



thrive

STRATEGIC
ROADMAP TO **2024**

SEPTEMBER 2021



Acton-Boxborough
United Way

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MESSAGE FROM BOARD PRESIDENT & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



We are excited to present Acton-Boxborough United Way's 3-Year Strategic Roadmap *Thrive2024*.

Today, more than ever, we need to dare to imagine. Rebuilding isn't a matter of going back to where we were. It's reimagining how we can be better and building towards that -- together.

Acton-Boxborough United Way believes in the power of mobilizing our community to create a place where everyone belongs and thrives. The 3-year roadmap highlights five critical challenges faced by our community, where we believe we can make the most impact by applying four proven strength-based strategies.

We intentionally designed a community-driven strategic planning process. It is promising and humbling to see that so many of you took our call-to-action to heart and supported the creation of this roadmap. Our call-to-action does not stop here; it will take all of us to implement the plan and evaluate the progress we make. Neighbors caring for neighbors implies reciprocity. It is a joint responsibility and an opportunity to weave our beautifully diverse community together.

The launch of the Plan coincides with A-B United Way's 40th Anniversary. In 1981, residents imagined that by coming together we could do better as a community. We are proud to build on their leadership and legacy.

Let's continue to be an engine of imagination to bring our community together and create opportunity for all!



Jill O'Brien
Board President

Griet Dehandschutter
Executive Director

THANK YOU TO ALL CONTRIBUTORS



Coming together as a community was central to creating this roadmap.

We are grateful for the more than 190 community members who formally participated in the survey, community conversations, stakeholder and board workshops, Community Scan analysis, impact-focused subteams, and Strategic Planning Taskforce over an 8-month period.

Thank you to all of you who shared ideas and concerns as we worked alongside one another throughout the pandemic, the Boxborough Fire, or in community groups such as the AB Racial Justice Collaborative, the Food Security Task Force, the Acton Boxborough Community Resources network, or other groups.

It takes a courageous Board to invest in a virtual planning process while working to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and the Boxborough Fire. Under the inspirational and bold leadership of former Board President Karen Collins, we reimagined our community's future, anchored in equity and racial justice. We are deeply appreciative of our Board's commitment and vision.





A special thank you to Board member Jo-Anne Nyer, who led the Board’s Strategic Taskforce and planning process; to Nancy Settle-Murphy for her consulting expertise in designing a virtual community-centric planning process; to Karen Collins for underwriting this consultancy; and to Emerson Hospital for the Community Benefit Grant in support of our strategic plan to improve community health.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the talents of Sylvan Huynh for the Graphic Design of *Thrive2024* and Megan Lloyd for the front cover community illustration.

Appendix 1 lists our valued community partners and volunteers who contributed to the creation of *Thrive2024*



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Acton and Boxborough are undergoing rapid change in a turbulent world. Our vision is to be a community where everyone belongs and thrives. To achieve this vision, collective action is urgently needed.

Suburbs like Acton and Boxborough are turning into a “desert for social services” at a time when more residents need to be uplifted. Income disparities are widening. Housing costs are skyrocketing. Child care is out of reach for too many neighbors. Poverty looks different in the suburbs; it is often invisible but growing. More than 1,000 of our neighbors live below the federal poverty level. Many more households are barely making ends meet, impacting one out of ten children and youth, even before the pandemic.

The pandemic has changed all our lives, affecting every resident’s mental health, the education of our children and youth, and the way we work and meet.

Our towns continue to grow rapidly with an increasingly rich diversity of backgrounds and lived experiences of residents with roots around the globe. Nobody can thrive, unless all belong. Yet too many residents of all ages, whether Black or brown, Jewish or Asian, are experiencing hate and don’t feel safe on our streets, in our schools, stores or neighborhoods.

To help our community address these complex challenges, Acton-Boxborough United Way has developed *Thrive2024*. Grounded in community input and data, this 3-year roadmap aims to rally our resource-rich community to address **5 critical challenges**.

Each of the 5 challenges needs to be addressed year-round, not just in times of crisis. We plan to use **4 strength-based strategies**: Assess, Connect, Program, Convene. These strategies have proven to be most impactful in our own practice and across the 1,800 independent member organizations that make up United Way Worldwide network.

The Board of Directors is committed to using a “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Racial Justice lens” in all our work (both internal and external) and has intentionally created and adopted DEI and a Racial Justice Statements. In a community where 80 languages are spoken at home, there is no one-size-fits-all to connect residents to services. It requires deeper listening, better representation, more tailored communications.

The ambitious impact goals we’ve outlined require an increase and optimization of our organizational resources. We are fortunate to build on a strong foundation as we reach our 40th Anniversary in the fall of 2021. Now is the time to invest in being the best organization we can be for today’s realities.

5 CRITICAL CHALLENGES

1 DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION AND RACIAL JUSTICE

Increase community conversations and support learning about DEI and Racial Justice.

2 MENTAL HEALTH

Enhance community-based mental health resilience.

3 EDUCATION: EARLY CHILDHOOD SUCCESS

Increase the number of children who enter kindergarten ready to learn.

4 FINANCIAL STABILITY

Increase the use and availability of resources for low-income residents.

5 CRISIS RELIEF & PREPAREDNESS

Improve preparedness for and ability to respond to disasters.

In the past two years, under new executive leadership, **we have embraced a new community-centric business model.**

Intentional community-building, community engagement and volunteer engagement is at its core. We want to keep inviting volunteers and community partners to come together, to work together to give back to our community.

We embrace the power of collective fundraising to increase the impact of any gift, large or small. We will continue to invite all members of the community to participate -- individuals, small businesses, large corporations, foundations, organizations and public funding sources. This diversification and growth of funding sources is essential in a rapidly changing philanthropic world.

As a result of the new business model, combined with our nimble response to crises and other factors, we have grown tremendously

in impact, visibility and volunteer engagement. Sustaining rapid organizational growth over the next three years requires further investment in strategic resource development, organizational structure and operational excellence.

We are hopeful. Reimagining the future at the time of our 40th Anniversary -- investing in our common good -- is also investing in and telling a new story. Building this common good is a vital endeavor that benefits everyone. It is not us vs. them. It is not a zero sum game, divided between winners and losers or givers and takers. The Boxborough Fire crisis demonstrated that we all benefit as a community when we come together, when we understand and get to know our neighbors and when we care for each other. Let's make this a joint year-round effort so that everyone can belong and thrive.

WHY CREATE A STRATEGIC ROADMAP



The purpose of this 3-year strategic plan is to guide Acton-Boxborough United Way in advancing our community vision by creating positive and lasting change in the most effective and impactful manner.

Historic crises, such as the pandemic, demand that we respond and recover. Our Board of Directors decided to harness the creativity and resources of our community to reimagine and rebuild. Together, we can create a better, more equitable community where everyone thrives. Hence the name of the plan!

The plan will help us focus on key issues, prioritize how to allocate resources and measure progress. By sharing our findings and focus, we hope to encourage collaboration, avoid duplication and create more opportunities for others to do important work that is beyond our scope.



THE PLANNING PROCESS



To better understand and meet the diverse and growing needs of the community, A-B United Way solicited input and guidance from residents and community partners throughout our planning process.

We partnered with a broad group of service providers, representatives of our school district, town and state officials, faith and other community leaders and residents across our diverse community.

A-B United Way began the planning process in November 2020 with an online Community Survey. 110 respondents shared their vision and priorities for the future of our community. In analyzing the results, A-B United Way identified several common themes and goals, specific challenges and obstacles, and opportunities for engagement and improvement.

Then, in a pair of workshops in January and February 2021, A-B United Way invited 40 community stakeholders to prioritize the goals identified in the Community Survey. Participants did this based upon two factors: importance to the community and the ability of A-B United way to make a positive impact. The stakeholders also further brainstormed strategies to achieve the articulated goals.



We also listened to a wide range of voices in our daily interactions with the community.

Valuable concerns and ideas were shared through our grassroots work in Committees, our annual community investment process of allocating grants to agencies, and our participation in the AB Racial Justice Collaborative, the Food Security Task Force, AB Cares, and other collaborations.

We built upon A-B United Way's prior Community Needs Assessment, published in 2015, including the Community Scan that provided data and trends through 2014.

We gathered and updated demographic, socioeconomic, education, housing and public safety data and trends. Our goal is to share these data and insights with our community in the coming months.

Several times throughout the process, the A-B United Way Strategic Task Force met with the Board of Directors to discuss and build upon the community input. Once our goals were clearly identified, we created sub-teams to collect and analyze data, partner with subject matter experts, leverage United Way network expertise and

resources, and ultimately recommended strategies, programs and initiatives that would help us meet each of the five goals. This strategic roadmap sets 3-Year high-level goals for each of our impact areas. We recognize that the world is changing rapidly, and that we are facing many unknowns. Our community's evolving needs will require flexibility & entrepreneurial thinking to respond.

The programs and initiatives to reach the high-level goals will be evaluated and measured on an annual basis so we can adjust where necessary to be most impactful. In our first year, A-B United Way will gather baseline data for new initiatives, while using historical data for initiatives, when available. A-B United Way will share progress updates and new knowledge with the community, as we refine the programs and initiatives each year.

Thrive2024 addresses key community hopes and concerns by focusing on five areas where A-B United Way can make a significant impact. The community's input helped to shape this strategic thinking, and their partnership will help to execute the plan. By working together, by supporting the common good as a volunteer, donor, advocate or community partner, we can build the community we want to be!



SWOT ANALYSIS & CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

A SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis and development of Critical Success Factor was completed by board and staff in January 2021, and helped frame the focus of our strategic subteams as they crafted each goal.

Looking at the highest priority internal and external factors of our SWOT, we sought to build strategies that both leverage our key strength as a proven coalition builder (AB Cares, Food Security Taskforce), and capitalize on the opportunity that the local and national DEI movement affords us.

We also sought to capitalize on the opportunity that there are many untapped fundraising sources by addressing a key weakness by improving our visibility and leveraging our strength as an open tent organization that can build community.

In working through this Strategic Planning process, we are addressing another key weakness by setting, communicating and keeping clear goals and priorities to be more effective and have a greater impact. This will enable us to combat the threat that the community, donors, and volunteers are burned out /overtapped.

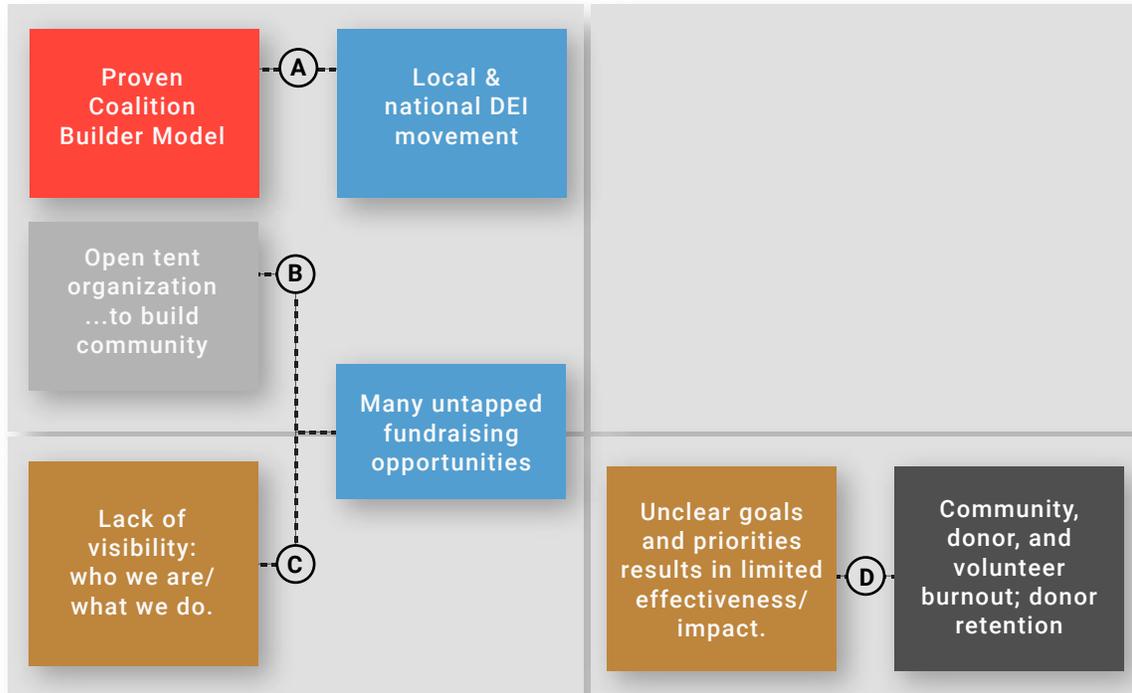
Additionally, the team identified ten Critical Success Factors -- elements within our control which must be realized in order to see success in our Strategic Roadmap.



SWOT ANALYSIS

EXTERNAL OPPORTUNITIES

EXTERNAL THREATS



CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

- 1 Connect with and build trust with all residents in our community so we are able to broaden our impact.
- 2 Expand relationships and credibility with community partners across all impact areas.
- 3 Establish new relationships with business and academic partners -- both locally and regionally.
- 4 Increase visibility of A-B United Way to further resource development (fundraising & volunteers) and impact.
- 5 Obtain ongoing access to the data needed to develop and implement our plans.
- 6 Increase volunteer retention and fundraising.
- 7 Obtain ongoing learning for board and staff.
- 8 Implement the 3-year strategic roadmap, revisiting strategies annually.
- 9 Optimize board productivity.
- 10 Leverage United Way Worldwide resources.

OUR FOUNDATION

OUR VISION A community where everyone belongs and thrives.

OUR MISSION We mobilize the caring power of community to drive positive, lasting change. United, we fight for the health, education, and financial stability of EVERY person in Acton and Boxborough.



Our Vision statement captures the long-term change we hope to achieve in Acton and Boxborough. Our Mission states how we, as an organization, plan to reach this vision.



Acton-Boxborough United Way serves as an open tent for all community members. We offer our organization as a safe platform for ALL residents and community partners, public and private, to work together to make our community a place where everyone belongs and thrives.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) and Racial Justice are the foundation of this open tent. Belonging is foundational for each of us. It cannot be taken for granted, and is a prerequisite for each person to thrive. Acton-Boxborough United Way is committed to strengthening our community culture of belonging. As such, we will use a “DEI and Racial Justice lens” in every aspect of our work and make it part of our organizational DNA. To capture our commitment to do this hard and often uncomfortable work, we show steps to climb. And to highlight our tireless dedication to expand learning and growing in our community, DEI and Racial Justice stand as a separate Impact Goal in our Strategic Roadmap.

Acton-Boxborough United Way believes in people power, depicted by the three people. We believe in the power of mobilizing people to uplift each other. Together, we can address the needs of our community in three focus areas: Health, Education and Financial Stability. These focus areas are critical levers in every resident's life and make it possible for each individual and family to thrive. We have created an Impact Goal for each in our Strategic Roadmap.

When a storm or crisis hits, stakes in the ground hold the tent in place so we are ready to act. This past year was dominated by rapid crisis responses to the pandemic and an apartment complex fire in Boxborough. Low-income residents, who have no emergency funds or insurance, are often hit the hardest in a crisis. In a volatile world, we need to be prepared and proactive. We are hopeful that we can extend the community spirit that was so visible throughout the multiple crises, to a year-round effort of “neighbors caring for neighbors.” As such, Crisis Preparedness & Relief warranted a dedicated focus in our strategic roadmap.





OUR GUIDING PRINCIPLES

WE BELIEVE IN

- ...thinking big and bold, coming from a place of joy and opportunity
- ...building bridges and coalitions.
- ...being nimble, creative, and entrepreneurial.

WE BELIEVE THAT

- ...everyone belongs and deserves a chance to thrive.
- ...our community's greatest assets are those who live in it.
- ...when we come together as neighbors, we all win.

WE ARE COMMITTED TO

- ...advancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Racial Justice in our organization, and in our community.
- ...building trust, transparency, and accountability.
- ...learning and growing as community leaders.



DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION (DEI) STATEMENT

A-B United Way is committed to advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and Racial Justice by putting them at the heart of our work and making them a strategic priority. Our Board of Directors voted to adopt the following DEI and Racial Justice Statements in June 2021. They clarify what we mean and how we see our role and the community's responsibility.

A-B United Way believes in a broad definition of diversity. We value both the unique visible and invisible qualities of each individual. Visible diversity can be differences that stem from race, color, ethnicity, gender identity or expression, age, physical disabilities, faith and religion. Examples of invisible diversity can be lived experiences, education, income, diversity of thought, faith and religion, sexual orientation or national origin.

We acknowledge that these visible and invisible qualities make each of us unique. We see this diversity as a particular strength of our community.

