

CFLeads

Community Foundations
Leading Change

Advancing Economic Mobility in our Communities

Results from a community
foundation pilot network

February 2023





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Executive Summary

The Economic Mobility Action Network, a two-year pilot initiative led by CFLeads, brought together a diverse group of six community foundations from across the country to develop strategies, build partnerships, and launch initiatives to advance economic mobility for low-income and vulnerable populations in the communities they serve.

The six community foundations in the pilot cohort of this network were selected based on their existing economic mobility work, their commitment to racial equity, and other factors such as demographics. Participants included community foundation teams made up of the CEO, senior staff, board members and community partners from The Chicago Community Trust, Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo, Foundation for Louisiana, Greater Cincinnati Foundation, San Francisco Foundation, and Southwest Initiative Foundation in Minnesota.

CFLeads guided the Network, connecting the foundations with expert speakers, training, funding, technical assistance and peer counseling through a series of six virtual and in-person convenings. The Network was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation with additional support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

Through this initiative, participants developed new skills and strategies for working toward racial equity and economic mobility in their

communities. In collaboration with public agencies, businesses, nonprofits and others, participants engaged residents within targeted neighborhoods and communities to help inform the economic mobility agendas.

Assets, goals and competencies for positive change

This work was guided by a Theory of Change developed by CFLeads in partnership with Community Science and the Network’s steering committee. This Theory of Change highlighted the following:

Assets

- A national funder committed to racial equity and economic mobility in communities;
- Community foundations with the same commitment; and
- CFLeads’ expertise in building capacities and leadership competencies.

Goals

- Using and developing key tactics for an economic mobility agenda;
- Identifying the benefits of a strong local-national funder relationship;
- Developing peer connections among the participating foundations; and
- Demonstrating the impact of a peer network.

Competencies



Engaging Residents



Working Across Sectors



Marshalling Resources



Commissioning and Sharing Local Data and Research



Shaping Public Policy

This report summarizes the activities, outcomes and impact of the economic mobility pilot network, drawing from the program evaluation conducted by Community Science and reports submitted by the participating community foundations.

Overall, the Network evaluation found that the six participating community foundations:

- Developed a stronger internal focus on racial equity as a vital piece of economic mobility;
- Engaged a diversity of community entities, including residents, to work together on economic mobility initiatives with a racial equity focus;
- Leveraged the Network’s financial support,

and the credibility it conveyed, to attract new funding commitments from other sources, both within and outside their service areas; and

- Succeeded in achieving positive short-term results, while also strengthening longer-term collaborations for ongoing impacts.

The report provides an overview of each community foundation’s activities and initiatives that took place during this pilot network:

- **The Chicago Community Trust** accelerating an equitable economic recovery in the region to help ensure Black and Latinx communities hit hardest by the COVID-19 crisis are not left behind
- **Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo** developing a “benefits cliff calculator,” enabling employers and others to pinpoint where earnings growth leads to a drop-off in public benefits that reduces overall income
- **Foundation for Louisiana** working with community residents and leaders to shape the development of a new strategy for economic justice
- **The Greater Cincinnati Foundation** centering its efforts on Black women, building new cross-sector partnerships to better support and portray Black women as professionals
- **The San Francisco Foundation** undertaking a community-driven strategic planning process, with neighborhood residents as paid consultants, to better develop and drive efforts to build genuine new wealth within public housing
- **Southwest Initiative Foundation** bringing together a new Regional Coalition of Equity Advocates, exploring cradle-to-career initiatives and working with local Dakota communities in a formal Land Acknowledgment process

About the Economic Mobility Action Network

The Economic Mobility Action Network was a two-year pilot project led by CFLeads. It engaged six community foundations from across the U.S. in making progress together on advancing economic mobility, using a racial equity lens, in the communities they serve.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation provided primary funding for the project with additional support from the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation.

The six foundations in the Network cohort included:

- The Chicago Community Trust (Illinois)
- Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo (New York)
- Foundation for Louisiana
- Greater Cincinnati Foundation (Ohio)
- San Francisco Foundation (California)
- Southwest Initiative Foundation (Minnesota)

Foundations were selected based on a number of factors, including existing economic mobility work, commitment to racial equity, and geography. The chosen community foundations formed teams comprised of the CEO, senior staff, board members and community partners to participate in the Network. Together, these foundation teams serve a wide range of communities and face diverse challenges in promoting economic mobility and racial equity. As the project began, they were in varying stages of building their

capacity and resources for engaging residents, businesses and public agencies in working toward positive outcomes. CFLeads, together with Community Science and the Network steering committee, developed and shared a Theory of Change for the network process and a framework for measuring progress across the projects, partnerships, communication efforts and related initiatives the foundations pursued during the two-year cohort.

