

THE CITY OF  
**COLUMBUS**  
ANDREW J. GINTHER, MAYOR



**FINANCIAL  
EMPOWERMENT  
ROADMAP:**  
Financial Security  
for Women & Families  
in Columbus

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**  
September 2020

A MESSAGE FROM  
MAYOR ANDREW J.  
GINTHER



We knew in the early days of COVID-19 that as a community we would need to fight the pandemic in three ways: as a public health crisis, as a human services crisis, and as an economic crisis.

We all know that these categories overlap, and we knew that each would hit our most vulnerable populations in the city the hardest.

Our efforts these past few months have been keenly focused on providing access to residents' basic needs as well as increasing the capacity of Columbus Human Service providers; supporting small, minority-owned and women-owned businesses; and addressing racial health disparities across our community. The pandemic exposed the depth of this racial divide and we know that we will only recover if we do so equitably.

Now, more than ever, our vision of economic security and resilience for residents requires building a thriving community where individuals and families have access to education, training, living wages, higher paying jobs, financial wellness programs and stable housing.

Which is why this Financial Empowerment Roadmap is so critically important at this time and why I am committed to moving this work forward.

We have neighborhoods in this great city where long before this global pandemic hit families were struggling with fewer quality education options, financial insecurity, higher unemployment, higher rates of infant mortality, and disproportionate crime.

Our administration will be measured not just by our ability to put Columbus on the map, but on how we address the challenges of all the people who live here. Every family in every neighborhood should be able to share in the success story that is Columbus.

Equity continues to be the foundation of all of my administration's policies - from diversity in our employees to inclusive availability for all City contracts, and the Financial Empowerment Roadmap will play a critical role as we move forward in our work. We cannot be a successful city without doing everything we can to make women and their families economically secure.

I want to commend the Columbus Women's Commission and Columbus City Council for their work to address the unique challenges facing women and minorities in our community, and I look forward to our work together to make Columbus a city where every resident in every neighborhood has the chance to succeed.

Sincerely,

Mayor Andrew J. Ginther

A MESSAGE FROM  
COUNCIL PRESIDENT  
PRO TEMPORE  
ELIZABETH C. BROWN



Columbus is a vibrant and growing city recognized nationally as a top destination for college graduates, young professionals, entrepreneurs, and families. Yet for all our successes, too many families in neighborhoods across Columbus simply do not have access to the opportunity our city holds. The Urban Institute found that 57 percent of Columbus families are financially insecure with less than \$2,000 in savings and that 42 percent of residents have subprime credit scores. Financial insecurity is also more prevalent among women, particularly Black and Latinx women. This instability among families reverberates throughout our entire city, straining their quality of life and public budgets alike.

With this knowledge, the City of Columbus set out to construct this Financial Empowerment Roadmap for women and families in the fall of 2019. The need for this work was clear at that time, but the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic have made it more urgent than ever. Our society's inadequate social safety net and the legacy of discriminatory policies have resulted in outsized negative impacts for women, people of color, and their families as a result of the health crisis, compounding the disparities that were already present. Addressing this harm requires intervention at every level of government and across systems. This work represents not only the moral and just path forward for our community, but the surest plan to achieve long-term shared prosperity for every family in Columbus.

Enabling financial security for families requires a host of resources related to housing, employment, transportation, and beyond, but supporting their underlying need for financial empowerment is just as critical. Financial empowerment is the bedrock of the financial security that every resident deserves, and when paired together, financial empowerment resources amplify the positive impacts residents reap from the other resources.