We welcome every person and their unique perspective and lived experience. To be the community we want to become, we draw on the differences in who we are, what we've experienced, and how we think.

We also believe that a remedy for underrepresentation of communities historically marginalized, not seen or heard, is essential. Underrepresentation speaks to a lack of influence, power, and voice within our community and being alone or "othered." Underrepresentation points to the need for equity and systemic changes.



Equity involves trying to understand and give people what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives.

Equality, in contrast, aims to ensure that everyone gets the same things in order to enjoy full, healthy lives. Like equity, equality aims to promote fairness and justice, but equality assumes that everyone starts from the same place and needs the same things.

We seek to promote systemic equity - systems, policies and patterns intentionally designed to create, support and sustain social justice. This also includes creating dynamic processes to strengthen and replicate equitable ideas, power, resources, strategies, conditions, habits and outcomes.

We believe that to serve everyone in our community, A-B United Way will seek to reflect the diversity within our community and seek to include everyone. Inclusion involves authentic and empowered participation and a true sense of belonging. We believe that no individual can thrive, unless they belong. We further believe that each community member and each of our donors, volunteers, advocates, and employees must have equal access to solving community problems.

Acton-Boxborough United Way strives to meet our goals and objectives with regard to DEI in our community by applying this DEI lens across our organization and in all our work. Intentionally, purposefully, however, the goal will always be just

out of reach. The work will be hard. We will make mistakes. But we will learn from our mistakes, persevere, and continue to strive to meet our DEI goals and objectives to build a better, improving and more welcoming community.

Each member of our community plays a role in advancing DEI and racial justice. Together, we must commit to the effort wholeheartedly.

For some of us, the work means summoning the courage to stand up and speak out, sharing opinions or experiences.

For others, the work means listening with patience and empathy, creating an environment conducive to dialogue even in circumstances that may make us uncomfortable.

And for all of us, the work means asking questions from the perspective of genuine, empathetic and inquisitive learning, respecting answers, being open to fresh perspectives, and, most importantly, appreciating one another's contributions to the community.

Join A-B United Way in embracing diversity, equity and inclusion for every individual in our community so that every person can belong and thrive.



RACIAL JUSTICE STATEMENT

Acton-Boxborough United Way affirms our commitment to antiracist action in our communities and beyond.

We denounce racism, colorism, ethnic or religious discrimination and oppression in all its forms.

Colorism is the prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a darker skin tone.

Racism in any form is dehumanizing to everyone it touches.

We stand in solidarity with those who have been calling for justice and working for so long to end institutionalized racism and white supremacy across our country, in our Commonwealth and in our towns and neighborhoods.

Racism encompasses more than just racial prejudices. Racism also involves social, institutional, and systemic power. Bias and racism can be unconscious or unintentional. We all have internalized many stereotypes, biases, myths, and conditionings that lead to biases and racism. Racism is a poisonous combination of social and institutional power with racial prejudice. Bias and racism, intentional or unintentional, hurt and wound individuals, families, communities, and our towns. We believe in the sanctity of safety for every neighbor. If one neighbor does not feel safe, it is not their problem, it is our problem as a community.

Identifying racism as an issue does not always mean that those involved in the act are racist or intended harm or the negative impact.

We recognize that there are systems and policies that were designed to marginalize people and the extent of the harm is only beginning to be acknowledged. Regardless of any individual's own race or ethnicity, we are all at various points along an antiracist journey. To help build an antiracist and ethnically unbiased community, A-B United Way will purposefully strive to identify, discuss, and challenge issues of race, skin color, ethnicity, or religious discrimination and its damaging impacts on all members of our community.

A-B United Way recognizes that antiracist work requires action by all members of our community. The work cannot be left to our community's Diversity, Equity & Inclusion public institutions, but must be undertaken and embraced by all of us. The work or burden should not be carried by residents from marginalized or targeted communities. The work of deepening our antiracist education must be paired with purposeful systemic changes to promote racial equity within our communities. Disrupting harmful patterns requires deep listening and learning before healing can start.

A-B United Way stands committed to the hard work of taking in the data and

information needed, and taking action as a result. Some of us are unpracticed and uncomfortable talking about, let alone leading, initiatives around race and systemic racism. The discomfort can be real. And if we shy away from it, it can be an obstacle to change. What literally has been given centuries to root will not be unearthed overnight.

Building the capacity to be antiracist takes commitment over time, hard work, uncomfortable conversations and action. We know that the results – a stronger community – are well worth it. A-B United Way stands committed to sustainable change, acknowledging the discomfort, and pushing forward.

Systemic racism in our local community is not an issue that can be addressed superficially. It will take a deep commitment from all community partners and residents to make the changes that are necessary.

A-B United Way is committed to putting antiracism at the heart of our work. We intend to engage our community, to offer a safe platform to learn, build, and act on an antiracist agenda and to be accountable for doing so.

Join A-B United Way to make our community a place where every neighbor has a voice, feels safe and belongs.

COMMUNITY INSIGHTS

A-B United Way is committed to broadly sharing data and key learnings with community organizations, as well as all residents in Acton and Boxborough. We hope that others in the community will find value in the information and will utilize it to develop their own objectives and strategies for serving our community.

On the following pages you will find a summary of the Community Survey, Stakeholder Workshops, and Community Scan (data analysis). At the end of each section is a link to the full report, each of which contains rich insights and data.



COMMUNITY SURVEY

Valuing the importance of community input and guidance, in November 2020, A-B United Way launched an online Community Survey. The goal was to create a community conversation space in which individuals could share their vision and priorities for the future of our community.

The Survey presents common themes and goals, specific challenges and obstacles, and opportunities for engagement and improvement.

The Survey revealed that residents and representatives across a broad range of community groups view A-B United Way as central to addressing challenges that the Acton and Boxborough community faces. Specifically, they see A-B United Way as filling an essential need in coordinating and facilitating connections and linkages between individuals and families in need, and resources available that may be able to assist or solve those needs.



Substantively, participants focused on concerns centered on diversity within our community. Making newcomers and existing residents feel warmly welcomed and included ranked high among respondents' key priorities, covering a range of groups within the towns – different racial and ethnic communities, residents and visitors with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ residents and visitors, the community's seniors and young people. Participants also emphasized the importance of addressing issues related to education, financial stability, and mental health in the community.

With regard to enabling A-B United Way's efforts to welcome and include the community's residents, participants underscored a need to listen attentively and respectfully, to seek out voices which may be unheard, to be inquisitive, and after hearing and learning what it can, to be courageous, consistent, resilient, and vocal in speaking to and confronting the challenges of the community. A key theme underlying the responses centered on a priority for

genuine and sustained courageous, inquisitive, empathetic community-wide listening and learning about who our neighbors are, their own unique histories and stories, and how A-B United Way can help make them feel included, valued and welcomed to Acton and Boxborough.

Respondents identified a need to model and teach our children and youth core principles of community including love, respect, kindness, compassion, the value of differences, self-reliance, self-respect, and hard work.

Lastly, respondents identified community mental health of students and young people in the community as a priority, as well as concerns regarding substance abuse among the community's students and young people. One notable concern centered on the academic pressure felt by many of our students, and the need for the community to value a broad range of post-ABRHS and post-vocational education paths and career paths.

For the full report of the Community Survey, [click here](#). It can also be accessed in Appendix 3.



BUILDING A SHARED VISION FOR ACTON AND BOXBOROUGH

STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOPS

To further home in on how to help the community move closer to its stated vision, A-B United Way conducted two Stakeholder Workshops with leaders and engaged citizens in the community. Stakeholders were asked to share their strategic insights and ideas about how A-B United Way could drive progress for the top-ranked objectives.

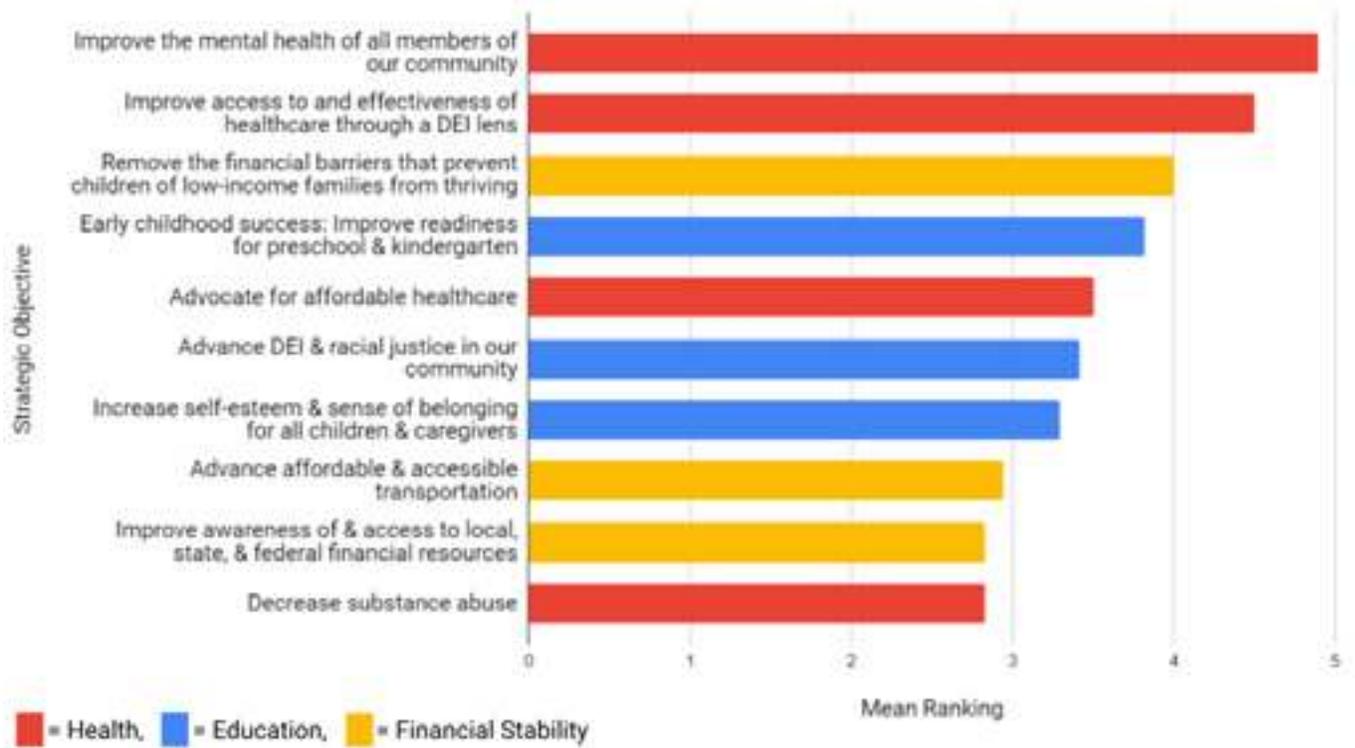
One of the important benefits of the Stakeholder Workshops was having so many community leaders from varying disciplines come together to collaborate and brainstorm about the community's future. Fostering collaboration such as this was an intentional design element of our planning process and is an example of the type of collaboration that we seek to foster.

Objectives Ranking

Community Stakeholders were asked to rank the 16 Community Objectives that were generated in the Community Survey. The stakeholders did this with two factors in mind: (1) those objectives that added the most value to all members of the community, and (2) those objectives that could be impacted by A-B United Way in a three-year time period.

Below is the result of their ranking, starting with the most important thing.

For the full report of the Stakeholders Workshop, [click here](#). The report is also accessible in Appendix 4.



COMMUNITY DATA SCAN

Building on our 2015 Community Needs Assessment, we are in the process of creating an updated Community Data Scan covering five areas:

- Demographics
- Socioeconomics
- Housing
- Education
- Public Safety

We will publish the data in phases. Below are key learnings from the Demographics analysis.

The purpose of the Community Scan is to organize the quantitative data and extract trends and insights in a meaningful way so that the data are actionable. By broadly sharing the data and trends, we hope that other community partners can benefit from the information to drive impact and change.

KEY LEARNINGS FROM THE DEMOGRAPHICS ANALYSIS

Population growth

- From 2009 to 2019, the population growth in Acton (14%) and Boxborough (9%) was significantly faster than in Middlesex County (7.2%) and across the state (5.3%). In 2019, Acton had 23,627 residents and Boxborough had 5,561.

Age groups

- Our population also continued to age over the same period, with a 90% increase in the 65+ age group in Acton and 53% in Boxborough.
- Children under age 5 declined as a percentage of the total population.
- School age children make up 24% of the total population in Acton and 23% in

Boxborough, compared to 19% in both county and state in 2019.

- The 20-39 age group is significantly smaller in Acton (17%) and Boxborough (20%) than in the county (28%) and state (27%) in 2019.
- Adults aged 40-54 make up a larger percent of the local population, 28% in both towns, compared to 23% in both county and state in 2019.

Birth Rates

- The number of births in Acton and Boxborough declined significantly. The combined number of births dropped from 396 in 2009 to 170 in 2019. This is below county and state average.

Gender

It is important to note that the Census only captures gender LGBTQ data at the state level. At town level, the data only reflect male or female.

- From 2009-2019, the male/female ratio remained fairly constant and evenly split.

Race & Ethnicity

The Census data on race ask for self-identification. For example, when an individual self-identifies as Asian, the person might be American-born, a first-generation immigrant, adopted, or a second-generation Asian-American. Racial classification is different from birthplace, nationality and ethnicity.

The Census data refer to Hispanic/Latino residents, which includes Spanish-speaking residents; however, this does not include Brazilians as most speak Portuguese. According to a Pew study of 2018, just 3 percent of the Brazilian population in the US will self-identify as Hispanic/Latino. The Census data do not fully reflect the Brazilian population, locally or nationally.

The Census data make a distinction between White and Hispanic. However, 90% of Hispanic residents in the US identify as White.

- From 2009 to 2019, racial diversity continued to increase in both towns, with the largest growth in residents self-identifying as Asian.
- The number of Asian residents in Acton grew from 3,231 in 2009 to 6,149 in 2019, a 90% increase.
- In Boxborough, the number of Asian residents grew by 327 to 1,000 in 2019, a 49% increase.
- The expansion of our Asian population has also brought about a growing ethnic

diversity. Chinese and Indian residents made up 88% of the Asian population in 2019 in both towns. Other Asian residents had roots in Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam and the Philippines.

There are several significant differences in the population composition in Acton and Boxborough vs. the county and state.

- Asian residents make up 1 out of 4 residents in Acton (26%) and 1 out of 5 in Boxborough (18%), compared to 13% of county residents and 7% of state-wide residents.
- Black residents make up 1.5% of Acton and 0.7% of Boxborough, significantly lower than the county (6%) and state (9%).
- The percentage of the Hispanic population in Acton is 4% and in Boxborough 5%; both are far below county and state levels (8% and 12%).
- The percentage of White residents in Acton (69%) is lower than the county (78%) and state (81%). Boxborough is close to the county level with 77%.

Birthplace

- In Acton, 1 out of 4 residents were foreign born in 2019. For Boxborough, the ratio was 1 out of 5.
- Approximately, 1 out of 3 Asian residents were born in the US. Over 10% of White residents were foreign born. This figure does not include Hispanic residents, 90% of whom identify as white.
- About half of the foreign-born residents in Acton and Boxborough have lived in America for over 20 years.

For the full report of the Community Data Scan (Demographics Analysis), [click here](#). The report is also accessible in Appendix 5.

IMPACT GOALS & PLANS

OVERVIEW

Through the Strategic planning process, we identified **five high level impact areas** to be our focus for the next three years. They are illustrated below.



FOUR STRENGTH-BASED STRATEGIES

Acton-Boxborough United Way is a proud member of the United Way Worldwide network of over 1800 independent chapters across 40 countries. As a result, we can draw on tremendous network expertise and resources to accelerate learning and increase our local impact.

Across the network and in our own practice, we identified four strengths-based strategies that have proven to increase impact. These strategies are:

ASSESS

Assessing grassroots needs is what A-B United Way has done for 40 years. It is what United Ways do very well across the US. We gather community data and knowledge, assess community needs and share that knowledge with partners and the community to turn knowledge into action.

CONVENE

As a trusted community leader, we will continue to build on our strong tradition and expertise in bringing partners from across the community together. It is a core strength we plan to use to bring about effective change.

PROGRAM

Based on the assessments, we prioritize and bring targeted programming to advance strategic goals. Using a DEI lens, we will seek to intentionally reach out and engage our entire community, especially those who are traditionally underserved and underrepresented.

CONNECT

Connecting residents with resources in the most efficient way is at the core of what we do. Despite being wealthy suburbs, our communities are a desert for social services, especially for residents under the age of 60. And with so many newcomers to our community, identifying and accessing resources is often extra challenging.

