



# Advancing Equity: Local Government Responses in the Time of COVID-19

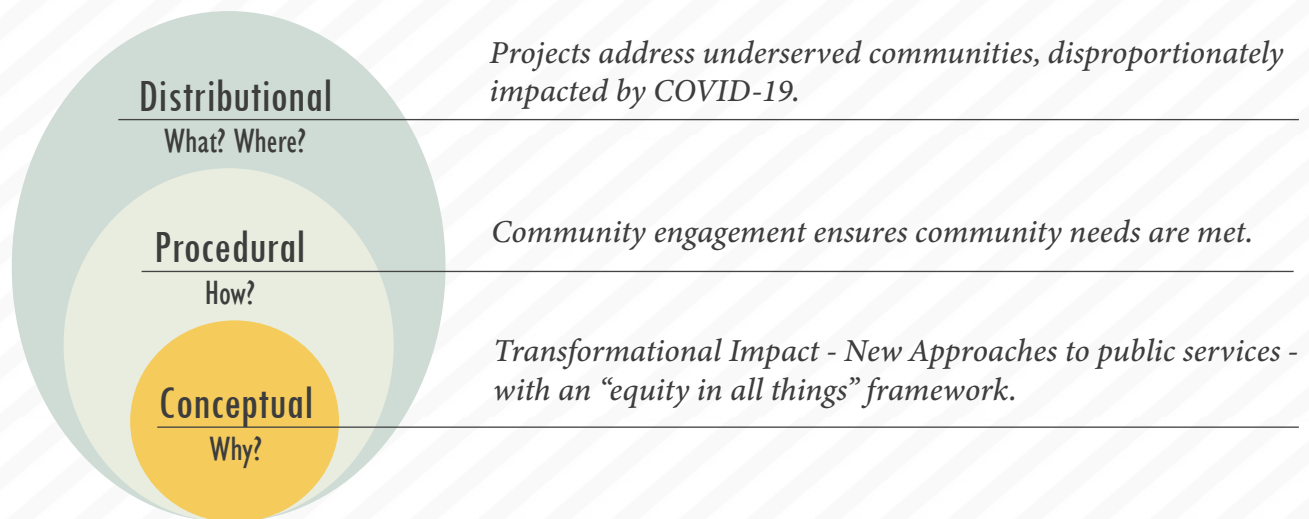
Mildred E. Warner

May 2022

*COVID-19 exposed many structural inequities in society. In response, governments around the world are giving more attention to investing in communities to promote a strong recovery. In the US, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provides state and local governments with \$130 billion over 4 years to support public health expenditures, address negative economic impacts caused by COVID-19, replace lost public sector revenue; and invest in water, sewer, and broadband infrastructure. A nationwide survey conducted by ICMA in 2021 found the majority of respondents (84%) planned to invest in water and sewer infrastructure and over a third (37%) planned to invest in equity focused projects.*

**What is a framework for promoting equity?** Advancing equity requires attention to three components: distributional, procedural and conceptual. ARPA gives specific guidance on how to measure disproportionate impact. It also encourages citizen engagement and new ARPA specific plans to help communities identify and respond to community needs. ARPA seeks to promote transformational impact – and this may require thinking about new approaches to public service delivery. **This is an exciting time for local government!**

## How Do We Instill An Equity Perspective?



Cornell researchers explored five areas where local governments are attempting to address equity through their new investments. These include water and sewer, broadband, child care, comprehensive planning and education. **Issue briefs on each of these can be found at the links provided.**

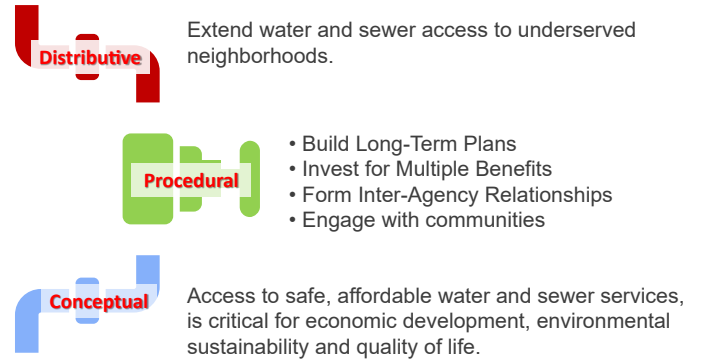


**Cornell  
AAP**

*This research was conducted by Professor Mildred E. Warner's Local Government Restructuring Lab. More information can be found at: <http://labs.aap.cornell.edu/local-government-restructuring-lab> It was supported by funding from the Mui Co Center for Cities, the Cornell Agricultural Experiment Station and USDA NIFA.*

