



An Equitable and Green Urban Stimulus

October 2020

An Equitable and Green Urban Stimulus: Pathways to Climate Resilient Cities

Background

We are in a transformative time in history. The COVID-19 pandemic poses an unprecedented challenge to the resilience of our societies and exposes fundamental flaws in our social, environmental and economic systems. At the same time, fires, hurricanes, and other extreme weather events make the climate crisis increasingly hard to ignore. Cities are at the intersection of both crises. Most of our cities are highly segregated by race and class and it is along these lines that the disparity in who gets the virus and who dies from it is evident.









The COVID-19 pandemic has redefined the meaning of climate action for cities by imposing several new tests: every climate policy will be viewed from the degree by which it can speed and strengthen the economic recovery; and every climate policy must help those whose economic prospects have been most devastated by the pandemic, previous rounds of discriminatory policies, and environmental harm. Yet the pandemic has made it increasingly difficult for cities to act on these fronts—the US Conference of Mayors and National League of Cities report that at least 88 percent of cities (and all cities with populations over 200,000) will experience budget shortfalls resulting from the pandemic and the faltering economy. Conversely, a recovery policy, when it does come, will require trillions of dollars of public investment; and that outlay will present an unparalleled opportunity for long-overdue investment in resilience, de-carbonization, and climate justice. For these reasons, cities are in the process of and need forums for rethinking recovery in this unusual pandemic context, regardless of when -or whether – they are allotted stimulus funding.

The Initiative: Against this background, The German Marshall Fund Cities Program and the Northeastern University Climate Just Cities project propose **“An Equitable and Green Urban Stimulus: Pathways for Climate Resilient Cities”** to advance leading practices to help cities bounce back from the COVID-19 crisis through climate and equity lenses.

Objectives

Through this initiative, the partner organizations will **convene city leaders and representatives of frontline communities and relevant local stakeholders along with experts and policymakers in Europe and the United States to identify, distill, and disseminate good policy and practice at the local level and to inform, advance leading practices and support pathways for a just, equitable, and climate-friendly urban stimulus.** The project will also map out vertical and horizontal policy gaps and propose cooperative solutions. Finally, the initiative will lift the voices of relevant community partners and leaders from civil society working in climate, equity and sustainable development and improve avenues of connection with city government officials. The overall goal is to support the co-creation and implementation of transformative policies and practices, while also creating opportunities for relationship-building and knowledge-sharing to make sure the current stimulus spending is a solution to the crisis, but also an opportunity to set our nations on a more inclusive, productive, just and sustainable track.

The project will engage committed and leading cities in the United States and Europe on four tracks where the crisis intersects that are carbon-intensive and amenable to city-level initiatives. Each of the tracks will also cover cross-cutting themes that permeate across all city policies and practice related to the topic:

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Housing: We will identify the mechanisms leading cities use to implement the highest standards of building energy efficiency (e.g. passive house, zero-net emissions) in new construction and retrofitting existing buildings and the political and other barriers to enacting them. Further, we will identify strategies for employing these standards in low-income and affordable housing and in creating well-paying jobs for residents of frontline communities.
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Transportation: We will explore strategies to make public transportation an integral part of stimulus packages for economic recovery; ensure the deployment of clean, affordable, accessible and multi-modal transportation; and encourage the transition to electric vehicles by residents and for taxi fleets and transit vehicles (particularly buses). We will focus on cities that are linking transit expansion to unionized jobs for low-income residents and on expanding transportation options in frontline communities.
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Energy: We will investigate mechanisms available to cities to expand the production of affordable renewable energy for all through technology roll-out, new services and business models, as well as fiscal and regulatory policies. It will also explore the unlocking of financing to support local investments in clean energy, as well as the engagement and protection of citizens/consumers. Focus areas include community solar, community choice aggregation, microgrids, and virtual power plants, particularly in frontline neighborhoods. We will also explore job creation through supply chain expansion.
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Land Use: We will examine land-use planning that creates transit-oriented developments without causing gentrification. Further we will explore how cities use green zones (eco-districts) to integrate all aspect of sustainable development and a new concept, green justice zones, which seek to remedy environmental harms and toxic hotspots in frontline neighborhoods. Building on these approaches, we will also examine green stormwater management, neighborhood greening and related approaches to create sustainable, resilient, and healthy areas.