Visit and help direct others to the new **Community Resources Site for Acton and Boxborough residents** through abu.w.org/community-resources. It provides an overview of local resources and services for food security, mental health, healthcare, transportation, cost-saving programs, racial justice, civic engagement opportunities, community connections, and the new “welcome initiative” for new residents. It also lists information for seniors and children.

1 EQUITY & RACIAL JUSTICE



DREAM STATE

A community in which everyone feels they belong.

3-YEAR GOAL

Increase community conversations and support learning about DEI & Racial Justice.

KEY LEARNINGS

In our 2015 Community Needs Assessment, racism was not listed as a concern. Analysis of data by race and ethnicity were limited.

However, with the continued tragic deaths of so many innocent people of color, a rise in anti-Asian hate and an increase in anti-Semitism, the national awakening is also echoing in our local community. The Community Survey that we conducted this past year showed an overwhelming concern about the need to ensure that all neighbors feel safe and belong.

“Making sure that newcomers and existing residents feel warmly welcomed and included” ranked high among respondents’ key priorities. Respondents specifically called out a breadth of racial and ethnic communities, residents with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ residents, and our seniors and young people as those whose needs we must address.

Belonging is obvious for some. For others, it is much less so. No one thrives, unless they belong.

- We are living in a time when divisiveness has increased locally, nationally and around the world.
- Local incidents of hate underline the need to educate our community.
- A-B United Way’s “open tent” approach is uniquely positioned to enable community learning about Racial Justice.



INITIATIVES & PROGRAMS

STRATEGIES	YEAR 0	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3
ASSESS.		Gather data on diversity of leadership in towns (gov, nonprofit, businesses)		
CONVENE.	AB Racial Justice Collaborative – 37 groups!	AB Racial Justice Collaborative	AB Racial Justice Collaborative	AB Racial Justice Collaborative
PROGRAM.	Wide Field Panel with A-B United Way staff/board- Acton TV	Acton in Focus panel discussions (viewership metrics?)	Panel discussions	Panel discussions
		Meet Your Neighbor - Acton TV	Meet Your Neighbors - Humans of AB	Meet Your Neighbors - Coffee Table Book
	“No Place for Hate” mask distribution	Community-wide speaker: The Power of Language	Community-wide speaker: TBD	Community-wide speaker: TBD
	Chalk the Walk / Week of Action	Chalk the Walk / Week of Action	Chalk the Walk/ Week of Action	Chalk the Walk/ Week of Action
	MLK Day of Action	MLK Day of Action	MLK Day of Action	MLK Day of Action
	Students United - Reading to Preschool Students	Students United - Reading to Preschool Students		
	Bystander Training	Support Collaborative programming and advocacy (Website, Welcome volunteers, Bystander Train the Trainer)	Support Collaborative programming and advocacy	Support Collaborative programming and advocacy
CONNECT.		MLK Day of Action		
		Students United - Reading to Preschool Students		
		Determine how to incorporate DEI and Racial Justice priorities in our annual Community Investment process of allocating grants to area nonprofits serving A-B residents.		



YEAR 1 HIGHLIGHTS

We believe that our expertise in convening makes a strategic difference for our community.

Earlier this year, A-B United Way took on a leadership role in the **AB Racial Justice Collaborative** of more than 30 local community groups who come together monthly to share, learn, increase collaboration and avoid duplication of efforts and resources. We see great potential in this collaborative as DEI and Racial Justice are not one person's or one group's responsibility. It will take all of us to bring about meaningful change.

Starting this fall, we plan to **train circle keepers (facilitators) to lead "community building circles."** These small-group conversations are for neighbors to get to know each other. A key theme underlying the Community Survey responses centered on a priority for genuine and sustained courageous, inquisitive, empathetic community-wide listening and learning about who our neighbors are, their own unique histories and stories.

For many years, Congregation Beth Elohim (CBE) has done incredible work bringing the community together for an event on **Martin Luther King Jr. Day**. This past year, we supported CBE to expand outreach during the pandemic. We also created an MLK Day mini website to amplify a wide range of local activities and events by community groups. Expanding collaborations like these is a key priority.

Connecting people with resources is critical. We created and will expand a **[shared resources site](#)** for the AB Racial Justice Collaborative to make it easy for residents to learn and grow, individually and jointly, through reading, movies, podcasts or by participating in events, book clubs and more.

All resources sites - one per impact area - will be linked under an umbrella "community resources" site. This site will be accessible through the [abuw.org](#) site and via links with community partners' websites.



2 MENTAL HEALTH



DREAM STATE

All residents recognize the importance of prioritizing mental health, know where to turn for resources, and enjoy regular programming to promote well-being among all our neighbors.

3-YEAR GOAL

Enhance community-based mental health resilience.

KEY LEARNINGS

A community-wide commitment to mental health is necessary to make a difference.

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention were raised as primary concerns in the Community Survey and in the Stakeholder Workshops. Both topics have been a community priority in the past years and continue to stand out as a major challenge.

The pandemic has had profound effects on our community's mental health. The collective impact of grief, anxiety, and isolation has been felt across the board, impacting different groups of residents in various ways.

Seniors in our community demonstrated remarkable resilience, according to a mental health assessment among senior residents over 60 years old, executed by A-B United Way in

collaboration with the Council on Aging in Acton in the fall of 2020.

Special consideration needs to be given for segments such as students and young adults, women, working parents, Asian-Americans, BIPOC, residents who have lost jobs, seniors, victims of domestic violence, LGBTQIA+ and more. It is evident that the impact will be felt long after the pandemic is over.

We found that while topics of mental health and well-being have become less taboo for some residents, there are still others who are much less comfortable seeking the help they deserve. The vastly different backgrounds and lived experiences are important to understand and address in our increasingly diverse community.



INITIATIVES & PROGRAMS

STRATEGIES	YEAR 0	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3
ASSESS.	<p>ABCRN Survey</p> <p>Senior Survey in collaboration with the Council on Aging in Acton</p>	<p>Utilizing DEI lens: Needs Gap Assessment (especially new needs created/exacerbated through COVID, collective grief), Resource Map (what is already available, how to access, share through coalition & site)</p>	<p>Access & affordability</p>	
CONVENE.		<p>Convene a Mental Health Coalition to break down silos, facilitate shared learnings, and foster joint initiatives.</p>	<p>Gather private practitioners</p>	
	<p>AB Cares Coalition for Suicide Prevention</p>	<p>Continue to be a driver within the AB Cares Coalition</p>	<p>AB Cares</p>	<p>AB Cares</p>
	<p>Participate in: AB Community Resource Network (ABCRN), Boxborough Well-Being Committee (BWC)</p>	<p>Continued voice in existing community coalitions: ABCRN, Boxborough Well-Being Committee</p>	<p>ABCRN, BWC</p>	<p>ABCRN, BWC</p>
PROGRAM. "COMMUNITY AS MEDICINE."	<p>Community-wide Resiliency Workshop</p>	<p>Community speaker: Addressing effects of COVID, grief & anxiety, strategies for recovery (virtual) - Possibly Dr. Robert Brooks</p>	<p>Community summit: Prioritizing Mental Health</p>	<p>Community speaker: TBD</p>
	<p>National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) panel (college), back-to-school panel (students)</p>	<p>Targeted programs: students, women & seniors – in partnership with Coalition</p>	<p>Targeted programs: Chinese-American, TBD</p>	<p>Targeted programs: TBD</p>
	<p>Week of Action (Art Kits for Group Home Residents, Letters to Seniors, Ice Cream Drive-Bys)</p>	<p>Week of Action - Supporting students & edu community in back-to-school</p>	<p>Week of Action</p>	<p>Week of Action</p>
	<p>7 Virtual QPR Trainings, in collaboration w/ AB Cares</p>	<p>Continue QPR trainings, targeted outreach to low-income</p>	<p>Train/Invite Chinese-language QPR trainers</p>	
	<p>Safer homes safer communities (AB Cares)</p>			



STRATEGIES	YEAR 0	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3
CONNECT.	Resource site with calendar (incl 211)	Further develop and share resource site .(partner w/college students) with calendar (amplify regional programming - incl. Drug disposal, etc).	Expand & share resources (grant for site/app?)	Maintain & share resources
			Resources & training for local police	
	Community Impact Grants	Community Impact Grants (refine reporting, assess impact on priorities)	Community Impact Grants	Community Impact Grants
		Expand Assist grant criteria to allow for help with mental health emergencies		

YEAR 1 HIGHLIGHTS

A key focus in year 1 will be to recover from the stress and isolation of COVID by creating new pathways for trust, connection, and community.

AB Cares Coalition, focused on suicide prevention, is one of the first community collaboratives that demonstrates the power of convening. We believe that creating a **broader local Mental Health Coalition** will be most impactful. The goal is to include local stakeholders in mental health with insight on a wide variety of audiences, reflective of our diverse community and its wide ranging mental health needs. We hope to engage higher-ed partners, faith groups, and community coalitions (AB Cares, the AB Community Resources Network and the AB Racial Justice Collaborative).

With input from this coalition, we will execute a **Community Mental Health Needs Assessment** to help inform what work needs to be done (both by us, and by all partners).

We will focus on needs created and exacerbated through COVID, examining collective grief, and needs of specific audiences, such as those who were economically burdened by COVID, children, working parents, and more... all with a DEI lens to make sure we are capturing the needs and opportunities of our diverse community.

A-B United Way has long been known for the **annual community speaker series** that brings residents together for shared learning on a topic. We plan to continue this tradition, as well as grow our targeted programming in collaboration with local partners.

A recurring theme from the community input was that residents often don't know what local resources are available to them. We plan to further develop **our mental health resource site**. We will work with community partners to share the information and to update resources for those in crisis, as well as resources that promote well-being for all.



3 EARLY CHILDHOOD SUCCESS



DREAM STATE

All children have the option to attend a quality Pre-K program. All children enter kindergarten ready to learn. Families understand the importance of and engage in local enrichment options to promote skill development and socialization for their young learners.

3-YEAR GOAL

Increase the number of children who enter kindergarten ready to learn.

KEY LEARNINGS

Early childhood support is critical for young families in many ways. These key data informed our goals:

- Annual costs at a child care center in Massachusetts average about \$30,000 for an infant and a 4-year-old, which is 32 percent of the median income for families with children. ([source: Center for American Progress](#))
- All families need access to affordable child care and preschool to support working parents and to ensure that children start kindergarten ready to learn.
- Many local families are not aware of resources available to help with child care costs.

Learning at any age requires a close partnership between the schools and the community. Early childhood success is a community responsibility and we need to make

sure that all kids can start kindergarten ready to learn.

- By the age of four, economically disadvantaged children hear about 30 million fewer words than their more advantaged peers. ([source: Ready4K](#))
- Massachusetts families need access to affordable child care and preschool to support working parents and to ensure that children start kindergarten ready to learn. During the first five years of life, children learn critical skills such as language and socio-emotional regulation, which provide a foundation for life-long learning. ([source: Center for American Progress](#))
- Many United Ways have robust Early Childhood Success programs; therefore there are tried and tested programs readily available.



INITIATIVES & PROGRAMS

STRATEGIES	YEAR 0	YEAR 1 INITIATIVES	YEAR 2	YEAR 3
ASSESS.		Gather baseline data: early childhood success with demographic breakdowns	Monitor & share data	Monitor & share data
		Gap assessment: Identify Barriers & Opportunities For Improving Early Childhood success		
CONVENE.	Child care Taskforce	Convene an Early Childhood Coalition to develop strategies for reaching underserved audiences (goal: find facilitator multicultural playgroups)	Early Childhood Coalition	Early Childhood Coalition
PROGRAM.		Implement Ready4k	Promote Ready4k	Promote Ready4k
		Born Learning Trail in Action	Spanish-language Born Learning Trail Acton	Born Learning Trail Boxborough
	Week of Action (pilot storytime, science kits for Discovery Museum)	Week of Action: Early Childhood Success Kits	Week of Action	Week of Action
	Virtual Storytime with Senior Readers	Virtual Storytime with Senior Readers	Virtual Storytime with Senior Readers	Virtual Storytime with Senior Readers
CONNECT.		Develop a resource site, including financial support for child care.	Maintain & share resources	Maintain & share resources
	Community Impact Grants	Community Impact Grants	Community Impact Grants	Community Impact Grants



YEAR 1 HIGHLIGHTS

Two programs we plan to bring to Acton and Boxborough in this coming year have been successfully implemented by other United Ways. We are able to learn and benefit from their experiences.

First, **the Born Learning Trail:** Learning happens everywhere a child goes, but parents, grandparents, and caregivers may not always know how to support that learning. Walking on a Born Learning Trail with an early learner, caregivers will be prompted to tell a story inspired by their surroundings, brainstorm words that start with letters painted on the ground, try to make each other laugh. A way to promote engagement and skill development -- while having fun outside!

We plan to bring the first Born Learning Trail to Acton this coming year, followed by another Trail in Boxborough the year after. [Learn more](#) about the Born Learning Trail.



Our next initiative to engage families of early learners is **Ready4K**. Developed by educational researchers, Ready4K is an evidence-based family engagement curriculum delivered via text messages. Each week, parents and caregivers receive fun facts and easy tips on how to promote their children's development by building on existing family routines, like pointing out letters on the cereal box at breakfast, counting the number of steps as you walk to the car or bus, or making faces that show your feelings in the mirror after you brush your teeth. In a series of randomized controlled trials, this approach has been shown to increase child development by 2 to 3 months over the course of a school year.

The program is available in several languages including Chinese and Spanish. We hope to make this available for free to parents and caregivers in Acton and Boxborough starting in the fall of 2021. [Learn more](#) about Ready4K.



4 FINANCIAL STABILITY



DREAM STATE

All low-income residents can benefit from a holistic care network.

3-YEAR GOAL

Increase the use and availability of resources for low-income residents.

KEY LEARNINGS

Financial Stability is fundamental to thriving. The pandemic has hit many households hard, especially those with residents working in low-wage jobs:

- Over 720 local families are receiving free food assistance each week, a 61% increase vs. before pandemic (Food Security Taskforce June 2021 Data).
- In the past 10 years, income inequality has sharply risen. Households earning over \$200K rose 89%, while the number of low income households (earning below \$50,000) remains flat. (2019 Census Data).
- More than 1,000 residents live at the federal poverty level in Acton and Boxborough (2019 Census Data). Many more families don't earn enough for a basic survival household budget, even when two adults work full-time. Most families rent. They cannot afford to save for a down-payment to buy a house, nor save for college or for retirement. Many have to choose between child care or a job, as a low income job cannot cover the cost of child care. They have no funds to deal with an emergency such as a job loss or medical emergency. (Living Wage Calculator MIT 2000 - Middlesex County).



Under 60 years old:

- Lack of affordable housing is the biggest cause of financial instability. Low-income residents are financially stretched to pay increasingly high local rent, leaving no financial buffer. Job losses and lack of child care due to COVID made the situation worse.
- For low-income residents, we are a “desert for social and economic mobility services” (career services, basic adult education, career fairs are no longer offered locally). Lack of transportation limits opportunity. Also, there are very few affordable local enrichment offerings for children.

Over 60 years old:

- Over the past 10 years, seniors (65+) are the fastest-growing group, totaling 15% of the population (90% growth in Acton and 53% growth in Boxborough)
- Seniors in our community have access to many local services, compared to residents under 60. Seniors in the lowest income brackets have access to a range of free services. Lower middle class struggles because services are expensive. Lack of affordable housing for seniors and high taxes for those on fixed income also present challenges.