This Roadmap leverages financial wellness data and the voices of Columbus mothers to identify opportunities that bring financial security within reach. I am grateful to Mayor Ginther and the Columbus Women's Commission for partnering with me to create this Roadmap, to City staff and private and non-profit leaders for giving their input, and most importantly, to the residents who shared their stories with us to help the City forge a plan that truly centers their needs. This broad coalition and the implementation of this Roadmap will help level the playing field for women and their families across our city.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth C. Brown

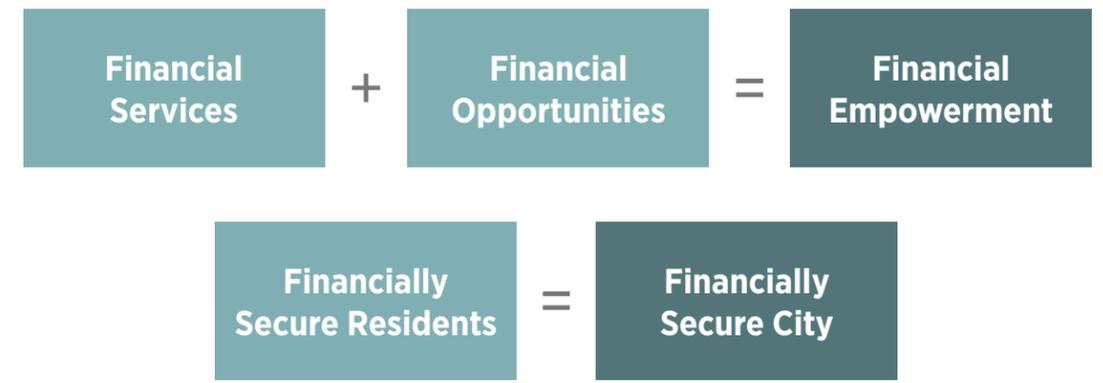


BACKGROUND

In 2019, the City of Columbus was selected as one of seven cities to receive a CityStart grant from the Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund. The CityStart grant provided planning dollars that initiated the development of this Financial Empowerment Roadmap. The purpose of the Roadmap is to help coordinate, support, and grow Columbus' financial empowerment services and systems.

**THE CITIES FOR FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT FUND APPROACH**

The CityStart initiative offers cities a structured approach to identify financial empowerment goals, convene relevant stakeholders for sustainable success, develop actionable strategies, and ultimately craft a blueprint that is rooted in local insights and opportunities.<sup>1</sup>



# FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT

## A TIMELINE FOR IMPACT & CHANGE

This report contributes to a growing body of research and policy change focused on improving the financial security of Columbus and Franklin County residents, particularly women and families.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic shutdown, the financial focus is on recovery and supporting the essential needs of Columbus households, particularly the most vulnerable. There is more momentum than ever to increase the resiliency of Columbus families.

2021 +

Greater Columbus Infant Mortality Task Force: **Final Report and Implementation Plan**

2014

2015

2017

2019

2020

Launch of the **Columbus Women's Commission** and the **Columbus Commitment Pay Equity Pledge**



Financial Capability Network of Central Ohio: **Pilot Report**



**Assets for Equity: Building Wealth for Women in Central Ohio**



**RISE TOGETHER: A Blueprint for Reducing Poverty in Franklin County**



Columbus City Council and Community Organizations Launch **Eviction Prevention Program**

**CityStart**

Launch of **Columbus CityStart Grant**

Implementation of **\$15/HR** for Full-Time City Employees

City Allocates **\$10 Million in Federal COVID-19 Relief** Funds for Housing Stability



Eviction Records Older Than **Three Years Removed** From Franklin County Municipal Court Website



Ohio Governor Mike DeWine declares **State of Emergency** Due to COVID-19

City of Columbus: **Financial Empowerment Roadmap**



**Financial Navigators**

Launch of **Columbus Financial Navigator Initiative**

**ONE**  
CELEBRATEONE

Launch of **CelebrateOne**

**LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE**

Over the next several years the City will work to embed financial empowerment opportunities in a variety of existing services that serve women and families, while working to better coordinate financial empowerment services citywide.

**ALIGNMENT**

Increase internal and external alignment of financial empowerment efforts by collaborating with partners to develop and implement a shared vision.

**ACCESS**

Increase public awareness and access to financial empowerment tools by utilizing a "many front doors" approach where residents are connected to an array of services and resources fitting their needs.

