

ASSESSING COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY MODELS FOR ECONOMIC MOBILITY

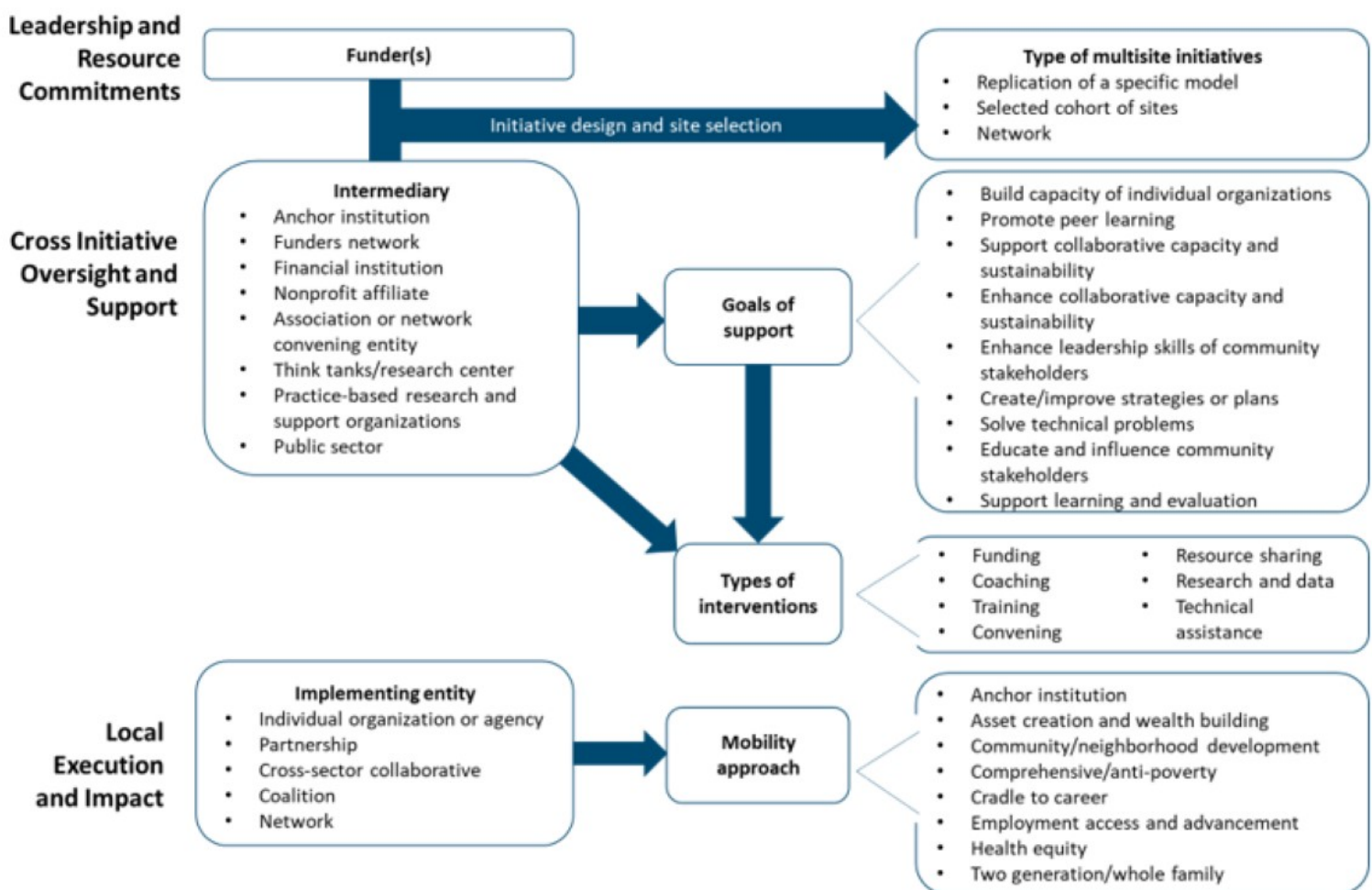
Mt. Auburn Associates, Inc.
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OVERVIEW

Economic inequality in the United States is entrenched and pervasive, with the top 10% of families holding 76% of the country's wealth and the bottom 50% of families holding just 1% (2019, *Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis*). In response, community actors and foundations across the country have urgently mobilized to close this gap, deploying a variety of approaches and methods. However, the economic mobility field remains largely understudied and under-evaluated, leaving broad questions about the breadth, depth, and impact of existing strategies unanswered. Mt. Auburn Associates, on behalf of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, undertook a research effort to better understand the landscape and make meaning from work underway to address economic mobility across the U.S. The specific focus was on learning from the **multisite initiatives** that support **partnerships or collaboratives of stakeholders** and employ **crosscutting approaches** beyond an individual program or issue area. Through a mixed methodology and grounded in interviews with expert practitioners, Mt. Auburn's analysis shines new light on gaps and opportunities within the economic mobility field and offers key findings and implications for the continuation of this work.