The tracks were identified as areas where cities could not only learn from each other, but where national, state, municipal and international policy could improve by either strengthening the voice of cities in the policymaking process or where other levels of government could learn from cities. The tracks and modular structure are flexible enough to be adapted or incorporate changing circumstances in a timely way. **Across these tracks the project will weave in cross-cutting themes that include intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder cooperation, organizational learning, strategic communication, technology, and cross-sector coordination.**

Outputs

The convening organizations attach high importance to an **outcome-oriented dialogue between local leaders in an interactive, trust-building, and empowering format**. To that end, the action will build an active network of city officials and leaders by involving them in online practitioner workshops, strategic convening, as well as policy research and analysis. The partner organizations will also **bring cities together with frontline communities, civic leaders, experts and policy-makers** in the practitioner workshops to share knowledge, discuss challenges and opportunities, and explore creative ways to

push the efforts and align the social, economic and environmental goals and actions of cities. Public health concerns could mean that in-person convenings are shifted to the second half of the project. This could decrease the in-person relationship-building of the network, but would allow us to engage a larger number of cities and participants with reduced trouble related to travel dates, costs, and in a more environmentally friendly way. The screening, selection, and outreach will be done through the organizations' vast networks in the U.S. and the EU.

A **key deliverable** of the project will be a series of **How-to Briefs that examine the economic, political, and governance issues in cities that pose barriers to making rapid progress on these four aspects of a just transition to carbon neutrality**. The goal of each Brief is to identify pathways that cities in different circumstances can take to achieve success. The briefs will be specifically calibrated to the abnormal COVID-19 context that cities are in for the foreseeable future, taking account of the extra challenges that are causing roadblocks and detailing strategies to overcome them. They will be based on our independent research and interviews with city officials, planners, community activists and other stakeholders within our network across the Atlantic, depending on the issue. **A unique aspect of the briefs is that they will be co-created with the local stakeholders participating in the interviews to obtain a balance of expert and on-the-ground advice. An example of a brief would be *Community Solar as Energy Democracy*, which would explore how cities are supporting community solar for low-income residents and identify what it takes to succeed.**

The How-to Briefs differ from a multitude of reports reporting on the *what* of urban climate action in their emphasis on the *how*—the “in-between bits” to use a term coined by Harriet Bulkeley, of how elected officials, planners, and other stakeholders design, finance, and implement effective policy and programs and overcome political obstacles. They will typically run not more than ten pages. The briefs will be interactive—as we hear from practitioners and city, state, and national officials, a Frequently Asked Question section will be added. Information will be updated as needed and new cases will be added to the briefs if they identify new opportunities and barriers to expanding the practice. To maximize dissemination, the briefs will be promoted by the partner organizations and posted on their websites.

Activities

The size and scope of the Green Urban Stimulus project will require a much more detailed workplan but an overview of the general activities is listed and described below:

- Up to 10 online Practitioner Workshops

Each How-to Brief will be introduced with an online Practitioner Workshop where leading cities and stakeholders will present in detail their effective practices or policies. A fundamental tenant of the project is the critical importance of local community groups and stakeholders in advancing the economy recovery of cities in alignment with climate and social justice goals. Therefore, to maximize impact, **the workshops will ensure the representation of local stakeholders and frontline community representatives and will open participation to everyone interested.**

- In-person Strategic Convening

In addition to the online Practitioner Workshop, the project will organize strategic convening to provide city officials and leaders across the Atlantic with the opportunity to dive deeper into the specific cases highlighted in the How-to-Briefs. The strategic convenings building new narratives around Pathways for Equitable, Healthy, and Climate Resilient Cities and will also provide an opportunity to participants to establish new relationships or deepen existing relationships with key partners outside of their typical professional circles. Thereby creating new collaborative networks and opening opportunities for innovation. **The strategic convening can take two forms:**

- **A cross-thematic in-person strategic convening:** under this format, up to 40 city officials and leaders seeking transformative change in their communities will gather to dive deeper into the cases highlighted in the How-to-Briefs and explore the untapped synergies and links between the different areas.
- **Four in-person thematic strategic convenings:** this format is designed to cover each of the focus areas of this project individually and it is aimed at gathering per convening up to 10 city officials and leaders with leverage, expertise and responsibility for the focus area.