**OPPORTUNITY**

Support systems, structural, and policy change that address the barriers to financial inclusion and financial justice so women and families are lifted out of poverty and connected to opportunity.

## FOCUS ON WOMEN & FAMILIES

The City of Columbus is home to over 900,000 residents, making it the 14th largest city in the United States. Columbus is one of the fastest-growing economies in the Midwest and the Columbus region is expected to triple in size by the year 2050. However, despite the strength of the economy, not all Columbus residents are able to share in the opportunities the city holds.

In 2019 the Women's Fund of Central Ohio and the Institute for Women's Policy Research released *Assets for Equity: Building Wealth for Women in Central Ohio*. Their report highlighted the fact that nationally, as well as within Central Ohio, women and woman-headed families, particularly women of color, experience the greatest financial vulnerability: <sup>2</sup>

- In Central Ohio, single women with children are the household type most likely to be in poverty, with 41% of households below the poverty line headed by women with children under 18 years. Single women without children are the second-highest group most likely to be in poverty (18%) followed by single men with children (16%).
- Nationally, single Black women have the lowest median wealth at only \$300, or 30% of single Black men's wealth. Single Hispanic women have median wealth of \$1,200, or 21% of single Hispanic men's wealth, and White women have median wealth of \$27,710, which is 74% of single White men's wealth. When compared to all single men:
  - Single Hispanic women own 8 cents to the dollar
  - Single Black women own 2 cents to the dollar
  - In total, single women own 40 cents to the dollar
- In Central Ohio, women who work full-time, year-round, earn less than men, and women of color experience the greatest income disparity. When broken down by race/ethnicity, compared to White men:
  - Hispanic women earn 60 cents to the dollar
  - Asian Pacific Islander women earn 79 cents to the dollar
  - Black women earn 65 cents to the dollar
  - White women earn 82 cents to the dollar

Mayor Andrew J. Ginther and Columbus City Council are committed to creating opportunities for every person, in every neighborhood.

In support of these efforts, the Columbus Women's Commission and Council President Pro Tempore Elizabeth Brown partnered on the development of this Roadmap which identifies several key initiatives that aim to connect women and families to economic opportunity and lift them out of poverty. This Roadmap outlines steps the City can take to improve the financial security of, and opportunity for, women and all Columbus residents.

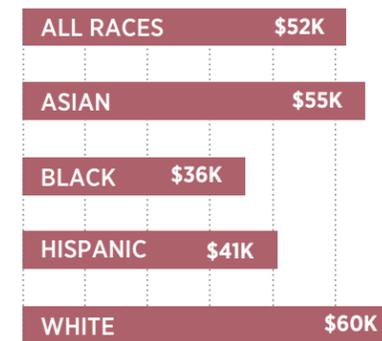
### WHAT IS ECONOMIC SECURITY?

Economic Security is defined as the situation of having sustainable income, benefits, savings, wealth, financial cushions, networks, and/or other resources to support a steady and sustainable standard of living now and into the future, and a situation that prepares one for rising cost-of-living expenses. <sup>3</sup>

## FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT COLUMBUS & FRANKLIN COUNTY

While the overall prosperity of the Columbus region continues to grow, certain populations, particularly women and communities of color, continue to experience disproportionate rates of financial insecurity.

Median Household Income by Race



The median household income for Black households is

**\$35,569**

or **40% less** than White households

**39%** of Black workers earn **less than \$15,000** per year



**38%** of Black households and **30%** of Hispanic households are in poverty



**1 in 5** Hispanic and Black households are unbanked, a rate that is **5 times** the number of White households



Black workers are more than **2.5 times** as likely than White workers to be unemployed

### EQUITY GAPS & GENDER

While communities of color face greater challenges financially, the trends continue when looking at equity gaps by gender



#### POVERTY BY GENDER

Black women are the **most likely** to be in poverty in Columbus representing **24%** of all persons in poverty



#### EDUCATION DISPARITIES

White women in Columbus are **2.4 times** as likely than Black women to have a **bachelor's or advanced degree**



#### SINGLE FAMILY HOMES

**40%** of all households in Columbus are single-parent households. **73%** of those households are headed by women. **82%** of single-parent Black households are headed by women

The median delinquent debt in Franklin County is

**\$1,376**

**57%** of communities of color having some form of delinquent debt

In predominantly **non-white** zip codes...

