



EVALUATION
REPORT

Mobility LABs Annual Learning and Evaluation Report

Implementation Year 2 (2022-2023)

Prepared for The Robin Hood Foundation | January 2024

EQUAL
MEASURE

FINDING
PROMISE
FUELING
CHANGE



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Launched in 2019, Mobility Learning and Action Bets (“Mobility LABs”) is a national investment led by the Robin Hood Foundation and supported by multiple funding partners, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, and Tipping Point Community. The initiative partners with local organizations in nine communities across the country (Figure 1) to develop community-driven solutions to sustainably lift families out of poverty.

Drawing from the work of the U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty,¹ Mobility LABs defines mobility from poverty as encompassing three equally important dimensions: **economic success, power and autonomy, and sense of belonging**. Sustained mobility can only be achieved through building up all three dimensions for both individuals and for communities. The initiative is highly contextualized to the strengths and needs of the nine communities. It is guided by a community-centered approach, grounding the work in the voices and experiences of those living in poverty and centering racial justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. The principles ensure that the nine community projects are reflective of and driven by the priorities of the residents who live and work there.

“...while economic success is an essential principle, it does not fully capture people’s experiences with poverty and mobility.”

—U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty, 2018.

FIGURE 1. MOBILITY LABS COMMUNITIES



This report documents the changes resulting from the community-driven mobility strategies implemented across the nine Mobility LABs projects during Year 2 (spring 2022-spring 2023) of the initiative and reports how communities hope to sustain the work. Findings are based on data collected through 1) a survey of anchor partners (“Learning Tool”) designed to understand strategies and outcomes, and 2) interviews with individuals in each community including anchor partner staff leading

¹ <https://www.mobilitypartnership.org/>



the Mobility LABs work, staff members from their partner organizations, and residents involved in work groups, programming, and other activities.²

Year 2 Accomplishments

The Mobility LABs partnerships reported meaningful change across the mobility constructs – **economic success, power and autonomy, and sense of belonging** – as well *emerging changes* in **narratives** and **local policy** – all evidence-based outcomes related to long-term economic mobility.³ Partnership activities during 2022-23 entered a new stage of maturity in which anchor partners, community partners, and community residents leveraged established relationships and project infrastructure to achieve more. These developments signaled **increased momentum for economic mobility** in the Mobility LABs communities. The partnerships have made considerable progress in the last two years and are well-positioned to sustain momentum with continued commitment to implementation and sufficient funding.

ECONOMIC SUCCESS

*"Economic success captures factors that directly contribute to individuals' and families' material well-being. Those factors fall into four broad categories: income, assets, and income adequacy; employment; skills (human capital); and family demographic circumstances."*⁴

Economic success and stability are integral to individual economic mobility, serving as the bedrock for upward advancement. When individuals experience financial stability, marked by family-supporting wages and job security, they gain the capacity to invest in education, acquire new skills, and pursue higher-paying jobs.⁵ Moreover, economic stability acts as a safeguard against financial setbacks, reducing reliance on social services and fostering wealth accumulation, thus paving the way for intergenerational economic progress.⁶

- **Mobility LABs partnerships created opportunities for increased economic success for community residents, primarily through direct services such as job training.** As a cohort, the Mobility LABs partnerships reported much more progress in all areas of education and employment during Year 2 as compared to Year 1.
- **Community residents gained education and employment through access to new opportunities, knowledge, and skill development.**
- **Mobility LABs partnerships removed barriers to education and employment for community members and provided wraparound supports for residents' basic needs to better enable economic mobility.**

² See Appendix A for more information about the Mobility LABs evaluation and methodology.

³ Ellwood, D. T. and Patel, N. G. (January 2018). *Restoring the American Dream: What Would it Take to Dramatically Increase Mobility from Poverty?* U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty.

⁴ Acs, et. al. (April 2018). *Measuring Mobility from Poverty*. US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty.

⁵ Ibid

⁶ Marinescu, Ioana, and Jake Rosenfeld. WorkRise (The Urban Institute), 2022. *Worker Power and Economic Mobility: A Landscape Report*.



POWER AND AUTONOMY

"Power is a person's ability to influence their environment, other people, and their own outcomes, and autonomy is a person's ability to act according to their own choices, rather than according to other's decisions."⁷

Power and autonomy are pivotal factors to economic mobility. Individuals endowed with decision-making power and autonomy in their professional and financial realms wield greater influence over their career trajectories, allowing for increased ability to secure better wages and working conditions.⁸ This empowerment extends beyond personal domains to encompass community-level autonomy, where the ability to shape policies and advocate for resources plays a vital role in fostering economic development.⁹

- **Mobility LABs partnerships contributed to increased power and autonomy in the communities to initiate change as their work matured during Year 2.** As a cohort, the Mobility LABs partnerships reported more progress in all areas of leadership and advocacy during Year 2 as compared to Year 1.
- **Engagement in leadership and advocacy training and experiences positioned community residents to be more influential actors in economic mobility efforts.**
- **Collaboration and network development built community capacity and power to advance economic mobility goals.**

SENSE OF BELONGING AND BEING VALUED IN COMMUNITY

"Being valued in community is a person's sense that they belong and are included among family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, other communities, and society. A related concept is social capital, which is a web of relationships that has economic benefits. Being valued in community facilitates access to material and cultural resources..."¹⁰

Belonging and inclusion are integral to economic mobility. Poverty is isolating and stigmatizing; Americans frequently "other" people living in poverty, assuming they are poor because they lack a strong work ethic or are not responsible.^{11,12} High poverty communities, with decades of disinvestment, are cut off from resources and opportunities for mobility. Building social connections across communities fosters opportunities to access high-quality jobs and resources such as nutritious foods and safe environments. Diverse and broad social networks can accelerate economic mobility. Further, feeling valued in community and having strong ties to a community can bolster self-efficacy and community power to make change.

- **Mobility LABs partnerships fostered a sense of belonging among residents.** As a cohort the Mobility LABs partnerships reported improvements from Year 1 to Year 2 – for example, all nine

⁷ Acs, G., Maitreyi, A., Conner, A. L., Markus, H. R., Patel, N. G., Lyons-Padilla, S., & Eberhardt, J. L. (April 2018). *Measuring Mobility from Poverty*. U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty.

⁸ Marinescu, Ioana, and Jake Rosenfeld. WorkRise (The Urban Institute), 2022, *Worker Power and Economic Mobility: A Landscape Report*.

⁹ Acs, G., Maitreyi, A., Conner, A. L., Markus, H. R., Patel, N. G., Lyons-Padilla, S., & Eberhardt, J. L. (April 2018). *Measuring Mobility from Poverty*. U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty.

¹⁰ Acs, G., et al. 2018. *Measuring Mobility from Poverty*.

¹¹ Stewart, Miriam J., 2009. *Poverty, Sense of Belonging and Experiences of Social Isolation*, *Journal of Poverty*, 13:2, 173 — 195

¹² Patel, N. et al. 2018. *Restoring the American Dream*



anchor partners reported some or significant progress in increasing community trust in Year 2, compared to six partners in Year 1.

- **Building on the foundational relationships established in Year 1, the partnerships focused on cultivating a sense of community among residents, following the Mobility LABs ethos of “those closest to the problem are closest to the solution.”**
- **Across the nine communities, the Mobility LABs partnerships fostered belonging among residents in two ways: elevating resident leadership and centering community priorities in decision-making.**
 - **Elevating resident leadership.** Community members took on leadership and decision-making, demonstrating the value partnerships placed on their perspectives and experiences.
 - **Centering community priorities in decision-making.** Listening to residents and elevating their perspectives formally and informally fostered trust and made residents feel valued in the work.

Emerging Areas: Narrative Change and Policy Change

Changing narratives and local policy are both indicators of structural change, shifts in the broader social, economic, and political context in which the Mobility LABs partnerships operate.¹³ As the partnerships matured over the past year, many increased their focus on structural change by implementing strategies to 1) **change narratives about poverty** and 2) **to influence local policy to improve economic mobility in their communities**. Narrative change strategies aimed to shift mindsets of community residents, organizations, and local leaders about the causes of and solutions to poverty. The strategies intended to humanize the experiences of residents living in poverty and socialize different solutions. Policy advocacy strategies recognized that local, programmatic efforts alone cannot fundamentally improve economic mobility; changes in local, state, and federal laws and regulations are needed.¹⁴ The partnerships’ attention to narratives and policy signal their commitment to addressing the root causes of poverty.

Mobility LABs partnerships made strides in crafting new narratives about poverty and influencing local policy to reduce the prevalence of poverty in their communities. As a cohort, the Mobility LABs anchor partners reported much more progress in creating new narratives during Year 2 as compared to Year 1. Anchor partners reported modest progress with local policy change.

NARRATIVE CHANGE

“A narrative reflects a shared interpretation of how the world works. Narrative change rests on the premise that reality is socially constructed through narrative, and that in order to bring about change in the world we need to pay attention to the ways in which this takes place.”¹⁵

¹³ Equal Measure (2023). *Mending the Path: The Central Role of Intermediaries in Building Equitable Pathways from Education to Work*. <https://www.equalmeasure.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Equitable-Pathways-BEP-Report-Mending-the-Path-6-5-2023.pdf>

¹⁴ Kania, J., Kramer, M., & Senge, P. (2018). *The Water of Systems Change*. https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change

¹⁵ <https://narrativeinitiative.org/blog/narrative-change-a-working-definition-and-related-terms/>



Narrative change is pivotal for economic mobility, influencing societal attitudes and policy decisions. Prevailing narratives often blame individuals in poverty, portray them as helpless victims, or rely on exceptional "rags to riches" stories.¹⁶ Shifting these narratives to emphasize diverse potential and contributions fosters inclusive opportunities, breaks down systemic barriers, and supports equitable access to resources, ultimately enhancing economic mobility for all.¹⁷ Changing narratives around poverty and mobility includes elevating the stories of those who live in poverty to connect to their humanity and dignity, and to better understand the structural forces that shape poverty.¹⁸

Mobility LABs partnerships increased community awareness about the symptoms, underlying causes, and solutions to poverty.

LOCAL POLICY CHANGE

Local policy change refers to changing the "government, institutional, and organizational rules, regulations, and priorities that guide the entity's own and others' actions."¹⁹

Policy change, particularly at state and federal level, is crucial for large-scale economic mobility; policy is a powerful tool for redressing systemic exploitation in labor, housing, and financial markets. Passing and implementing new policies to strengthen workers' rights, improve housing affordability, and dismantle discriminatory practices, are essential for sustainably alleviating poverty and facilitating economic mobility.²⁰

Two partnerships, Si Se Puede Collective in East San Jose, CA (SSPC) and the Brownsville Hub Cooperative in Brooklyn, NY (BHC), reported significant progress in local policy change aligned with their Mobility LABs projects.

Sustaining Mobility LABs Work

As Mobility LABs draws to a close (most grants end in mid-2024), anchor partners are considering ways to sustain their work and leverage the valuable lessons learned and achievements attained.

Encouraging economic mobility in communities challenged by disinvestment and discrimination is complex, long-term work; it requires simultaneously addressing the immediate needs of residents as well as drawing attention to the root causes of poverty to drive long-term structural change.