INITIATIVES & PROGRAMS

STRATEGIES	YEAR 0 (CURRENT)	YEAR 1 INITIATIVES	YEAR 2 INITIATIVES	YEAR 3 INITIATIVES
ASSESS.	Gather data (Census, stakeholders) and share data publically	Provide input to Build out community data page on A-B United Way site	Refresh community data	Refresh community data
		Gather more data e.g. through talking to people. Develop an Unmet Needs table.	Continue to gather	Continue to gather
CONVENE.		Convene a Community Advisory Board (CAB) to develop strategies for reaching underserved audiences. Identify best ways to communicate (with other subteams)	Use and expand CAB	Use and expand CAB
		Convene outreach groups around "Unmet Needs Table" - ask local groups to distribute kids clothing		
	Food Security Taskforce	Food Security Taskforce (FST)- evolve as needed	Food Security Taskforce	Food Security Taskforce
	Partner with ABCRN	Partner with ABCRN (Acton Boxborough Community Resource Network)	Partner with ABCRN	Partner with ABCRN
	Child care Taskforce	Child care Taskforce - evolve as needed		
PROGRAM.		Create Welcome Wagon packets, distribute through landlords + Volunteers (multilingual) to welcome people new to the community and answer questions/share resources. (with AB Racial Justice Collaborative)	Expand system of distribution	





INITIATIVES & PROGRAMS

STRATEGIES	YEAR 0 (CURRENT)	YEAR 1 INITIATIVES	YEAR 2 INITIATIVES	YEAR 3 INITIATIVES
PROGRAM.		Volunteers helping seniors (eg bring trash to transfer station, shovel, clean backyard after storm)		
	Help people find jobs: - Ask ComEd for free training on resume writing and prep for interviews for entry level job seekers - ask AB schools/towns and surrounding towns to share entry level jobs openings with social workers	Help people find jobs: - attract funding (grant?) and increase advocacy to bring economic mobility programs from Masshire, SMOC here for people to find entry level jobs non-profits/state agencies - (low priority) : help organize local career fair for entry level jobs		
		Free Tax Preparations: Work with AARP to expand local services to residents under 60, or work with VITA tax preparation (UW resource) to bring virtual or in- person services to our community.		
		(low priority) Help set-up Massachusetts chapter of United Way's ALICE group (sharing practices financial stability)		
		Education: - Lobby local community colleges to bring adult basic education/GED to the suburbs or virtually if there is a need. - Promote Budget Buddies - virtual financial workshops for women and 1:1 coaching	Work with partners to rollout programs like "Boston Builds Credit" in the suburbs	Introduce financial literacy program option.



INITIATIVES & PROGRAMS

STRATEGIES	YEAR 0 (CURRENT)	YEAR 1 INITIATIVES	YEAR 2 INITIATIVES	YEAR 3 INITIATIVES
PROGRAM.			AB summit: Wealth Inequality / Financial Stability in the Suburbs (include youth panel?)	
		Share list of available low rent apartments with social workers as needed	Peer to peer support group?	
		- If opportunity arises, talk to legislators to increase affordable housing, child care, transportation	Advocacy program (affordable housing, child care, transportation)	
	Week of Action (supply drives)	Week of Action	Week of Action	Week of Action
CONNECT.	Resource site with calendar. (incl 211). Community resource flyer.	Maintain resource site with calendar. (incl 211). Add additional info as needed (eg UW programs, who can help apply...). Share flyers.	Investigate feasibility, logistics of A-B United Way marketplace app or central database across town/orgs	Create and launch A-B United Way app or update resource database/site
	Share United Way programs: Familywize	Share United Way programs like Familywize, student loan programs,...		
	Community Impact Grants, Assist grants, State fund for undocumented immigrants	Increase Community Impact Grants (to agencies), Increase Assist grants (direct to residents). Evaluate how child care grants are used/do they cover the need/DEI lens?	Community Impact Grants, Assist Grants	Community Impact Grants, Assist Grants



YEAR 1 HIGHLIGHTS

Initiate the **Unmet Needs Table**. As we learn about emerging and evolving community needs that are not being met (for example, when out of the scope of the Town Community Coordinator services), A-B United Way will share a “needs” list with the community groups (faith communities, and other groups) based on the belief that we can be more effective as we coordinate, share information and brainstorm solutions.

Create a **Community Advisory Board**. We will be inviting volunteers to help connect with ALL residents in our community, to hear all voices and help advocate, to better understand needs, and share information and connect directly through the widest possible range of communication channels. In a community where 80 languages are spoken at home, there is no one-size-fits-all.

Develop **Welcoming Committee initiatives** to share community information via landlords and other channels to new community members so they can connect more quickly with available resources. Organize a group of volunteers in collaboration with the Acton-Boxborough Racial Justice Collaborative to help answer newcomers’ questions.



5 CRISIS PREPAREDNESS



DREAM STATE

An effective, holistic community response to prepare and support our most vulnerable residents in disaster and crisis.

3-YEAR GOAL

Improve preparedness for and ability to respond to disasters and crises and share learnings from Boxboro fire with other communities.

KEY LEARNINGS

With two big disasters in our community in the past year - COVID and the Boxborough Fire - we learned so much about the additional hardship low-income families experience, and about crisis preparedness and relief.

Unprecedented collaborations with so many organizations and volunteers, and generous financial contributions by so many residents, made a big difference.

COVID & Boxborough Fire:

- There is more work to do to reach all members of our community. Hidden needs became more visible in crisis.
- We have experienced the power of collaboration across organizations and increase in trust of A-B United Way as a community leader and convener.
- There is potential to mobilize the caring power of our community (from financial support to stepping forward as volunteers).
- Red Cross commented that they have never seen such swift, innovative and effective mobilization of an entire community to support 24 families who lost their home in a fire, especially with COVID restrictions. This “whole community” approach is worthwhile to share beyond our own community.



INITIATIVES & PROGRAMS

STRATEGIES	YEAR 0 (CURRENT)	YEAR 1 INITIATIVES	YEAR 2 INITIATIVES	YEAR 3 INITIATIVES
ASSESS.		Reflect and document learnings Boxborough Fire and COVID by A-B United Way and community partners		
CONVENE.			explore regional NVOAD vs local coalition	
PROGRAM.	Boxborough Fire Relief		Disaster preparedness workshop (Red Cross)	Disaster preparedness workshop
CONNECT.	COVID-19 Grants, Boxborough fire grants	Create Disaster Response Playbook based on experience from COVID & Boxborough Fire. Share with UW's, Red Cross, NVOAD and other partners.	Develop resource site with resources for both Disaster Preparedness & Disaster Recovery	Maintain & share resources

NVOAD (*National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster*) is a national forum with chapters in each state, where voluntary organizations share knowledge and resources throughout the disaster cycle—preparation, response and recovery—to help disaster survivors and their communities.

YEAR 1 HIGHLIGHTS

Of course, the dream state is never to have any disasters or crises, but that is not realistic. Therefore, we need an effective, holistic community response to prepare and support our most vulnerable residents.

We plan to document and share the learnings with other communities and further improve our own preparedness for and ability to respond to disasters and crises.



COMMUNITY INVESTMENT / GRANT ALLOCATIONS

A-B United Way has a strong tradition of supporting area nonprofits that deliver critical services to Acton and Boxborough residents that otherwise would not be available. Thanks to the generosity of the community, we can leverage the combination of small and large gifts to direct services where most needed and we can demand more transparency about where and how funds are used. We can also encourage agencies to work together to the benefit of our community.

The annual grants are allocated through a community-driven investment process. In the coming three years, we plan to:

- Reverse the grant-funding cycle so we raise funds before we allocate them (a key goal of the 40th Anniversary Campaign).
- Strengthen and improve the effectiveness of the process.
- Expand community participation in the decision-making.
- Reevaluate allocation criteria from a DEI lens.
- Align the grant allocation with this strategic plan's priorities.
- Increase funding.

IMPACT MEASUREMENT

We recognize the importance of tracking progress against each of our goals and to communicate that progress with the community. Impact measurement is an area that we plan to develop and refine, leveraging the resources available within the United Way Network. A-B United Way created a new Impact and Technology Committee to determine best practices. Impact measurement will inform our learnings, help refine our programs, and inform the development of future programs and initiatives.

We will track metrics for each initiative. In year one, we will be mostly gathering baseline data, as we have few historic data to track against. We will collect data to track who we are engaging with our programs, both in number of participants and also in diversity of those participants, as we want to ensure we are reaching our increasingly diverse communities. Through our Assess strategies under each goal, we will collect broader community data which will continue to shape our initiatives.

Longer term, we will monitor community data trends such as kindergarten screening data and census data.



ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS

The ambitious impact goals we've outlined will require an increase and optimization of our organizational resources.

In the past two years, under new executive leadership, A-B United Way experienced rapid growth in impact and visibility.

A critical success factor has been our ability to mobilize our community to volunteer and donate.

We introduced and will continue **to embrace a new community-centric business model.** Intentional community-building, community engagement and volunteer engagement is at its core. We want to keep inviting volunteers and community partners to come together, to work together to give back to our community. We embrace the power of collective fundraising to increase the impact of any gift, large or small.

We will continue to invite all members of the community to participate -- individuals, small businesses, large corporations, foundations, organizations and public funding sources. This diversification and growth of funding sources is essential in a rapidly changing philanthropic world.

In the Fall of 2021, A-B United Way will reach a big milestone: **our 40th Anniversary.** A big anniversary offers a time to come together and celebrate all leaders - current and past - and lift up our strong community tradition of neighbors caring for neighbors. It also creates an extraordinary opportunity to evaluate and adapt to today's

realities, to leave behind what no longer works and invest in being the best organization we can be.

A new business model demands a new narrative. Our 40th Anniversary offers the opportunity to share our new community-centric narrative and further invest and strengthen our capacity building.

Sustaining rapid organizational growth over the next three years requires further investment in strategic resource development, organizational structure and operational excellence.

As a member of the United Way network, we plan to leverage strong network resources and best practices, including the Modern United Way Blueprint and especially increased sharing and learning with other United Ways in MA, to achieve these organizational goals.



THE MODERN UNITED WAY BLUEPRINT

Over the past two years, we adopted the “**Modern United Way Blueprint**” as our **guidestar and methodology** to help us deliver our promise to our community. We will continue to use this Blueprint as we aim to nimbly navigate through today’s turbulent and uncertain times and to address the challenges that come along with rapid organizational growth.

Key tenets of the Blueprint are:

- We dare to lead with a growth mindset. (This includes making and acknowledging mistakes)
- We reflect our community in philosophy, policy and participation, using a DEI and equity lens in all our work.
- We understand what needs to be done locally.
- We are insight and data-driven -- it’s not how we think it is, but how we know it is.
- We offer unparalleled service, solutions, content and engagement.
- We leverage team talent in conjunction with technology to empower people (board, staff, volunteers) across our organization.
- We don’t go it alone. We partner, share and learn through community partners and the United Way network.

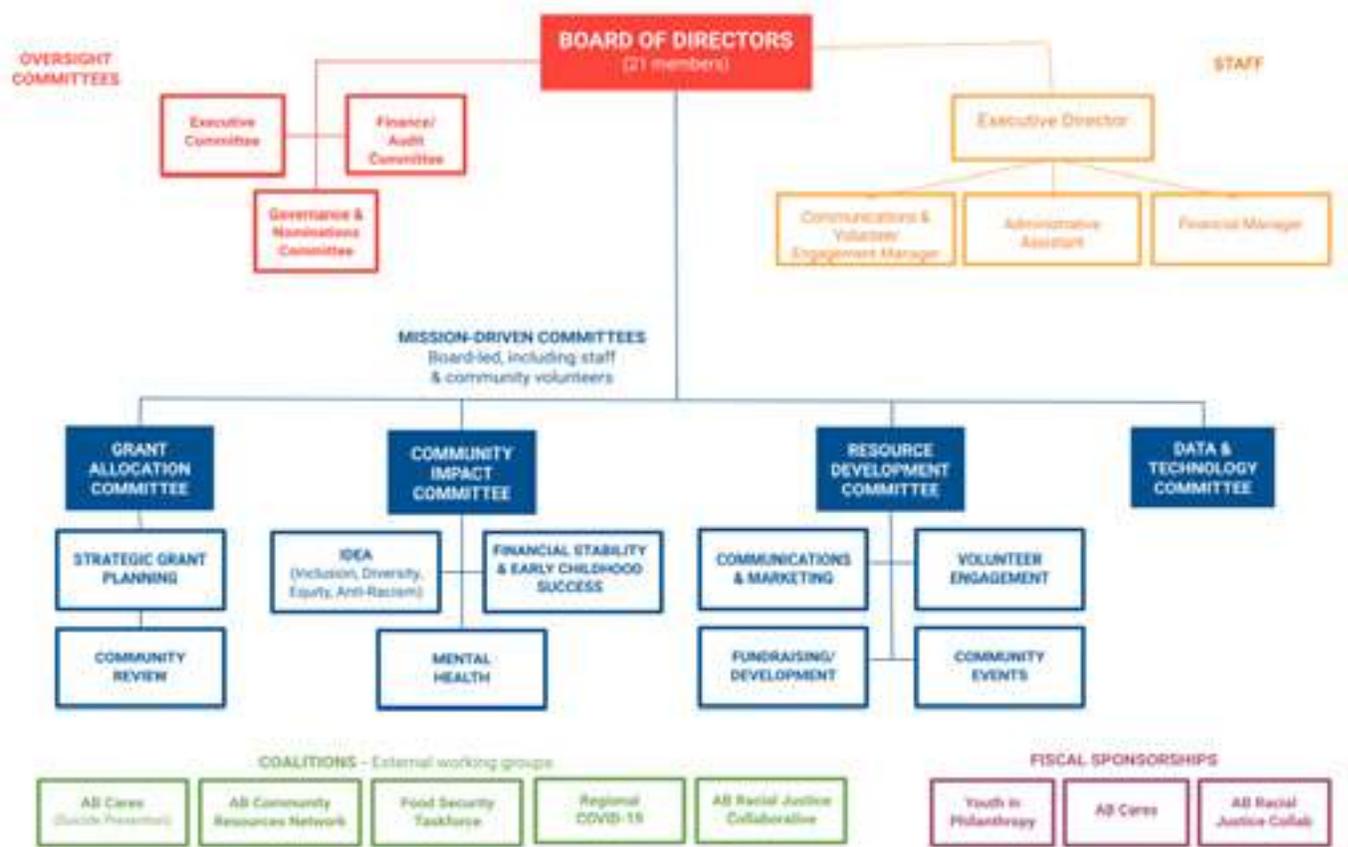


ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE & OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

A critical success factor of our increased impact in the past two years has been our increased ability to mobilize our community.

Volunteer engagement rose from 2,400 in-kind volunteer hours in fiscal year 2019, to 8,600 volunteer hours in fiscal year 2021. Effective continued mobilization of a much larger volunteer corps requires a more robust organizational structure.

This organogram shows our current organizational structure. We will continue to adjust it over the next three years.





YEAR 1 GOALS:

Board and Committees:

- Refine committees' goals, roles and responsibilities and those of the Committee (Co-)Chairs.
- Create a separate Audit Committee and Finance Committee.
- Undertake an in-depth Board Self-Assessment using United Way resources and create Board training where appropriate.
- Strengthen the governance of the organization by adopting or updating policies.
- Invest in Committee and Board leadership development with a DEI lens.
- Strengthen process for Committees to provide timely input on annual impact and resource development plans and budget.

Staffing goals:

We intend to remain a volunteer-driven organization, but effective mobilization of resources requires a small nimble professional staff. The growth in volunteer engagement and our ability to drive new or reinvigorate existing coalitions was made possible by an upfront investment in staff. In the past two years, the staff team grew from one full-time equivalent employee to three full-time equivalent employees today.

- Hire one part-time staff member in development and community giving.
- Retain one paid "Fellowship" from a student or graduate of an area college/university for a time-limited and project-focused fellowship, where the recipient contributes specific expertise.

Other Optimization Goals:

- Create annual operational plans including tech plan to help leverage optimal use and integration of technology & data security plan.
- Leverage data to measure progress and gain insight for internal purposes.
- Strengthen human resources, training and create and/or update operation procedures for staff.
- Attract pro-bono external advisors with expertise to help address one internal capacity-building challenge each year.
- Leverage United Way resources to support operational excellence, including to update policies.
- Invest in larger multi-functional office space that can accommodate a staff team, community volunteers and other groups for year two and three.



STRATEGIC RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Strategic Resource Development requires a holistic and integrated approach to Marketing and Communications, Community and Volunteer Engagement, and Development/Fundraising to achieve our 3-year impact goals and vision.

The growth of volunteer engagement and giving in the past two years has shown the potential and generosity of our resource-rich Acton and Boxborough community. United, we can mobilize our community for our common good.

It requires vision, leadership, upfront and continued investment in capacity-building and operational excellence to meet the enormous opportunities in our community and overcome critical challenges.

For each of the three resource development areas -- marketing and communications, volunteer engagement and fundraising -- each volunteer team will provide timely input to the staff to **create an annual resource development plan**. These plans will be shared with the board together with the budget for the coming year. The creation of these annual plans will allow progress measurement and adjustments where needed.



Marketing & Communications

Our high-level marketing and communications objective is:

to position Acton-Boxborough United Way as the trusted, leading community-building organization and premier partner that drives meaningful, sustainable, measurable change to help every resident in Acton and Boxborough belong and thrive.

Over the past two years, we have embraced a new community-centric business model. This requires a change in our narrative -- from a fundraising organization to the leader in intentionally building community.

