



Unity Agenda

Taking Action, Together,
to End Poverty



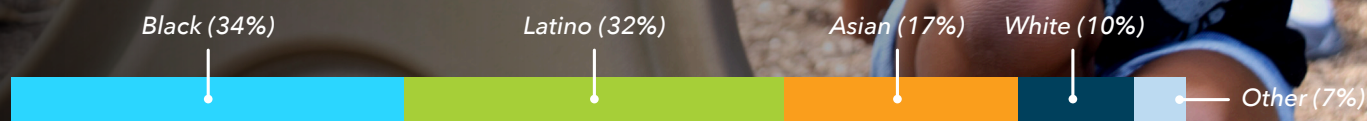
RMAPI
ROCHESTER-MONROE
ANTI-POVERTY INITIATIVE

Updated May 2025

What if everyone had what they needed to thrive?

In the Greater Rochester and Monroe County region, many of our neighbors are living in poverty. 14% of us within the nine-county region are experiencing the challenges, barriers, and negative effects of poverty. But this poverty is not evenly distributed.

Poverty Distribution in the Greater Rochester & Monroe County Region



What is poverty?

If you're among the many in our communities who are struggling, then you might know what poverty feels like. Maybe it feels like isolation. Desperation. The inability to make ends meet. Eviction. Struggles to feed your family. Or maybe it feels like your day-to-day reality. These experiences are valid, and you are not alone in going through them.

Poverty is different for every person, household, neighborhood, and city that experiences it. And there are almost as many "anti-poverty" initiatives that aim to support people with the basic needs and services they are often going without – like food, shelter, education, internet access, and other community resources. These initiatives, organizations, and people are vital to our community.

But here's the thing: poverty is a problem that results from historic and continuing systems of oppression and

Historic and continuing discriminatory policies, practices and systems in the US and the greater Rochester area create enduring inequities and conditions for Black people, Indigenous people, and People of Color, actively and passively preventing access to [upward mobility](#).

Unity Agenda Problem Statement

discriminatory policies and practices—across the U.S., and right here in Greater Rochester. These systems, policies, and practices have created enduring inequities and conditions for Black people, Indigenous people, and People of Color, both overtly and covertly, preventing access to [upward mobility](#). The root causes of poverty are deeply embedded in American soil.

What can be done?

We believe that a lot can be done, when we think about the problem of poverty from all angles and levels, and when many people, in all sectors, from all backgrounds and walks of life, come together with a unified goal. Together, we can use our collective power to solve poverty.

Together, we are breaking the cycle of poverty by shifting power to enable upward mobility for all families.

Unity Agenda Impact Statement



The shift to upward mobility.

In order to create an equitable Greater Rochester, we seek to achieve upward mobility from poverty for everyone in our community. It's common to talk about being "anti-poverty." But to define ourselves in terms of what we're against does not leave enough room for the vision of the world we're yearning to see. That's why we're changing how we talk about our work, instead using language that is focused on solutions and based on our shared strengths.

What is **upward mobility** from poverty?

Dignity and Belonging is feeling the respect, dignity and sense of belonging that comes from contributing to one's community.

Power and Autonomy is the ability to make choices and the collective capacity to influence larger policies and actions that affect one's future.

Economic Success refers to factors that directly contribute to individuals' and families' material well-being.

Solving poverty differently requires defining poverty differently.

One big change is recognizing that poverty is not just about income. As we evolve how we are addressing poverty, we need to move from a single-point definition to a multi-point definition of poverty. By recognizing the three main drivers of **upward mobility**, we can also see the three main ways of solving poverty. A systemic approach to solving poverty means viewing the experience of poverty—and its solutions—holistically, as they are all interconnected.

What is the Unity Agenda?

The Unity Agenda is a roadmap for achieving poverty alleviation together in Greater Rochester. Our guiding principles help explain how we will uproot poverty, through upward mobility, by creating shared credibility, accountability, and responsibility. We seek to honor the work that has been done already for poverty alleviation, and bring our community along to a new vision of upward mobility.

Our guiding principles:

These values establish a framework for how we'll work together and make decisions as we implement the Unity Agenda.



Center Racial Equity:

In our community, the racial disparities are stark & pervasive. RMAPI's work centers racial equity by declaring that racial equity is achieved when race is no longer a determinant of life outcomes. This will mean measuring and evaluating the outcomes of our work with a racialized lens. We will disaggregate data to understand the racial disparities and target strategies that address and redress the inequities.



Address Collective Trauma:

Community trauma, also referred to as collective trauma, means that traumatic events affecting communities may impact a few people but have structural and social traumatic consequences. This type of systems trauma, just like individual trauma, affects cognitive decision-making and can lead to reduced civic engagement, weakened social networks, and lower social cohesion. To foster inclusion and belonging, we must acknowledge this community trauma and take intentional steps to heal and repair historical and ongoing hurt.



