



**COUNTY LEADERSHIP COUNCIL
STRATEGY SESSION**

July 29, 2020 | VIRTUAL

EMERGING STRONGER FROM COVID-19

ECCF COUNTY LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

Summer 2020 Strategy Session Report: Emerging Stronger from COVID-19

On Wednesday, July 29, ECCF's County Leadership Council participated in a **VIRTUAL STRATEGY SESSION** to inform the foundation's future systems work within **FIVE LOCAL SECTORS, CRITICAL TO THE RECOVERY AND REBUILDING** of Essex County communities post COVID-19.



This report is a summary of almost **300 OBSERVATIONS, IDEAS AND EXPERIMENTS** brainstormed in each sector group.

SECTORS EXPLORED:

Education & Learning

Bringing equity into K-12 Education & Learning

Mental Health

Designing a better system for accessing mental health services

Food Security

Working together to create greater access to food

Workforce Development

Creating well-paying jobs that meet post-COVID workforce needs

Climate Resiliency & Environmental Justice

Analyzing changes COVID-19 has brought for climate and land use opportunities

SESSION SUMMARY:

Using The Innovators Compass, an online design thinking guide, CLC members broke into small groups to reflect on critical community needs that emerged and intensified within each sector as a result of COVID-19. **Together, they explored the following questions and brainstormed strategies to better address these needs and serve Essex County in a post COVID-19 world.**

- What people, roles and organizations should be involved in this journey?
- What are the principles that will guide our journey and matter the most?
- What are our observations from the field? What is happening - and why?
- What are the big ideas, future headlines and possibilities that could be our vision?
- What are experiments, prototypes or pilots we can try to start moving forward with agility?

***Responses to the first two questions are summarized below. Responses to all other questions are summarized by sector in the following pages.*



WHO IS INVOLVED?

What people, roles and organizations should be involved in this journey?

- Small and Large Businesses
- Nonprofit Organizations
- Government & Municipalities
- Community Leaders
- Funders
- Healthcare Sector
- Education Sector
- Residents
- Faith Based Community



PRINCIPLES

What are the principles that will guide our journey and matter the most?

Values to Guide Us: Resiliency, Equity, Transparency, Integrity, Courage

Mindsets to Embrace: Systems Thinking, Creativity, Resourcefulness, Inclusive Growth, Long-term Focus



CLIMATE RESILIENCY

Preparing communities for the economic and human impacts of climate change

COVID-19 has underscored our interconnectedness as a community and the urgency to prepare for and prevent future impending crises such as climate resiliency and environmental injustice. As a county that is surrounded by oceans and rivers, we need to invest in long-term climate resiliency planning to minimize the eventual catastrophic impacts to our cities, towns, roads and public transportation. Climate resiliency for all residents is likely our next regional crisis and its impact will not be equitable.

COVID-19 has had some positive ecological outcomes such as the temporary reduction in carbon emissions and a resurgence in outdoor land and space use. How can we continue to support these efforts?

OBSERVATIONS

What are our observations from the field? What is happening and why?

- COVID-19 has shown that rapid change can happen on many fronts including pollution, encouraging people to use sustainable food sources and transportation**
- Climate migration will cause catastrophic impacts on food security, water resources, housing and the economy and will most significantly impact the most marginalized and underserved globally*
- Even though the impact is imminent, climate change/resiliency and environmental justice are less of a focal point today due to COVID-19
- Climate Resiliency is seen as a problem of the wealthy, though the impacts will be most felt by the less resourced and most vulnerable
- Climate organizations and agencies are fragmented across Essex County
- More people are thinking of our interconnectedness globally; climate is not an American problem, it is a worldwide problem
- Climate migration has already begun due to the impacts of COVID-19 and climate change.
- Economically insecure populations tend to live in places that produce more environmental harm
- It is critical to educate and inform the public about the rapidly accelerating impacts of climate change

*Indicates thought was mentioned more than once.

BIG IDEAS

What are the big ideas and possibilities that could lead our vision?

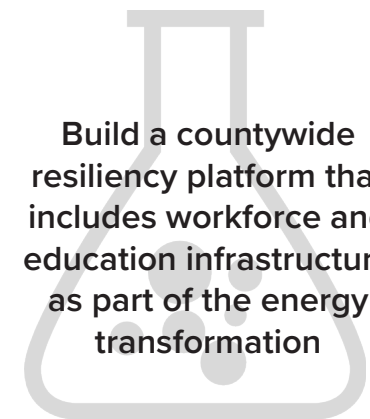
1. Harness the power of philanthropy (both financial resources and technical assistance) for distributed solar, wind and food systems to switch to electric.
2. Advocate for a cabinet-level position for climate resiliency initiatives.
3. Educate youth on the importance of climate resiliency and environmental justice by making it required, engaging and fun.