- **Sustaining the partnerships:** While many partners believed their partnerships would continue in some form because of the meaningful relationships that had been established, most partners noted that sustaining ongoing partnership efforts requires dedicated staff and resources.
- **Sustaining community engagement:** Dedicated staff and resources are needed to authentically engage community residents. Anchor partners are wary of contributing to the

¹⁶ Ellwood, D. T. and Patel, N. G. January 2018. Restoring the American Dream: What Would It Take to Dramatically Increase Mobility from Poverty?

¹⁷ From [Talking-about-poverty.pdf \(frameworksinstitute.org\)](https://www.frameworksinstitute.org/talking-about-poverty.pdf)

¹⁸ Ellwood, D. T. and Patel, N. G. (January 2018). *Restoring the American Dream: What Would it Take to Dramatically Increase Mobility from Poverty?* U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty.

¹⁹ Kania, J., Kramer, M. and Senge, P. June 2018. The Waters of Systems Change. FSG. https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/

²⁰ Desmond, M. (2023, March 9). *Why Poverty Persists in America*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/09/magazine/poverty-by-america-matthew-desmond.html>



cycle of mistrust, false promises, and disappointment which may further harm the work of advancing mobility from poverty.

- **Future work:** Even as they look for ways to sustain some or all of the projects from Mobility LABs, anchor partners are also looking to embark on or expand ambitious work to address the structural causes of poverty in their communities, such as narrative change and advocating for policy changes.

Considerations

We ask **Robin Hood and the other Mobility LABs funders to consider ways to continue to support the work these nine communities have started** as we know that achieving economic mobility is long-term complex work. We will not see community-wide changes in family income, stability, and wealth in the short-term because the deep systemic factors holding families back from economic mobility were long in the making and won't be solved by a few years of funding. It will take considerable time and effort to make inroads and begin to dismantle these structures at the local, state, and national levels.

The Mobility LABs partnerships have started transformational work. In addition to meeting the immediate needs of community residents, we see evidence the partnerships are beginning to address the structures in their communities that keep people in poverty. They are building community power through partnerships with local organizations and residents, building organizational and advocacy skills, and starting to change narratives and policies. Time, experimentation, and adaptation are needed to devise and refine new ways of working that center and empower residents in the effort to develop new strategies and solutions. The communities need continued funding and other types of support (training, technical assistance) to achieve ambitious outcomes.



INTRODUCTION

Launched in 2019, Mobility Learning and Action Bets (“Mobility LABs”) is a national investment led by the Robin Hood Foundation and supported by multiple funding partners, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, and Tipping Point Community. The initiative partners with local organizations in nine communities across the country (Figure 1) to develop community-driven solutions to sustainably lift families out of poverty.

Drawing from the work of the U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty,²¹ Mobility LABs defines mobility from poverty as encompassing three equally important dimensions: **economic success, power and autonomy, and sense of belonging**. Sustained mobility can only be achieved through building up all three dimensions for both individuals and for communities. The initiative is highly contextualized to the strengths and needs of the nine communities. It is guided by a community-centered approach, grounding the work in the voices and experiences of those living in poverty and centering racial justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. The principles ensure that the nine community projects are reflective of and driven by the priorities of the residents who live and work there.

“...while economic success is an essential principle, it does not fully capture people’s experiences with poverty and mobility.”

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FIGURE 1. MOBILITY LABS COMMUNITIES



BACKGROUND

The nine communities within Mobility LABs share a history marked by systemic racism, discriminatory policies, and economic challenges, resulting in high poverty rates. Targeted to fail, these communities bear the lasting impacts of historical legacies such as slavery, redlining, and racially restrictive deeds, affecting housing opportunities and economic prospects in cities and neighborhoods. From Baltimore's

²¹ <https://www.mobilitypartnership.org/>



deep roots in racial segregation—adopting the first residential segregation law in the country, forbidding black people from living in predominantly white neighborhoods—to the history of extreme industrial pollution in the predominately Black neighborhood of Bayview-Hunters Point in San Francisco, each Mobility LABs community has endured a complex history of racial segregation and economic exploitation.

Brownsville, once a vibrant working-class neighborhood in Brooklyn, NY, was affected by discriminatory real estate and urban renewal policies, leading to disinvestment and population decline. Racist policing and anti-Chinese violence in **East San Jose** in Santa Clara, CA contributed to lasting social and economic disparities between the diverse neighborhood and surrounding communities. Black residents were displaced from the neighborhood of **Flushing** in Queens, NY by mid-20th-century urban renewal, reflecting wider patterns of racial segregation.²²

The collapse of the coal industry in the **Northeast Pennsylvania** region caused enduring economic challenges that in turn have contributed to the recent harassment of new immigrants. The 1960s Chicago Freedom Movement to desegregate housing in the city of **Harvey**, IL was met with blockbusting, white flight to suburban neighborhoods, and deindustrialization, impacting the area's long-term economic stability. **Antioch**, CA, where white residents lynched Chinese residents and burned down their neighborhoods in the late 1800s and early 1900s, today grapples with resegregation and disinvestment, resulting in housing disparities and financial distress.

As in other cities impacted by major twentieth-century urban renewal projects, the Cross Bronx Expressway displaced whole communities in the **Bronx**, NY and contributed to the decline of property values, exacerbating deep economic disparities between the borough and the rest of the city.

These communities grapple with historical and contemporary factors, such as low wages, eroded workers' rights, rising rents, limited housing options, and restricted access to traditional banking and high-cost financial services, that reinforce intergenerational poverty. These multifaceted challenges for upward mobility require comprehensive changes at the individual, institutional, and systems levels, including changing the narratives and mindsets about poverty, and the policies and practices that keep people in poverty. Sustaining economic mobility through employment, family-sustaining incomes, and wealth building; building autonomy and the power to influence one's circumstance; and strengthening a sense of belonging and feeling valued for one's contributions to family, community, and work form the foundation of the Mobility LABs investment. Community engagement and collaboration offer pathways to building community resources and power to affect change that leads to upward mobility.^{23, 24}

PERCENT OF POPULATION BELOW THE FEDERAL POVERTY LINE*

United States	12.8%
Baltimore	33.3
Brownsville	28.8
Harvey	28.5
Bronx	27.0
Bayview-Hunters Point	18.0
Flushing	16.0
Antioch	12.9
Northeast Pennsylvania	12.0
San Jose	11.0

* Rates are from the 2022 American Community Survey (ACS) except for Antioch and Bayview-Hunters Point, which are from the 2021 ACS.

²² Crooks, B. (2023). 9 *Mobility Lab Historic Research Briefs: How did this place come to be?* InCommon Insight.

²³ Turner, M. A., Acs, G., Solari, C. D., & Fudge, K. (2022, November 16). *Boosting Upward Mobility: Metrics to Inform Local Action (Second Edition)*. Urban.org. Retrieved November 20, 2023, from <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/boosting-upward-mobility-metrics-inform-local-action-second-edition>

²⁴ Ridzi, F., & Doughty, M. (2017). *Does collective impact work?: what literacy coalitions tell us*. Lexington Books.



PLACE-BASED APPROACHES TO MOBILITY FROM POVERTY

Mobility LABs is one of many initiatives partnering with communities to develop evidence-based poverty solutions in the United States. The Urban Institute's *Boosting Upward Mobility Project* partners with eight counties to create Mobility Action Plans, addressing local conditions affecting equity. The *What Works Cities Economic Mobility Initiative* empowers nine cities to test local strategies for economic mobility, offering seed funding and support. Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) developed the *State and Local Innovation Initiative* which supports evaluations of program effectiveness and develops partnerships for evidence-informed policymaking. These initiatives collectively aim to tackle economic and social challenges while also focusing on local conditions. These efforts reflect the growing body of knowledge that a comprehensive place-based approach is key to addressing mobility and equity issues across different geographical scales.

MOBILITY LABS YEAR 2 REPORT

This report documents the changes resulting from the community-driven mobility strategies implemented across the nine Mobility LABs projects during Year 2 (spring 2022-spring 2023) of the initiative and reports how communities hope to sustain the work. Findings are based on data collected through 1) a survey of anchor partners ("Learning Tool") designed to understand strategies and outcomes, and 2) interviews with individuals in each community including anchor partner staff leading the Mobility LABs work, staff members from their partner organizations, and residents involved in work groups, programming, and other activities.²⁵

FIGURE 2. TIMELINE OF THE INITIATIVE



The report is structured as follows:

- Year 2 accomplishments
 - Economic success
 - Power and autonomy
 - Sense of belonging and being valued in community
- Emerging areas: narrative change and policy change
- Sustaining the Mobility LABs work
- Considerations

²⁵ See Appendix A for more information about the Mobility LABs evaluation and methodology.



TERMS USED IN THE REPORT:

Anchor partner: the organization directly receiving funds from Robin Hood for Mobility LABs.

Partner organization: the organizations collaborating with the anchor partner.

Community partnerships, Mobility LABs partnerships, or partnerships: the combination of the anchor and partner organizations working on Mobility LABs.

Community residents: people living in the geographic area(s) where the Mobility LABs project operates.

Anchor Partner/Initiative Name (location)



RCF Connects/Mobility LABs of East Contra Costa (Antioch, CA)



SOMOS Mayfair/Si Se Puede Collective (SSPC)/Jobs to Grow (East San Jose, CA)



Young Community Developers (YCD)/Community Economic Mobility Vehicle (CEMVe) (Southeast San Francisco/Bayview, CA)



Community and Economic Development Association of Cook County (CEDA)/Uplift Harvey (Harvey, IL)



Commission on Economic Opportunity/Northeast Pennsylvania (NEPA) Mobility LABs (northeast PA)



Center for Urban Families/Baltimore Communities Assisting and Advancing Neighbors (BCAAN) (Baltimore, MD)



The Bronx Defenders/Bronx Leadership & Organizing Center (BLOC) (South Bronx, NY)



JobsFirstNYC/Brownsville Hub Cooperative (BHC) (Brownsville, Brooklyn, NY)



Chinese American Planning Council/Undo Poverty: Flushing (Flushing, Queens, NY)



YEAR 2 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Mobility LABs partnerships reported meaningful change across the mobility constructs – **economic success, power and autonomy, and sense of belonging** – as well *emerging changes* in **narratives** and **local policy** – all evidence-based outcomes related to long-term economic mobility.²⁶ Partnership activities during 2022-23 entered a new stage of maturity in which anchor partners, community partners, and community residents leveraged established relationships and project infrastructure to achieve more. These developments signaled **increased momentum for economic mobility** in the Mobility LABs communities. The partnerships have made considerable progress in the last two years and are well-positioned to sustain momentum with continued commitment to implementation and sufficient funding.

INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF THE THREE MOBILITY CONSTRUCTS

Many of the Mobility LABs projects address multiple dimensions of mobility from poverty. Increasing **economic success** by building job skills, getting a new job (especially a high-quality one), and increasing wages increase one's **power and autonomy** as residents build confidence and have greater control over their lives. Engaging community members builds a **sense of belonging and inclusion** and can also increase power and autonomy. Social networks can also influence economic success through connections to jobs. While we present the accomplishments of the Mobility LABs projects in these three domains, we recognize the interconnectedness of the domains – influencing one aspect of mobility also impacts other aspects.