Revitalize Neighborhoods:

RMAPI seeks to transform communities at scale through systems-change work. We will continue to advocate for equity in allocating resources and opportunities to neighborhoods that have been disinvested and underserved for decades.

What is systems change?

Poverty is a systemic problem that requires systemic solutions. Systems change means that we are working to address the root causes of a problem, rather than only treating the symptoms of a problem.

Systems change solutions are transformative approaches that cut across institutions, focus on everything from policies and organizational culture,

alter how our society operates, and shift both cultural values and political will. It's also important to note that systems, at their core, are run by people—they won't change without a shift in human behavior.

Take a look at some conditions of systems change. Where do you hold power? Where do you see yourself influencing?

What are the conditions of systems change?

(EXPLICIT) Structural Change

Policies

The governmental, institutional, and organizational rules, regulations, and priorities that guide our interactions and behavior.

Practices

The espoused or actual activities of institutions, coalitions, networks, and other entities targeted to improving progress. Practices are also the procedures, guidelines, or shared habits of that group or entity.

Resource Flows

How money, people, knowledge, information, and other assets are allocated and distributed within a system.

(SEMI-EXPLICIT) Relational Change

Relationships & Connections

The quality of our connections and communication with others in the system, especially those with differing histories and viewpoints.

Power Dynamics

The distribution of decision-making power, authority, and both formal and informal influence among individuals and organizations.

(IMPLICIT) Transformative Change

Mental Models

Habits of thought. From deeply held beliefs and assumptions to taken-for-granted ways of operating that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk.

*This model is adapted from John Kania, Mark Kramer, and Peter Senge's *The Waters of Systems Change*.*

What are our goals?

The RMAPI Collective has developed a set of systems outcomes and goals that define the work of our Unity Agenda. We looked at the barriers to upward mobility in our communities, collected input from content and context experts, and invited learnings from across the country. These statements reflect the visionary systems changes that we want to see, and what it will look like when our goals are achieved.

We envision a future where everyone...



Lives in a safe, inclusive, and opportunity-rich neighborhood.

What does it look like?

- The housing system offers affordable, safe, desirable options.
- Residents have choices in safe, reliable and high-frequency transportation.
- Public safety systems are effective and residents report feeling safe in their neighborhoods.
- Employers create employment opportunities in underserved neighborhoods.
- Governments ensure neighborhoods have well-maintained infrastructure.



Accesses quality education and skill-building that equips them for success.

What does it look like?

- Educational systems graduate students college- and career-ready.
- Career pathways connect students to employment opportunities.
- Skill-building programs effectively engage residents outside of the K-12 setting.



Relies on equitable, accountable, and responsive local government, public safety and legal systems.

What does it look like?

- Public safety systems eliminate disproportionately punitive policies and practices.
- Government policies are designed for equitable outcomes.
- Public safety, government and legal/court systems are responsive and just.
- Government exhibits cultural and linguistic competence in their interactions with residents.
- Governments eliminate environmental hazards that impact health and ensure sustainability and resiliency against climate change impacts.



Engages in rewarding work that provides dignity and builds financial security and stability for their families.

What does it look like?

- Employers pay living wages and provide benefits that enable stability.
- Employers center equity in policies and practices, especially for entry and mid-level employees.
- Employers address common barriers to employment.
- Banking and financial systems engage residents with affordable products and services.
- Predatory and exploitative fees, fines, and services are eliminated.
- Financial systems provide resources to BIPOC-owned businesses.



Lives in healthy environments and gets access to quality, affordable health and social care.

What does it look like?

- Consistent healthy, affordable food options are convenient to all people.
- Healthcare and social care systems coordinate internally and externally to eliminate inequities in outcomes.
- Behavioral, health, and social care systems are culturally responsive and reflective of the populations they serve.
- Governments eliminate environmental hazards that impact health.
- Families have access to convenient, affordable, quality childcare.



Experiences inclusion, dignity and belonging, leading to greater well-being and increased participation in civic institutions and community life.

What does it look like?

- Civic institutions make it easy for community members to engage in and influence decision-making.
- Social networks and social institutions intentionally increase diversity along socioeconomic, racial and ethnic lines.
- Community leaders share information and resources equitably within and across neighborhoods.
- Educational systems actively cultivate social capital and networks.

Our decisions and actions will center those who have been historically disadvantaged by racism, trauma and community disinvestment.



How will RMAPI succeed?

Our Unity Agenda is ambitious, and the RMAPI Collective is energized by our goals. We will draw on the diverse tools, skills, strengths, and resources of each collective member, including our strategic partners, to make these changes happen at every level of systems change.

