

A Strategic Partnership Launches With The Task of Transforming Community Safety and Creating A More Just Grand Rapids

Grand Rapids, MI – April 15, 2025 – A partnership aimed at creating a thriving, safe and just Grand Rapids has formally launched after more than two years spent in planning and stakeholder-engagement stages. Today, the initiative known as *A Just GR*, marks a new chapter in its vision to eliminate disparities and achieve equity through data sharing and systems collaboration to secure public safety, health and well-being and belonging in Grand Rapids. The name reflects the initiative’s broad focus on creating a more just and inclusive community, emphasizing action, accountability, and systemic change.

“We believe A Just GR will help to improve the quality of life for our city’s residents and neighborhoods,” said Rev. Parris McMurray, Pastor of Renaissance Church of God in Christ and Chair of A Just GR. “This work is about transforming the systems and structures that have historically excluded or marginalized certain communities. This is an effort to create an even safer and more just city for all that doesn’t rely on crisis systems to solve problems but instead focuses more on innovative approaches that include community voice and authentic collaboration.”

A Just GR is a community-driven, multisector approach to safety and invites collaboration among community-based organizations, government agencies, policymakers, and other multi-sector partners to promote justice and community safety.

The initiative was formed through a partnership with the Aspen Institute’s Criminal Justice Reform Initiative, a global leader in driving change through dialogue, leadership and action. Aspen Institute has provided critical guidance and resources to help *A Just GR* share its strategy for building a more just community through community development, equity-centered leadership and policy reform. Other funders include Ford Foundation, Michigan Justice Fund, KRW Foundation, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and Bank of America.

“A critical element in driving change and earning trust with historically marginalized communities is to spend time building relationships. That means truly listening to people, considering their lived experience, and working to understand the ways systemic racism has impacted their quality of life, particularly as it pertains to safety, health and well-being,” said Amari Fuller, Community Engagement Specialist - Greater Grand Rapids for the Michigan League for Public Policy and Vice Chair of A Just GR. “Anti-racism, collaboration, and a systems approach are critical components in co-creating a more just, safe, and healthy Grand Rapids and Kent County.”

The inclusion of law enforcement is critically important in the work of A Just GR. “When you care about something, you want it to be the best it can be,” said Eric Winstrom, Chief of the Grand Rapids Police Department. “Criminal justice professionals know that with the right reforms, we can do even better, for ourselves and for our communities. We can stop wasting time on problems that shouldn’t be criminal justice issues, free up law enforcement to focus on the most serious crimes, build trust between the police and community, and make our communities safer.”

Here are some of the Key Goals of *A Just GR*:

- ***Data Sharing and Systems Collaboration:*** Utilizing Justice Audits, an analytical process that collects, renders, and interprets a vast array of data about the nature of justice in a community, to document the perspectives of community members through interview data from people within various justice systems. A Justice Audit also looks to the ‘adjacent’ systems that interact with the Justice Systems – things like housing, health care, education, workforce, and others.
- ***Community Engagement & Empowerment:*** Encouraging civic participation by amplifying the voices of underrepresented communities and fostering partnerships between local organizations, government, and residents.
- ***Social Justice & Racial Equity:*** Addressing systemic racism through policy reform, education, and community dialogue. The initiative will engage city officials, community groups, and residents to drive change in policing, education, and healthcare access.

Grand Rapids is the first city to launch its own justice and government initiative with the Aspen Institute. Other cities include Birmingham, AL and a ten-county region in South Carolina. The Justice and Governance Initiative, over time, will comprise of up to 10 jurisdictions throughout the country. These initiatives are designed to be led by local individuals who leverage their sector experience, community relationships, and trust from other leaders in the region. The initial co-chairs for the work in Grand Rapids were current Mayor David LaGrand, followed by Melissa LaGrand, Kent County Commissioner, and Joe Marogil, board member, ACLU of Michigan. Current chair and co-chair are Rev. Parris McMurray and Amari Fuller. Additional leaders and organizations currently leading this effort are: Hon. Angela Ross, 61st District Court, Eureka People, Housing Kent, John Wittkowski, Kent Intermediate School District, Angelica Ferrer, Kent County Prosecutors Office, Aaron Yore-VanOosterhout, GVSU, Trudy Ender, Women’s Resource Center, William Smith, Grand Rapids Fire Department, Beverly Ryskamp, Network180, J.D. Chapman, Jr., Realism Is Loyalty, Rachel VerWys, Safe Haven Ministries, Brandon Davis, City of Grand Rapids, Trudy Ngo-Brown, Steelcase Foundation, Victoria Proctor-Gibbs, Community Member, Deputy Chief Mike Maycroft, Grand Rapids Police Department, Chief Deputy Lyndsie Cole, Kent County Sheriff’s Department, and Corewell Health, who serves as the convener and administrative support to the initiative.

This undertaking was inspired by myriad conversations with Grand Rapids community leaders and residents who called for more focus on dismantling the root causes of inequity, from systemic racism to environmental injustice, while eliminating disparities and achieving equity through data sharing and systems collaboration.

“A Just GR signifies our bold commitment to justice and equity as a city,” said David LaGrand, Mayor of Grand Rapids, and an early influencer in attracting the Aspen Institute to Grand Rapids. “We believe Grand Rapids can be the model city in promoting systemic approaches to public safety and several forms of justice including criminal, economic, environmental, and social. We’re about pushing for lasting, systemic change that ensures everyone in Grand Rapids can live with dignity and opportunity.”

To follow the progress of A Just GR, please visit www.ajgr-jgp.org

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About A Just GR

A Just GR is a community-driven initiative dedicated to advancing social, racial, and environmental justice in Grand Rapids. Formerly known as Grand Rapids Justice and Governance Partnership, the initiative has rebranded to better reflect its mission of driving systemic change and creating a future where all residents can thrive.