ECONOMIC SUCCESS

“Economic success captures factors that directly contribute to individuals’ and families’ material well-being. Those factors fall into four broad categories: income, assets, and income adequacy; employment; skills (human capital); and family demographic circumstances.”²⁷

²⁶ Ellwood, D. T. and Patel, N. G. (January 2018). *Restoring the American Dream: What Would it Take to Dramatically Increase Mobility from Poverty?* U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty.

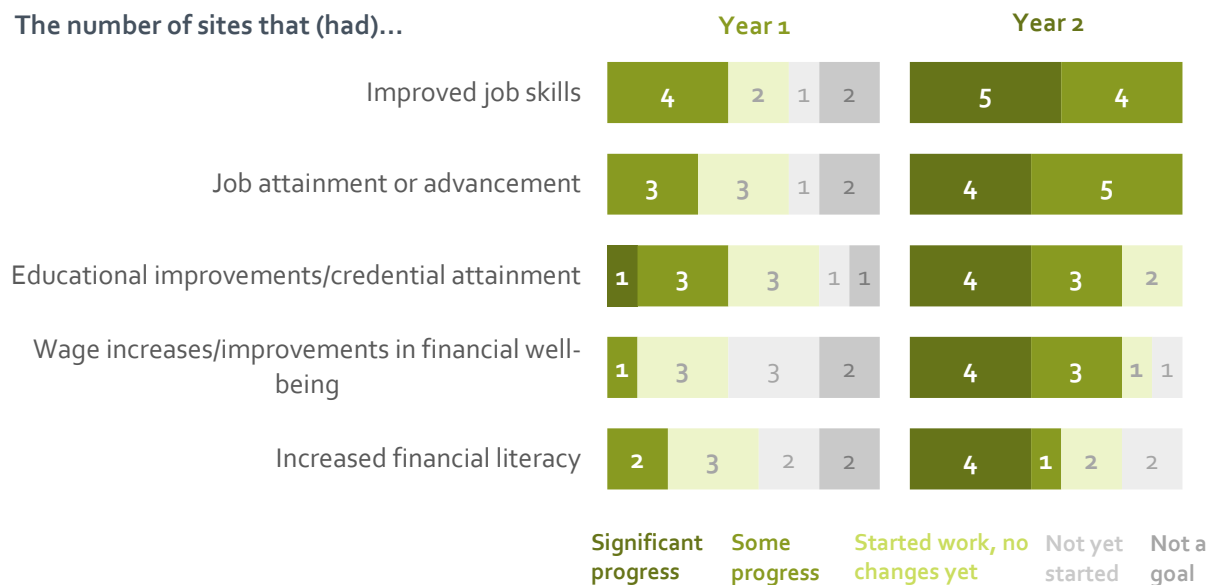
²⁷ Acs, et. al. (April 2018). *Measuring Mobility from Poverty*. US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty.



Economic success and stability are integral to individual economic mobility, serving as the bedrock for upward advancement. When individuals experience financial stability, marked by family-supporting wages and job security, they gain the capacity to invest in education, acquire new skills, and pursue higher-paying jobs.²⁸ Moreover, economic stability acts as a safeguard against financial setbacks, reducing reliance on social services and fostering wealth accumulation, thus paving the way for intergenerational economic progress.²⁹

Mobility LABs partnerships created opportunities for increased economic success for community residents, primarily through direct services such as job training. Changes in economic success were measured in the learning tool through job skills, attainment, and advancement; wages; educational attainment; and financial literacy. In Year 2, all anchor partners reported some or significant progress in residents' job skills and job attainment or advancement, key indicators of economic success (Figure 3). Most anchor partners (7 of 9) also reported some or significant progress in Year 2 in education (such as attaining credentials) and wage increases or improvements in financial wellbeing. As a cohort, the Mobility LABs partnerships reported much more progress in all areas of education and employment during Year 2 as compared to Year 1. For example, all nine anchor partners reported some or significant progress in job attainment or advancement in Year 2 compared to three in the previous year. Improved job skills and wage increases were other notable areas of perceived improvement from Year 1 to Year 2.

FIGURE 3. CHANGES IN ECONOMIC SUCCESS AS A RESULT OF MOBILITY LABS, YEAR 1 AND YEAR 2³⁰



Community residents gained education and employment through access to new opportunities, knowledge, and skill development. Connecting residents to immediate opportunities to advance their education and job prospects was a top priority for the partnerships during Year 2. Programming was responsive to community needs based on listening sessions, advisories, and other engagement

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Marinescu, Ioana, and Jake Rosenfeld. WorkRise (The Urban Institute), 2022. *Worker Power and Economic Mobility: A Landscape Report*.

³⁰ Based on data from survey ("learning tool") that anchor partners completed in 2023.



methods, and partnerships used community input and feedback to refine and implement education and employment offerings. In most communities, there was a strong desire to enhance resident skills to prepare them to obtain employment, start their own businesses, or earn a credential to transition to a new role. The eagerness for job training was not new. Partnerships, however, did learn more about what it takes to create pathways for employment and career advancement and how to navigate the many obstacles frequently faced by residents as they embark on a career path. For example:

- **SSPC** added new workshops, experiential learning opportunities, and community building events to the Jobs to Grow initiative, which provided more hands-on opportunities for the food entrepreneurship and childcare provider cohorts. As a result, 86 percent of childcare participants and 95 percent of food entrepreneur participants reported increased knowledge of how to track their profit and expenses. Seventy-five percent of food entrepreneur participants passed the Food Safety Manager exam, expanding their options for employment and entrepreneurship. Additionally, SSPC and other partner organizations hired graduates of the Jobs to Grow program to provide childcare or catering for organization-wide events, further supporting pathways to employment.



Credit: <https://www.facebook.com/ParentPathwaysNEPA>

- **NEPA's Parent Pathways** program supports parents who are pursuing training, certifications, or credentials. The program was rolled out in multiple counties with case management and wraparound referral services to additional resources. In Year 2, more parents have engaged with the program and are pursuing degrees or certificates focused on technical skills and participants are graduating and securing job offers, attesting to the program's impact.

- **Uplift Harvey** offered career pathways programming for youth to explore their career interests while gaining related skills, such as resume writing and interviewing. Some high school participants also got jobs or paid internship placements over the summer through the youth employment program, introducing them to career opportunities while they earned income. Uplift Harvey reported all their youth participants demonstrated increased financial literacy and employability skills.
- **BHC** offered basic safety and advanced construction skills training programs and supported residents in obtaining certification and eligibility to work on local construction sites. The collaborative's Brownsville Workforce Alliance provided training programs that enrolled residents and cultivated relationships with local developers and general contractors. BHC also developed entrepreneurship training for residents to open businesses in the community and hosted in-person and virtual job fairs with career counseling and connection to job opportunities.

Mobility LABs partnerships removed barriers to education and employment for community members and provided wraparound supports for residents' basic needs to better enable economic mobility. Partnerships balanced long-term vision for the work against the pressing, immediate needs of community members. Maintaining trust with residents and acting as a stabilizer in the community



required partnerships to ensure community members’ basic needs were met before engaging them in programming and services to advance mobility. Residents of the nine communities had multiple needs – housing, mental health, legal services, food, education, and social services. Leaning on their extensive networks, partnerships referred and connected residents to resources (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4. PROGRAMS, SERVICES, AND RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITY MEMBERS, YEAR 2³¹



For example:

- **BLOC** partners strengthened their referral networks to improve clients’ experience of hand-offs between partner organizations. Working together to improve referrals and responding to community needs (such as hiring community members for translation services). These collaborations broke down logistical barriers—like ineffective referral processes and lack of culturally-responsive language services—to improve access to educational and employment-related resources.
- **Undo Poverty: Flushing’s** “Poverty: It’s Not What You Think” local awareness campaign resulted in community members and organizations reaching out to the partnership for resources and connections. The organization responded by forming a workgroup focused on community building. Two community advocates were promoted from part-time to full-time to enhance referrals by mapping neighborhood resources. Community building efforts connected residents to the resources they requested.
- **NEPA** worked with a local employer, i2M, to develop an emergency transportation fund to reduce their employees’ transportation challenges as a barrier to work (see Spotlight on next page).

³¹ Based on data from survey (“learning tool”) that anchor partners completed in 2023.



SPOTLIGHT

As a manufacturer, i2M in northeast Pennsylvania depends on enough employees showing up for each shift to safely operate the machinery. Transportation issues that result in last minute employee call-outs can cause costly delays to production. **In 2022-23, i2M and Mobility LABs created a transportation assistance fund for employees.** Employees can get reimbursed for last minute taxis or rideshares or receive zero-percent interest loans to help with vehicle repairs or purchases.

After the first year, the program **reduced callouts by 17%** and **saved i2M approximately \$64,000.** Employees reported that this benefit kept them from losing their job or being forced to take out high-interest loans.

i2M plans to use their initial seed fund and repayments on loans to **continue the program for future employees.** They hope sharing their success will encourage other companies to implement similar initiatives.

- **CEMVe** streamlined resident access to YCD programs and other organizations in the Alice Griffith and Sunnydale neighborhoods, introducing residents to service options based on their needs. CEMVe conducts a "warm handoff" where a community advocate schedules and attends a meeting between the resident and the organization. The system built trust and rapport with the residents and connected them to housing services, legal services, workforce development, and food access.



Image provided by CEMVe

POWER AND AUTONOMY

"Power is a person's ability to influence their environment, other people, and their own outcomes, and autonomy is a person's ability to act according to their own choices, rather than according to other's decisions."³²

Power and autonomy are pivotal factors to economic mobility. Individuals endowed with decision-making power and autonomy in their professional and financial realms wield greater influence over their

³² Acs, G., Maitreyi, A., Conner, A. L., Markus, H. R., Patel, N. G., Lyons-Padilla, S., & Eberhardt, J. L. (April 2018). *Measuring Mobility from Poverty*. U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty.

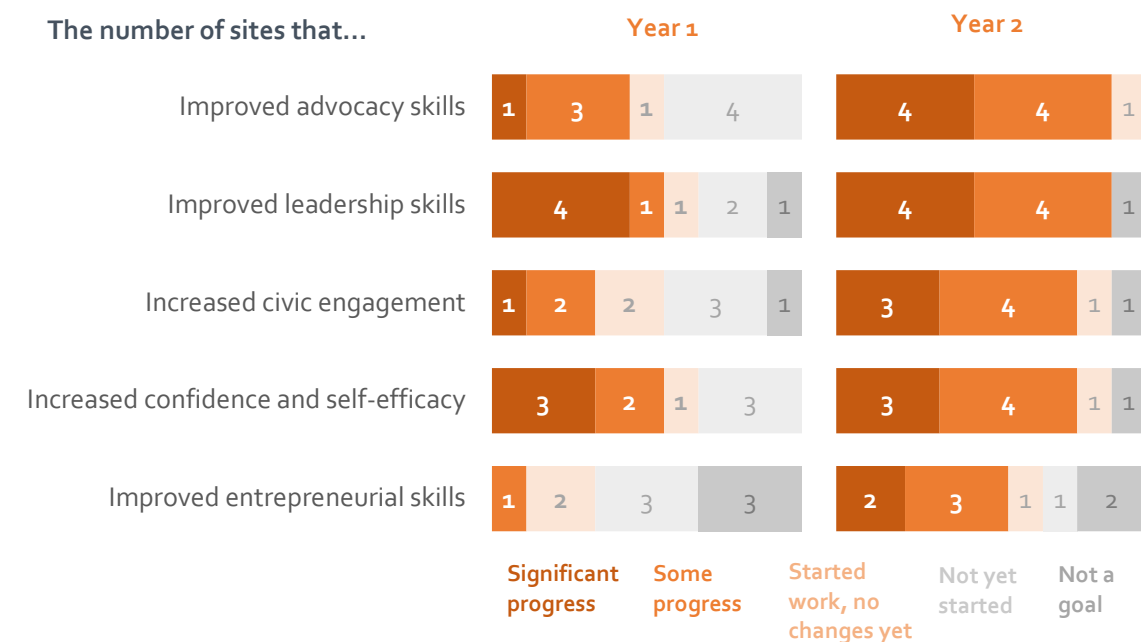


career trajectories, allowing for increased ability to secure better wages and working conditions.³³ This empowerment extends beyond personal domains to encompass community-level autonomy, where the ability to shape policies and advocate for resources plays a vital role in fostering economic development.³⁴

Mobility LABs partnerships contributed to increased power and autonomy in the communities to initiate change as their work matured during Year 2. Changes in power and autonomy were measured in the learning tool through advocacy, leadership and entrepreneurial skills, civic engagement, and confidence and self-efficacy. Nearly all anchor partners (8 of 9) reported *some* or *significant* progress in improving leadership and advocacy skills among residents in their communities in Year 2, key indicators of power and autonomy (Figure 5). In addition, most anchor partners (7 of 9) also reported *some* or *significant* progress in Year 2 in increasing confidence and self-efficacy and civic engagement among community members.