## Water and Sewer

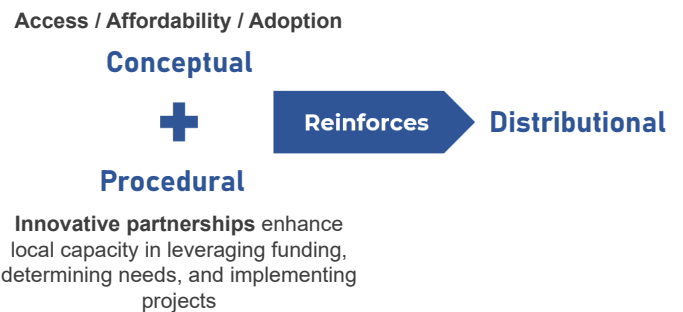
The US faces a backlog of needed investments. But low income neighborhoods and communities of color face historic disinvestment. ARPA creates an opportunity to address these inequities by extending service lines, ensuring access through free hook ups, and building partnerships across government agencies and with local communities. These investments can be transformational – for public health, economic development and environmental protection.



Kang, J. Y., Turlapati, L., Schwab, J. and Huang, J. (2022) **Water and Sewer Infrastructure: Correcting Underinvestment with Smart Spending**. Issue Brief. Local Government Restructuring Lab, Cornell University.

## Broadband

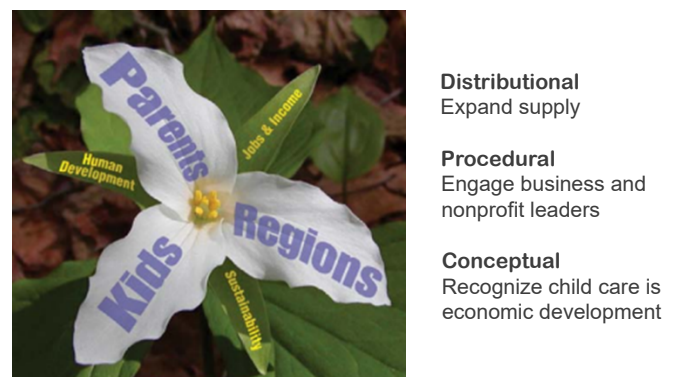
The Pandemic exposed challenges with broadband access, especially for seniors, children and low income and rural communities. Local governments are building partnerships with internet service providers and non profits to expand access, promote affordability and ensure adoption by providing devices and training in underserved communities. This will have transformational impact on community residents and the local economy.



Faulwell, H., Ford, A., Guo, E. and Kamaruzuki, M. (2022) **Broadband for All: Harnessing ARPA for Effective Broadband Expansion**. Issue Brief. Local Government Restructuring Lab, Cornell University.

## Childcare

Women were especially hard hit by the pandemic. Many left the labor force due to lack of child care and online schooling which required the need for parental supervision. Communities recognize the need to address social infrastructure, such as child care. While local ARPA funds do not directly address child care, communities can use funds freed up by ARPA to engage in transformational partnerships to build back child care supply.



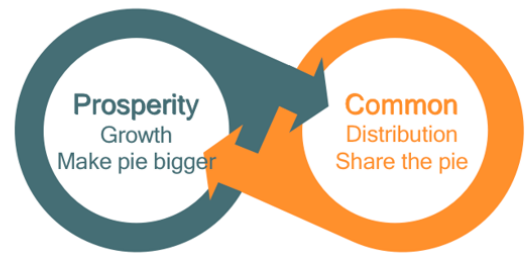
Wen, A., Coats, K., Diaz, P., Wang, Y. and Yang, Q. (2022) **Expanding Childcare in Tompkins County**. Issue Brief. Local Government Restructuring Lab, Cornell University.