About CFLeads

As the national network of community foundations committed to community leadership, CFLeads provides learning opportunities and resources that build the capacity of individual foundations to become community leaders in generating change that centers on the needs of local residents. CFLeads conducts research, highlights best practices and promotes peer learning as it collaborates with hundreds of community foundations across the nation to identify and share best practices, challenges and opportunities.

As the organizer and facilitator of the Economic Mobility Action Network, CFLeads guided the community foundation teams as

At a collective with a **purpose**, moving past the surface to be servants of the greater good — shifting structures and neighborhoods that are often forgotten, providing resources to our communities’ most valuable resources — **we are people who believe in people**. And don’t let other people fool you — we do more than just write grants. We change trajectory, rewrite policy, revive economies, mobilizing for economic mobility. **We invest where the rest have divested.**

Spoken-word piece commissioned by CFLeads; written and performed by Christian Paige, Emmy-nominated poet, educator and community activist

they worked to develop an economic mobility agenda for their communities, using a racial equity lens. CFLeads provided grants to each community foundation, designed and facilitated each Network learning meeting, and connected each foundation to content experts and technical assistance to advance their work. CFLeads engaged Community Science, an independent evaluator, to assess key measures of how effective the project was in helping each foundation work more productively on promoting positive change.

About the Network

Through the Network Learning Meetings, the participating community foundation teams came together — virtually, due to COVID-19 — to gain a deeper understanding of economic mobility in various contexts and to build their skills and capacities for making a difference.

The meetings enabled participants to learn more about working across sectors, building peer connections, marshalling resources, improving their own racial equity practices, and communicating within their communities. Participants learned about effective means of shifting the narrative for communities of color; analyzing data to identify target populations

and strategies for positive impact; and using outcome measures to assess impact.

Fifteen highly regarded speakers (see box on following page) shared their knowledge, experience, and lessons learned with participants. Their presentations spanned a variety of topics, including interpersonal biases, structural racism, storytelling and narrative, and the social safety net.

Tony F. Pipa, a senior fellow in the Center for Sustainable Development at the Brookings Institution, supported the Network by creating a framework and resources to help the cohort connect their economic mobility efforts with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

The cohort was able to come together in person for a capstone session in Chicago in June 2022. They had a site visit at the Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation and heard from Robin Rue Simmons, Founder and Executive Director of FirstRepair and former 5th Ward Alderman for the City of Evanston, IL. Simmons spoke about her experience with economic mobility efforts and her work to pass America’s first municipal-funded reparations program.



Economic Mobility
Action Network Speakers
2020-2022

- **Maurice Cox**, Commissioner of the Department of Planning and Development, Office of the Mayor, City of Chicago
- **Rodney Foxworth**, CEO, Common Future
- **Keith Fudge**, Senior Policy Program Manager, Urban Institute
- **Darrick Hamilton**, Stratification Economist and Professor, The New School
- **Tiffany Manuel**, President and CEO, TheCaseMade
- **Michael McAfee**, President & CEO, PolicyLink
- **Carlos Nelson**, CEO, Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corporation
- **Sharon Parrott**, President, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
- **Tony Pipa**, Senior Fellow, Global Economy and Development, Brookings Institution
- **john a. powell**, Professor of Law, UC Berkeley, and Director, Othering & Belonging Institute
- **Robin Rue Simmons**, Founder and Executive Director of FirstRepair and former 5th Ward Alderman for the City of Evanston, IL
- **Tracey Rutnik**, Director of Program Development and **Martha Fedorowicz**, Policy Associate, Research to Action Lab at the Urban Institute
- **Rinku Sen**, Executive Director, Narrative Initiative
- **Jennifer Splansky Juster**, Executive Director, Collective Impact Forum, and **John Harper**, Managing Director, Consulting Team, FSG
- Two local community leaders with personal stories about public systems

The Core Elements of Positive Impact

According to the **Theory of Change** that CFLeads shared with participants, the effectiveness of this project relied on the following core elements of positive impact.

Assets

- A national funder committed to racial equity and economic mobility in local communities;
- Community foundations committed to investing in the economic mobility of community members; and
- The expertise of CFLeads in building capacities and leadership competencies.

Goals

- Employ and further develop key tactics for an economic mobility agenda;
- Identify the benefits of a strong local-national funder relationship in tackling a complex issue;
- Develop peer connections among participating foundations that can be leveraged as they work toward economic mobility in their communities; and
- Demonstrate the value and impact of a community foundation peer network dedicated to the five competencies that CFLeads identifies and promotes for community leadership.

Competencies

In evaluating the impacts and results of the Network as the project concluded, the consulting firm Community Science assessed those four goals against the **five leadership competencies** that CFLeads works to build in community foundations:

-  **Engaging Residents**
-  **Working Across Sectors**
-  **Marshalling Resources**
-  **Commissioning and Sharing Local Data and Research**
-  **Shaping Public Policy**

CFLeads provided training and introduced tools to help Network participants develop successful narratives and expansive, inclusive approaches for resident and community participation. Some tools included strategic casemaking from TheCaseMade and exploring emergent strategies such as john a. powell’s *targeted universalism*.