As a cohort, the Mobility LABs partnerships reported more progress in all areas of leadership and advocacy during Year 2 as compared to Year 1. For example, eight partnerships reported *some* or *significant* progress in improving advocacy skills in Year 2 compared to four in the previous year. Civic engagement and entrepreneurial skills were other areas of significant progress from Year 1 to Year 2 across the cohort.

FIGURE 5. CHANGES IN POWER & AUTONOMY AS A RESULT OF MOBILITY LABS, YEAR 1 AND YEAR 2³⁵



³³ Marinescu, Ioana, and Jake Rosenfeld. WorkRise (The Urban Institute), 2022, *Worker Power and Economic Mobility: A Landscape Report*.

³⁴ Acs, G., Maitreyi, A., Conner, A. L., Markus, H. R., Patel, N. G., Lyons-Padilla, S., & Eberhardt, J. L. (April 2018). *Measuring Mobility from Poverty*. U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty.

³⁵ Based on data from survey ("learning tool") that anchor partners completed in 2023.



Engagement in leadership and advocacy training and experiences positioned community residents to be more influential actors in economic mobility efforts. Across the cohort, partnerships prioritized community resident participation in training and advocacy events, supporting residents' knowledge about organizing and cultivating their advocacy and leadership skills. Training included workshops or sessions on different topics such as communicating with local leaders, facilitation skills, community organizing, and interacting with local government officials. Some partnerships provided opportunities for community members to practice these skills such as attending and speaking at city council meetings or state advocacy days or organizing friends, family, and neighbors around an issue. Some examples include:

- **BCAAN** held leadership and advocacy workshops on a variety of topics, as well as a more intensive leadership program that incorporated community projects and a commitment to community service. Workshop participants indicated they were more likely to participate in advocacy opportunities due to the knowledge gained in the workshops. Community members in Baltimore also participated in "Jobs & Economic Justice Advocacy Day" in Annapolis where they advocated for better jobs, higher wages, and economic stability for all by lobbying, attending legislative briefings, and phone banking.
- **Undo Poverty: Flushing** increased the participation of community members, who have been historically disengaged, in advocacy related to economic mobility through 1) organizing Community Advisory Group members to attend the Poor People's Campaign in Washington, D.C. and 2) supporting community members in speaking with elected officials and representatives in Albany, NY during the CPC's State Advocacy Day.
- **Uplift Harvey** implemented leadership and advocacy projects that engaged youth. The youth leaders in the program led a political panel with federal, state, and local government officials; attended city meetings; and traveled to the state capital building to engage with their state representative. Their efforts led to stronger relationships and coordination across local organizations to drive community improvement (see Spotlight on next page).
- As cohort participants and community navigators identified barriers to successfully launching businesses, **SSPC** leveraged their advocacy and organizing expertise to offer advocacy training and mobilize participants. Jobs to Grow noted that 100 percent of their community navigators and 86 percent of workshop participants reported feeling prepared to advocate for issues affecting their community. Nearly half of its Jobs to Grow participants participated in collective action, which included mayoral forums, meeting with county officials, and providing testimonials at Santa Clara County Board of Supervisor meetings.

"I am most proud of the leadership and advocacy workshops. They were a new addition and have been well-received by the community. It has shown that people are interested in receiving the knowledge if you are proactive about how you get to them."

– BCAAN



SPOTLIGHT

Personal experiences with gun violence and his participation with Uplift Harvey led **AbdulAhad Vhora** to begin working to create a **gun amnesty program in Harvey**. Through **leadership development training and mentorship**, he and his peers planned and executed a public event to engage elected officials and the local community. They delivered speeches and spoke with politicians, including the city's mayor, Christopher J. Clark, about the changes they wanted to see. State Senator Napoleon Harris committed to working with AbdulAhad during summer 2023 to further develop the gun amnesty program.



Photo credit: cedaorg.net/about-us/uplift-harvey

Abdul Ahad reflected that Uplift Harvey supported the **leadership skills and confidence** he needed to move his project forward. **He is college-bound**, in part because Uplift Harvey helped him secure scholarship funds and demonstrate his leadership skills.

"This experience has molded me into a leader... It's shown me that I'm the one that needs to be taking initiative if someone else isn't taking initiative, and I need to be the one who is going to use my voice, and to basically spread a message to those around me that we want to help our own community..."

Collaboration and network development built community capacity and power to advance economic mobility goals. While power and autonomy grew for community residents who participated in leadership and advocacy activities, it also grew at the community level through the continued development and expansion of partnerships. All anchor partners reported some or significant progress in increasing collaboration and partnerships, and in network development or expansion in Year 2 (Figure 6). As a cohort, the Mobility LABs partnerships reported more progress in these areas during Year 2 as compared to Year 1. For example, seven anchor partners reported significant progress in collaboration and partnerships in Year 2, compared to four in Year 1.



FIGURE 6. CHANGES IN PARTNERSHIPS AND NETWORKS AS A RESULT OF MOBILITY LABS, YEAR 1 AND YEAR 2³⁶

The number of sites that (had)...	Year 1			Year 2	
Increased collaboration and partnerships	4	5		7	2
Network development or expansion	4	4	1	6	3
	Significant progress			Some progress	
				Not a goal	

Building on the foundation developed in Year 1, the partnerships continued to expand and strengthen relationships with cross-sector partners.³⁷ Effective partnerships are integral to economic mobility, enabling organizations to unite resources and tackle shared challenges. The collaborative approach goes beyond singular interventions, creating a synergistic effect as organizations collectively address factors like workforce development and affordable housing, forming a holistic strategy for poverty reduction.³⁸ Collaborative efforts not only streamline resource allocation to high-need areas, but also act as catalysts for policy change.³⁹ By influencing community policies and environments, partnerships contribute to lasting systemic changes, shaping an environment conducive to economic mobility.⁴⁰ Some examples of building community power were:

- **Mobility LABs of East Contra Costa** joined a county-wide guaranteed income working group with four other organizations. Together, they advocated for guaranteed income by co-hosting focus groups and attending a national guaranteed income convening over the summer with partner organizations. Mobility LABs is building on the efforts of the county working group to establish a pilot guaranteed income project in Antioch.
- **Uplift Harvey** continued to refine their youth development and employment programs in Year 2, which meant a shift in partners. In the past year they worked with a range of local organizations and one high school to expand their leadership program, drive recruitment, and host community building activities. These partners offered the technical skills and expertise requested by the participating young people.
- **BLOC** convened a network of 45 community-based organizations in the South Bronx that shared organizing principles and engaged in shared decision-making. The enhanced partner collaboration broke down organizational

"The problem is when you work on just the issue without tackling what is at the root of that, you stay in this cycle of we have to fight this issue. We have to fight. The issue doesn't go away. It doesn't move. Until people own their power and say, 'Hey, enough is enough,' it doesn't really change. And so I'm convinced that organizing is still the way to go."

—BLOC

³⁶ Based on data from survey ("learning tool") that anchor partners completed in 2023.

³⁷ See Appendix C for additional data on the types of partners, and partnership structures and processes.

³⁸ Walzer, N., & Weaver, L. (Eds.). (2019). *Using collective impact to bring community change* (Ser. The community development research and practice series, volume 9). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315545073>

³⁹ Ridzi, F., & Doughty, M. (2017). *Does collective impact work?: What literacy coalitions tell us*. Lexington Books.

⁴⁰ Ibid



barriers and led to streamlined referrals. The partnership also increased the number of participating organizations and community members involved in project activities.

- **NEPA Mobility LABs** wanted to improve the referral process for parents interested in furthering their education and skills to gain employment. They expanded their partner network to include 12 additional partners connected to their Unite Us referral platform and case management system. Additionally, they established a partnership with an advocacy nonprofit to address policy barriers.

Partnership building and ongoing collaboration to build community power is also challenging work, for a variety of reasons including different ways of working, bureaucratic challenges, competing priorities, and leadership turnover. Collaboration and coordination are time and resource intensive and for many partnerships resulted in a need to take a slower pace amid a sense of urgency to make progress.

SENSE OF BELONGING AND BEING VALUED IN COMMUNITY

“Being valued in community is a person’s sense that they belong and are included among family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, other communities, and society. A related concept is social capital, which is a web of relationships that has economic benefits. Being valued in community facilitates access to material and cultural resources...”⁴¹

Belonging and inclusion are integral to economic mobility. Poverty is isolating and stigmatizing; Americans frequently “other” people living in poverty, assuming they are poor because they lack a strong work ethic or are not responsible.^{42,43} High poverty communities, with decades of disinvestment, are cut off from resources and opportunities for mobility. Building social connections across communities fosters opportunities to access high-quality jobs and resources such as nutritious foods and safe environments. Diverse and broad social networks can accelerate economic mobility. Further, feeling valued in community and having strong ties to a community can bolster self-efficacy and community power to make change.

Mobility LABs partnerships fostered a sense of belonging among residents. Changes in belonging and feeling valued were measured in the learning tool through community engagement and community trust. All anchor partners reported *some* or *significant* progress in Year 2 in engaging community residents and building community trust, key indicators of greater belonging and being valued in community (Figure 7). As a cohort the Mobility LABs partnerships reported improvements from Year 1 to Year 2 – for example, all nine anchor partners reported some or significant progress in increasing community trust in Year 2, compared to six partners in Year 1.