Other ideas:

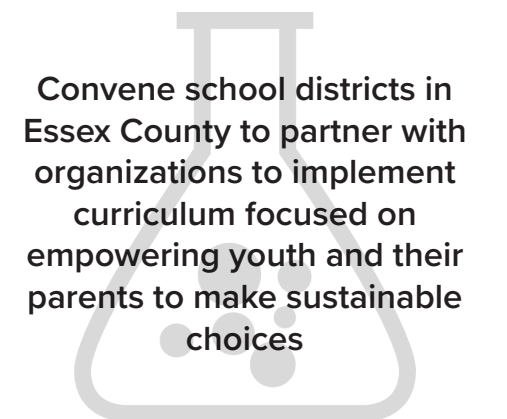
- Educate the community that climate change is real
- Provide government incentives for people to make changes such as rebates, tax discounts and other monetary motivators
- Businesses need to consider environmental impact as part of their business plans
- Harness what we have learned from COVID-19 about the importance of acting now as well as the racial and systemic inequities*
- Reeducate the public regarding how quickly Climate Change will impact us, and how much more significantly than COVID-19, if we do not act now

EXPERIMENTS

What are experiments, prototypes or pilots we can try to start moving forward with agility?



Advocate to have state and federal-led positions on climate resiliency



Other experiments:

- Create and fund a public online platform to house detailed information on sustainable solutions available (electric vehicles, solar panels, community solar, heat pumps, etc) coupled with information about how those solutions can save money and influence greater health outcomes
- Create partnerships between proximate communities that allow for those with land resources (ability to build solar fields) to connect with those that have barriers to entry for clean energy
- ECCF and the major utilities in Essex County partner with community leaders to remove the barriers to access sustainable solutions for low and moderate income communities
- Advocate for a tax on companies and organizations that have large carbon footprint

EDUCATION & LEARNING

Bringing equity into K-12 Education & Learning

COVID-19 has made inequity in education glaringly apparent. During the pandemic, students and families struggled with equitable access to technology, and teachers were challenged with learning environments and platforms that were unable to meet diverse needs. Additionally, over the last six months, students and teachers have accumulated learning debt that now needs to be addressed.

Equity in education requires investing in systems to ensure that every child has an equal chance for success. How can our communities support this goal?

OBSERVATIONS

What are our observations from the field? What is happening and why?

- Schools are struggling with concrete plans for a return to school and there is no consistency in how schools will implement plans across the state
- State dollars for school budgets are in jeopardy and districts are worried about the added expense for COVID-related safety measures
- There are equity issues within schools and districts
- Students who have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are struggling the most
- Teacher aptitude for pivoting to online learning varies
- There is significant concern for diverse learners and how to address experiential learning in this time of remote education
- With loss of afterschool enrichment, students are isolated and in need of social interaction
- The delivery of content during spring remote learning was inconsistent across school systems
- Equitable access continues to be an issue among school systems
- Lack of routine for children and families affects children's learning and mental/behavioral health
- There is tremendous guilt for parents trying to juggle working and remote learning from home

BIG IDEAS

What are the big ideas and possibilities that could lead our vision?

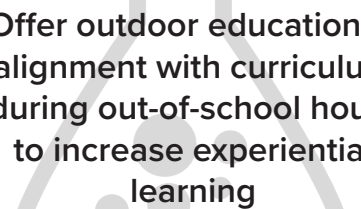
1. Increase experiential learning opportunities for students using our region's natural environment and unique businesses.
2. Create solutions that allow parents to work while giving children opportunities to safely learn in engaging ways.
3. Develop grade-level teaching platform for teachers to access resources, experiential learning opportunities and more.

Other ideas:

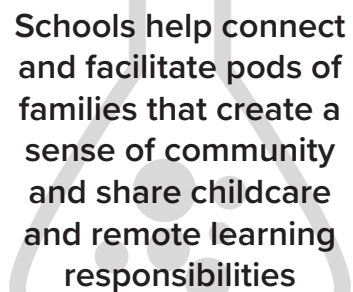
- Create community partnerships to bring Internet to a whole town, neighborhood or housing development
- Eliminate MCAS testing in its current form to allow for more experiential learning opportunities
- Increase diversity and inclusivity practices in schools, among teachers and across town lines

EXPERIMENTS

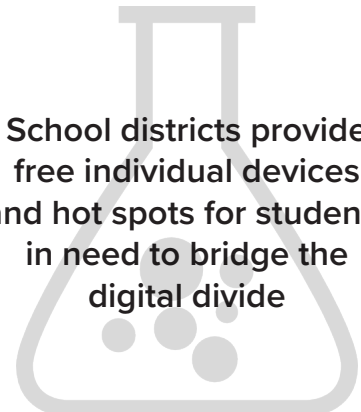
What are experiments, prototypes or pilots we can try to start moving forward with agility?