Beyond the scope of the Network, CFLeads also supported participants in drafting and sending a letter to Congress supporting the expansion of the Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit. Eight additional community foundations signed on to this letter.

Evaluating the Outcomes

The evaluation by Community Science found that during their participation in the Network, the six community foundation teams built a notably stronger internal focus on racial equity as a vital component of economic mobility. Externally, they achieved significant results in engaging a diversity of community partners – nonprofits, businesses, public agencies, foundations, and other stakeholders – to work together on economic mobility initiatives with a racial equity focus. They were able to build on those partnerships and the Network’s financial support to bring in significant additional resources from other funders.

Advancing economic mobility in communities

In the initiatives they launched or extended during their participation in the Network, the six teams sought to generate positive outcomes for a wide range of stakeholders, including:

- Black female workers in Cincinnati, OH
- Black and Brown work-seeking youth in Buffalo, NY
- Affordable housing residents in San Francisco, CA
- Workers seeking equitable working conditions in New Orleans, LA

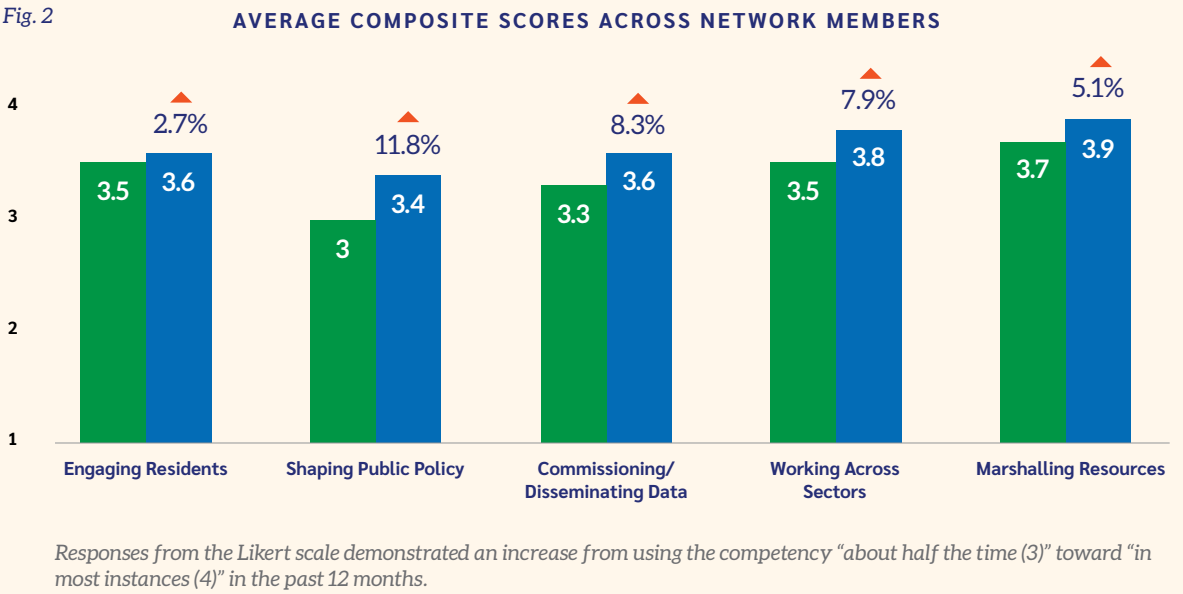
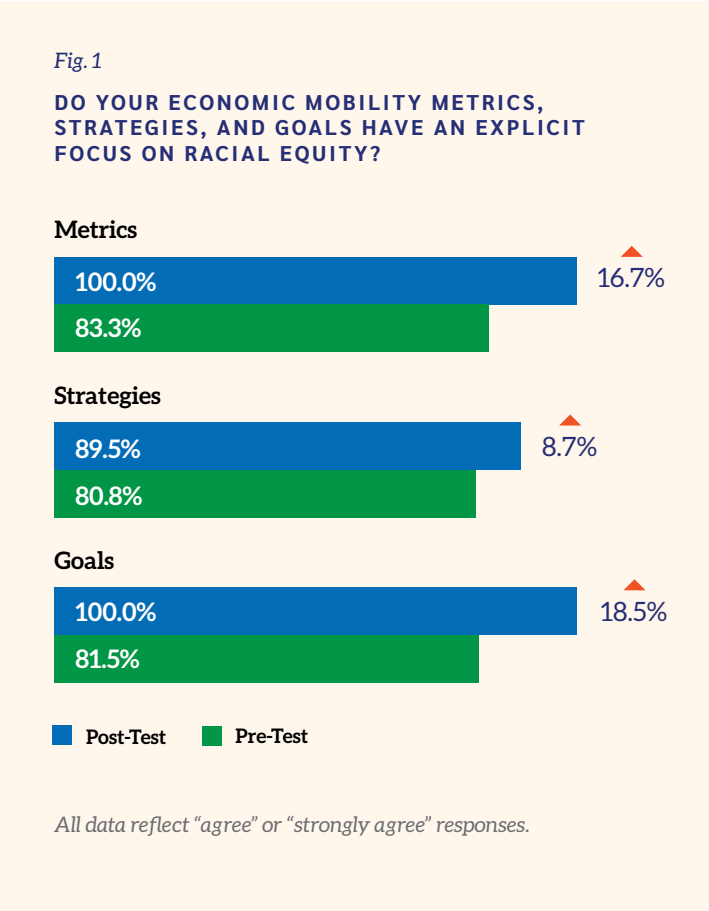
Participants also explored how to support community residents by:

- Addressing economic inequity through community-driven development and place-based investments in Chicago, IL; and
- Working on cradle-to-career initiatives that support a reasonable standard of living for all residents in southwestern Minnesota.

Racial equity

As participants sought to help advance racial equity in their communities, the Network helped them develop and act on specific goals, strategies and metrics. Community Science found that foundation leaders and staff “sharpened their racial equity focus, made public statements about their racial equity approaches, and honed these approaches in their philanthropic practice.”

While Network participants were selected partly because they had already demonstrated a commitment to racial equity, the participants’ internal economic mobility metrics, strategies and goals developed an even greater focus on racial equity during the Network (fig. 1).



Five competencies of community leadership

All community foundations increased their use of the five competencies during their time in this network (fig. 2).

Marshalling resources

Through this pilot program, CFLeads was able to provide grants to each participating community foundation to support their economic mobility efforts. The community foundations were able to leverage this support, expanding the financial resources they could deploy to support economic mobility for racial equity, with increases ranging from less than \$100,000 to more than \$1 million.

Within their communities, the Network helped the participants build their capacities and competencies for leadership, including playing a vital role in bringing together government, businesses and others to develop coordinated strategies for systemic change. Foundation staff told the evaluators that financial support from a national funder like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation was key to securing buy-in from civic and corporate partners – and moving from buy-in to accountability.

\$10M
to support Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo’s pilot benefits cliff project

\$3.7M
for Southwest Initiative Foundation to expand belonging work across rural Minnesota

\$750,000
for the San Francisco Foundation to support the HOPE SF design process

\$500,000
to support IT credentials for Black women in Cincinnati

\$150,000
for the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo’s Youth Employment Coalition



Working Across Sectors

The Network Learning Meetings hosted by CFLeads expanded opportunities for participants to communicate and converse about goals and strategies — among each other and with community members and partners — and to bring together and mobilize stakeholders from various sectors to address specific issues.

Outwardly, the survey data showed that the foundations are indeed working to advance the economic mobilities of low-income families and are more often engaging other public and private funders in supporting aligned economic mobility strategies.

For example, in Buffalo, the county government is partnering with the community foundation, chamber of commerce, and Atlanta Federal Reserve to build out a local benefits cliff calculator. In Chicago, the Trust convenes working groups with community, business, government and philanthropy to address factors impacting local projects and to inform public policy as part of its We Rise Together: For an Equitable & Just Recovery initiative.

 **Commissioning and Sharing Data**

Network participants commissioned or used existing data to inform their economic mobility agenda.

For example, the Greater Cincinnati Foundation produced a series of three reports detailing the history, quantitative status and qualitative perspective of Black women's economic mobility in the Cincinnati area. The Southwest Initiative Foundation commissioned research to assess how southwest Minnesota residents feel a sense of belonging in their communities.

The Foundation for Louisiana partnered with a Ph.D. program at the University of New

Orleans to connect local organizations to students that could create and disseminate custom research or evaluations at no cost. This partnership will help the foundation evaluate its economic justice grantmaking and inform its strategies for advancing justice in the community.

 **Shaping Public Policy**

One of the equity practices that saw the biggest increase pre- to post-Network was pursuing public policies to increase racial equity (fig. 3.1).

For example, the Southwest Initiative Foundation worked with the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development on COVID-19 relief funding, providing the agency with on-the-ground insights on funding rules that were impacting rural businesses. Through its HOPE SF initiative, the San Francisco Foundation is working on designing strategies at the systems level that center Blackness, along with a guaranteed income pilot that will foster progress at the macro level and at the individual and family level for HOPE SF residents.

 **Engaging Residents**

The other equity practice that had the biggest pre- to post-Network increase was engaging residents' voices to inform or identify needs (fig. 3.2).

A core element of many of the initiatives Network participants are working on is engaging residents to help identify local needs and how to shape their responses. Daniel Ash, former Associate Vice President of Community Impact at The Chicago Community Trust, said: "All the work that we do to create the conditions for wealth building, to create the conditions for economic mobility, to create the conditions for community safety, and so on — all the decisions that we need to find in order to

solve those challenges or meet those challenges will come from people working together. People dreaming together."