FRAMEWORK

To effectively analyze the work underway, it was crucial to develop a shared definition of terms and a framework to structure analysis. The framework (below) provides an overview of the components, actors, roles, and decision points at play in the design and implementation of a multisite economic mobility initiative.



METHODS

Mt. Auburn Associates developed a research approach that involved the following methods:

LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

Developed criteria and gathered data on 60 multisite initiatives that involved cross-sector groups, had a crosscutting frame, and focused on economic mobility-related outcomes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conducted a scan of existing literature on economic mobility approaches, intermediaries, evaluations of multisite initiatives, types of stakeholders involved in collaboration, and variety of support mechanisms.

MODEL INITIATIVE SELECTION

Selected ten models for primary research, including seven multisite initiatives and three comprehensive community efforts. Completed secondary research on 11 additional initiatives.

INTERVIEWS

Completed 67 interviews of funders, intermediaries, and local stakeholders in ten selected models as well as additional field experts.

LANDSCAPE

Mt. Auburn Associates assembled a representative cross-section of multisite cross-sector initiatives that focus their various approaches on increasing economic mobility. This landscaping identified 60 initiatives for further examination.

- African American Financial Capability Initiative
- All-In Cities
- Best Babies Zone Initiative
- Blue Meridian Partners - Place Matters
- Boosting Opportunities for Social and Economic Mobility for Families
- Building Healthy Communities
- Building Power in Place project
- Communities of Opportunity
- Community Action Economic Mobility Initiative
- Community Progress Makers Fund
- Connecting Capital and Community
- Cross-sector Innovation Initiative
- Deep South Economic Mobility Collaborative
- Economic Mobility Action Network
- Economic Mobility Initiative
- Economic Opportunity Challenge
- Enterprise Economic Mobility Initiative
- Equitable Development Initiative
- Expanding Opportunities for Young Families
- Families Forward Demonstration
- Family-Centered Community Change
- Forward Cities
- Harlem Children's Zone
- Healthcare Anchor Network
- Intersections Initiative
- Invest Health
- Learn and Earn to Achieve Potential
- Linked Learning Regional Hubs of Excellence
- Living Cities Integration Initiative
- MDC Network for Southern Economic Mobility
- Mobility Learning and Action Labs (LAB)
- National Fund for Workforce Development
- New Communities Program
- Next Generation Initiative
- Opportunity Accelerator
- Opportunity Youth Forum
- P-16 Community Investment Initiative
- Partners in Progress
- Priority Communities
- Promise Neighborhoods
- PRO Neighborhoods
- Purpose Built Communities
- Ready by 21
- Regional Whole Family Approach Community of Practice
- Regional Women's Economic Mobility Hub
- Rockefeller Foundation Opportunity Collective
- Say Yes to Education
- Shared Prosperity Partnership
- Spreading Community Accelerators through Learning and Evaluation
- StriveTogether Cradle to Career Network
- Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge
- Tapestry Project
- Upward Mobility Cohort
- Ventures
- What Works Cities Economic Mobility Initiative
- Workforce Partnership Initiative
- Working Cities Challenge
- Working Families Success Network
- Year Up
- YouthBuild

LANDSCAPE

Based on the literature review, landscaping, and interviews, Mt. Auburn identified the following cross-cutting mobility approaches that practitioners and funders use to define their work.



Asset creation and wealth building – initiatives that focus on improving financial education, savings to promote financial growth, access to credit, black/minority business development and ownership, cooperative business development, community ownership, and homeownership.



Employment access and advancement – initiatives centered on employment, including skills training and allied services, work-related supports (e.g., childcare or transportation), career pathways, improving job quality, economic development, training linked to sector/cluster development, college access and success.



Comprehensive/anti-poverty – community or regional initiatives that work to broadly advance mobility through multiple and crosscutting efforts that extend beyond one or two frames.



Community/neighborhood development – initiatives that target place-based barriers to mobility, including funneling investments and services to high-poverty neighborhoods and expanding access to affordable housing with additional supports in high-opportunity neighborhoods.

Two-generation/whole family – initiatives that focus on both parental and child mobility through a range of supports around child development and education, parental employment, financial stability and assets, integrated human services, and health and social supports.