Key strategies include:

1. Expand audience and broaden reach, utilizing a DEI lens to reach all audiences.
2. Increase public knowledge and insight of community needs (ie, sharing the Community Scan, etc.).
3. Work in partnership with the Impact Teams to Increase awareness, understanding, and engagement with our impact initiatives.
4. Support volunteer engagement goals, in collaboration with the volunteer engagement team, to increase the number, diversity, and satisfaction of volunteers.
5. Support communications by the coalitions in which A-B United Way is an active convener or participant to optimally share knowledge and impact with the community.
6. Support financial and non-financial goals in collaboration with the Campaign team through creation of tailored fundraising materials.
7. Optimize use of United Way Worldwide resources and assure quality/brand standards.
8. Create annual marketing and communications plan with input from relevant teams, including use of data to assess and improve development effectiveness.



Community & Volunteer Engagement

Our high-level Community & Volunteer Engagement objective is:

to create opportunities for everyone to engage in making our community a great place to live for all, turning every opportunity into an awesome experience.

We have experienced tremendous growth in volunteer engagement in the past two years (8,600 volunteer hours in FY21 from 5,800 hours in FY19). To support achieving our strategic impact goals, we will continue to strengthen our community and volunteer engagement. As such, we are committed to:

- continue to operate as a volunteer-driven organization with a small nimble staff team
- be the “Open Tent” where everyone can come together and give back at whatever level works for them
- deepen collaboration, exchange ideas and resources, and avoid duplication

Key strategies include:

1. Strengthen volunteer onboarding process, including the creation of a volunteer handbook to welcome volunteers and enhance transparency.
2. Strengthen the sense of community and ease ongoing communication and collaboration among volunteers through encouraging the use of virtual collaboration platforms and a set of communication channels.
3. Improve the use of data in community engagement of volunteers, event or activity participants and community partners (tracking of hours, celebration of milestones).
4. Enhance corporate engagement opportunities.
5. Support effective coalition building, by sharing out information and learnings and stepping forward as the trusted convener.
6. Create an annual community and volunteer engagement plan with input from relevant teams, including use of data to assess and improve program effectiveness.





Development/Fundraising

Our high-level strategic development goal is:

to continue to grow revenue (10% average annual growth over the next 3 years), to diversify funding sources and to lift up the power of collective giving to create greater impact in our community.

In the past, many United Ways relied heavily on contributions from employees in their workplace. In the last two years, A-B United Way has transformed its fundraising model to reflect its community-centric approach by diversifying funding from a broader range of sources: individuals, small businesses, large corporations, area foundations and public funding sources. Thanks to the generosity of our community, we achieved revenue growth from \$260,000 to \$530,000 and a significant increase in the number of donors.

The new holistic resource development approach can be illustrated by our event design. The “neighbors storytelling” event in spring is intentionally designed to serve multiple purposes: as an opportunity for community members to come together, to build community and get to know each other, while also providing the opportunity to donate and give back to the community.

In an increasingly diverse and global community with 1 out of 4 residents foreign born, Acton-Boxborough United Way will intentionally reach out to all community

members and cannot assume that residents know our organization or impact, or that “giving back” by making gifts, is an important American and local community tradition. We plan to continue to demonstrate that the power of collective fundraising increases the impact of any gift, large or small.

The celebration of A-B United Way’s 40th Anniversary this fall provides a great opportunity to launch a year-long “40th Anniversary Campaign” during Fiscal Year 2022. The Campaign, with a \$275,000 goal, aims to support the implementation of the strategic plan, especially the reversal of our grant funding cycle; to build and celebrate the caring power of our community; to increase A-B United Way’s visibility; to increase our internal fundraising capacity; to increase touchpoints to connect with current, former and new donors; to introduce our new narrative and introduce multi-year pledges to select leadership donors.



Key strategies include:

1. Strengthen infrastructure to support short- and long-term fundraising goals (including hiring and rapid onboarding of part-time development and community giving manager; optimizing use of cloud-based database and fundraising tools; Board training and involvement).
2. Expand giving opportunities for individual donors by offering more giving channels (annual giving, digital campaigns, multi-year giving, recurring giving; planned giving).
3. Implement integrated and differentiated fundraising strategies for community members with different abilities to contribute:
 - Develop leadership giving program
 - Differentiate appeals for long-term and new donors
 - Strengthen tailored stewardship and thank-you practices
4. Increase grant funding, leveraging the 3-year strategic plan.
5. Increase corporate support from our local business community.
6. Create an annual fundraising plan with input from relevant teams including use of data to assess and improve development



APPENDIX 1

THANK YOU TO
Thrive2024
CONTRIBUTORS

THANK YOU to *Thrive2024* CONTRIBUTORS



Coming together as a community was central to creating this roadmap.

We are grateful for the more than 190 community members who formally participated in the survey, community conversations, stakeholder and board workshops, Community Scan analysis, impact-focused subteams, and Strategic Planning Taskforce over an 8-month period.

Thank you to all of you who shared ideas and concerns as we worked alongside one another throughout the pandemic, the Boxborough Fire, or in community groups such as the AB Racial Justice Collaborative, the Food Security Task Force, the Acton Boxborough Community Resources network, or other groups.

It takes a courageous Board to invest in a virtual planning process while working to mitigate the impact of the pandemic and the Boxborough Fire. Under the inspirational and

bold leadership of former Board President Karen Collins, we reimagined our community's future, anchored in equity and racial justice. We are deeply appreciative of our Board's commitment and vision.

A special thank you to Board member Jo-Anne Nyer, who led the Board's Strategic Taskforce and planning process; to Nancy Settle-Murphy for her consulting expertise in designing a virtual community-centric planning process; to Karen Collins for underwriting this consultancy; and to Emerson Hospital for the Community Benefit Grant in support of our strategic plan to improve community health.

Finally, we would like to acknowledge the talents of Sylvan Huynh for the Graphic Design of *Thrive2024* and Megan Lloyd for the front cover community illustration.

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AB CARES (SUICIDE PREVENTION)

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH COMMUNITY RESOURCES NETWORK

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH COVID RESPONSE GROUP

ACTON-BOXBOROUGH RACIAL JUSTICE COLLABORATIVE

BOXBOROUGH WELL-BEING COMMITTEE

COVID-19 CHILD CARE TASKFORCE

COVID-19 FOOD SECURITY TASKFORCE

SUB-TEAM PLANNING COMMITTEES

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Karen Collins, underwriter of strategic planning consultancy Emerson Hospital, Community Benefit Grant in support of our strategic plan to support community health.

FY21 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

AMY CEREL	JO-ANNE HARRIS NYER	PAT EASTERLY
ASHWIN ANAND	JOEL FRIEDMAN, TREASURER	PUBALI BANERJEE
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ELIZABETH SUN	MARIE ALTIERI	ZAINAB GARELNABI
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JILL O'BRIEN, BOARD PRESIDENT ELECT	MARTHA PAPALIA, SECRETARY	

APPENDIX 2

Acronyms

AARP	American Association Of Retired Persons
ABCRN	Acton-boxborough Community Resource Network
ABRHS	Acton-boxborough Regional High School
ABRSD	Acton-boxborough Regional School District
ABUW	Acton-boxborough United Way
ACACS	Acton Chinese American Civic Society
ACLS	Acton Chinese Language School
BIPOC	Black, Indigineous, People Of Color
BWC	Boxborough Well-being Committee
CAB	Community Advisory Board
CBE	Congregation Beth Elohim
COA	Council On Aging
DEI	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion
FST	Food Security Taskforce
FY	Fiscal Year (Abuw's Fiscal Year Runs July 1 - June 30)
GED	General Education Development (High School Equivalency)
IDEA	Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Anti-racism
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Asexual, + Any Additional Gender/Sexual Identities
MLK	Martin Luther King Jr.
NVOAD	National Voluntary Organizations Active In Disaster
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TBD	To Be Determined
VITA	Volunteer Income Tax Assistance
UWW	United Way Worldwide

APPENDIX 3

Community Survey

[Click here](#) to open the Community Survey



**Acton-Boxborough United Way
3-Year Strategic Roadmap:**

COMMUNITY SURVEY SUMMARY REPORT

March 22, 2021

Prepared by:

Carol Buysse | Jo-Anne Nyer | Bert Ware
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INTRODUCTION

In October 2020, the Acton-Boxborough United Way Board of Directors agreed to develop a strategic roadmap for A-B United Way for the coming three years. This strategic process will enable A-B United Way to plan thoughtfully to meet the diverse and growing needs of the Acton and Boxborough community.

Valuing the importance of community input and guidance, in November 2020, A-B United Way launched an online Community Survey. The goal was to create a community conversation space in which individuals could share their vision and priorities for the future of our community. The following report summarizes Community Survey responses from over 100 residents of diverse backgrounds. It presents common themes and goals, specific challenges and obstacles, and opportunities for engagement and improvement.

After analyzing the responses to the Community Survey, A-B United Way invited 40 community members to prioritize the community survey findings in a pair of workshops held in January and early February 2021. The participants also further brainstormed strategies to achieve the articulated goals.

The learning from the Community Survey and Stakeholders Workshops is being used in two ways:

First, it serves as the foundation on which A-B United Way will develop its goals, and design and build its strategies and plans. A-B United Way will articulate measurable outcomes that align with its three “impact areas”: health, education and financial stability -- as well as its commitment to advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and Racial Justice and responding to crises (such as COVID-19 or the Boxborough Fire).

Second, the information will be shared with survey participants and community organizations, as well as all residents in Acton and Boxborough. A-B United Way recognizes that it will not have the resources to act on all of the ideas generated in the survey and workshops, and hopes that others in the community will find value in the information and will utilize it as they develop their own objectives and strategies for serving our community.

A-B United Way would like to give special thanks to Nancy Settle-Murphy of Guided Insights who consulted with us on the structure for developing the 3-year Strategic Roadmap in a virtual environment, as well as the design and implementation of the Community Survey and Stakeholder Workshops.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Survey revealed that residents and representatives across a broad range of community groups view A-B United Way as central to addressing challenges that the Acton and Boxborough community faces. Specifically, they see A-B United Way as filling an essential need in coordinating and facilitating connections and linkages between individuals and families in need, and resources available that may be able to assist or solve those needs.

Substantively, participants focused on concerns centered on diversity within our community. Making newcomers and existing residents feel warmly welcomed and included ranked high among respondents' key priorities, covering a range of groups within the towns – different racial and ethnic communities, residents and visitors with disabilities, LGBTQIA+ residents and visitors, the community's seniors and young people. Participants also emphasized the importance of addressing issues related to education, financial stability, and mental health in the community.

With regard to enabling A-B United Way's efforts to welcome and include the community's residents, participants underscored a need to listen attentively and respectfully, to seek out voices which may be unheard, to be inquisitive, and after hearing and learning what it can, to be courageous, consistent, resilient, and vocal in speaking to and confronting the challenges of the community. A key theme underlying the responses centered on a priority for genuine and sustained courageous, inquisitive, empathetic community-wide listening and learning about who our neighbors are, their own unique histories and stories, and how A-B United Way can help make them feel included, valued and welcomed to Acton and Boxborough.

Respondents identified a need to model and teach the children in the community core principles of community including love, respect, kindness, compassion, the value of differences, self-reliance, self-respect, and hard work.

Lastly, respondents identified community mental health of students and young people in the community as a priority, as well as concerns regarding substance abuse among the community's students and young people. One notable concern centered on the academic pressure felt by many of our students, and the need to value evenly a broad range of post-ABRHS and -vocational education paths and career paths.

A-B UNITED WAY COMMUNITY SURVEY

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic and public health lockdowns and restrictions, A-B United Way conducted the Community Survey on-line during November 2020. A-B United Way launched the Survey through www.MeetingSphere.com to hoped-for respondents in the Acton and Boxborough community, including residents, community leaders and stakeholders, long-time volunteers, and current and former Board members.

Survey respondents are associated with

- youth, community and civic engagement nonprofit organizations,
- local and state government agencies,
- the regional school district,
- the local business community,
- faith-based communities,
- social and racial justice community advocacy groups, and
- a diverse group of residents in Acton, Boxborough and neighboring communities.

Survey questions and responses can be accessed [here](#).

SELECT RELEVANT DATA POINTS CONCERNING THE SURVEY METHODOLOGY AND RESPONDENTS

A-B United Way received 109 individual responses to the Survey. Demographically, the number of respondents constitutes 0.35% of the approximate total number of residents in Acton and Boxborough. The racial makeup of the individual respondents is 66% white, 13% Asian, 6% African American or Black, 0% Native American, 2% Hispanic or Latino, 13% unknown. Foreign-born individuals comprise at least 11% of the individual respondents. Residents under 18 years of age comprise 2% of the individual respondents, 19-35 years old 4%, 35-50 years old 19%, 51-64 years old 47%, 65+ years old 10% and 18% of unknown age. Female residents comprise 74% of the individual respondents, Male residents 24%, unknown gender 2%. 47% of the respondents reside in Acton, 16% in Boxborough, 14% in neighboring towns and 23% unknown. (See appendix for relevant United States Census Bureau data.)

Notwithstanding the numerically narrow slice of the combined number of residents of Acton and Boxborough, because of carefully selective targeting of individuals to whom A-B United Way invited to participate in the Survey, Survey respondents constitute an unscientific but comparatively representative sampling of residents from across our community.

ANTICIPATED FOLLOW-UP WITH RESPONDENTS & COMMUNITY STAKEHOLDERS

Generally, respondents eagerly and freely answered and addressed the questions posed in the Survey. To further sharpen the learnings from the Survey, A-B United Way is also conducting two Community Stakeholder Workshops and a series of small-group Community Conversations. Information gleaned from these activities will be incorporated into A-B United Way's strategic planning as well.

A-B United Way anticipates that it will make this report, as well as a recap of the Stakeholder Workshops, publicly available to the community as part of the strategic roadmap in June 2021.

A-B UNITED WAY COMMUNITY SURVEY

The following sections generally track the questions posed in the Survey, identifying key highlights and themes from the responses. Some questions and information are condensed for the ease of presentation.

The Survey opened with two brainstorming questions. The first question focused on respondents' vision for what an ideal Acton and Boxborough community would look like in three years. The second question focused on what leadership characteristics and qualities A-B United Way must embody to help the community make that vision a reality.

Question 1 *Imagine it's November 2023. Acton-Boxborough has just been named as a model community for mobilizing all its residents to come together to create access to health, educational opportunity, and financial stability for every person. Reporters from The Boston Globe and The New York Times have asked you to help write the headline that captures why you love to be part of this community. How would your headline read?*



Common themes centered on an aspiration for Acton and Boxborough to be a community that cares for and welcomes all residents. Respondents hoped that the community will acknowledge the increasing racial and ethnic diversity of our towns and the pressing need to make individuals and families new to the community feel included. Respondents' vision included fostering a thriving and safe community, and specifically identified that it will ensure access to all that the community offers for our residents and visitors with disabilities, our LGBTQIA+ residents, and our newcomers. Respondents also looked to be a community that focuses greater attention on the needs of the communities' seniors, and one that continues to excel in education.

"We all benefit from reaching out and learning from one another. Long-time residents learn, and newcomers to the community learn as well. And being around people who are different from us makes us all more creative, smarter and stronger. We all come away from the experience richer communally and as residents in our towns."

"Acton Boxborough is a welcoming and diverse community that supports and empowers people of all ages to imagine and to live safely and healthily."

"Acton Boxborough cares for its citizens of all ages, races, ethnicities, genders, abilities and orientations - AB cares for EVERYONE!"

Question 2 *In this same article, Acton-Boxborough United Way is recognized as a catalyst to this stunning achievement, achieving what many had thought impossible. What are the essential characteristics, qualities, beliefs or principles that A-B United Way must embody to help lead the community in making this vision as reality?*



“(A-B United Way must be) an anchor for all community members, an org with strategic leaders that are willing to hold the bull by its horns and drive the agenda, an org that is willing to foster/lead uncomfortable conversations about race, equity and inclusion. An org that has the ability to bring people together to appreciate their differences and how it enriches them and not divide them.”

Responses to this question about A-B United Way’s leadership fell into two categories: “HOW” A-B United Way must show up (that is, what characteristics and qualities should A-B United Way embody), and “WHAT” A-B United Way must do to be a successful catalyst.

With regard to the “HOW”, respondents mentioned that it will be important for A-B United Way to embody the following characteristics and qualities:

- a good listener; an inclusive listener;
- respectful, compassionate, and empathetic;
- honest and transparent;
- courageous, committed, and resilient for the long-term;
- inquisitive and visionary; and
- empowering and encouraging others in the community.

With regard to “WHAT” must be done, respondents noted that A-B United Way must take the following actions to succeed:

- Be bold leaders, challenge the status quo, and drive the agenda;
- Collaborate with town leaders and residents to develop and execute plans;
- Foster and lead uncomfortable conversations, especially around DEI;
- Acknowledge that residents’ needs change over time and rely on data to inform decisions;
- Break down the barriers to full inclusion across all services;
- Reflect DEI in A-B United Way’s own operating principles; and
- “Walk the Talk” by investing in programs and initiatives that empower multiple voices.