All issue briefs can be found at:  
<http://labs.aap.cornell.edu/local-government-restructuring-lab/student-work>

## Equity in China

After decades of dramatic growth and urbanization, China is now reckoning with inequity, especially between rural and urban communities. Nowhere is this more important than in education. The Common Prosperity agenda seeks to address this gap by encouraging governments to collaborate, increase transfers and equalize access to services, regardless of location.

Tan, X. and Zhao, Z. (2022) **The Equalization of Basic Public Service under Common Prosperity in China.** Issue Brief. Local Government Restructuring Lab, Cornell University.



- Reduce income gap
- Achieve basic service equalization
- Rebalance regional development

### Distributional

Enlarge the subsidy and transfer payment to disadvantaged areas and groups

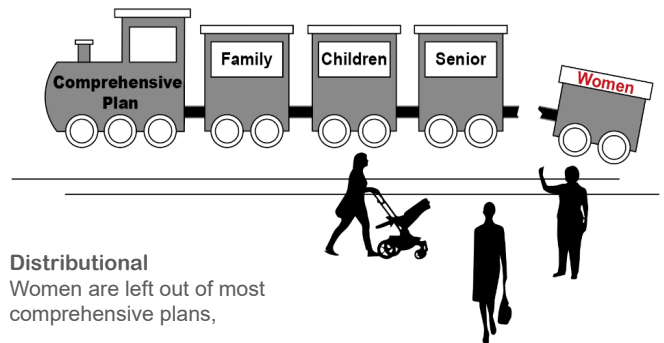
### Conceptual

Reduce the institutional barrier between rural and urban caused by the Hukou system.

## Planning

Plans help position communities to respond to local needs. But our analysis of comprehensive plans shows that women are often left out. Plans attempt to be neutral, but in doing so, they fail to address the diverse needs of the population. Women are more likely to be poor, to be transit dependent and to be concerned about safety. Attention to gender equity requires rethinking traditional land use, transportation and economic development policy.

Xu, C., Wang, Y., Jin, J. and Liu, Q. (2022) **Invisible Women in Comprehensive Plans.** Issue Brief. Local Government Restructuring Lab, Cornell University.



### Distributional

Women are left out of most comprehensive plans,

### Conceptual

Engage women to address their unique needs.

### Conceptual

Expand planning beyond traditional land use and economic development to address women's needs.

All issue briefs can be found at:

<http://labs.aap.cornell.edu/local-government-restructuring-lab/student-work>

## Resources

- American Planning Association. 2021. Planning for Equity – Policy Guide, APA.  
URL: [https://planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/publication/download\\_pdf/Planning-for-Equity-Policy-Guide-rev.pdf](https://planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/publication/download_pdf/Planning-for-Equity-Policy-Guide-rev.pdf)
- ICMA (2021). American Rescue Plan Act Local Fiscal Recovery Fund Priorities Survey, International City County Management Assoc., Washington, DC.  
URL: <https://icma.org/documents/icma-survey-research-american-rescue-plan-act-local-fiscal-recovery-fund-spending-priorities>
- Kelly, P. & Warner, M.E. (2022). How will New York Local Governments Use their ARPA funds? Issue brief. Local Government Restructuring Lab, Cornell University. URL: <https://labs.aap.cornell.edu/node/620>
- National League of Cities. 2021. COVID-19: Local Action Tracker. URL: <https://www.nlc.org/resource/covid-19-local-action-tracker/>
- Svara, J.H., Watt, T., & Takai, K., (2014). Local Governments, Social Equity, and Sustainable Communities: Advancing Social Equity Goals to Achieve Sustainability. ICMA Report, Washington DC: ICMA
- Warner, M.E., P. Kelly, X. Zhang. Challenging Austerity under the COVID-19 State. Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy, and Society. Forthcoming. (Preprint: <https://bit.ly/3kKNDro>)



**Cornell  
AAP**

This research was conducted by Professor Mildred E. Warner's **Local Government Restructuring Lab**. More information can be found at: <http://labs.aap.cornell.edu/local-government-restructuring-lab> It was supported by funding from the Mui Co Center for Cities, the Cornell Agricultural Experiment Station and USDA NIFA.