- **Constant and dynamic communication**

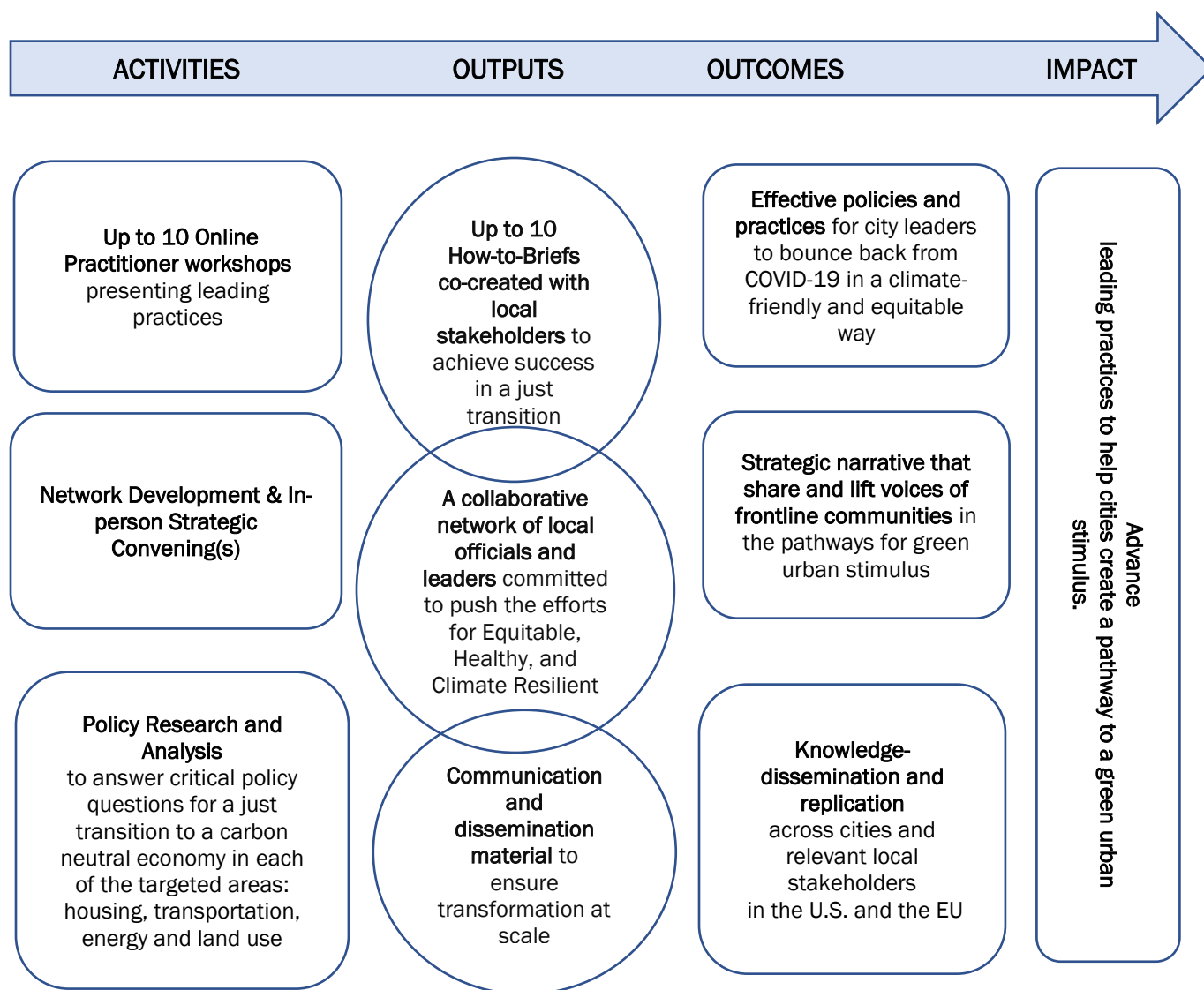
Communications will be a dynamic activity throughout the project. GMF and Northeastern University will collaborate with other organizations. In different phases of the implementation and according to the content of the tracks, GMF will be pulling in organizations who have specific complementary experience or insight to provide input. Because both partner organizations have extensive experience working in this space, there are already strong formal and informal relationships and partnerships with many organizations that could be helpful. A few that have already been considered and discussed to different extents: Urban Sustainability Directors Network, Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance, and Climate Nexus.