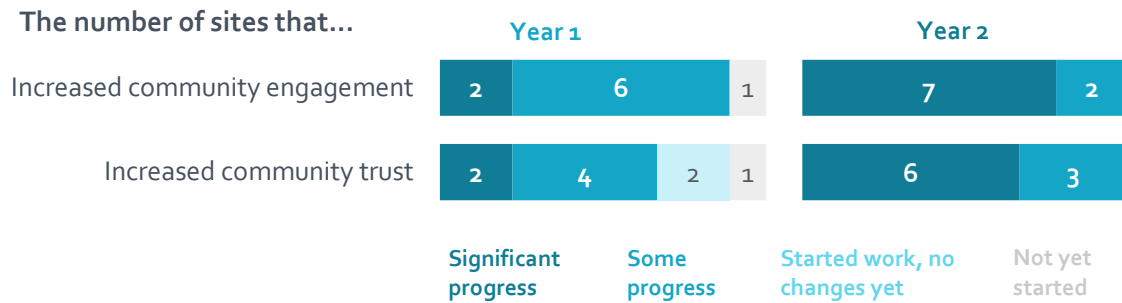
⁴¹ Acs, G., et al. 2018. *Measuring Mobility from Poverty*.

⁴² Stewart, Miriam J., 2009. *Poverty, Sense of Belonging and Experiences of Social Isolation*, *Journal of Poverty*, 13:2, 173 — 195

⁴³ Patel, N. et al. 2018. *Restoring the American Dream*



FIGURE 7. CHANGES IN SENSE OF BELONGING AS A RESULT OF MOBILITY LABS, YEAR 1 AND YEAR 2⁴⁴



Building on the foundational relationships established in Year 1, the partnerships focused on cultivating a sense of community among residents, following the Mobility LABs ethos of “those closest to the problem are closest to the solution.” Many partnerships refined their community engagement approaches beyond consulting with or informing residents to facilitating collaboration and community ownership.⁴⁵ Meaningful and authentic engagement with residents fosters trust and strengthens relationships, which in turn builds social cohesion and enhanced social capital for residents.⁴⁶ Community engagement can also result in improved institutional and governmental responsiveness as organizational leaders and governments make decisions (e.g., policies, programs, practices) informed by those who are most impacted and address the priorities of the communities, identifying solutions that would not have been possible otherwise.⁴⁷

DEFINITIONS:

Community engagement: The process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the well-being of those people.

Community ownership: Community-driven decision-making through democratic participation and equity; bridges the divide between community and governance.

Gonzalez, R. (2019). Spectrum of community engagement

Across the nine communities, the Mobility LABs partnerships fostered belonging among residents in two ways: elevating resident leadership and centering community priorities in decision-making. Partnerships used a variety of activities to do achieve these outcomes, from hiring community members into decision-making roles to working with resident advisory boards to soliciting feedback from community members about program implementation or experience (see Figure 8).

⁴⁴ Based on data from survey (“learning tool”) that anchor partners completed in 2023.

⁴⁵ Gonzalez, R. (2019). Facilitating Power: Spectrum of community engagement <https://movementstrategy.org/resources/the-spectrum-of-community-engagement-to-ownership/>.

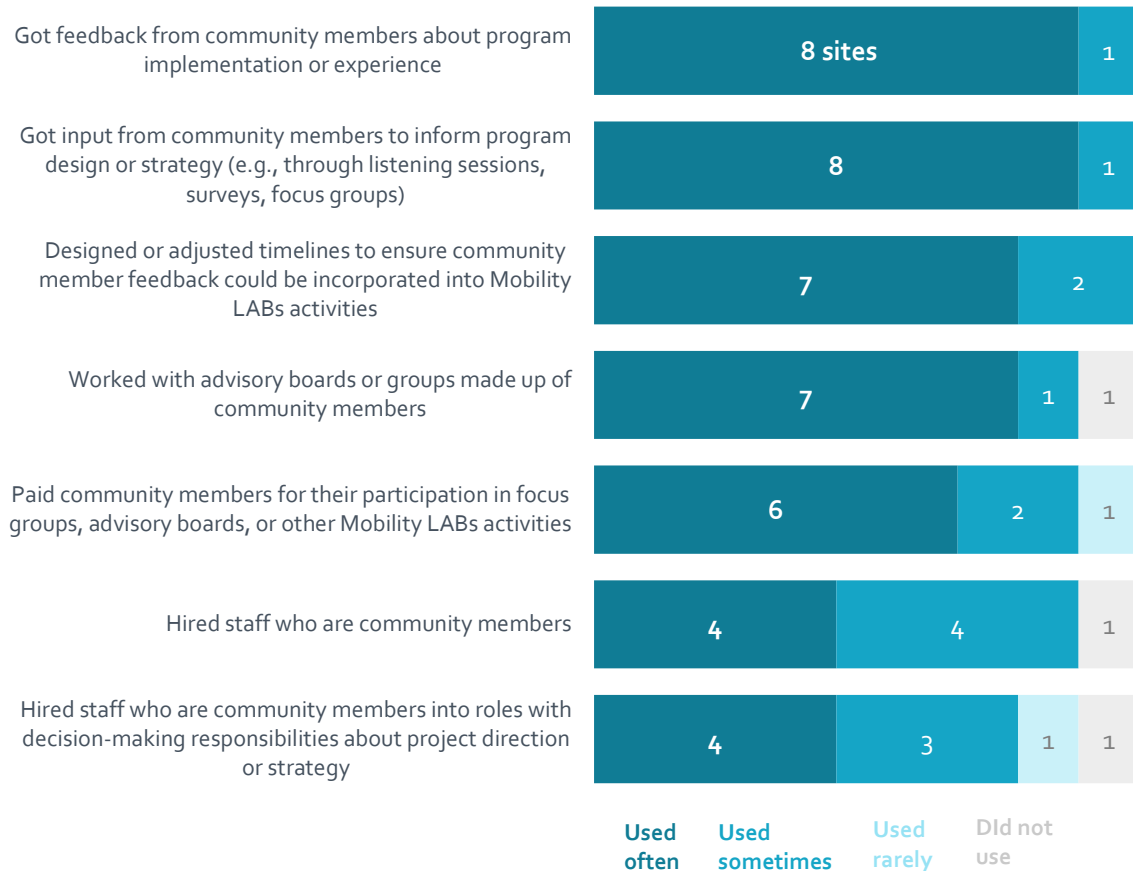
⁴⁶ Attree, P., French, B., Milton, B., Povall, S., Whitehead, M., & Popay, J. (2011). The experience of community engagement for individuals: A rapid review of evidence. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 19(3), 250-260. doi: 10.1111/j.1365-2524.2010.00976.x

⁴⁷ Burton, P., Goodlad, R., & Croft, J. (2006). How would we know what works? Context and complexity in the evaluation of community involvement. *Evaluation*, 12(3), 294-312.



FIGURE 8. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES USED IN YEAR 2⁴⁸

The number of sites that...



Elevating resident leadership. Community members took on leadership and decision-making, demonstrating the value partnerships placed on their perspectives and experiences. In a number of Mobility LAB partnerships, residents were hired as program managers, community advocates, or community navigators. These individuals worked closely with residents and were crucial liaisons for organizational leaders, informing leadership about the day-to-day experiences of the communities they served. Others, in addition to working proximate to the community, were key decision makers leading the vision and direction of the projects. These positions helped foster resident ownership of the economic mobility projects and enhanced resident self-efficacy, reinforcing the ability of residents to be change agents in their communities. Residents saw themselves as critical actors in the work, working towards a long-term vision, which created a sense of belonging among residents participating in these efforts. Residents in these positions were also able to establish significant relationships and networks with their neighbors and other organizations in their communities, expanding social networks. For example:

- In **Mobility LABs of East Contra Costa**, the program manager and community advocates for the initiative are all residents of the community with strong ties to other residents in Antioch and the county. The community advocates facilitated the leadership cohorts, building the skills and confidence of residents to advocate for changes in their community. Within the cohort,

⁴⁸ Based on data from survey ("learning tool") that anchor partners completed in 2023.



residents rallied around the issue of economic justice and are working to launch a guaranteed income project, where the city of Antioch would provide each adult \$1,000 dollars every month. Residents have built close relationships with other participants through these collective efforts. The camaraderie of the guaranteed income working group has galvanized residents to advocate for change.

- In the **Jobs to Grow program**, the community navigator role has evolved into an important leadership position. Community navigators are residents of the Mayfair community who work closely with participants in the program and advocate on behalf of them to the organizational leaders. They co-facilitate sessions, help evaluate the effectiveness of the program, and are well respected by the SSPC, the participants, and the community. Community navigators described the importance of this role for their own professional development and connectedness with the organizations and the Mayfair community.



Image provided by SSPC

"The navigator is not just a navigator. We are friends, we are counselors, we are teachers... That connection that they come to feel with us is so beautiful."
—Jobs to Grow

- A Community Advisory Council of ten community residents led **BLOC's** initiatives, which prioritized the elevation of the leadership and decision-making skills of residents. Beyond the official advisory council, BLOC looked for opportunities for residents to lead. For the Housing Forum and Youth Leadership Day, residents oversaw the planning and implementation of the events. Working on projects together helped to foster trust and build stronger relationships between residents.
- For the **CEMVe** team, leading from community has been critical. All members of the CEMVe team have lived in southeast San Francisco and because community advocates are part of the community, they have strong connections and credibility with residents. CEMVe was able to quickly become a trusted source and build an extended network where residents are eager to both receive services and work for CEMVe.

"This project works so well because the team reflects the community...all of us, at some point, have lived in the community. And we've understood the importance of being able to relinquish organizational power, to listen, to let the community lead us."

—CEMVe

Centering community priorities in decision-making. Listening to residents and elevating their perspectives formally and informally fostered trust and made residents feel valued in the work.

Partnerships understood the importance of hearing from a range of perspectives and centering community priorities. They valued community input and demonstrated this value by regularly soliciting feedback. For some partnerships, feedback occurred through resident advisory boards, surveys, or



listening sessions. For others, the feedback was more informal, through frequent communication with residents or through staff members like community advocates. Seeing the partnerships employ different strategies to elevate community voice was an important strategy to demonstrate to residents that the Mobility LABs teams valued resident experiences and ideas. For example:

- **NEPA** partners gathered feedback from participants through satisfaction and experience surveys to inform most of their programs and be responsive to the community. For instance, NEPA worked with the Woodloch Resort, a local employer, to conduct a needs assessment of their employees to determine the most beneficial investments in employer support such as offering employer-supported childcare, caregiver assistance, transportation assistance, and employer-assisted housing. Gathering feedback and using this information to determine what supports employees needed was a strategy the NEPA team used to communicate to residents that the partnership cared about and was invested in them.
- **BCAAN** engaged residents through a dedicated outreach coordinator who built and deepened relationships in the community and connected residents to resources and programming. As a result of community feedback, BCAAN's partner Step Up Maryland designed and presented nine additional leadership and advocacy workshops on topics of interest to residents, such as advocating within schools. By listening to and incorporating resident priorities, BCAAN demonstrated community members' priorities were central to their work, contributing to the high-level of programming engagement from the community.
- **BHC** collected feedback through their subcommittee structure and community meetings. In 2023, they shifted their communications from a newsletter to monthly in-person meetings called Brownsville Meet-ups. The gatherings were designed to facilitate healing, belonging, learning, and leadership for community residents. The shift in strategy increased the number of residents who attended meetings and became actively involved in subcommittee meetings, which lead to advocacy efforts around the education-to-entrepreneurship pipeline. The BHC team reported that because of these networking opportunities, there has been a "robust increase in social capital."
- For **Undo Poverty: Flushing**, working closely with residents has been an integral part of the partnerships' approach from the outset. The Community Advisory Group, made up of Flushing residents, expanded into planning, designing, and executing activities related to housing, language access, and job readiness. For example, the group led free ESL classes and developed educational materials such as job interview preparation. Participating in mobility from poverty efforts in a collective helped residents build new relationships with neighbors and feel valued in their communities.