**23%** have **student loan debt** in default

**28%** have **medical debt** in collections

Racial disparities exist in Franklin county with debt in collections. **Communities of color** are...

**1.8x** as likely to have medical debt

**2.1x** as likely to have student loan debt

**2.3x** as likely to have auto loan debt

**3.0x** as likely to have credit card debt compared to **White** communities

The gap continues to widen for **communities of color...**

#### Average Credit Score

**561**

**vs. 668** for White majority communities

#### Homeownership Gap

**20%**

between **White** (52%) and **Black** (32%)

#### Hispanic and Black households

**more than 60%**

**do not** have resources to cover unexpected expenses

#### Hispanic and Black households

**2x**

more likely to **not have** any wealth

# FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT

## DEFINING WHAT THIS MEANS

Financial empowerment is not one thing. Financial empowerment can be a feeling as much as a strategy, or a goal as much as an experience. Financial empowerment has different meanings to different people, depending on their financial circumstances, hopes, and dreams.

We asked our stakeholders to tell us what financial empowerment means to them.

OXFORD DICTIONARY DEFINITION

Empowerment is "the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one's life and claiming one's rights."



Not having to worry about finances when making important decisions

Resources to improve your knowledge and financial position

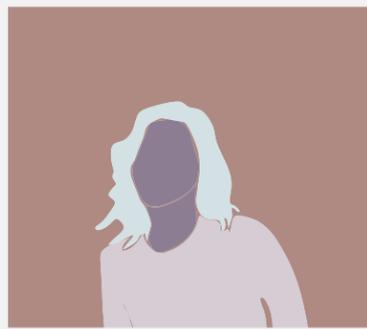
Freedom from anxiety



Addressing barriers to building wealth

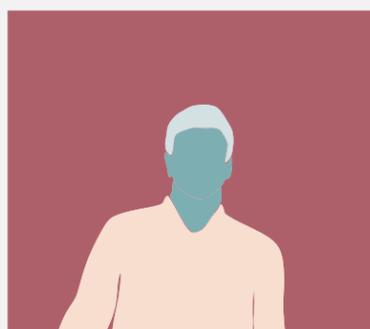
Equal access to opportunities to build wealth

Having financial goals for the long term



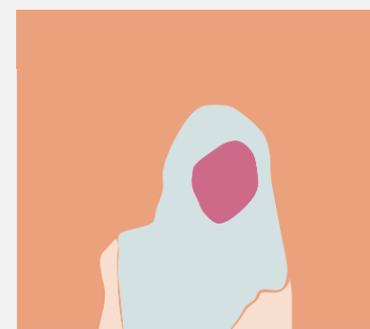
Addressing survival so you can get to stability

Ability to access capital and banking



Steady and sustainable resources to support your lifestyle

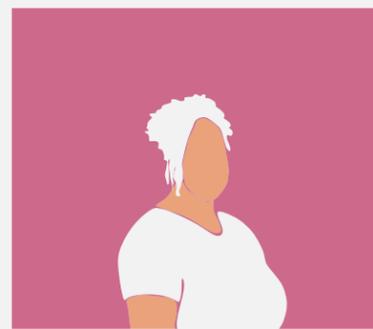
Having enough in case of an emergency



Access. Advocacy. Opportunity. Knowledge. Resilience.