Offer outdoor education in alignment with curriculum during out-of-school hours to increase experiential learning



Schools help connect and facilitate pods of families that create a sense of community and share childcare and remote learning responsibilities



School districts provide free individual devices and hot spots for students in need to bridge the digital divide

Other experiments:

- Develop a centralized online resource center for teachers and parents to share best practices, ideas, budgets, etc. so everyone is learning and improving education together*
- Change the school day, host remote learning in the evening and offer outdoor learning during the day to better accommodate parents work schedules*
- Test out the theory that experiential learning in addition to classroom instruction benefits most students by creating a scientific evaluation*
- Develop internship programs for high school students with fisheries, wildlife, etc. to explore career aspirations and continued education goals.

*Indicates thought was mentioned more than once.

FOOD SECURITY

Working together to create a more effective and efficient food distribution system resulting in greater access to food for all

Hunger and homelessness have always been a significant challenge in Essex County, with nearly 40% of people living below the living wage. Food security was a concern before COVID-19 and with the current unemployment rate, access to food is increasingly vital. Most of our cities and towns face similar food distribution challenges, including: sourcing healthy food, staffing models across the distribution chain, and creating an easy system for families to access healthy food locally.

Throughout COVID-19, many partnerships and collaborations have been forged on an ad hoc basis to mitigate the food shortage crisis – a silver lining in this pandemic and a seed of innovation. How can our community strengthen the food security system as we move forward?

OBSERVATIONS

What are our observations from the field? What is happening and why?

- The local food rescue/distribution systems have evolved with many more farmers, producers and distributors participating in the wake of COVID-19 **
- There is a high demand for healthy, diverse foods that meet cultural/ethnic and dietary needs and wants, yet there is limited variety in the region**
- Most hunger organizations/programs saw their demand double or more over night, making it hard to keep up with the need **
- There are many access issues across Essex County. We need to focus on getting food where people are vs. having them find transportation to sources*
- A database where people in need can access a comprehensive list of sources including farms, pantries, resources, etc. is needed *
- Fast food culture is a huge part of our daily lifestyle and nutrition education is lacking*
- We need to prepare for the impact of financial stress in the hunger nonprofit sector*
- There is a lack of coordination across the food system that undermines the productivity and leverage that is available
- Regular donors and volunteers can no longer help because of financial challenges and/or the risk of being exposed to COVID-19

*Indicates thought was mentioned more than once.

BIG IDEAS

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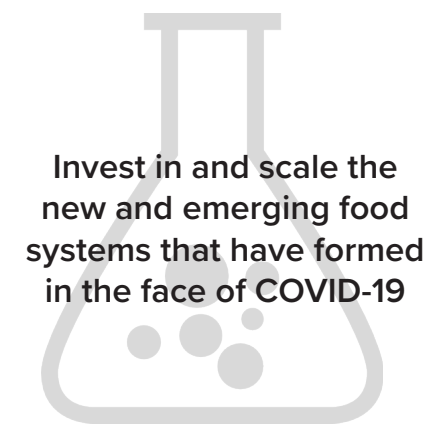
1. Overhaul the entire food system for productivity, sustainability and equity through a COVID-19 lens.
2. Create a prototype of the new regional food systems that have emerged from COVID-19.
3. Form a dedicated coalition to provide regional leadership and strategy across key stakeholders.

Other ideas:

- Expand programs that offer nutrition/shopping/cooking classes for low-income communities to learn how to stretch dollars and provide nutritional meals*
- Create a food transport system that picks up at-risk food so farmers can avoid costly deliveries
- Government or the nonprofit sector should fill the gaps in meeting market threshold
- Identify other and new ways to reduce food waste and redirect it to those most in need
- Integrate healthy living into affordable housing properties with gardening spaces and CSA delivery
- Require nutrition and/or gardening classes in middle and high school

EXPERIMENTS

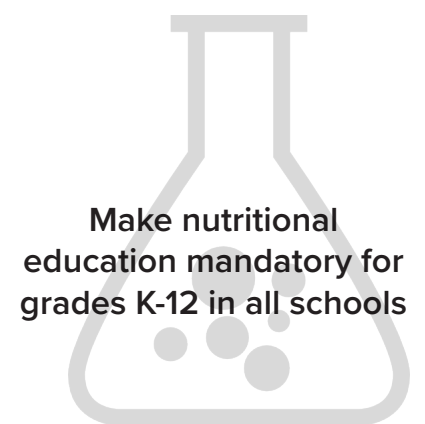
What are experiments, prototypes or pilots we can try to start moving forward with agility?