"We have these big lofty goals," said Rasheda Cromwell, Vice President of Community Strategies at the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, "and there are so many different marginalized communities. [The Network] kind of gave us an entry point on where to start and how we can focus and hone in our strategy. Because we can't do it all. So where is the right entry point to make the biggest impact?"

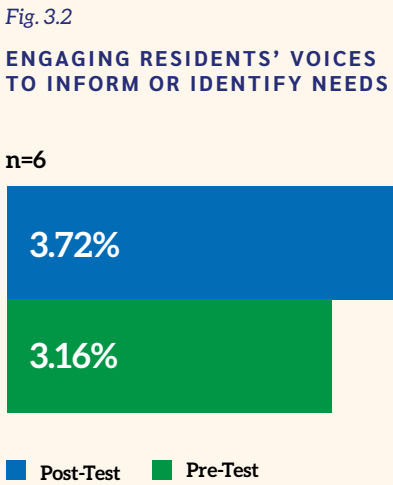
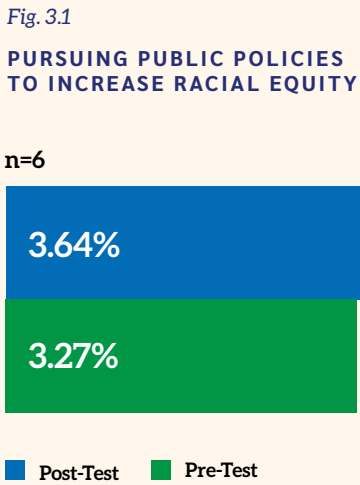
"I think that's where it's really inspired and shaped our work on the community strategy side," Rasheda continued. "It's honing in and establishing some goals, listening a bit more, leaning into the community, that we may not have all the solutions and that's OK. What's really best for the community should actually come from the community. They should be involved in the decision-making."

Interviews and focus group data showed that engaging residents was also fundamental to supporting the other competencies of community leadership. One foundation staff member said:

"We were able to learn a bunch through engaging residents, and then we were able to marshal resources by going out and getting funding to support a position for two years to work in those communities. So really, we are absolutely taking what we heard and translating that into programmatic action."

The following sections highlight the key actions and achievements reported by each of the Network's six community foundations, followed by their own assessments of what this project meant for their capacities to advance the cause of economic mobility coupled with racial equity in their communities.

Equity-focused practices with the biggest increase



Both equity-focused practices moved from "about half the time" (3) closer to "in most instances" (4).

The Chicago Community Trust

We Rise Together

TOP-LEVEL GOAL:

Advancing resident-driven economic development to accelerate economic recovery in majority Black and Latinx communities.

 Shaping Public Policy

 Working Across Sectors

Community conversations and levers of change

Community engagement has been central to We Rise Together: For an Equitable & Just Recovery, a multi-sector funding collaborative The Chicago Community Trust launched in late 2020 to complement and advance economic mobility partnerships and strategies in the Chicago region. The Trust used information and resources provided through the Economic Mobility Action Network to help it steer new support to the Black and Latinx communities that were hit hardest by the job and business losses of the COVID-19 pandemic.

To involve residents in shaping We Rise Together, the Trust interviewed 15 community leaders, surveyed residents and businesses, ran focus groups and commissioned the nonprofit BECOME to conduct nine community conversations.

These efforts refined the model for We Rise Together, focusing on hyper-local challenges as well as systems issues such as permitting delays, inflation costs and access to capital.

Three levers of change — philanthropy, business practices, and public policy and practices — will help drive neighborhood investment, strengthen Black and Latinx businesses, and increase quality, resilient employment in the Chicago region.

Creating alignment to target investments

We Rise Together convened partners and resources from area businesses, nonprofits, local governments and philanthropies for its coordinated effort. A steering committee representing the multiple partners used economic and demographic data, with resident input, to target place-based investments to the majority Black and Latinx neighborhoods most affected by historic disinvestment along with the COVID-19 pandemic.

We Rise Together and the Metropolitan Planning Council co-organized cross-sector working groups to clarify the challenges and elements of success in local projects and to highlight improvements in public policy that can help the projects succeed such as speeding up permitting. “We are intentionally creating alignment with federal, state and local funding in communities to address barriers and unlock capital,” the Trust reported, through “co-funding efforts, linking projects

to other funders including the Chicago Prize, funding in partnership with Invest South/West investments and Community Recovery grant recipients.”

To challenge “business as usual” practices, We Rise Together works with the Corporate Coalition of Chicago to hold each other accountable to do more to change the culture of doing business in Chicago, intentionally embedding the Deputy Mayor and the Cook County Chief of Economic Development on the steering committee. The City of Chicago’s Chief Equity Officer served on the Trust’s Economic Mobility Action Network planning team.