A sustainable living wage

Choice and not being constrained by your environment or circumstances



Real capacity and opportunity to achieve, maintain, and bounce back to economic security

More than education, also connection and ability to engage with financial institutions

Financial wisdom and knowledge



# RESIDENT FOCUS GROUPS

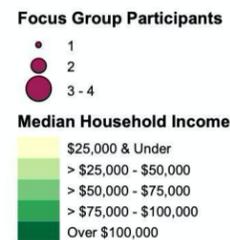
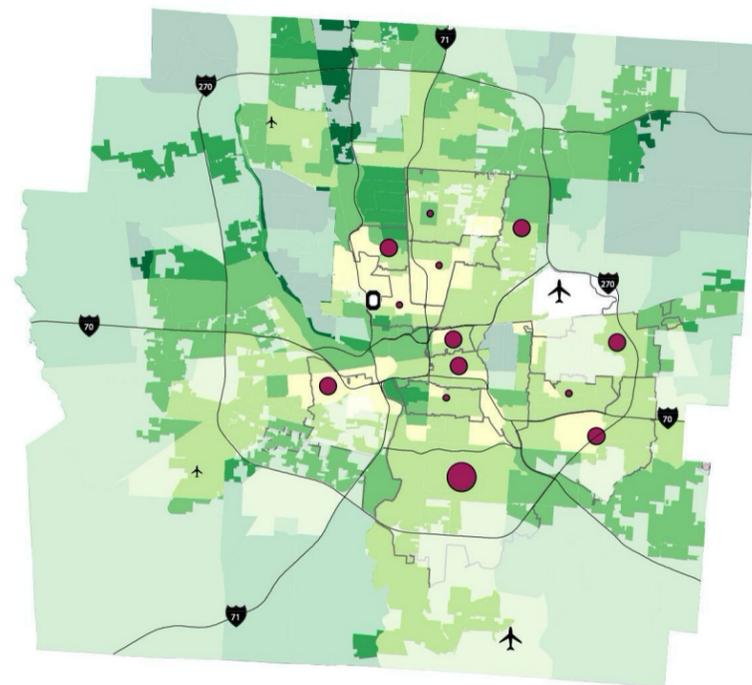
In early 2020, the City of Columbus held three focus groups with women in order to hear directly from those who might be impacted by the work of the Roadmap. The focus groups were held in partnership with Moms2B, IMPACT Community Action, and Columbus Early Learning Centers. The questions centered on the women's experiences of financial insecurity and solicited feedback on financial empowerment services. A simple pre-survey was administered at the beginning of the focus group, followed by 90 minutes of discussion.

## Research Questions

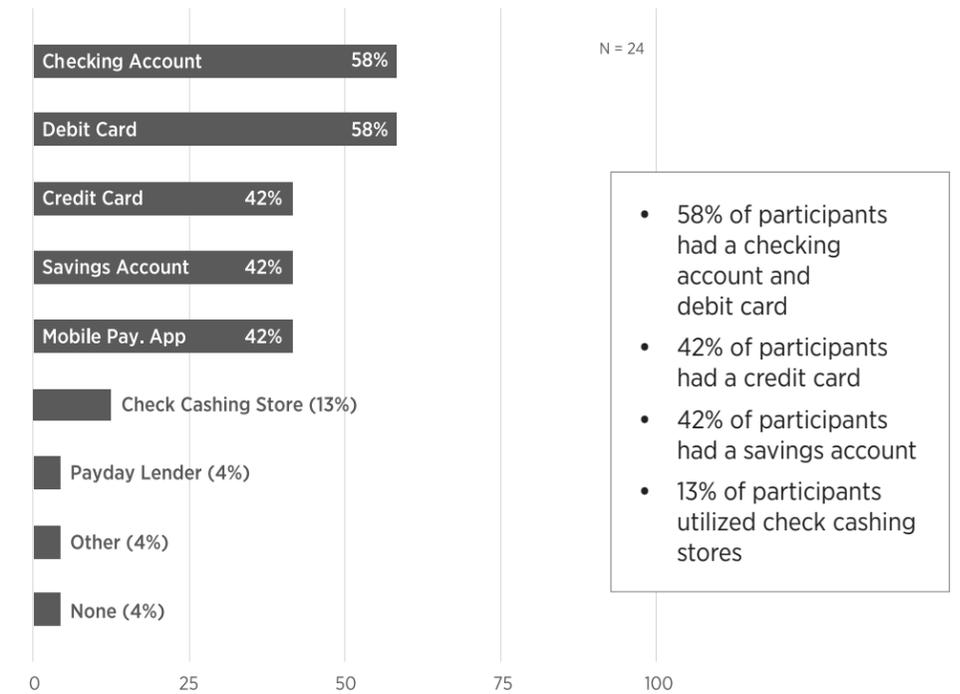
- What are the financial vulnerabilities women experience?
- What barriers do women face in achieving financial security?
- What services currently exist to help women achieve financial security?
- How can the City make it easier for women to access services?
- What are the ways in which women feel financial empowerment and disempowerment?
- How do we deliver services in a way that is efficient and impactful?