Question 3 *Acton-Boxborough United Way has identified certain areas of focus where it can make the greatest impact. Thinking about each area, what specific goals would you like to see us achieve? As you respond, consider the beautiful diversity of our population, including cultures, languages, age ranges, financial situations, and other important demographics.*

3-1. Childhood success (age 0-12 years) - e.g. education, health, overall well-being

A majority of respondents emphasized that all children in the community need an opportunity to thrive. Respondents identified a number of goals and initiatives to help attain childhood success, including

- encourage the school district to bring aboard a more diverse staff which better reflects the diversity of the community,
- commit to and reinforce with school administrators, faculty and staff DEI training, rethink and deliver a fuller, more complete history curriculum,
- translate all school and town communications into the commonly spoken non-English home languages, and provide language interpreters for town meetings and school events,
- collaborate with local daycare facilities, preschools and groups like ABFN to facilitate more inclusive programming and to provide all families with the tools they need to support their children's education, and
- ensure all children in the community have access to necessary tools and supplies (WIFI, electronic devices, school supplies, etc.).

Respondents identified a need to model and teach the children in the community core principles of community including love, respect, kindness, compassion, the value of differences, self-reliance, self-respect, and hard work. Modeling and teaching the core principles should permeate all ages for the community's young people to help ensure that they feel seen, heard, valued, and understand the importance of their contribution to the community.

In addition, respondents noted that childhood success also turns on

- helping to meet the needs of food-insecure families,
- providing support for single parents and parents of children with disabilities to find and access after-school transportation, and child care, and
- identifying why some children do not attend pre-school (financial and cultural barriers, etc.) and then addressing these challenges so that pre-school enrollment becomes a viable option, especially for families in which English may not be a first or home language.

3-2. Youth success (ages 12-24 years) – e.g. education, health, overall well-being

Notably, comparatively A-B United Way received more comments and responses to this particular question and issue. Respondents mirrored many of the same issues identified in the previous section, most notably better representation in our schools of our diverse population so that children and families of every race and ethnicity can feel heard and represented. In addition, to help young people in this age range meet their full potential, respondents urged that efforts be made to increase leadership, mentorship, volunteer and internship opportunities for all students and young people, and especially for traditionally marginalized and underrepresented populations in the community.

A particularly notable concern centered on valuing evenly a broad range of post-ABRHS and -vocational education paths for career paths, equally supportive of vocational education as higher education. Finally, we should identify and address the issues regarding why certain groups of AB students don't pursue education after high school.

Respondents also identified financial challenges and support as a barrier and derailer for youth success. Initiatives identified that A-B United Way might consider include

- support after-school transportation to enable young people to take advantage of school sponsored clubs and athletics opportunities,
- support transportation to and from the community to Middlesex Community College for enrolled students,
- assist students from the community interested in pursuing further education beyond ABRHS and vocational education in identifying means of financial support toward those goals, including counseling and identifying potential sources for private scholarships, and other tuition support,
- assist students who may face immigration/status-based challenges and obstacles, and
- provide post-ABRHS and -vocational scholarships and tuition support focused on meeting A-B United Way's stated goals with regard to racial and socioeconomic equity.

Equally important, respondents identified community mental health of students and young people in the community as a priority. Pressures in the community about achieving academic success can prove overwhelming and, as demonstrated over the past several years, can be extraordinarily damaging. Far too often, the community measures, recognizes and signals success and validation in its young people by taking note of grades, test scores, which colleges and universities they attend, and more. Respondents urged that in the interest of a more balanced and healthier approach, A-B United Way encourage and foster a wider exploration of career and extracurricular paths and a more holistic approach to success and happiness not solely centered on academic achievement. Respondents also identified concerns regarding substance abuse among the community's students and young people.

3-3. Financial stability – e.g. income equity, housing, transportation

Respondents identified several areas in which community residents need financial support, including

- Affordable housing and rent subsidies to create more opportunities for
 - town workers, teachers and other residents who serve our community,
 - low-income families,
 - survivors of and individuals affected by domestic violence,
 - newcomer immigrant families who have not yet secured residence status,
 - persons with disabilities living independently, and
 - seniors, and
- Public transportation and free/low cost transportation options for
 - work, school, after-school programs, and recreation,
 - the Boxborough community to the South Acton commuter rail station
 - persons with disabilities,
 - seniors and for mobility-impaired individuals for access to medical appointments, and

- Ready access to affordable daycare, extracurricular programming, after-school care, and
- Financial support necessary to access “specialty” extracurricular programming – e.g., the Russian School of Math, music classes, Acton School of Ballet, etc. – and access to affordable daycare and after-school care.

3-4. Access to health – e.g. affordable medical care, mental health, overall fitness

Respondents acknowledged the complexity of the healthcare system, yet challenged the community to do a better job in making healthcare accessible to the community’s residents. Many collaborative relationships already underway in Acton and Boxborough can be enhanced, more fully coordinated, and better funded.

A principal goal centered on helping to make certain that community residents know of and can access resources and services currently available. More specific goals focused on removing the barriers to meaningful access including financial barriers, language barriers and the stigma associated with mental illness and substance abuse. Related actions to be considered include:

- identify and engage a more ethnically and racially diverse and LGBTQIA+ sensitive pool of therapists and counseling staff at ABRHS,
- establish collaborative, working relationships with local health care providers to support home visitation services for seniors, vulnerable children, and for improvement of maternal and newborn health, and
- create more access to recreation areas for all and more opportunities for affordable adult recreation.

3-5. Diversity, equity and inclusion

Respondents enthusiastically engaged in response to this question, calling out and focusing on a need for greater visible diversity in our community reflected in local government, elected and appointed boards, agencies, school administration and teachers, public safety, non-profit boards, local institutions, and other leadership positions. Other notable themes and observations raised included

- encourage, foster and model more immersive community-wide engagement by all residents around DEI goals for Acton and Boxborough, enlisting schools, the business community, town governments, faith communities, and other local institutions,
- greater support and funding for organizations primarily focused on addressing structural solutions to combat systemic racism and lead policy and advocacy efforts in the community,
- generate greater awareness around issues of domestic violence to make it easier for survivors of domestic violence to report and receive help,
- develop a community-funded, -sponsored department or a volunteer committee comprised of a broad range of community residents across a range of ages, socioeconomic and educational levels, races and ethnicities to pursue community-wide DEI goals,

- encourage all members of our community, including young people and adults who may be reluctant to do so, to engage on with an open and inquisitive mind in DEI conversation, dialogue and issues,
- acknowledge that the DEI conversations and dialogue will be challenging and difficult, while recognizing that affecting systemic change is an ongoing effort that will require the whole of the community,
- partner with institutions and organizations – e.g., town government, schools, faith communities, social clubs, etc. -- to develop strategies to expand reach and engagement within the community in support of DEI genuine conversations and dialogue,
- encourage active participation of traditionally underrepresented and marginalized groups in town institutions,
- offer the marginalized, unheard communities support through access to greater civic engagement through training, workshops, and mentorships to encourage confident participation,
- communicate more effectively to the community's diverse members for whom English may not be a first or home language information about town government, resources and services (through professional language translation services in the most commonly-used non-English languages) to encourage deeper civic engagement of the community's diverse population,
- design, measure against, and publicly report both specific engagement and satisfaction goals and the community's progress toward DEI standards through surveys and other community engagement efforts, and
- establish a culture center to host a variety of cultural events that can be accessed by all community residents to foster interaction, connection, community, and conversation within the community.

3-6. Other areas of impact

Respondents identified a handful of additional aspirations and goals to be considered by A-B United Way, including

- create more cross-cultural and intergenerational activities to showcase the community's diversity and to build connections among residents,
- leverage ActonTV, the local community public access television outlet, more effectively,
- enlist local artists to reach more members of the community, to share stories, perspectives and understanding, and to initiate conversation, and
- protect and preserve the community's open spaces for clean air, water and biodiversity.

Question 4 *To achieve our goals, we need relationships, alliances and partnerships with those who share our passion and energy for working together to make a lasting impact on the lives in our community. What organizations, affiliations, entities, groups, or individuals should we seek out? This can be a type of organization or entity, or a specific organization or a person you may have in mind. Consider those within our A-B community and beyond, including regional, national, or even global organizations.*

Respondents recognized the need for partnership and collaboration across the community in order to make our vision a reality, including

- Town governments, boards & agencies
- Housing advocacy organizations, e.g., Acton Housing for All
- Local sports & recreational leagues
- Youth organizations, e.g., the Boy Scouts of America (“BSA”), the Girl Scouts (“GSA”), the Boys & Girls Club
- Past A-B United Way board members
- Civic & cultural affinity organizations, e.g., the Acton Chinese Language School (“ACLS”), the Acton Chinese American Civic Society (“ACACS”), and Essence of India
- Public safety & law enforcement, e.g., the Acton Police Department (“APD”), the Boxborough Police Department
- Acton-Boxborough Regional School District
- School-affiliated youth groups, e.g., Youth in Philanthropy at ABRHS,
- Cultural institutions, e.g., the Discovery Museum
- Faith-based communities and houses of worship, and affiliated youth-focused groups
- Mental health providers
- Civic organizations, e.g., the League of Women Voters, local garden clubs, local Women’s clubs
- Business community leaders
- Social justice advocacy groups, e.g., Fostering Racial Justice Group, Black Lives Matter
- Local nonprofits, e.g., Danny’s Place, Acton-Boxborough Community Resource Network
- Community parent & neighborhood groups Society (“ACACS”), and Essence of India

Respondents lauded the virtual public forum co-hosted by the Acton town manager’s office and ACACS on BLM and racial diversity in the community. Open dialogue between residents and local officials proved encouraging with APD taking an active role. While feedback proved favorable, more needs to be done to foster a better understanding of and steps to address community concerns. Respondents expressed the hope that the dialogue might be a model for future public forums.

Respondents also identified the Food Security Taskforce, created in 2020 in response to the pandemic, as a successful model for collaboration. Respondents suggested that the taskforce continue past the end of the pandemic, possibly reshaping itself to include more widespread resources. In addition, the approach should be applied to other service areas in our community.

Respondents urged the creation of an easily-accessed, well-publicized, on-line virtual space to enable residents – both those in need of services and support, and those able to volunteer, or to provide assistance and resources – to connect more easily and readily.

To the extent that a clearinghouse or similar concept already exists through town resources in Acton or Boxborough, arrange a link to enable broader and more direct access between those in need and those able to assist. If appropriate, expand the network to other area resources – e.g., neighboring towns, Emerson Hospital, local chambers of commerce, religious institutions, as well as state agencies and institutions.

Because Acton and Boxborough are small communities with limited resources, respondents suggested that A-B United Way consider partnering with organizations outside of the towns to expand its ability to support community residents, including:

- Emerson Hospital
- Local business communities
- Neighboring towns
- Mental health experts
- Regionally-based religious institutions
- A-B Cultural Council, The MA Cultural Council, Other arts foundations
- Academic and educational institutions
- Middlesex West Chamber of Commerce

Question 5 *For us to achieve our intended impact, we must do a better job of reaching residents who are underserved or might need more support. What might be some of the best ways to reach A-B United Way's constituents to better understand their wants and needs?*

Respondents believe that the best means of reaching A-B United Way's audience and constituents is through

- newsletters (e.g., senior-centered publications through the Acton Council on Aging ("COA"), Meals on Wheels, and the Senior Center, faith-based community-publications through the area and local houses of worship, school PTO-based publications, the Silver Unicorn independent book store, Acton Recreation Department & Community Education publications, the Acton Memorial Library, and the Sargent Memorial Library)
- social media (e.g., using the same social media channels of the organizations referenced above),
- the Nextdoor.com app, the WeChat app, the WhatsApp app, and other cross-platform messaging services,
- mailings to targeted audiences and constituents appended to town mailings and notices, including Action Unlimited,
- mass communication channels and publications like The Beacon, ActonTV, and town-owned Acton Radio WAEM-LPFM 94.9 MHz FM,
- grass-roots-based one-on-one, word-of-mouth outreach pushed through the ABRHS, local youth groups, and seniors, and
- links to existing networks through food security providers, the Acton Housing Authority, ACLS, ACACS, events hosted by the Silver Unicorn book store and other businesses, and ABCRN.

More details on suggestions about how to reach specific groups within our community can be found on the Survey questions and responses document at

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QCPYPm4SZB8x5Uoy5J-_ZcdW4ZbP6foJt6G5VHI4JZA/edit?usp=sharing - section 5"](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QCPYPm4SZB8x5Uoy5J-_ZcdW4ZbP6foJt6G5VHI4JZA/edit?usp=sharing - section 5)

Question 6 *Achieving a bold, shared vision will take a village. Please share your ideas about the best ways to engage, inspire and motivate volunteers across these different groups.*

Achieving a bold, shared vision will take a village. In general learning through collaboration and across functions in different volunteer groups and types is vital. It is also important to acknowledge and recognize volunteers with appreciation, thanks, and, in instances where appropriate, rewards – e.g., early notice for upcoming events, preferred access to tickets for events, etc. -- and to ask volunteers if they would like to bring a friend or know anyone else who would like to volunteer.

Respondents identified several ideas about the best ways to engage, inspire and motivate specific volunteer groups.

6-1. Families & Parents

- Create volunteer opportunities where families can volunteer together – all ages.
- Students generally must meet a community service requirement in the school system. To encourage students to direct their energies toward program and volunteer initiatives targeted and supported by A-B United Way, publish notice of opportunities in the student daily emails, or through ABRHS clubs focused on DEI and community service, or local youth organizations such as the BSA or GSA, and faith-based organizations.
- Students who demonstrate sustained engagement in program and volunteer initiatives targeted and supported by A-B United Way, consider – where appropriate and warranted – offering the student an individualized letter of recommendation in support of college or employment applications.

6-2. Young Professionals

Respondents report that young professionals increasingly engage in volunteerism where a clear community and social impact is evident, and where the volunteer opportunity is flexible/one-off to combine with work schedules. Respondents believe that young professionals will eagerly pursue leadership roles in driving initiatives and to network with the staff, board and other volunteers. Engagement with seasoned A-B United Way staff, and current or former board members can create mentoring opportunities that benefit both professionally and communally the young professional, A-B United Way, as well as the community.

6-3. Local Business Community Leaders

Respondents urge a greater and more sustained outreach to local business community leaders. Engagement with well-run, visible United Way sponsored initiatives can be an effective means of supporting brands and local businesses with team building opportunities to volunteer in the community, goodwill and publicity.

6-4. Faith & Spiritually-Based Institutions & Organizations

Respondents suggest that A-B United Way collaborate with area faith-based organizations to foster community conversations and dialogue. Faith-based organizations, respondents report, also are eager to support group team building opportunities in the community. Collaboration with the Acton Clergy Association can enhance interdenominational cooperation.

6-5. Newcomers to the Community

Respondents report that individuals and families new to Acton and Boxborough can benefit immensely from volunteer opportunities as a means of becoming knitted into the fabric of community, getting to know the community, and becoming known in the community. One channel suggested to reach newcomers is through the housing rental agencies and realtors who serve the area.

In addition, respondents suggest that A-B United Way may wish to consider forming an affinity group for individuals and families new to the community. Common and shared interests – and solutions and resources -- could form a solid foundation for welcoming the newcomers to the community.

6-6. Engagement of Racial & Ethnic Communities

Respondents note that to engage and motivate members of different racial and ethnic groups who may traditionally perceive that they are left out of what goes on in Acton and Boxborough, thoughtful and culturally-sensitive marketing is essential. In addition, sustained outreach to these communities and an acknowledgement of an eagerness to welcome these communities into the broader fabric of the towns is critical.

6-7. Collaboration with other Local Nonprofits

Respondents suggest that effective partnering with other local nonprofits with similar missions in our principal focus areas can be encouraged by a continued willingness on the part of A-B United Way to collaborate in grant proposals and development. Beyond the traditional nonprofit community, respondents urged that A-B United Way look also to local and community organizations like the Acton Lions Club, the Acton Minutemen, and the Middlesex West Chamber of Commerce.

6-8. Seniors

Respondents suggest that the community's seniors enjoy volunteerism principally for its social aspect and positive impact on the community. The opportunity to pass on generational knowledge to younger residents of the community would likely be a welcome opportunity and provide a level of engagement beneficial to the seniors, an invaluable asset to the community, and to younger residents. As noted previously, engagement likely is best communicated through the COA and other channels outlined above.