In addition, the Network’s introduction of the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals and support from Tony Pipa led the Trust to participate in a new project, funded by the C.S. Mott Foundation, which explores how its assets under management can be aligned to support the SDGs.

Measuring outcomes and reporting impacts

We Rise Together continues to work on improving its measures of outcomes and on reporting the positive impacts — both

as relatable data and through narrative storytelling — to the targeted neighborhoods.

The Trust describes its Network experience as transformational, and not only because it helped shape and refine We Rise Together. “We have developed new partnerships with other community foundation colleagues across the country, we expanded our own economic mobility knowledge through peer and facilitated learning, and we have considered new and innovative approaches led by community foundation colleagues to address racial equity.”

Everybody needs to thrive and that means that we have to continue to invest, making sure that everybody has access to those resources, that every kid can walk down a street safely, that everyone has access to education and health care. So when we think about economic recovery and economic well-being, we think about what does it look like for the whole being to thrive.

Jennifer Axelrod, Senior Director of Learning and Impact

“Our ongoing participation in the Network has allowed for dedicated time as a team to pause, reflect, connect, plan and execute on a shared economic mobility agenda that could not have been more timely.”

from the Trust’s Network report

Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo

Collaborating Across Sectors

TOP-LEVEL GOAL:

A diversity of community leaders guiding racial equity initiatives



Working Across Sectors



Shaping Public Policy

Bridging the “benefits cliff”

To oversee the economic mobility projects that Network funding and other support helped it advance, the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo reached out to the Greater Buffalo Racial Equity Roundtable, a cross-sector coalition of 350-plus representatives from the public, nonprofit, private-sector and faith leaders to advance racial equity in their region. Collaborations generated through the Roundtable brought energy, ideas and resources to initiatives that focused on connecting young people to promising job opportunities and illuminating the “benefits cliff” that can stand in the way of economic mobility.

The Network funding supported the foundation’s collaboration with the Buffalo Niagara Partnership (the local chamber of commerce) and the Atlanta Federal Reserve to create and roll out the Benefits Cliff Calculator. This tool lets employers, employees and others pinpoint where growth in a person’s earnings



leads to a drop-off in public benefits that reduces their overall income. The Partnership rolled out the calculator in early 2022 and continues to promote it in the community.

The community foundation reported that participation in the Network “resulted in a \$10 million pilot project from Erie County to help individuals ‘bridge’ over the benefits cliff.” The pilot aims to assist more than 200 families of color in making the transition.

Sharing resources and data

Also as a result of the Economic Mobility Action Network, the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo worked with fellow Network participant Greater Cincinnati

Foundation to develop an HR Toolkit, a source of vetted HR policies designed to retain employees and help them advance in a company. The foundation was also able to update its 2020 survey of employers to profile how companies in Western New York approach diversity and inclusion, with actionable takeaways to advance diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Connecting young people with promising careers

To help more young people connect with positive job opportunities, the Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo used the Network funding to support three related projects:

- Bringing in consultants to work with its Youth Employment Coalition on creating a youth employment system for Buffalo;
- Building out a website where young people and others can “learn about and connect to high-demand local career pathways”; and
- Marketing the youth employment system its coalition has developed. This work is now fully funded for the next three to five years.

The foundation noted that its work with the Buffalo Niagara Partnership and the Youth Employment Coalition are both explicitly motivated to increase racial equity for the collective benefit of the entire region. “In our community, we’ve been making an economic case for racial equity,” said Felicia Beard, the foundation’s Senior Director of Racial Equity Initiatives. “Being part of this network and seeing how it has really blossomed and developed over the past couple years – it’s really encouraging.”

This region is looking at 165,000 open jobs in the next 10 years, with two-thirds requiring post-secondary credentials – and the largest concentration of young people is in the city of Buffalo. The Say Yes Buffalo initiative currently has 2,500 students on scholarship, 60% with combined family income below \$20,000. It’s a game changer for those families.

David Rust, CEO, Say Yes Buffalo

“We have government leaders, business leaders, nonprofit leaders, and philanthropy at the table, each bringing unique assets and insights to create these cross-sector collaborative solutions that are systemic in nature and sustainable. That’s the end game.”

Clotilde Perez-Bode Dedecker,
President and CEO

Foundation for Louisiana

Linking Economic and Environmental Justice

TOP-LEVEL GOAL:

Build an economic justice strategy that shifts the dominant narrative on racial justice

 Engaging Residents



Shaping a community-grounded strategy

Flexible funding provided through the Network made it possible for the Foundation for Louisiana to hire a full-time economic justice program officer whose interviews with organization leaders, organizers and community members shaped the development of a complete economic justice strategy.

Locally crafted climate resilience

In particular, the foundation is exploring emerging opportunities in green and blue economies and the transition away from oil and gas. The foundation is also looking into land use, zoning and the managed retreat away from coastal communities that are past the points of climate change mitigation or adaptation.