## Demographics

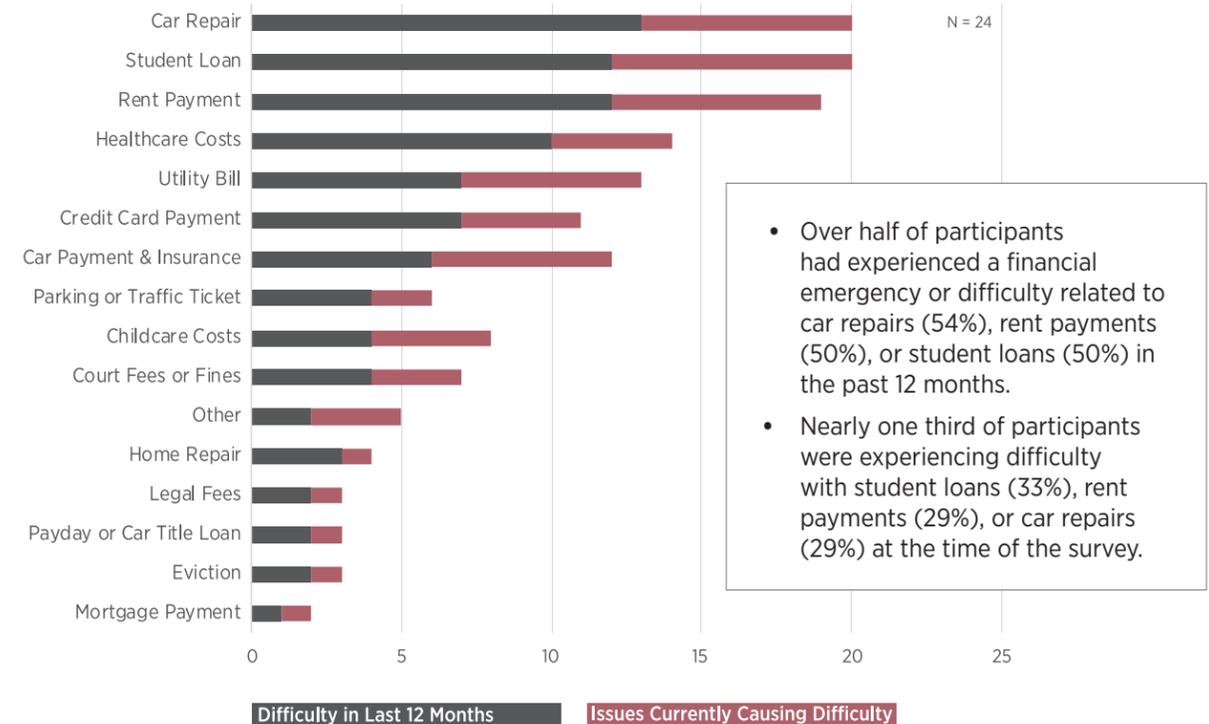
- A total of 27 women participated in the focus groups, with ages ranging from 24 to 71 years.
- Participants were from a variety of Columbus neighborhoods and represented diversity in age, race/ethnicity, and income.
- Participants were asked to identify in one or more employment categories: 22 were employed full-time or part-time; six were retired, unemployed or unable to work; and two were students.