APPENDIX

About Acton-Boxborough United Way

A-B United Way is an independent 501 (c) (3) nonprofit, and a member of the United Way Worldwide network with over 1800 local United Ways. A-B United Way is based in Acton, Massachusetts, supporting the communities of Acton and its neighboring town, Boxborough. Our mission is to mobilize the caring power of community to bring positive lasting change. United, we fight for the health, education and financial stability of EVERY resident in Acton and Boxborough.

Under the supervision of an engaged 19 member Board, Griet Dehandschutter, Executive Director, leads a three-person staff team. Together, we mobilize approximately 150 volunteers a year who give back over 6000 volunteer hours to our community.

United States Census Bureau Data

In 2019, the United States Census Bureau estimates that approximately 29,400 residents live in Acton and Boxborough. QuickFacts, United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/actontownmiddlesexcountymassachusetts> (retrieved Dec. 4, 2020) (Acton);

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/boxboroughtownmiddlesexcountymassachusetts,actontownmiddlesexcountymassachusetts/PST045219> (retrieved Dec. 4, 2020) (Boxborough).

For context to reflect how representative the information gathered from the Survey appears in comparison to the residents of the communities A-B United Way serves, relevant demographic data for Acton and Boxborough shows the following.

Approximately 23,600 residents live in Acton. Town residents live in approximately 8,800 households, averaging 2.65 persons per household. Eighty-six point eight percent (86.8%) of town residents live in the same household as they did one year ago. The racial makeup of Acton as of July 1, 2019 was 69.6% white, 25.1% Asian, 1.7% African American, 0.1% Native American, 3.1% Hispanic or Latino, 0.1% from other races, and 2.9% from two or more races. Foreign-born individuals comprise approximately 26.2% of Acton residents. Residents under 18 years of age comprise 24.6% of the individuals in Acton, and residents 65 years of age and older comprise 15.5% of the individuals in Acton. Female residents comprise 51.5% of the individuals in Acton. Six hundred ninety-seven (697) veterans reside in Acton. Ninety-five point two percent (95.2%) of the households in Acton have a computer with 92.4% having broadband internet access. Ninety-seven point one percent (97.1%) of Acton residents are high school graduates with 75.7% holding a bachelor's degree or higher. See QuickFacts, United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/actontownmiddlesexcountymassachusetts> (retrieved Dec. 4, 2020).

Approximately 5,800 residents live in Boxborough. Town residents live in approximately 2,300 households, averaging 2.56 persons per household. Eighty-four point one percent (84.1%) of town residents live in the same household as they did one year ago. The racial makeup of Boxborough as of July 1, 2019 was 72.5% white, 21.6% Asian, 0.8% African American, 0.0% Native American, 3.7% Hispanic or Latino, 0.0% from other races, and 3.4% from two or more races. Foreign-born individuals comprise approximately 21.3% of Boxborough residents. Residents under 18 years of age comprise 21.5% of the individuals in Boxborough, and residents 65 years of age and older comprise 11.3% of the individuals in Boxborough. Female residents comprise 48.5% of the individuals in Boxborough. Two hundred six (206) veterans reside in Boxborough. Ninety-seven-point-nine percent (97.9%) of the households in Boxborough have a computer with 96.3% having broadband internet access. Ninety-six-point-four percent (96.4%) of Boxborough residents are high school graduates with 70.0% holding a bachelor's degree or higher. See QuickFacts, United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/boxboroughtownmiddlesexcountymassachusetts,actontownmiddlesexcountymassachusetts/PST045219> (retrieved Dec. 4, 2020).

(95.2%) of the households in Acton have a computer with 92.4% having broadband internet access. Ninety-seven point one percent (97.1%) of Acton residents are high school graduates with 75.7% holding a bachelor's degree or higher. See QuickFacts, United States Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/actontownmiddlesexcountymassachusetts> (retrieved Dec. 4, 2020).

<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/boxboroughtownmiddlesexcountymassachusetts,actontownmiddlesexcountymassachusetts/PST045219> (retrieved Dec. 4, 2020).

APPENDIX 4

Stakeholders Workshop

[Click here](#) to open the Stakeholders Workshop



**Acton-Boxborough United Way
3-Year Strategic Roadmap:**

**STAKEHOLDER WORKSHOPS
SUMMARY REPORT & DETAILED FINDINGS**

March 22, 2021

Prepared by:

Carol Buysse | Jo-Anne Nyer
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INTRODUCTION

In October 2020, Acton-Boxborough United Way began the process of developing a 3-year Strategic Roadmap to meet the diverse and growing needs of the community. Understanding the importance of community input and guidance, A-B United Way launched an online survey in November 2020 in which over 100 individuals from diverse backgrounds shared their vision for Acton and Boxborough, as well as specific ideas about how A-B United Way could help make the vision a reality.

To further hone in on how to help the community move closer to its stated vision, A-B United Way conducted two Stakeholder Workshops with leaders and engaged citizens in the community. A-B United Way asked the stakeholders to rank the community objectives identified in the Survey based upon those that added the most value to all members of the community and that could be impacted by A-B United Way in a three year time period. Stakeholders were also asked to share their strategic insights and ideas about how A-B United Way could drive progress for the top ranked objectives.

One of the important benefits of the Stakeholder Workshops was having so many community leaders from varying disciplines come together to collaborate and brainstorm about the community's future. Fostering collaboration such as this was an intentional design element of A-B United Way's planning process and is an example of the type of collaboration that it seeks to foster. After the sessions were over, stakeholders reflected positively on the workshops and offered the following comments:

- "The assets in our community are the people - and there were amazing people in attendance at this meeting. It was a very inspirational session. Despite our different jobs and functions, we're all often thinking about similar issues."
- "So much potential - with so many people who care, together we can achieve a lot."
- "We're discovering how we can avoid duplication of work, and how we can have more goal-based collaboration."

The learning from the Community Survey and Stakeholders Workshops is being used in two ways:

First, it serves as the foundation on which A-B United Way will develop its objectives, and design and build its strategies and plans. A-B United Way will articulate measurable outcomes that align with its three "impact areas": health, education and financial stability -- as well as its commitment to advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and Racial Justice and responding to crises (such as COVID-19 or the Boxborough Fire).

Second, the information will be shared with survey participants and community organizations, as well as all residents in Acton and Boxborough. A-B United Way recognizes that it will not have the resources to act on all of the ideas generated in the survey and workshops, and hopes that others in the community will find value in the information and will utilize it as they develop their own objectives and strategies for serving our community.

A-B United Way would like to give special thanks to Nancy Settle-Murphy of Guided Insights who consulted with us on the structure for developing the 3-year Strategic Roadmap in a virtual environment, as well as the design and implementation of the Community Survey and Stakeholder Workshops.

METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANTS

Two virtual Stakeholder Workshops were held on January 27, 2021 and February 3, 2021. Prior to the workshops, stakeholders were given the results of the Community Survey and a list of the sixteen (16) Community Objectives which the survey participants had identified as important for A-B United Way to focus on in the coming three years. Knowing that A-B United Way would need to narrow its focus, the stakeholders were asked to rank the Objectives. Then, during the workshops, the stakeholders discussed their top Community Objectives and ideas about how the community can work together to achieve them.

Results of the stakeholders' ranking and notes from their discussions are provided in the Executive Summary and Detailed Findings sections that follow.

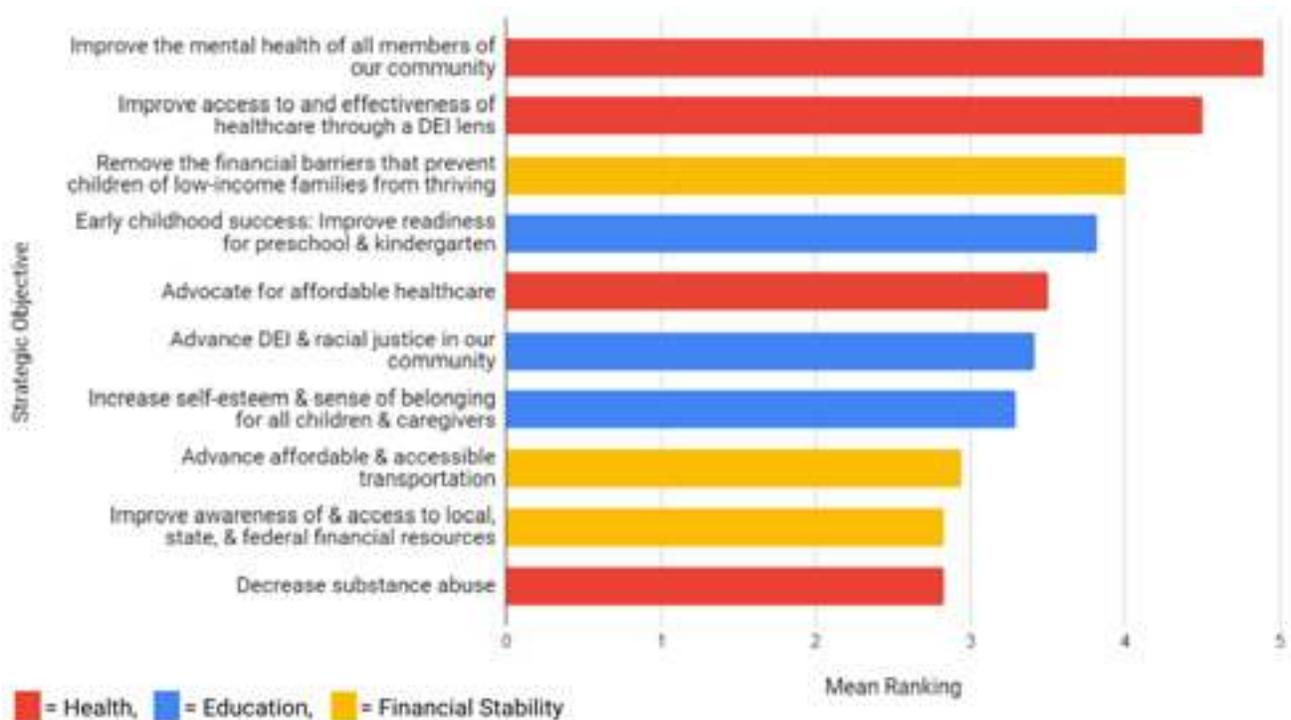
The workshops included a diverse group of participants, including members of the following organizations:

Acton-Boxborough School Committee (current and former)	CrossTown Connect
Acton-Boxborough Schools	Danny's Place Youth Services
Acton-Boxborough United Way	The Eliot Center
Acton Chinese American Civic Society	Emerson Hospital
Acton Chinese Language School	First Connections
Acton Council on Aging	Highrock Covenant Church
Acton Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Commission	MA State Senator and Representatives
Acton Housing Authority	Minute Man Arc
Acton Police	Mt Calvary Community Supper
Acton Town Management	Select Board Acton
Acton Town Community Resources	Select Board Boxborough
Boxborough Council on Aging	St. Elizabeth's Church
Boxborough Sargent Memorial Library	United Church of Christ, Boxborough
Communities For Restorative Justice	

OBJECTIVES RANKING

Community Stakeholders were asked to rank the 16 Community Objectives that were generated in the Community Survey. The stakeholders did this with two factors in mind: (1) those objectives that added the most value to all members of the community, and (2) those objectives that could be impacted by A-B United Way in a three year time period.

Below is the result of their ranking, starting with the most important at the top. (Color is used to indicate the three impact areas upon which A-B United Way focuses: Health, Education and Financial Stability.)



Another way to look at the results of the Stakeholders' ranking is to group the list of Community Objectives into A-B United Way's impact areas: Health, Education and Financial Stability and to rank them within each area:

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve the <u>mental health</u> of all members of our community • Improve access to and <u>effectiveness of healthcare</u> through a DEI lens. • Advocate for <u>affordable healthcare</u> • Decrease <u>substance abuse</u> for all members of our community
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early childhood success: Improve <u>readiness for kindergarten & preschool</u> • Advance <u>DEI & racial justice</u> in our community • Increase <u>self-esteem</u> & sense of belonging for all children & caregivers
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remove the <u>financial barriers</u> that prevent children of low-income families from thriving • Advance affordable & accessible <u>transportation</u> • Improve awareness of & access to local, state, & federal <u>financial resources</u>

Stakeholders spent time brainstorming strategic ideas to support the top Community Objectives in each of the three impact areas. A summary of those discussions follows.

STRATEGIC BRAINSTORMING

As mentioned earlier in this report, during the Stakeholder Workshops the participants collaborated and brainstormed strategies for achieving the prioritized objectives. A-B United Way believes it is important to share these ideas with residents and organizations who serve the community so we can continue to collaborate and address our community's needs together. Also, A-B United Way recognizes that it will not have the resources necessary to address all of the community's needs and hopes others will utilize this information as they develop their own objectives and strategies for serving our community.

Below are detailed notes from the brainstorming sessions, organized by impact area.

Health

Objective #1

Improve the mental health (both preventative measures and treatment) of all members of our community - children (ages 0-12), youth (ages 13-18), young adult (age 19-25), adults (age 26-64) and seniors (age 65+)

Sample Strategies provided to participants

- A. Gather data and analyze the impact of COVID on mental health for people of all ages - take actions based on data. Use a DEI lens for both input and analysis
- B. Co-organize workshops (eg QPR) and/or guest speakers regarding mental health for all ages. Expand the reach of training to meet the growing need in the community
- C. Create a "Community Advisory Board" to overcome the stigma and share information about mental health with all groups within the community

Brainstormed Strategies

- 1. Collect data on risky youth behavior in the community that indicate mental health issues.
 - a. Example: Emerson hospital performed a youth risk behavior survey - this survey helped the hospital understand health issues faced by public school students suffering mental trauma.
 - b. CDC offers data summary - Link: https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/yrbs_data_summary_and_trends.htm
- 2. AB school district participated in COVID response survey too; data on mental health from all 12 months is pending; we can analyze this data to assess youth mental needs better
- 3. Create a "Community Advisory Board" to overcome the stigma and share information about mental health with all groups within the community
- 4. Use the McKinsey & Co method of assessment & evaluation (practiced by Emerson hospital clinicians and therapists) for addressing mental health needs in the community

5. Mustard Seed run by Dr Josephine Kim organizes Korean parents to participate in mental health workshops. Considerations: There is stigma associated with mental health surrounding BIPOC; Target particular communities of color with the help of NAMI, arrange a cohesive coalition & sponsor workshops; Customize the communications keeping in mind ethnic sensitivities. For example, mental health is considered a taboo topic in the Indian American community and counselors are not part of the mainstream society. A-B United Way can help increase awareness about mental health issues in this community.
6. Ethnic representation is important, translation is only a gateway to try to make things accessible. Other considerations such as availability of materials that are translatable, representation for different communities of color who have stigma around mental health issues and then providing input will help us move forward towards effective strategies.
7. MIT engineers - addressing the health deficits conversation using technology.
8. Use policy and legislation; it would be useful to talk about challenges we all face: income equality, poverty, traumatizing with mental health implications, policies that make it so hard to rely on each other.
9. Collaboration between ABUW and reps in Emerson hospital; schools are key, police.
10. Mental health also impacts physical health
11. Policies: MA state senate had initiative on improving access to mental health care. Didn't make it this legislative cycle, but hope will be brought up again.
12. QPR anti-suicide training: can there be a similar large scale mental health training?
13. Ensuring cultural proficiencies, welcome diverse communities - proficiency training.
14. Restorative community circles - kids get an opportunity to talk about their stories, trust based conversations, mix cultural groups.
15. Pediatricians should also address mental health, bullying.
16. Trauma and crisis counselors - desperate need (more funding).
17. Cultural engagement helps mental health. William James Interface Referral Service - who is reaching out for services?
18. Family resource navigator.
19. Emergency helpline.
20. Crisis services- follow up.
21. Identify gaps in William James Service.
22. Black counselors deficit
23. Age is in issue - COVID isolation, concerted efforts to include all ages and all cultural
24. Communication: How do we as a community look for places to learn - 211 helpline
 - a. Leverage an App that provides easy access - Ready resource

Objective #2

Improve access to and effectiveness of healthcare in our community (including Mental Health) by looking through a DEI lens at how service is provided and who receives that service.