Cradle to career – initiatives that define themselves in terms of providing youth with health, social, and educational supports from birth through college and career.



Health equity – initiatives that have a grounding in health-related outcomes but focus on the multiple social determinants of health that impact these outcomes. Strategies can include elements of economic mobility, such as neighborhood development, affordable housing, healthy food access, wellness-related efforts, and employment. Often involves healthcare anchors and/or public health entities.



Anchor institution – initiatives that utilize anchor institutions to advance mobility in multiple ways, including employment, business contracting, education, and housing/homeownership.



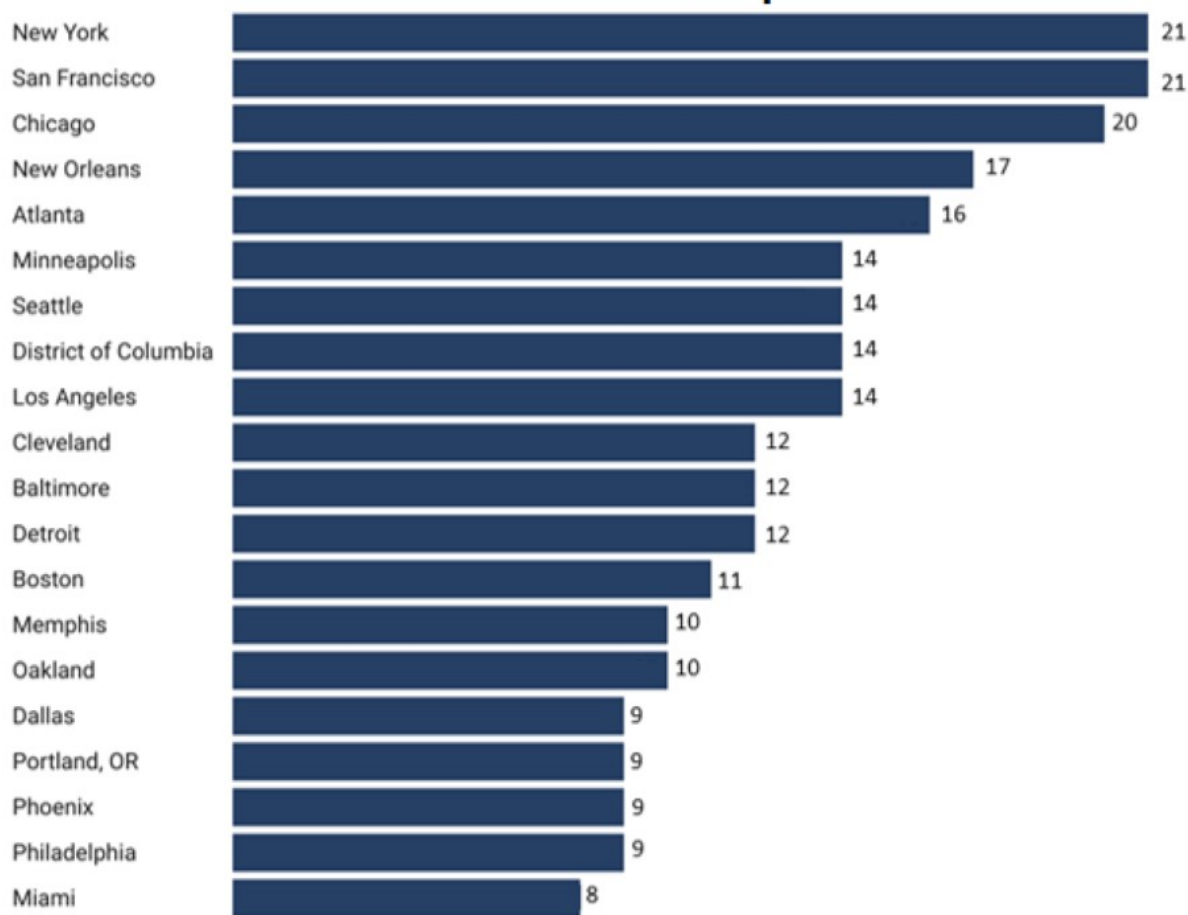
KEY FINDINGS



THE LANDSCAPE OF MULTISITE MOBILITY INITIATIVES

There is a large concentration of mobility-related initiatives in a relatively small number of places. The ten largest MSAs account for approximately one-quarter of all the sites included in the initiatives Mt. Auburn reviewed, and one-third were in only 20 cities. A small set of U.S. cities have many overlapping and unaligned funder initiatives involving cross-sector collaboration and community engagement. In a majority of communities, namely small and midsize cities and rural regions, there is little support for these types of efforts.