## Access to Financial Tools



## Financial Difficulties



# FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Below are the most common themes that emerged in the focus group conversations with the women. The full discussion summary can be found in Appendix: Focus Group Discussion Summary.



## TRANSPORTATION

### CHALLENGE

The most common challenge mentioned across the three focus group discussions was transportation issues. Car repairs, car payments, and car insurance were also the most common financial difficulties in the pre-survey results. Participants in each focus group shared a range of car-related problems impacting their ability to commute to work or appointments, transport their children, or meet other basic needs. It was clear after speaking to the women that they considered having a car necessary for survival in Columbus; as one woman explained, “no car, no job”.

Themes shared included the need for:

- Emergency car repairs
- Affordable cars and car loans
- Affordable car insurance
- Assistance getting licensed, registered and other legal considerations
- Emergency gas cards

### OPPORTUNITY <sup>4</sup>

There are many national examples of nonprofits providing transportation assistance. Wheels4Hope in Raleigh, NC provides reliable, affordable cars to families in need. Wheels of Success in Tampa, FL provides residents with reliable transportation through a program of car repairs, vehicle replacement, licensing services, car payments, down payments and car-care classes. Ways to Work in Milwaukee, WI provides low-cost loans for car purchases and repairs. The Carpenter’s Garage in Vancouver, WA and The Lift Garage in Minneapolis, MN provide low-cost or sliding-scale car repairs for eligible residents.



## DEBT RELIEF

### CHALLENGE

Women across multiple focus groups expressed the difficulty they experienced meeting debt payments. They shared the challenge of feeling like they could never “get ahead” with debts outweighing their income.

Student loans were the most common debt mentioned, and were also the second-highest financial difficulty captured in the pre-survey.

### OPPORTUNITY <sup>7</sup>

Financial counselors, including nonprofit consumer credit counseling service agencies certified by the National Foundation for Credit Counseling, can help residents work with creditors to create a debt management plan. Financial counselors can also help provide financial education and budgeting assistance.

Financial Empowerment Centers offer professional, one-on-one financial counseling as a free public service to enable residents to address their financial challenges and needs and plan for their futures.



## RESOURCE NAVIGATION

### CHALLENGE

Women shared the difficulty and time intensity of finding resources appropriate for their needs and demographics.

They shared their challenges related to finding the support they need when many organizations are siloed and there is no one-stop shop where they can learn about all the opportunities that exist.

They shared the importance of word-of-mouth and referrals when trying to find programs that could provide assistance.

### OPPORTUNITY <sup>6</sup>

Well-trained financial navigators with access to an aggregated database of resources can provide one-on-one guidance to help residents navigate the complexity of the social services system.



## FAMILY SUPPORT & COMMUNITY BUILDING

### CHALLENGE

Another financial challenge mentioned multiple times was the need for free or low-cost family activities. These include health and wellness programs, educational activities, hobby groups, and social outings. Women across the focus groups shared the difficulty finding or affording “fun” activities for their children, whether sports and recreation opportunities or simple entertainments like going to the movies. Women shared that these kinds of activities are an important way to support the well-being of their family, reduce stress, and feel “normal” but were often either not affordable (free or low-cost) or easily accessible (provided in their neighborhood).

Another common barrier to achieving financial empowerment shared was the need for more community support networks. These included ways to connect to other women, share resources, and build positive relationships. Women in the focus groups shared their difficulty finding support groups to help with issues such as domestic abuse or healthcare issues, finding childcare, or even just finding “healthy things to do” like book clubs or yoga. They expressed the need for groups and activities that would also be held after work hours and that included opportunities for women without children.