Invest in and scale the new and emerging food systems that have formed in the face of COVID-19



Create a robust public database accessible by food producers and food consumers to better connect food availability with those in need



Make nutritional education mandatory for grades K-12 in all schools

Other experiments:

- Form a strategic partnership with farmers, distributors and food pantries to test how we can increase food distribution to communities in need
- Regularly convene all parts of the food system for better collaboration
- Create a system to collect and distribute “misfit vegetables”

MENTAL HEALTH

Imagining a better system for accessing mental health services, including behavioral health and substance abuse

Essex County has always experienced shortfalls in mental health services and the pandemic has exacerbated these challenges. A shortage of mental health professionals means long waiting lists for mental health services. The cost for services, especially for those without health insurance, means programs and treatments are often out of reach. COVID-19 has caused greater isolation, especially for seniors, and domestic abuse and substance use have been on the rise while access to support and treatment has been reduced.

New improvements like Telehealth and workforce development programs can bring hope to tackling these challenges, but complex solutions require a systems-based approach. How can our community support this effort to bring about change?

OBSERVATIONS

What are our observations from the field? What is happening and why?

- Seeking support for mental health carries a social stigma and people tend to seek it out only in times of crisis vs. as a preventative health measure**
- Telehealth restrictions are loosening, including the provision of support across state lines**
- When individuals seek support, insurance companies create administrative burden for providers and patients
- There is an increase in demand for services to those with substance abuse issues
- Currently, 50% of children admitted at Beverly Hospital ER are admitted due to mental health issues
- There is a national lack of access and resources
- There is more need than there are providers
- Providers are seeing an expansion in reasons patients seek mental health support as a result of COVID-19, including: isolation, fear of death, fear of the unknown, loss of income, unstable housing, trauma of children wearing masks, not going to school
- Marginalized communities experienced more trauma from the pandemic yet have fewer resources/opportunities to seek support
- Overall education and prevention are under-funded which is what causes the stigma

BIG IDEAS

What are the big ideas and possibilities that could lead our vision?

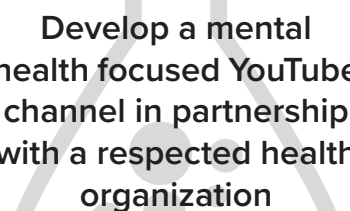
1. Consider mental health as a public health issue and direct funding and education towards it.
2. Put social workers on staff as a resource to help patients in hospitals address the need for mental health support and navigate available resources.
3. Bring mental health to the forefront of all health; have insurance companies mandate that all subscribers have a preferred mental health provider.

Other ideas:

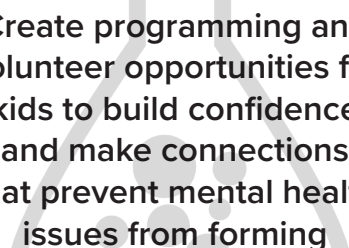
- Consider the benefits of universal healthcare to combat inequities in access to insurance that deems mental health worthy of coverage
- Fix administrative hassles with insurances
- Create more access to Telehealth for vulnerable communities
- Move beyond the 'checking a box' nature of the mental health conversation at annual check-ups
- Staff mental health positions in all schools

EXPERIMENTS

What are experiments, prototypes or pilots we can try to start moving forward with agility?



Develop a mental health focused YouTube channel in partnership with a respected health organization



Create programming and volunteer opportunities for kids to build confidence and make connections that prevent mental health issues from forming



Create a centralized, digital mental health platform to help people access and navigate resources

Other experiments:

- Create a regional Mental Health collective including cross-sector leaders and key stakeholders
- Promote volunteerism as a means of building confidence and connection which are preventative measures to developing future mental health issues i.e. Civil Conservation Corps for kids
- Create a one-stop-shop for mental health resources in Essex County like NYC Well
- Pilot mobile therapists to bring mental health support to the communities in which people live

**Indicates thought was mentioned more than once.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Well-paying, living-wage jobs that align with post-COVID-19 workforce needs

The Becker Friedman Institute at the University of Chicago estimates that 42% of recent employment layoffs in the U.S. will become permanent as businesses and entire sectors face lasting damage due to COVID-19. In addition, some businesses may be using the Coronavirus as an opportunity to shift their business models permanently, which could reduce the number of workers they rehire as the economy continues to reopen.