Image provided by Undo Poverty: Flushing

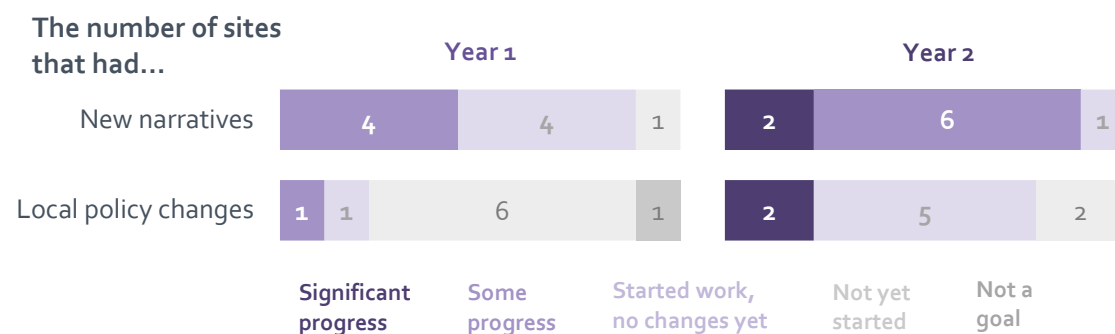


EMERGING AREAS: NARRATIVE CHANGE AND POLICY CHANGE

Changing narratives and local policy are both indicators of structural change, shifts in the broader social, economic, and political context in which the Mobility LABs partnerships operate.⁴⁹ As the partnerships matured over the past year, many increased their focus on structural change by implementing strategies to 1) **change narratives about poverty** and 2) **to influence local policy to improve economic mobility in their communities**. Narrative change strategies aimed to shift mindsets of community residents, organizations, and local leaders about the causes of and solutions to poverty. The strategies intended to humanize the experiences of residents living in poverty and socialize different solutions. Policy advocacy strategies recognized that local, programmatic efforts alone cannot fundamentally improve economic mobility; changes in local, state, and federal laws and regulations are needed.⁵⁰ The partnerships' attention to narratives and policy signal their commitment to addressing the root causes of poverty.

Mobility LABs partnerships made strides in crafting new narratives about poverty and influencing local policy to reduce the prevalence of poverty in their communities. Nearly all anchor partners (8 of 9) reported *some* or *significant* progress in new narratives in Year 2 and two anchor partners reported *significant* progress in local policy changes (Figure 9). As a cohort, the Mobility LABs anchor partners reported much more progress in creating new narratives during Year 2 as compared to Year 1. For example, eight anchor partners reported *some* or *significant* progress with new narratives in Year 2 compared to four in the previous year. Anchor partners reported modest progress with local policy change: two partnerships saw *significant* progress in Year 2, and five had *just started work* in this area, indicating that strategy implementation was nascent for most.

FIGURE 9. CHANGES IN SYSTEMS & COMMUNITY AS A RESULT OF MOBILITY



⁴⁹ Equal Measure (2023). *Mending the Path: The Central Role of Intermediaries in Building Equitable Pathways from Education to Work*. https://www.equalmeasure.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Equitable-Pathways_BEP-Report_Mending-the-Path_6_5_2023.pdf

⁵⁰ Kania, J., Kramer, M., & Senge, P. (2018). *The Water of Systems Change*. https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change



NARRATIVE CHANGE

“A narrative reflects a shared interpretation of how the world works. Narrative change rests on the premise that reality is socially constructed through narrative, and that in order to bring about change in the world we need to pay attention to the ways in which this takes place.”⁵¹

Narrative change is pivotal for economic mobility, influencing societal attitudes and policy decisions. Prevailing narratives often blame individuals in poverty, portray them as helpless victims, or rely on exceptional “rags to riches” stories.⁵² Shifting these narratives to emphasize diverse potential and contributions fosters inclusive opportunities, breaks down systemic barriers, and supports equitable access to resources, ultimately enhancing economic mobility for all.⁵³ Changing narratives around poverty and mobility includes elevating the stories of those who live in poverty to connect to their humanity and dignity, and to better understand the structural forces that shape poverty.⁵⁴

Mobility LABs partnerships increased community awareness about the symptoms, underlying causes, and solutions to poverty. For example:

- **Undo Poverty: Flushing** crafted a robust awareness campaign with assistance from F.Y. Eye, a nonprofit media agency, to shift residents’ and local leaders’ perceptions about what poverty looks like in the Flushing community. The campaign, ‘Poverty. It’s Not What You Think,’ socialized conversations about poverty in Flushing through media outreach and advertisements and social media content and culminated in a documentary, *The Cost of Living*, that told the stories of several residents living in poverty. The campaign aimed to reduce the stigma around poverty in the Flushing community and to encourage community members to seek support.



Image provided by Undo Poverty: Flushing

⁵¹ <https://narrativeinitiative.org/blog/narrative-change-a-working-definition-and-related-terms/>

⁵² Ellwood, D. T. and Patel, N. G. January 2018. Restoring the American Dream: What Would It Take to Dramatically Increase Mobility from Poverty?

⁵³ From [Talking about poverty.pdf \(frameworksinstitute.org\)](#)

⁵⁴ Ellwood, D. T. and Patel, N. G. (January 2018). *Restoring the American Dream: What Would it Take to Dramatically Increase Mobility from Poverty?* U.S. Partnership on Mobility from Poverty.



- **East Contra Costa** residents involved with Mobility LABs rallied around a guaranteed income pilot in Antioch. While they were eager to launch the pilot, the team quickly learned that they had to begin by listening to and educating the community – residents and local leaders - about the benefits of guaranteed income. Working with a partner organization, Community Financial Solutions, they held listening sessions and focus groups with community members to correct misinformation about guaranteed income and increase awareness of its benefits as a solution to poverty. During the sessions, community members and RCF staff discussed the current understanding of guaranteed income and worked to dispel myths about this strategy.

"...But then when Mobility LABs selected it [guaranteed income] as their narrative change project, I really need to go through some gymnastics and wrestle with that concept that we're going to just give people money without them working for it. So, it took me a while to really shift my own mind around that, to a point where I could not just understand it but understood it to be a viable option for some people."

—Mobility LABs East Contra Costa

- **BCAAN** partner, the Black Arts District of Penn North, which specializes in historical and cultural preservation projects, worked with community members to draw attention to the rich history of the West Baltimore community and to garner support for its revitalization. Their work provided new perspectives for BCAAN partners and community residents on the neighborhood's history and culture, encouraging residents to think differently about their own neighborhood.
- **NEPA** Mobility LABs implemented the NEPA Mobility Tracker, a survey of local families modeled on Robin Hood's Poverty Tracker⁵⁵, to understand poverty in the five counties and share findings with local partners. The initial survey revealed financial precarity and employment barriers among the region's residents, underscoring the need for solutions like living-wage jobs. Future surveys will explore regional factors influencing economic mobility over time, enhancing awareness of poverty symptoms and potential solutions.

LOCAL POLICY CHANGE

Local policy change refers to changing the "government, institutional, and organizational rules, regulations, and priorities that guide the entity's own and others' actions."⁵⁶

Policy change, particularly at state and federal level, is crucial for large-scale economic mobility; policy is a powerful tool for redressing systemic exploitation in labor, housing, and financial markets. Passing and implementing new policies to strengthen workers' rights, improve housing affordability, and dismantle

⁵⁵ <https://www.robinhood.org/programs/special-initiatives/poverty-tracker/>

⁵⁶ Kania, J., Kramer, M. and Senge, P. June 2018. The Waters of Systems Change. FSG. https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/



discriminatory practices, are essential for sustainably alleviating poverty and facilitating economic mobility.⁵⁷

Two Mobility LABs partnerships, SSPC and BHC, reported significant progress in local policy change aligned with their Mobility LABs projects:

- **BHC saw a New York City policy passed that stemmed from its hub model.** During 2023, NYC Mayor Eric Adams unveiled a “Blueprint for Community Safety,” which includes “the Economic Mobility Hubs Strategy.” The city-wide strategy intends to generate “a network of neighborhood, business, and technology intermediaries in the priority communities to develop integrated solutions for economic mobility.”⁵⁸ The strategy was directly informed by the Brownsville Hub Cooperative, specifically named as a model in the blueprint. JobsFirstNYC took the lead on meeting with the City to discuss its model as a viable approach to investing in neighborhoods with high unemployment rates. Next steps include continued communication and bi-directional support between the Brownsville Hub Cooperative and with the First Deputy Mayor’s team.



Photo Credit:

<https://www.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/press-releases/2023/Blueprint-Community-Safety.pdf>

- **In spring 2023, SSPC and program participants lobbied to increase opportunities for entrepreneurship in Santa Clara County.** The partnership’s policy committee focused on specific policies or measures that would directly benefit aspiring childcare providers and food entrepreneurs. SSPC, along with past and current childcare entrepreneur participants, lobbied for home-based daycare centers during a Board of Supervisors meeting. The measure, the Childcare and Early Education Infrastructure Grant Program, was approved, resulting in \$20 million towards early childhood education infrastructure.

SSPC and Eastside Grown (EG) participants lobbied for implementation of the MEHKO bill in Santa Clara County, which allows people to sell prepared foods out of their home. Past and current EG participants shared testimonies at Board of Supervisor meetings. MEHKO was subsequently adopted in Santa Clara County. In addition, Veggielution, an SSPC partner focused on food entrepreneurship, succeeded in having the City of San José lift the requirement for individuals to secure a zoning verification letter to sell food. This saved EG participants and graduates \$500 in application fees. District Supervisor Chavez included a provision for all Department of Environmental Health (DEH) application/inspection fees to be waived for the remainder of 2023. Veggielution and SSPC are working to make application processes permanently affordable through local policy change.

⁵⁷ Desmond, M. (2023, March 9). *Why Poverty Persists in America*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/09/magazine/poverty-by-america-matthew-desmond.html>

⁵⁸ From Brownsville learning tool, quoting the Blueprint. <https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/555-23/mayor-adams-gun-violence-prevention-task-force-release-a-blueprint-community-safety-#lo>



SUSTAINING MOBILITY LABS WORK

As Mobility LABs draws to a close (most grants end in mid-2024), anchor partners are considering ways to sustain their work and leverage the valuable lessons learned and achievements attained.

Encouraging economic mobility in communities challenged by disinvestment and discrimination is complex, long-term work; it requires simultaneously addressing the immediate needs of residents as well as drawing attention to the root causes of poverty to drive long-term structural change.

Anchor partners expressed feeling they are just getting started on some of the projects and further support is needed to sustain and build on the valuable partnerships, infrastructure, credibility, and community trust developed by the Mobility LABs cohort.

LEARNING IN A COHORT

The partners expressed appreciation of the opportunities to learn together – especially in-person at the kickoff convening in NYC and the visit for some partners to Harlem Children’s Zone – and wished there had been more opportunities. Partners valued the connections across the cohort and learning and sharing with each other. While the contexts varied significantly, they faced many similar challenges.

“... to know that we’re not alone within our struggles is amazing. And to be able to talk to [partners in other communities], to bounce ideas off of each other. Initially during COVID it was ‘how do we get participants?’ Now it’s ‘we have participants, how to we gather sustainability?’”