The Network support has also enabled the foundation to engage with a local tribal organization on ways to manage disaster recovery or potential migration. The results, it predicts, will be a set of clear community-created decisions on responding to various forms of disaster. This plan — the first of its kind in the state — may be used as a template to support resilience responses and forced migration for other communities.

Shifting dominant narratives

By shifting dominant narratives in support of racial justice, the foundation is working to make Louisiana a place where people can tell their own stories, own their experiences, and stand in their power to correct the history shaped by white supremacy culture.

This dialogue acknowledges, heals, transforms and restoratively repairs wounds from the past and the presence of racism and injustice.

“We do need a great deal of active policy work. This is not just in terms of lobbying or advancing certain policies, but also making sure the population is aware of what’s going on ... providing good information so that people can say, “This, I don’t like. This, I do like.”

Nathan Rupp,
*Senior Fellow in
Economic Justice*

“We really have to think about economic mobility in the context of resilience building. There’s been a lot of work also in connecting the dots on safe and affordable and resilient housing, and equitable community development ... finding the sweet spot where those points intersect.”

Flozell Daniels, Jr.,
former President and CEO

“We envision a Louisiana in which all people are free and well-equipped to thrive in life, in work, in school and play and all the different things they might want to pursue. Our vision is that it’s done explicitly in a liberation and collective-freedom framework, where we are naming the history of settler colonialism, chattel slavery, and pervasive systems of anti-Black racism.”

Jamie Schmill,
VP of Programs

Greater Cincinnati Foundation

Centering the Focus on Black Women

TOP-LEVEL GOAL:

Build a community-wide campaign to advance economic mobility for Black women



Commissioning and Sharing Local Data

Sharing facts to empower change

To deepen public understanding and underpin a campaign promoting positive images of professional Black women in the community, the Greater Cincinnati Foundation produced three data-rich reports on the history, potential, and challenges involved with Black women’s economic mobility in the Cincinnati area. It created a new full-time position focused on building cross-sector partnerships and marshalling national resources to support economic mobility. The foundation also developed a multi-partner effort to equip more Black women with IT credentials through the Grow with Google initiative.

The foundation’s research reports, together with the results of several community-resident focus groups, helped it shape its economic mobility strategy. Data cited in the reports show that even though their work has been

central throughout U.S. history — and their workforce participation today is high — Black women earn significantly less than white women and Black men. In the Cincinnati area, the research found that 49% of employed Black women earn less than \$15 per hour, even with a college degree.

This statistic inspired the foundation to focus on Black women and become narrowly focused on the industries where Black women predominate and don’t make a living wage, such as childcare, healthcare support, retail and food service as well as sectors with high-paying jobs that don’t have many Black women in their ranks, such as IT and advanced manufacturing.

If you would draw a Venn diagram and overlap our big efforts around affordable housing, around economic mobility, and around racial equity, you would see that the center overlap is quite large. Black women are at the center of it.

Robert Killins, Jr., *Director of Special Initiatives*

“[The Network] gave us an entry point on where to start and how we can focus and hone in our strategy.”

Rasheda Cromwell,
VP of Community Strategies

Undoing destructive narratives

“We became aware of the destructive narratives we reinforce when we continue to present disparities and negative images of Black women,” the foundation noted. “So, our recently launched campaign shows the power of Black women in a positive light. ... Our work was led by a diverse team, and we relied on the insight and lived experience of groups of marginalized people in our community to guide the way.”

For its effort to advance IT credentialing and employment among Black women, the foundation worked with a number of project partners — including the Cincinnati USA Chamber of Commerce, local employers and community nonprofits — and secured a \$500,000 grant from JP Morgan Chase.

Joining the Network benefited the foundation, in part, through deep learning and skills advancement from exposure to national thought leaders, stating in their report: “We had access to the top-tier thought leaders in an intimate setting. This kind of pollination supercharges our thinking and work.”



One initiative that we created is our Racial Equity Matters series, where we’re educating the community. We’ve reached about 2,500 people now ... it’s really built a narrative in our community, with shared language where people can actually talk about race. It’s influenced people across every sector.

Ellen Katz, *President and CEO*

San Francisco Foundation

A Shared New Vision for Building Wealth

TOP-LEVEL GOAL:

Show how genuine, inclusive prosperity can be nurtured in former public housing communities

 **Marshalling Resources**

 **Engaging Residents**

HOPE SF: Building a new vision of wealth

The San Francisco Foundation has been engaged in a community-driven strategic planning process to assess and understand how wealth-building policies and strategies can lead to economic advancement for isolated public housing communities that are transforming into mixed-income communities.

HOPE SF started in 2011 and is housed at the foundation, with the City and County of San Francisco and the nonprofit Enterprise Community Partners as partners. HOPE SF serves over 5,000 city residents, 88% to 96% of whom are people of color.