Sample Strategies provided to participants

- A. Advocate for medical professionals to understand the needs of non-white patients (ie how to address skin rash on black skin)
- B. Advocate for medical professionals to reflect the diversity of our community, address cultural barriers that prevent some groups from optimizing their medical care

Brainstormed Strategies

1. Establish Next Generation Pipelines - A-B United Way along with others should develop a pipeline of medical professionals to reflect the diversity in the neighborhood 10 years into the future, provide scholarships and job opportunities as incentives to stop brain drain in the community
2. Create a resource guide (possibly in different languages) for residents of diverse backgrounds
3. Create an advisory board for healthcare professionals; DEI centered approach
4. Advocate to understand needs and perspectives, Question: why do diverse patients go to Lowell instead of Acton? Healthcare organizations need to reach out to patients of color by doing a deeper dive into the data to better understand the disparities
5. Develop a team of people who could put together a coalition of faith based organizations
6. Legislate and make policies from a DEI lens perspective
7. Do our local medical centers have translation and cultural proficiency training?
8. Greeters to direct people to correct areas
9. Have Interpreters - available in Acton and Boxborough
10. A-B United Way spearheading a volunteer service program where UW connects medical professionals to community folks who need help (undocumented immigrants); untapped pool within the community
11. Barriers to enter a space for medical help that may be too overwhelming - volunteers brought in by A-B United Way to help with this
12. Portugese, Latino folks go to Lowell and Worcester; undocumented immigrants
 - a. Local service centers instead not out of community service centers
13. Navigate the Acton Medical website - patient portal is very cumbersome
14. What can UW to identify gaps in clinical issues for DEI BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color); to partner with other organizations
 - a. Skin rash
 - b. Bluish purple lips

15. Online health portal - time consuming - real issues remove barriers that help navigate these issues
16. Tech illiteracy; Potentially recruiting a group of volunteers targeted for seniors that helps vaccinate older people;
17. High school students are looking for volunteer hours; would love to engage in helping technology challenged
18. Minutemen By your side - Helpline for services (Example)
19. Create video recording "Welcome to Acton and Boxborough" to intentionally welcome newcomers, especially immigrants.
20. Notion of focus groups - Chinese
21. Brazilian kid who had a trusted adult (Youth risk survey) helped a lot
22. Power of having people who communicate effectively

Education

Objective #1

Early Childhood Success: Improve readiness for preschool and kindergarten by supporting families who need financial and other kinds of assistance

Sample Strategies provided to participants

- A. Help early childhood programs reach more diverse and low income public (through grants, outreach, translations etc.)
- B. Provide families moving to our community with available resources and preschool/daycare info
- C. Advocate for affordable child care/preschool

Brainstormed Strategies

1. Build an ambassador program or buddy system for all families new to the community / school. Having a trusted intermediary, buddy or ambassador who understands the newcomers' culture would help. Similarly, for non-english speakers somebody, a buddy or ambassador who speaks the same language would help with integration. This buddy or ambassador could help new people with any questions they have, share available resources, explain how things work here.
 - a. Will reduce workload on principals
 - b. Now, non-English speakers often rely on school for all translations including non-school related issues. Buddies can help.
2. Have A-B United Way be matchmaker public / private : provide community members with info on what resources are available. Collaborate with schools and other organizations
3. Education campaign in people's native languages on existing communication platforms - so they can start to learn about the different organizations and resources available
4. Advocacy for universal pre-K
5. Sharing resources about options for preschool with groups who often don't find the way to preschool, how to get financial assistance
6. Child care/preschool often not affordable and transportation hard for working parents
7. Use the public library! Many programs available, lend out books to different organizations, already reach out to newcomers and families - can leverage. Would love to work more together with local organizations.
8. Possible roadblocks : cultural issues, translations, work hours, lack of awareness of early intervention, some kids don't have books at home, not knowing how to stimulate children/play together
 - a. Early intervention: people are not aware, hard to navigate the whole process. All to

spread the word : In MA early intervention is free (access health insurance but if there is no insurance can still provide service for free)

- b. Early intervention staff are often the first ones to provide overview of what other resources are available to families
- c. Provide wrap around services assistance- help navigate insurance, contacts, financials, medical etc (schools work with Assabet Valley Collaborative)
- d. All new parents at Emerson get a box with info eg from First connections. New moms (Dad) group very popular but not many people of color attend this one. Note: many Latinx people don't like going to library or other organizations where they don't see anybody looking like them. First Connections has multi-lingual playgroups - great way to have people from different cultures feel more comfortable. Afterwards the people feel better joining other groups too. Could maybe invite the whole multi-lingual playgroups to go to the library together or introduce them to other services together. Could start playgroup eg in Spanish to make people feel welcome - would need volunteers speaking that language to lead the group.

9. Advocate for affordable child care (vouchers can take 2-3 years to get)

- a. Many low income families need to work crazy hours and don't have common family time together because no access to affordable child care. Even going to library often challenging with crazy work hours.
- b. Fyi See more jr high/highschool students needing to take care of younger siblings.

10. A lot of resources are available to help kids get ready for preschool/daycare, but residents don't know about them. Can A-B United Way help reach the people and share the resources?

11. Collect more data on needs and wants from families with young children related to early childhood readiness.

12. During pandemic, educate parents / share info on risk for children's eye sight issues because of prolonged electronics usage.

Objective #2

Advance a shared understanding of and advocate to further Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) and Racial Justice with all members of our community

Sample Strategies provided to participants

- A. Provide training related to DEI and racial justice to the entire community
- B. Collaborate with local daycares, preschools and ABFN/First Connections to provide more inclusive programming, DEI training to teachers and to increase diversity of staff
- C. Strengthen neighborhood relationships through a series of planned activities in the neighborhoods and by providing a multi-digital platform for neighbors to share their stories.

Brainstormed Strategies

1. Advocate for Universal pre-K so we can remove barriers for lower income families.
 - a. Make daycare inclusive by making it accessible to families of color. Sometimes people of color will hear there is no space whereas white families still do get a spot.
2. Coordinate across different groups to bring them together and achieve a more coherent strategy across the different groups working on racial justice. Share what services each provide to the public.
 - a. A-B United Way is starting an AB Racial Justice Collaborative to encourage all formal and informal community groups in Acton and Boxborough working on racial justice and DEI to combine efforts on common goals, increase impact and avoid duplication of work.
3. Vehicle for a wide range of people to get education about racial justice and DEI. Many people don't know history from an alternate point of view. A-B United Way is a neutral group - people might listen to A-B United Way. Build material and make it readily accessible. Create spaces where people can talk about and learn new skills.
4. A-B United Way could be an enabler to bring people together. Be a platform for the community at large to get to know people from different backgrounds better.
Eg workshops
5. Struggle to find educators of color. Find right organizations to partner with to help support people of color who do great work in the community, help bring more educators and staff of color in our community
6. Different entry points into community
 - a. School working with group Visions-Inc around DEI to make schools (and hopefully the whole community) more equitable and inclusive
 - b. Helping people who have different beliefs - can lead into new directions.
7. Educating young kids/students on DEI/Racial justice:
 - a. via parent education on DEI/Racial Justice
 - b. Children playing together - bring kids from different elementary schools together.
Gives opportunity for children and adults to play together
 - c. Introducing racially diverse books at pre-K and in libraries
8. Acton Chinese Language School started a Chinese as 2nd language program for non-Chinese speaking students and adults - recruiting students / parents . Hope to bridge the gap between Chinese community and the rest of the community. Looking for ideas how to recruit more students/parents. Also organize student exchange programs during summer - students teach English to migrant families in China. Share info to broader public if programs are open to the public (eg Chinese New Year celebration)

9. Use cultural organizations in the community to bring diversity in other organizations. Eg First Connections would love to have somebody from the Acton Chinese Language School to come to explain about Chinese New Year. spread the word : In MA early intervention is free (access health insurance but if there is no insurance can still provide service for free)
10. Ambassador/buddy program (referenced above): pair people from different cultures together to get to know each other. Creates opportunities for real friendship/bonding
11. When trying to advance DEI, need to ask the people who are not included what is needed, should not push what majority population think is needed.
12. Increase opportunities to learn about other cultures incl the arts.
13. Increase opportunities for students and adults to volunteer/exchanges/mission trips- Grants to sponsor these? or volunteer at organizations where you can volunteer together with people from different backgrounds.
14. Library did programs about specific cultural holidays but only people from that culture came. Can A-B United Way invite people from different backgrounds to join in together, introduce each other's culture to each other? How to break open the silo's?
15. Identify issues of privilege and power to address racial justice. Need to be ok to disappoint well meaning people in community, if we want to advance racial justice.

Financial Stability

Objective #1

Remove the financial barriers that prevent low income families from accessing the resources that children need to thrive.

Sample Strategies provided to participants

- A. Advocate for affordable daycare, before/after school care, "specialty" extracurricular activities, wifi
- B. Create "Community Advisory Board" to help reach residents in need in the most effective manner (incl translations/adaptations) and to connect them with resources
- C. Apply DEI lens for all A-B United Way grants (COVID-19 & Assist Emergency Grants and annual Community Impact grants)

Brainstormed Strategies

1. Identify and advocate for families who are at risk of eviction
 - a. Community services coordinators, police
 - b. For housing authority residents, many services available (legal services, tenant preservation) -- not often evicted for just being behind in rent
 - c. For private housing residents, same legal resources not available-- so they ARE often evicted for being behind in rent
 - d. Faith Groups -- Faith groups may be able to help identify/connect people in need.
 - e. Role for A-B United Way -- Find volunteers to review the legal filings at our local courts, to ID who is at risk
2. Child care that's tailored to the income of families (sliding scale)
 - a. Preschools & daycares
 - b. Early childhood association
 - c. After-school programs
 - d. Who carries the burden of the cost? Could there be a town-wide fund (publically funded) to help? Because the need is so large -- really need state and federal funding. A lot of Western countries do fund child care costs. A need bigger than the community
3. Making accessible the resources for those for whom English is not their first language
4. Extra curriculans (sports, theatre, etc) free to those whose families are less than 30% median income -- including expanding access to private programs
5. Find a partner to create a universal basic income (UBI) program for the poorest in our community
6. Free all-day kindergarten for low-income families (for all!) (already being worked upon by the school committee.)
7. Use the public library! Many programs available, lend out books to different organizations, already reach out to newcomers and families - can leverage. Would love to work more together with local organizations.

8. Mentoring

9. Financial literacy programming

10. Eliminate barriers to programs (asset limits)

11. Reducing barriers to take advantage of programs like free tickets to Discovery Museum

12. Shared challenges regardless of income: two parents working or single parent working-- How do we give those parents a break so they are their full selves for their children. Drop your kids off for a night off, movie night.

13. How do we close the gap for after school care? Sponsor fees for community ed, after school activities. Can be difficult navigating what is available, especially summer camp. Possible to increase the amount of scholarship. Costs are expensive even for those not otherwise struggling.

14. How do you ID people and reach out to them BEFORE they're in a crisis? How do you remove the stigma of asking for help?

15. Outside tutoring. Common for families who are able to afford it. Resource and referral program - retired teachers and empty nesters? Making connections - sign up with time, subject. Community service through high school.

16. High cost of internet. So much easier to connect people with Zoom, but if you have trouble accessing the internet it is challenging. Also true for our seniors - some CoA members can't participate in Zoom meetings.

17. Difficult for families who are already struggling to do the work to learn about what resources are available. Almost takes a case manager one-to-one as it is so difficult to navigate. How to streamline so that resources don't get lost in the overwhelming amount of emails-- communications expert to streamline. Can we create a community phone tree to connect neighbors? Not a lot of nonprofits that have a physical presence in Acton, where you can walk up and pick up a brochure.

18. How can we reach the many languages of our community? Google translate can be incredibly helpful (widget for website- worked for Acton Arboretum). Students, children of those who aren't as fluent in English, can be an incredible resource-- how can we affirm and support them.

19. Community Assets we have - 15% Acton's population are seniors. 1,600 people 75+. Looking for ways to give back, things to do.

20. Tap into people's pocketbooks to level the playing field. Fundraising can open a lot of doors.

21. Transportation. More coordination between CrossTown Connect and schools. Although the schools stopped allowing bus passing, we have ways of addressing that gap.

22. Housing -- Could support information gap. Regional housing service organization is able to answer questions but that's not its main purpose. SMOC -- We fall in their catchment area, but Acton isn't high on their priority.

23. Co-sponsor education events on housing -- history of housing discrimination. Convener.
24. Financial education and credit building. Boston Builds Credit.
25. Paying for studies -- look at needs of low-income people.
26. How to fund house repairs for people who want to stay in their house but need to make it handicap accessible-- loan that's payable when the house is sold. Partner with Habitat for Humanity, SMOC Home Loan Modification Program (not a free service).

Objective #2

Advance affordable and accessible transportation services In Acton and Boxborough to allow greater access for everyone to and from daycare, schools, after-school activities, work, medical appointments and other important services.

Sample Strategies provided to participants

- A. Gather data on what the needs are, what is offered (before and during COVID), for what cost. Advocate for change where there is a mismatch
- B. Generate greater awareness with all groups within the community of available transportation options
- C. Advocate for public transportation to community college from Acton and Boxborough and to vocational schools and train station from Boxborough

Brainstormed Strategies

1. Acton's transportation services - especially for seniors good compared to many surrounding towns
2. Still a gap for kids, and families without cars
3. Leverage existing transportation capacity within towns -- school bus fleet, CASE transportation
4. Acton working to launch micro-transit program -- basically subsidized Uber/Lyft programs for short-term needs
5. Difficult/expensive to get to hospitals, an affordable grocery store
 - a. Building on Neighbor Brigade volunteer system
6. Central point to book the available transportation options
 - a. Currently in Acton, you can call one of the services, dispatchers -- can book senior rides in advance (two vans only for seniors, two vans for general use)
7. Need more access on the weekends (vans don't run, limited schedule)

8. Boxborough not member of Cross Town Connect
 - a. Post-COVID, hope for increased cross-town collaboration to continue in these new spheres -- 5 town consortium currently in place for federal CARES grant
 - b. Millionaires Act would devote significant state funding to transportation (2022)
 - c. A-B United Way: Pull together large companies, organizations, etc -- multi-town -- to create an appealing proposal for state funding
9. Regional transit authorities (MBTA, Lowell RTA) has programs that go out into the suburbs, but not really here -- ABTA?
10. A-B United Way: Demonstrate best practices for hybrid events which allow greater accessibility through different ways to access events/meetings (remote & local)
11. Biking - increasing public education on biking (use of sidewalks to bike), amplify bike-to-school day, etc

Objective #3

For all residents in need, improve awareness of and access to local, state and federal financial resources.

Sample Strategies provided to participants

- a. Create a "Community Advisory Board" (with people from different cultures, different neighborhoods...) to help reach residents in need in the most effective manner and to help connect those in need with resources. (Address cultural barriers, language barriers, etc.)
- b. Apply DEI lens for all A-B United Way grants (COVID, Assist, Community impact) for advertisement and assignment
- c. Work together with towns, school, and the different non-profits (eg Minuteman Senior, DVSN...) to have 1 central source of financial resource information - centrally updated and available in multiple languages.

Brainstormed Strategies

1. Raising awareness. A-B United Way doesn't have much visibility in Boxborough. How do you ID the target markets you're looking to communicate with; how do they communicate best? Town of Boxborough has taken on a communication survey. Focus on target markets/segments-- redefine markets regularly.
2. Email. "This week, this is the assistance available to you."
Keep communications relevant.
3. Different minorities -- different languages, different social media and tools. Chinese community uses WeChat. Ambassadors who can help reach different audiences.

4. Learn from and connect to subgroups in town who have really good communication.
5. Strengths-based approach. 25% population seniors. Engage those who are looking to give back, increase equity. Raising money is an easy way for people to feel they are part of the effort.
6. Reaching out through Facebook groups for volunteers. Lots of people who want to give back, just looking for opportunities.
7. Advocate for businesses that hire those with special needs. Community center/store. Builds on peoples' special skills.
8. Cultural Center for Acton. All volunteer run. Artists display work. Tutor/mentor service. Just need space/parking. Accessible, affordable, approachable. Everyone has something to offer-- building on strengths of neighbors. (Logistically to build something new - large scale with swimming pool, etc - would be millions of dollars, then to think about on-going funding, dues may not be equitable.)
9. Low-tech is an important avenue to reach people who might not access tech. Grocery stores, bulletin boards.
10. How do new people in this area navigate all the nuances, resources?
11. Access the library during open hours for those who work is challenging.
12. Everyone is trying to do everything themselves, many people are trying to "pick up the same flag and carry it". A lot of power in collaboration, even town governments can contribute time and energy if municipal funding limits are challenging. People make contributions in different ways. For some, donating will be the way they contribute.
13. Community Advisory Board.
14. A lot of information is shared out through the schools. Those without kids in the system don't hear about it.
15. Inspire people to do more. Monthly volunteer program. Example:
Delivering food from pantry food to senior housing. Target teens/families for a multi-generational opportunity.

APPENDIX 5

Community Data Scan

[Click here](#) to open the Community Data Scan



thrive

STRATEGIC ROADMAP TO 2024

If you have questions, would like to discuss the challenges facing our community, or would like to learn more about how you can get involved, please contact us.

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