For many of our residents, the labor market looks bleak. What can we do as a community to help people transition and find living-wage jobs that align with economic growth and new career opportunities?

OBSERVATIONS

What are our observations from the field? What is happening and why?

- Workforce data is bleak with 42% permanent layoffs or jobs being eliminated and more than 18% unemployment**
- Digital divide has been exposed in education, employment and healthcare****
- There is no going back to normal, the workforce landscape has changed forever**
- Gateway communities and people of color have been most impacted and inequalities have been exposed**
- Arts, cultural and creative workforce is severely impacted with limited job potential in next 12-24 months*
- Need free or low-cost digital access*
- 40% of people in Essex County living below the living wage is a root cause of the inequities
- The wealth gap, education gap and engagement gap are widening
- National labor reports are predicting a 25% drop in lifetime income for all 2020 graduates

BIG IDEAS

What are the big ideas and possibilities that could lead our vision?

1. MA employers collaborate to create new credentials enabling workers to better prepare (quickly and at low costs) to meet NEW workforce needs.
2. Workforce ecosystem collaborates to perform a county-wide study to predict emerging job opportunities.
3. Educational organizations collaborate to create online solutions for students; all students are armed with technology to close the digital divide.

Other ideas:


- Get information out to people in impacted industries that opportunities exist in other employment sectors (manufacturing, e.g.) and include training
- Create an Essex County campaign that could start rebuilding the economy by educating people with what they need to access new employment
- Create a federal program with public and private participation to examine workforce in each sector, resulting in a 10-year transition policy with centralized federal leadership; a civic training program for people in declining sectors; and new infrastructure across the country

EXPERIMENTS

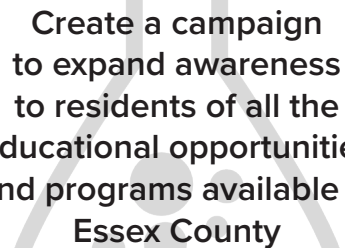
What are experiments, prototypes or pilots we can try to start moving forward with agility?



Partner with schools, companies and organizations to launch a new credentialing program



Create a county-wide job study to identify future workforce needs and gaps



Create a campaign to expand awareness to residents of all the educational opportunities and programs available in Essex County

Other experiments:

- Partner with utilities to address digital divide and provide free universal wi-fi and technology access
- Form a public-private partnership to build career exploration and expertise into K-12 curriculum
- Support nonprofit partnerships and mergers to create efficiencies and leverage resources
- Create a study to identify new manufacturing and technology fields

*Indicates thought was mentioned more than once.

CLC SESSION CHATTER

*So pleased to be a part of this.
Fabulous rapid-fire discussion.
Looking forward to next steps.*

*This was amazing. Well done.
Thank you all.*

Healthy discussion!

*Thanks all! I look forward to
next steps on these amazing
community concepts.*

*Looking forward to more
conversations and successful
work ahead!!*

*ECCF continues to amaze and
impress. It's a gift to be involved
and support all the efforts here.*

*Thank you all so much!
GREAT DISCUSSION.*

ECCF Rocks!

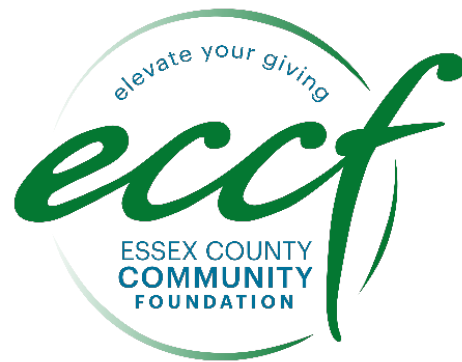
ECCF Next Steps

- >> Publish summary report and share with ECCF Board of Trustees and County Leadership Council
- >> Prioritize experiments and explore what can be implemented within ECCF's existing strategy
- >> Explore augmenting ECCF staff and volunteers to accomplish rebuilding and strengthening goals
- >> Explore additional Think Labs and/or convenings in these five topical areas as relevant

JOIN US.

If you would like to volunteer, fund or be more involved in shaping the future of Essex County's social sector, contact Stratton Lloyd at s.lloyd@eccf.org. In these uncertain times we are excited about volunteer enthusiasm, but kindly ask for patience as we determine next steps and how to best utilize our volunteers.





Essex County Community Foundation
978-777-8876 | eccf.org