awareness of ASPIRE's ability to add tremendous momentum to existing efforts in Austin, the Aspire Center for Workforce Innovation was prioritized due to its potential to catalyze the development of ASPIRE's full set of Initiative Projects.



The Aspire Center for Workforce Innovation is a massive, long-term investment that will build area capacity to:

Train over 4,900 workers in programs that will increase their ability to earn a living wage over a period of 5 years.

Create 100 new living wage jobs within the first five years and anchor \$28 million in investment to the targeted geography of the community area.

Increase the income of 500 Austinites and help 250 more acquire access to capital for business and/or property ownership by the year 2030.

The Aspire Center for Workforce Innovation will transform the abandoned Emmet School into a state-of-the-art, multi-use facility that will include a:

- high tech manufacturing training center for working-age youth and adults
- business incubator for startups
- restaurant with indoor/outdoor dining and social events
- financial opportunity center
- new retail bank through BMO Harris Bank
- selection of other neighborhood building businesses

AUSTIN'S HUB FOR RESOURCES

In conjunction with the organizations located within the Aspire Center, ACT's

Austin Community Hub and expansive member network, residents will access integrated services like income supports, financial coaching, job readiness training, and employment services to help them become financially stable and connect to the economic mainstream.

So far, \$15.62 million has been raised toward the \$28 million needed to actualize the Center. Construction will begin soon and is anticipated to be completed by 2023. The Aspire Center will open later that year or early 2024, along with supporting spaces for Austin residents, and will transform the corner of Madison and Central into a symbol of Austin's potential rather than its challenges. ■



We care about **AUSTIN.**
We care about **OUR CITY.**
We care about **EQUITY.**

AUSTIN Cares

Chicago's Austin community is full of incredibly passionate individuals and groups who truly care for one another. It has beautiful architecture, housing stock, and an immense potential for growth. But it is also struggling now more than ever from health inequities ranging from job loss to food insecurity.

Austin Coming Together (ACT) has worked alongside our 50+ member network to serve and care for Austin families since 2010. **In the last year, we have supported the equitable distribution of vaccine to Austin that resulted in:**

Show how much you care.

Join the **#AustinCares** campaign today!



50K+
masks distributed



60%
of Austin's resident population fully vaccinated



10 recurring vaccination sites
5 temporary vaccination sites



43+
one-time vaccination events



AUSTIN COMING TOGETHER

In order to continue supporting Austin families right now, we need your help. Make an impact where it's needed most!

DONATE ONLINE AT
AustinComingTogether.org/AustinCares