In addition to a multi-site cohort model, Mobility LABs was a multi-funder initiative. Some partners hoped to leverage Robin Hood’s connections as they consider sustaining their work. Others wished there had been more efforts to build relationships with the other Mobility LABs funders.

“I personally think this is still a missed opportunity, that we are not having more conversations as the grantees with all of the funding partners. To me, it’s not enough that they’re [funders] present in these meetings...that is not really a relationship; that feels like observation.”

SUSTAINING THE PARTNERSHIPS

Building cross-organization or cross-sector partnerships was intrinsic to the Mobility LABs projects, as organizations worked together to meet the many needs of community members and to advance mobility from poverty. While many partners believed their partnerships would continue in some form because of the meaningful relationships that had been established, **most partners noted that**



sustaining ongoing partnership efforts requires dedicated staff and resources. Staff are needed to coordinate and communicate across multiple organizations and institutions and keep partners engaged, connected, and aligned to the vision and goals of the partnership. Dedicated staff can prioritize these efforts and sustain the partnerships even with leadership and staff turnover and disruptions at partner organizations. Dedicated staff are particularly important in more formal collaborative structures such as in SSPC and Flushing. For example, one form of collaboration, the collective impact model, depends on a team dedicated to aligning and coordinating the work of the group.⁵⁹ But even less formal models such as in BCAAN, NEPA, and BLOC, require staff to coordinate efforts, communicate across partners and with residents, and maintain relationships.

Most of the anchor partners provide stipends or some financial incentive to partner organizations to show appreciation for their time and expertise. At least one partnership would like to continue to do so, even if at a reduced amount, as an important commitment.

SUSTAINING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Authentic community engagement is a critical aspect of the Mobility LABs projects; partners held a strong belief that those closest to the problem are closest to the solution. Anchor partners are considering ways to sustain the community engagement strategies—feedback sessions, resident advisory groups, or programming and services for residents—undertaken during the initiative.

Dedicated staff and resources are needed to authentically engage community residents.

Authentic and ongoing community engagement is both challenging and essential to achieving meaningful change. Residents in high-poverty communities often juggle multiple low-paying, inflexible jobs and extensive family responsibilities, leaving them with limited time and energy to engage with external entities like nonprofit organizations, even when they are making efforts intended to improve residents' lives. Residents often feel marginalized and distrustful of new initiatives purporting to change the economic direction of their communities given the years of disinvestment and broken promises. Anchor partners' outreach workers and advocates work tirelessly to reach residents and engage them in opportunities to build skills and share their voices and experiences.

Resources are needed to continue to provide high quality services and programs that meet immediate community needs and build job, leadership, and advocacy skills for long-term individual and community change. Several anchor partners noted they also relied on Mobility LABs funding for food and stipends to encourage residents to engage in programming. For example, BCAAN took a "learn and earn" approach to its trainings and BLOC noted that its "ability to provide food at community events ... is a critical factor in attendance."

Anchor partners are intensely committed to sustaining the community engagement supported by Mobility LABs because their residents have historically been distrustful of new initiatives that cycle in and out of their communities. Anchor partners are wary of contributing to the cycle of mistrust, false promises, and disappointment which may further harm the work of advancing mobility from poverty.

"Our community members would once again be like 'I can't rely on you guys when there's an initiative or a certain program that goes this way, and it seems to be going well, and then all of a sudden it ends.' So that's something we are trying really hard to work against, and we're trying to keep the program going no matter what."

⁵⁹ <https://collectiveimpactforum.org/what-is-collective-impact/>



FUTURE WORK

Anchor partners are actively seeking ways to sustain their Mobility LABs work, including looking for new sources of funding and transitioning parts of the work to other organizations or programs. For example, the NEPA Mobility LABs partnership is considering moving the Mobility Tracker to their community research program and funding it through sponsorships, as opposed to a specific grant. CEMVe is leveraging the commitment of and funding from Young Community Developers to expand to a second mobile unit.

Even as they look for ways to sustain some or all the projects from Mobility LABs, **anchor partners are also looking to embark on or expand ambitious work to address the structural causes of poverty in their communities, such as narrative change and advocating for policy changes.** For example, Mobility LABs of East Contra Costa is building on the efforts of a county working group to establish a pilot guaranteed income project in Antioch, CA. Many of the partnerships want to focus more heavily on policy and advocacy work, working with elected officials and sourcing funding from new sources such as government and foundations. For many, this work will require new staff (and resources) with relevant skills and experience in the public sector, advocacy, and organizing, as well as potentially other support, such as evaluation, to learn and grow.



CONSIDERATIONS

In Year 2, the nine Mobility LABs communities continued to advance their work toward economic mobility. Utilizing partnerships, infrastructure, and ways of working developed in Year 1, and refined and expanded in Year 2, the Mobility LABs partnerships:

- Implemented a variety of workforce, educational, leadership, and advocacy programs for adults and youth.
- Supported basic needs and connection to community resources.
- Provided opportunities to use advocacy and organizing skills.
- Began to mobilize narrative and policy changes, with a few communities focusing on these in Year 2, and others thinking ahead and planning to do more in this area.

Importantly, the partnerships continued to take a **community-driven approach** using a variety of methods, from getting resident feedback and input on strategies to resident advisory boards and hiring staff from the community.

The partnerships' approaches and strategies led to increased skills for residents (i.e., job, leadership, advocacy), and more credentials, confidence, community engagement, and community trust, as reported by anchor partners and other partners and participants. **Community trust was identified as critically important for any community initiative to succeed and expansion of trust in these communities is a significant accomplishment.**

While the nine Mobility LABs communities have made a strong start, questions remain about how the work will be sustained. Except for one or two communities, without continued funding most anchor partners anticipate having to choose which strategies to keep and which to cut. **Anchor partners have deep and well-justified concerns about eroding community trust if this ends up being "just another initiative" that came and went.**

We ask **Robin Hood and the other Mobility LABs funders to consider ways to continue to support the work these nine communities have started** as we know that achieving economic mobility is long-term complex work. We will not see community-wide changes in family income, stability, and wealth in the short-term because the deep systemic factors holding families back from economic mobility were long in the making and won't be solved by a few years of funding. It will take considerable time and effort to make inroads and begin to dismantle these structures at the local, state, and national levels.

The Mobility LABs partnerships have started transformational work. In addition to meeting the immediate needs of community residents, we see evidence the partnerships are beginning to address the structures in their communities that keep people in poverty. They are building community power through partnerships with local organizations and residents, building organizational and advocacy skills, and starting to change narratives and policies. Time, experimentation, and adaptation are needed to devise and refine new ways of working that center and empower residents in the effort to develop new strategies and solutions. The communities need continued funding and other types of support (training, technical assistance) to achieve ambitious outcomes.



APPENDICES

Appendix A. About Equal Measure's Learning and Evaluation

As the learning and evaluation partner for Mobility LABs, Equal Measure conducted a cohort-level evaluation, gathering information and data from the nine anchors and their community partners and participants to understand Mobility LABs as an initiative. Through quantitative and qualitative data collection, we aimed to understand how anchors and their partners engage communities to implement mobility projects, the different contexts and structures that impede or advance their work, and where they are seeing progress towards sustainably moving community members out of poverty. The evaluation is guided by the following learning questions:

Activities: How are partners implementing projects in each community to advance mobility from poverty?

- How are the nine pilot projects being implemented? Who are the partners? How is the community engaged?
- How are the communities measuring "success" (i.e., short-term indicators of mobility from poverty) across the three constructs of mobility from poverty (economic success, power and autonomy, and belonging and inclusion)?
- How, if at all, are partners engaging residents with lived experience in poverty?
- How, if at all, are partners using data to inform implementation and track outcomes?

Context: What contextual factors within organizations, across partnerships, and in the broader community facilitate or impede implementation efforts?

Short-term outcomes: To what extent and in what ways have anchor organizations and their partners made progress towards programmatic, organizational, and community changes that facilitate mobility from poverty?

Community-Level

- What changes have occurred in short-term indicators of mobility from poverty, using the three constructs (economic success, power and autonomy, and belonging and inclusion)?
- How is Mobility LABs influencing practice and service delivery changes in the community? Within organizations?
- Within each community, how well are partners working together?
- How, if at all, are partners building infrastructure for sustained mobilization and partnership in communities?
- How and to what extent have partners built meaningful relationships with community?
- What efforts have occurred to change the public's understanding of poverty (i.e., narrative change)? What have been the outcomes of this work?



Field Level

- How has Mobility LABs influenced grantmaking practices within Robin Hood? With funder partners?
- How has Mobility LABs influenced narratives about poverty and effective solutions within Robin Hood? With funder partners?

Lessons Learned: For Mobility LABs Partners & Field

- What were the successes and challenges in implementing Mobility LABs implementation pilots?
- What strategies appear to lead to increases in mobility from poverty?

OUR APPROACH AND METHODS

During the evaluation of the second year of implementation of Mobility LABs projects, we collected data through the following methods:

- **Anchor, Partner, and Community Resident Interviews (May-August 2023):** We conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with each community to learn about implementation and progress in Year 2. Anchor partner staff members (n=23) participated in one-hour interviews and identified a small set of other partners and community residents to engage in separate one-hour interviews. An additional 18 staff/partners and 11 community residents participated in interviews.⁶⁰
- **Learning Tool (March-April 2023):** Like the survey from Year 1, we administered an online survey ("Learning Tool") where the nine anchor partners reported on Year 2 activities, outputs, and short-term outcomes. All nine anchor partners completed the Learning Tool.

In addition, we conducted interviews with Robin Hood staff (n=4) about their perspectives on the initiative, and implementation and progress within particular communities they worked most closely with.

Using data from the interviews and Learning Tool, we developed **eight site reports** focused on implementation and progress in Year 2 in each community. We shared and discussed these reports with the anchor partners to ensure the data and interpretations were accurate.

⁶⁰ The Brownsville Hub Cooperative anchor partner and other partners and residents did not participate in interviews due to experiencing transitions and challenges in summer 2023.