33% of sites are located in these 20 places



Numbers to the right of bars denote count of multisite initiatives underway in the corresponding geography.

KEY FINDINGS



COMMUNITY SUPPORT PROVIDED THROUGH FUNDERS AND INTERMEDIARIES

A primary objective of this research was to learn more about the types of support provided to communities through funder-driven economic mobility initiatives. The research found:

- **Better articulated goals** for the support that intermediaries provide sites could lead to more strategic interventions, greater capacity gains, and reinforce the mobility strategy.
- There is a significant need for more resources and technical assistance related to **data management, data sharing structures, and outcome measurement systems**.
- Funding and support for the **collaborative infrastructure** and functioning is the most important and under-resourced need in most communities.
- **Peer learning**, the most highly valued element of many multisite initiatives, was most effective when sites were working on similar strategies and at relatively similar stages of capacity.
- **High-quality coaching** for leadership and collaboration capacity was highly valued among stakeholders who received this type of assistance.
- **Data and research from national partners** can help create a sense of urgency, increase the understanding of the economic mobility challenges specific to their community, and provide credibility to the local work.
- **Racial equity training** was an important component in educating stakeholders and influencing the thinking and actions among collaborative members.
- **A longer timeframe** is necessary to build local capacity, strengthen collaborative structures, and design and implement mobility strategies.

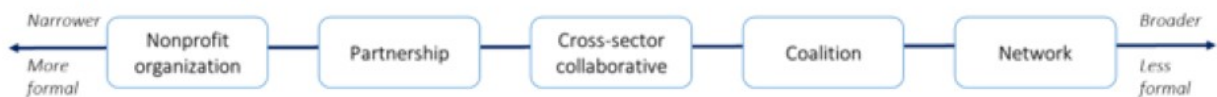
KEY FINDINGS



IMPLEMENTING ENTITIES: CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATIVES, PARTNERSHIPS, NETWORKS

Most of the multisite initiatives Mt. Auburn reviewed were supporting some type of cross-sector group as the “implementing entity.” The research sought to learn more about the composition and structures of these groups, finding:

- **Multiple types of entities** are engaged in overseeing economic mobility efforts. These entities range from very formal and relatively narrow partnerships to more informal and broad networks.



- **Cross-sector collaboratives are not appropriate for every type of initiative.** Individual organizations or broader coalitions might better serve some important policy and advocacy work.
- Most collaborative efforts prioritize representation of resident voice but rarely emphasize **worker voice**.
- **Local philanthropy** plays an important role in leadership, initiative backbone, and assembling resources.
- Some players, including **CDFIs and unions**, are potentially critical to economic mobility but have not actively engaged in mobility work at the community level.
- There is often a disconnect between local stakeholders focusing on **economic development**—building a stronger, more resilient economy—and the groups focusing on economic mobility.
- Communities with **multiple initiatives and tables** could benefit from greater alignment and more synergistic approaches to the mobility work.

ADVANCING THE FIELD

These research findings illustrate important strengths, gaps, and lessons for the field. From these findings, Mt. Auburn shares the following priorities that we believe could benefit both the field of economic mobility and the suite of funders, intermediaries, initiative participants, and community members engaged in it.

1

Communities not currently engaged in funder-led economic mobility initiatives could benefit from expanded learning communities and support. Targets for this support could include:

- communities advancing a broad, interdisciplinary approach to economic mobility across various issue areas;
- communities approaching economic mobility through a worker-centered economic justice framework; and
- Communities that have a more challenging political structure and culture, resulting in lower levels of “readiness.”

2

Intermediaries need support too. An “affinity group” or community of practice for intermediaries that are supporting community-level economic mobility work could yield greater impact. Subjects could include best practices in peer learning, coaching, co-design of interventions, and level of community control of resources.

3

New sources of flexible funding for collaborative infrastructure are essential. Funders could ensure the sustainability and increase the impact of existing economic mobility efforts by providing longer-term flexible funding to support the infrastructure of established collaboratives.

4

Learning requires enhanced investments in data systems and long-term tracking of outcomes. Making a comprehensive commitment to improving economic mobility is a significant first step for any community—establishing a way to track and quantify impact is a crucial follow-up that stakeholders often overlook. Financial and technical support through tools and resources can help communities build integrated data systems and innovative approaches to tracking their population-level and place-based impacts.

Interested in learning more, discussing our findings, or
collaborating on further learning?

Contact:

Beth Siegel at bsiegel@mtauburnassociates.com
or Emily Klein at eklein@mtauburnassociates.com



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