### OPPORTUNITY <sup>5</sup>

The Village to Village model is a grassroots community support network that connects neighbors and encourages them to build community and support each other while attending services and activities. These include health and wellness programs, educational activities, hobby groups, and social outings.

The Village to Village model is geared towards seniors but could be adapted to serve families. Village in the Ville is an example of a local chapter in Columbus.

# STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

## MISSION

To support the financial security of Columbus women and families by delivering accessible, equitable, and human-centered resources through cross-sector collaboration.



## VISION

The City will elevate financial empowerment as a citywide priority and embed a vision of equity, access, and shared prosperity into all policies, programs, practices and procedures.

## GOALS

### ALIGNMENT

Increase internal and external alignment of financial empowerment efforts by collaborating with partners to develop and implement a shared vision.

### ACCESS

Increase public awareness and access to financial empowerment tools by utilizing a “many front doors” approach where residents are connected to an array of services and resources fitting their needs.

### OPPORTUNITY

Support systems, structural, and policy change that address the barriers to financial inclusion and financial justice so women and families are lifted out of poverty and connected to opportunity.

THE CITYSTART APPROACH

Embedding systemic financial empowerment programs and policies into city services to improve individual and family financial stability.

## OBJECTIVES

### ALIGNMENT

1. Regularly convene partners and residents around key financial empowerment issues; create working groups for key issues
2. Support the Financial Capability Network of Central Ohio as a platform to create and sustain financial empowerment efforts for Columbus residents; partner on the development of a financial empowerment referral network and other municipal financial empowerment strategies
3. Develop and annually track financial health indicators for the City and Columbus region

### ACCESS

1. Launch a Financial Navigation pilot program for residents
2. Launch a Bank On Coalition to expand banking access; explore a connection to municipal youth workforce development initiatives
3. Invest in professional financial counseling as a public service

### OPPORTUNITY

1. Develop a financial justice platform to reform municipal fines and fees
2. Develop a consumer financial protections agenda
3. Explore opportunities to develop new childcare initiatives and expand existing capacity; explore opportunities for providing childcare to City employees
4. Explore a pilot program to address residents' transportation access challenges, with a focus on emergency car repairs
5. Explore the development of family-supporting community hubs



## ENDNOTES:

- 1 Source: <https://cfefund.org/project/citystart/>
- 2 *Assets For Equity: Building Wealth for Women in Central Ohio*, Women's Fund of Central Ohio and the Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2019: <https://www.womensfundcentralohio.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-Gender-Racial-Wealth-Gap-Report.pdf>
- 3 Ibid
- 4 Sources: Wheels4Hope - <https://wheels4hope.org/>; Wheels of Success - <http://www.wheelsofsuccess.org/>; Ways to Work - [https://ofn.org/sites/default/files/resources/PDFs/Member%20Profiles/OFN\\_MP\\_WaysToWork.pdf](https://ofn.org/sites/default/files/resources/PDFs/Member%20Profiles/OFN_MP_WaysToWork.pdf); The Carpenter's Garage - <https://www.thecarpentersgarage.org/>; The Lift Garage - <https://www.theliftgarage.org/>
- 5 Sources: Village to Village - <https://www.vtvnetwork.org/>; Village in the Ville - <https://www.clintonvillecrc.org/village-in-the-ville/>
- 6 Source: Financial Navigators: <https://cfefund.org/project/financial-navigators/>
- 7 Sources: National Foundation for Credit Counseling - <https://www.nfcc.org/>; Financial Empowerment Centers - <https://fecpublic.org/>

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THE CITY OF  
**COLUMBUS**  
CITY COUNCIL

**US** COLUMBUS  
WOMEN'S  
COMMISSION

# THE CITY OF COLUMBUS<sup>★</sup>

ANDREW J. GINTHER, MAYOR

To learn more about the City of Columbus' Financial Empowerment efforts, visit:  
[www.columbus.gov/financialemPOWERment](http://www.columbus.gov/financialemPOWERment)



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