Appendix B. Mobility LABs Theory of Change

Strategies		Activities	Short-term Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes
Mobility LABs: Community-led, data-driven	Community Level	<p>Community-driven projects helping families move from poverty that may include: direct service programs, policy/practice changes, advocacy/organizing, narrative change campaigns, network building, COVID-19 recovery and rebuilding efforts, and/or support to racial justice movements. Develop short-term predictors of mobility from poverty.</p>	<p>Individual/Interpersonal: Shift short-term predictors of mobility from poverty</p> <p>Organizational: Increase # orgs addressing and measuring mobility through economic sustainability, power & autonomy, and belonging & inclusion; improve data capacity and capacity to engage community</p> <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Community support for projectEffective org partnershipsDevelop/use new narratives about poverty	<p>Individual/Interpersonal: Increase economic sustainability, power & autonomy, and belonging & inclusion</p> <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Increase in orgs implementing policies or practices to support three mobility constructsIncrease orgs using/sharing dataAdopt new mental models about mobility obstacles, drivers, and solutions
		<p>Lessons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Identify short-term predictors of sustainable economic mobilityUnderstand how to expand use of human/community-centered design practicesUnderstand community-specific contextIncrease capacity (understanding, skills, and tools) to change and measure three mobility constructs		
Learning & Dissemination	Field Level	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Compile/develop potential short-term metrics to track 3 mobility constructsDisseminate learningsFacilitate relationships between Mobility LABs grantees, philanthropies and policymakersFacilitate learnings across LABs sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Support community-driven grantmakingUnderstand on-the-ground short-term metrics useSupport for anchor partners who promote new mobility narrativesRelationships with policymakersMore/diverse stories about people experiencing poverty and effective solutions spread	<p>Systems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Researchers, policymakers, and evaluators use short-term mobility metricsIncreased community-driven funding, more investmentsMore people with lived poverty experiences informing and making decisionsPolicy changes support structural poverty solutions, including more public fundingAdoption of humanized, positive narratives about people living in poverty and mobility
		<p>Lessons</p> <p>For Mobility LABs Funding Partners:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Identify metrics for future investmentsUnderstand how mobility solutions may be exported/ replicatedUnderstand how to incorporate community-driven grantmaking with racial equity and mobility lens <p>For the Field:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Identify and learn about short-term predictors and strategies to increase mobility in diverse communitiesUnderstand how Mobility LABs process can be replicated (multiple funders, community-led, data-driven)		
<p>Context & Assumptions</p> <p>Context:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Global health pandemicMovements for racial justiceMultiple funders with different expertise and perspectivesDiffering community capacities and experiences, geographies, costs of living, languages and cultures, and political and social environmentsDifferent regional and community poverty levels <p>Assumptions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Grantees will be able to identify and engage communityCommunities will be ready, able, and willing to engage in new waysGrantees are able to make case for project to stakeholdersFunders will trust granteesPlanning processes and implementation pilots will generate policy ideas to address larger structural issues				



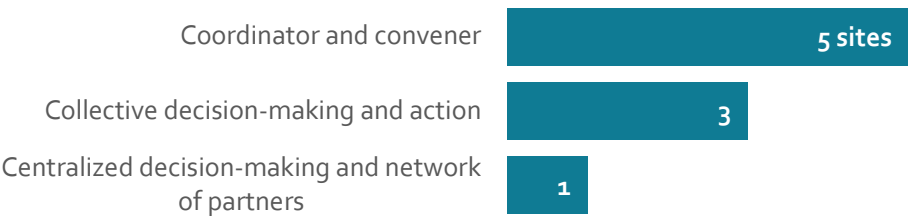
Appendix C. Data from the Learning Tool

The Learning Tool was a survey administered to anchor partners in Spring 2023 to collect data on the activities, outputs, and short-term outcomes from Year 2 of Mobility LABs implementation. The purpose of the tool was to understand Year 2 implementation and changes across the cohort.

FIGURE 1. TYPES OF PARTNERS IN MOBILITY LABS PROJECT



FIGURE 2. MOBILITY LABS PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURES



Note: anchor partners were asked to select the one that best describes them.

PARTNERSHIP STRUCTURE DEFINITIONS:

Coordinator and convener: one organization convenes partners and provides the structure, finances, and administrative capacity to ensure all activities are part of a coherent, coordinated strategy

Collective decision-making and action: shared decision-making where many or all partners co-lead work through coalitions or collective partnerships

Centralized decision-making and a network of partners: one organization leads decision-making and implementation of the work, consulting partner organizations as needed



FIGURE 3. STRUCTURES, PROCESSES, AND DOCUMENTS FOR WORKING TOGETHER

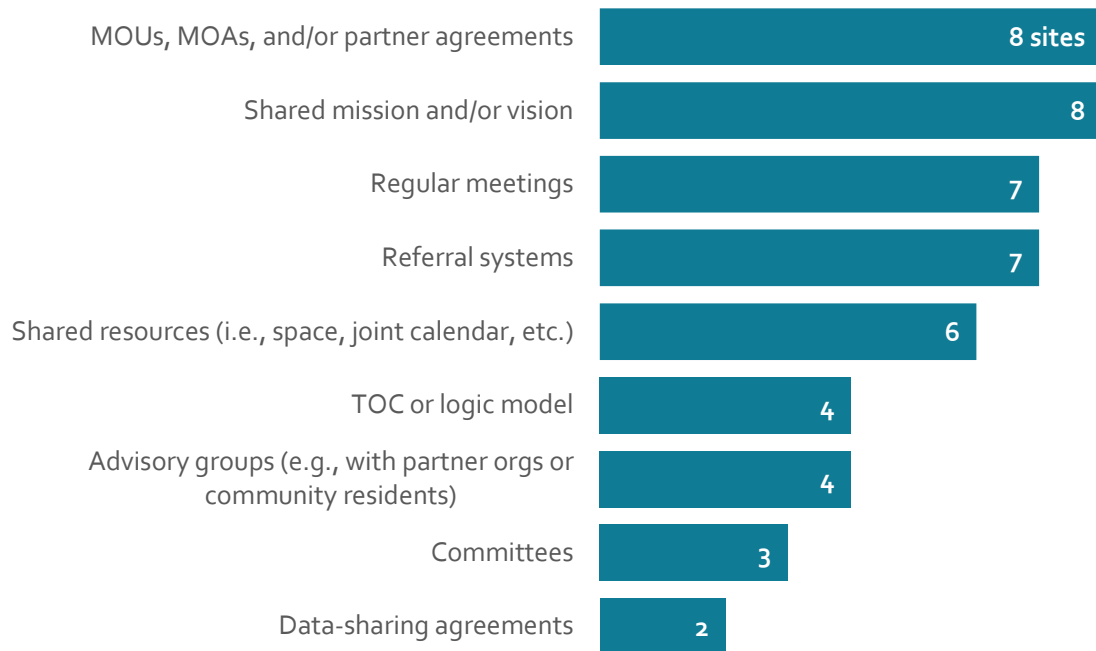
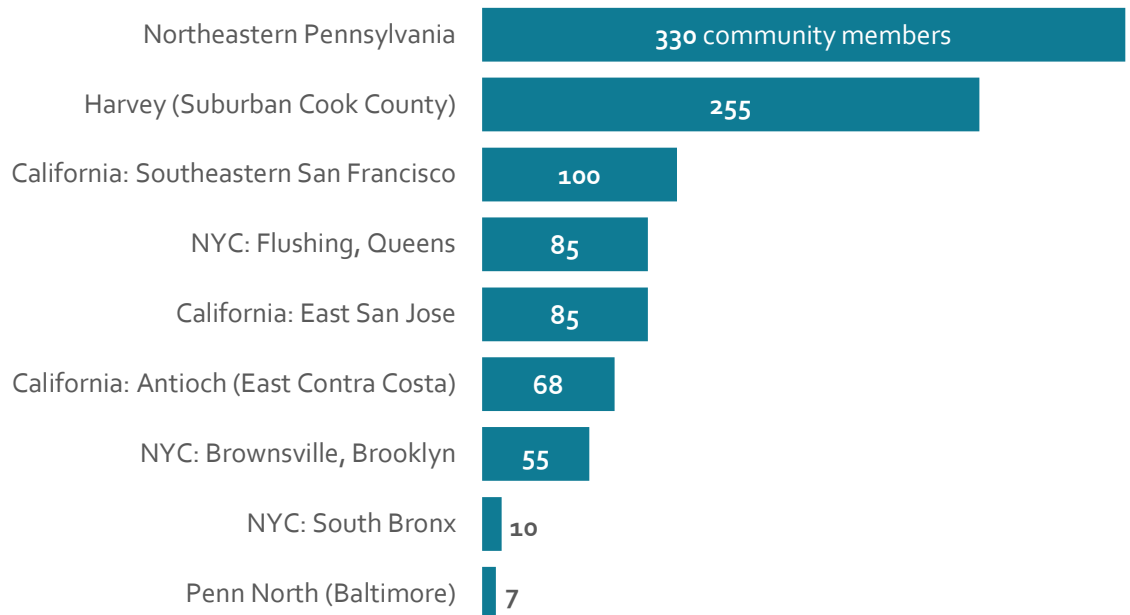


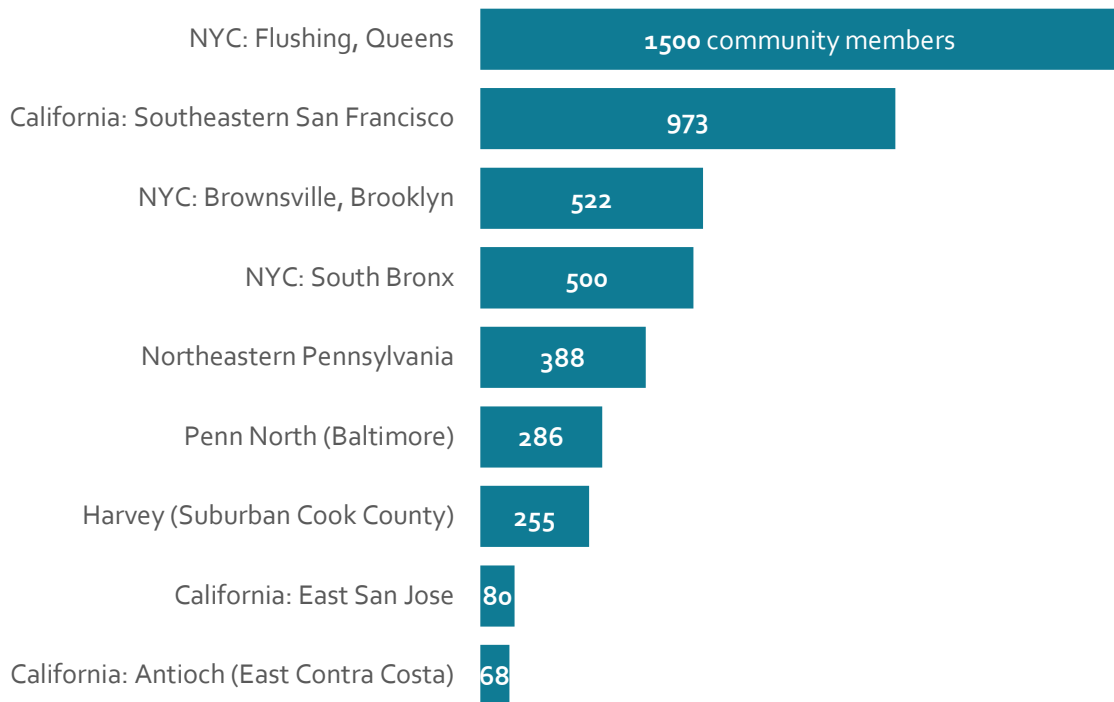
FIGURE 4. NUMBER OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS INVOLVED IN PLANNING, DESIGNING, OR INFORMING MOBILITY LABS WORK IN YEAR 2 (ESTIMATE)*



*Includes providing input to inform program design or strategy (through listening sessions, surveys, focus groups); providing feedback on program implementation/experience; serving on advisory boards; and hired as staff.



FIGURE 5. NUMBER OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS INVOLVED IN TRAININGS, SERVICES, AND RECEIVING RESOURCES IN YEAR 2 (ESTIMATE)*



*Includes participation in training (job readiness, leadership, entrepreneurship, advocacy; case management or navigation services; referrals to housing, food, education, immigration, legal, and other types of programs and services; and direct provision of resources (food, housing, cash, gift cards).

FIGURE 6. FACTORS AFFECTING ACTIVITIES AND PROGRESS IN YEAR 2