For each goal, we will:

ACT

Take direct action to address this goal in the Greater Rochester community. The RMAPI Collective takes the lead on reaching these goals and is accountable and responsible for developing and executing a plan of action. If we aren't the best organization to act to achieve a goal, we will instead align with or assess that goal.

ALIGN

Partner with existing organizations that are already working to realize systems change in our community. This could look like providing technical support or consultation, co-leading initiatives with municipal governments, signing onto letters of support, and participating on commissions or task forces that are addressing this outcome.

ASSESS

Use our resources and tools to monitor and evaluate community initiatives to ensure meaningful progress is being made. This includes supporting evaluation via results-based accountability reporting, and responding to key New York State reports on poverty and other measurements such as the American Community Survey.

How will you engage?

Our community is powerful. The Unity Agenda is a roadmap for achieving poverty alleviation together. Whether you are a content expert—someone with formal power, knowledge, tools, and resources to address poverty, or a context expert—someone with lived experience of poverty, you can share in the Unity Agenda.

Think about how you might act on, align with, or assess each upward mobility goal. Together, we can turn a theory of change into a reality of change for our region.



Sign On

Visit unityagenda.org to sign on to the Unity Agenda. Add your name to join the collective of people just like you who believe in systems changes and want to make our community more equitable.



Take Action

Look out for RMAPI's annual policy agenda and contact your legislators to let them know that you believe everyone deserves economic success, power and autonomy, and dignity and belonging.



Get Involved

Are you ready to make real change in your community? RMAPI is a collective of partner organizations. Find out more about our partners and learn about their work with RMAPI at unityagenda.org.



This isn't business as usual.

Poverty is a complex, long-standing issue that requires complex, long-lasting solutions. In the past, too many players addressing social issues were working alone, without coordination within or among their efforts or sectors. The Unity Agenda is different. It serves as a vital anchor in our community, and it harnesses the power of Rochester's organizations, businesses, neighborhoods, government entities, and community members to achieve [upward mobility](#) for all.

RMAPI utilizes a community-driven process where those with lived and living experiences of poverty equitably and actively participate in decision-making processes in Rochester and Monroe County.

Making an impact, together.

The goal of the Unity Agenda is to bring the community together around a common aspiration and align around what we can achieve together. In order for the Unity Agenda to be effective, the RMAPI Collective has put a lot of time and intentionality into its creation.

Positive outcomes for systems-level poverty reduction are not going to happen overnight. We know that solving poverty is a complicated, multi-faceted process, and solutions can't be predicted or controlled or reduced to a single "one size fits all" approach. That's why we're inviting everyone – including you – to the table.

We invited a collective of people to shape this Unity Agenda. Many, including context experts with lived experiences of poverty, and content experts who have studied the impacts of poverty, have shared their wisdom with us. We hope you'll share yours, too. Together, we can shift power, create upward mobility, and end poverty.

The RMAPI Collective

RMAPI is a community-wide coalition working together to break the cycle of poverty by shifting power to enable **upward mobility** for all families.

Steering Committee:*

Corinda Reaves, RMAPI Chair, Chief Customer and Community Experience Officer, RTS

1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East
7th Judicial District, New York State
Action for a Better Community, Inc
Assemblymember Harry Bronson, NYS Assembly District 138
Center for Governmental Research
Common Ground Health
Connected Communities
County Executive Adam Bello, Monroe County
Empire State Development
ESL Federal Credit Union
Finger Lakes Performing Provider System
Goodwill of the Finger Lakes
Greater Rochester Chamber of Commerce
Greater Rochester Health Foundation
Ibero American Action League
Max and Marian Farash Charitable Foundation
Mayor Malik Evans, City of Rochester
Monroe Community College
OneRoc
Rep. Joseph Morelle, NY 25th Congressional District
ROC The Future Alliance
Rochester Area Community Foundation
Rochester Educational Opportunity Center
Rochester Housing Authority
Rochester Regional Health System
Rochester Works!
RTS
The Children's Agenda
TogetherNow
United Way of Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes
University of Rochester
Urban League of Rochester
US Ceiling Corp

*Partners as of May 2025.

RMAPI Backbone Staff



Aqua Porter
Executive Director



Nate Dougherty
Communication
Coordinator



Patricia Collado
Administrative
Assistant



Rebekah Meyer
Operations Manager



Madison Byrne
Operations Associate



Martha Cole
Strategic Partner
& Community
Engagement Manager



Christopher Rush
Collective Impact
Manager

Shifting Power. Creating Upward Mobility. Ending Poverty.

unityagenda.org

endingpovertynow.org

 [RochesterMonroeAntiPovertyInitiative](https://www.facebook.com/RochesterMonroeAntiPovertyInitiative)  [_rmap_i](https://www.instagram.com/_rmap_i)

COVER PHOTO CREDIT: Communications Bureau, City of Rochester. Mural by Peculiar Asphalt.