To ensure findings reach a range of audiences, we will also work to identify additional channels to amplify communications and highlight project findings. Given youths' vital importance in continuing this work into the future, we will ensure that this audience is also targeted. **The output from this communications strategy will ensure that ideas and narrative will move beyond the participating cities, injecting into mainstream policy discussions.**

Ultimate Outcomes

1. City leaders have access to **effective policies and practices** to bounce back from the COVID-19 crisis that link environmental and social justice
2. City leaders will gain **insight and better know-how from their peers and experts on who to address housing, transportation and clean energy challenges** and make progress with their own resources
3. **Relevant community partners** in advocacy and policy work on climate, sustainable urban development and equity will have **lifted their voices and co-created solutions for equitable, healthy and climate resilient cities**
4. A **strategic narrative has been built for city leaders, relevant local stakeholders and frontline community representatives to advocate for solutions** that support the sustainable, equitable and healthy recovery of cities and their communities
5. **Large dissemination of policies and practices** that can be replicated beyond the targeted audience in the project to **ensure transformative action at scale**

The Initiative in a Nutshell



About the organizations

The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) is a non-partisan policy organization committed to the idea that the United States and Europe are stronger together. GMF champions the principles of democracy, human rights, and international cooperation, which have served as the bedrock of peace and prosperity since the end of World War II but are under increasing strain. GMF works on issues critical to transatlantic interests in the 21st century, including the future of democracy, security and defense, geopolitics and the rise of China, and technology and innovation. By drawing on and fostering a community of people with diverse life experiences and political perspectives, GMF pursues its mission by driving the policy debate through cutting-edge analysis and convening, fortifying civil society, and cultivating the next generation of leaders on both sides of the Atlantic.

Founded in 1972 through a gift from Germany as a tribute to the Marshall Plan, GMF is headquartered in Washington, DC, with offices in Berlin, Brussels, Ankara, Belgrade, Bucharest, Paris, and Warsaw. One of GMF's pillars of work is GMF Cities, which supports leaders, policymakers, and practitioners in the U.S. and Europe by facilitating the exchange of knowledge for building inclusive, sustainable, and globally engaged cities. GMF Cities' activities also support individual participants in expanding their network, growing their policy expertise, and developing their leadership skills. Through their outcome-oriented work, GMF Cities has gained high recognition among government branches at both the local, regional, and federal level. GMF Cities has a network of over 4,000 cross-sector city leaders, hundreds of which have been engaged in programming across approximately 50 North American and European cities, with extensive experience working and doing research in the selected areas of housing, transportation, energy and land use.

Northeastern University Climate Just Cities Project is situated in the School of Public Policy & Urban Affairs (SPUAA), which has climate justice as one of its core themes for research and teaching. The School seeks to drive interdisciplinary thinking and problem solving on issues of pressing concern to society at local, state, national, and international levels – from transportation, housing, energy and community development to social and environmental justice, resilience and sustainability. By educating students in both theory and practice, SPPUA prepares them to become effective contributors to social, economic, and environmental change, in careers spanning the public, private, and nonprofit sectors, as well as academic research.