Through the Economic Mobility Action Network, the foundation and its HOPE SF partners explored how the partnership could evolve from a vision of repairing and redressing systematic racial oppression towards a vision of wealth-building. In this new approach, trust-building and power-sharing with residents are central objectives.

To shape the wealth-building work, the Partnership for HOPE SF put together a planning and design team that includes 10 HOPE residents as paid consultants, together with representatives from the lead organizations. The team met two to three times each week to work on developing and putting into action a framework for the project, with contracted help from the Insight Center for Community Economic Development and its expertise on disparities in racial wealth across the U.S.

The resident consultants and the Wealth Planning Team developed a vision of wealth that, beyond finances, is an individual’s and community’s total accumulated tangible and intangible assets and resources, including social, familial, resilient, aspirational, cultural, financial, political, and educational resources.

Undoing the root causes of inequity

The team’s framework focuses on four “foundational actions” that can address the root causes of racial wealth inequity: center policies on Blackness, create narrative change and culture shifts, dismantle extractive practices and policies, and nourish the social and financial assets of communities of color. As initiative planning continues, the commitment is for HOPE SF resident consultants to continue making up more than half of those at the table.

Eventually, the team coalesced around a plan for an intervention that included a guaranteed income pilot. The pilot project aims to advance racial economic equity at macro and individual and family levels. Along with the support it

“This is a very much more progressive approach to trying to get a lot of community work done. We have systems where we have residents at the table.”

Deirel Marquez,
Director of Economic Advancement, San Francisco Mayor’s Office

received from CFLeads through the Network, the initiative has raised \$750,000 from philanthropic partners.

“The emphasis here really is that this is a resident-led initiative,” said Daryel Dunston, former Sr. Director of the Place Pathway at the foundation. “This is not a situation where you have government partners or philanthropic partners telling the residents what they should be doing ... but rather serving in an advisory role to help guide them to a strategy.”

“The funding has absolutely equipped us to do the work,” he added. “It shows a commitment to the work that isn’t just locally based; we are able to say, ‘There is a national network that is supporting this wealth-building work, that is supporting the work of equity.’ That’s a more powerful message.”

“It was a breath of fresh air, and it’s actually very inspiring,” he continued. “It’s been a long journey, and we’re not done yet.”

Look at the literally billions of dollars that have been spent on public housing and revitalization in this country. More often than not, you will find two things. One, all of that money was spent on bricks and mortar, and almost none of it was spent on kids and families – and two, the end result has been to push the kids and families that lived in these public housing developments for decades out into surrounding communities. HOPE SF has turned that paradigm on its head.

Fred Blackwell, CEO, San Francisco Foundation



Southwest Initiative Foundation

Connectedness that Can Change the Narrative

TOP-LEVEL GOAL:

Build trusted relationships across differences to foster true economic mobility for all

 Engaging Residents

Blending stories and data to advance equity

The violence and unrest that followed the 2020 police killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis exposed deep divisions within Southwest Initiative Foundation’s Minnesota region, with many community members of color self-isolating out of fear. The foundation joined the Network with the clear goal of listening, supporting, and deepening its relationships with Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color — and of using data-driven strategies and humanizing narratives to advance equity and undercut racism across local systems.

The foundation adapted strategies from the US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty to create the conditions for true economic mobility: change the narrative, generate access to good jobs, ensure that zip code is not destiny, provide support that empowers, and transform its use of data.

Through the Network, the foundation created a plan with actionable efforts as a nimble roadmap. One of its major ongoing efforts has been a commitment to building relationships with the Cansa’yapi Oyate (Lower Sioux Indian Community) and Pezihutazizi Oyate (Upper Sioux Community) communities. A task force of foundation board members and staff has begun a “Land Acknowledgement” process.

An Indigenous land acknowledgment is “an effort to recognize the Indigenous past, present, and future of a particular location and to understand our own place within that relationship. Usually, land acknowledgments take the form of written and/or verbal statements,” said a definition shared by the Native Governance Center. For its project, the Southwest Initiative Foundation partnered with representatives of the Native Ways Federation and engaged historic preservation officers from the two Native nations.

“What feels different about this process is the deep level of humility that accompanied the learning and community engagement,” the foundation reported.

The six-month effort led to the late 2022 adoption of a Land Acknowledgment statement. A series of planned follow-up actions aim to further develop relationships with tribal communities, continue the foundation’s learning, help to educate the broader community, and explore foundation assets and other investments that can benefit tribal communities.



Conversations that can open new understanding

The foundation partnered with the Harvard Negotiation and Mediation Clinical Program in an 18-month project to understand how staff could effectively engage residents in conversations about race and racism. Project teams engaged with community members across age, gender, race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, regional geography, occupation, and sector to map the political and social landscape of the region and assess people’s readiness to engage in hard conversations about race and racism.

The foundation also created the Regional Coalition of Equity Advocates in southwest Minnesota, which includes 18 leaders from higher education, arts organizations, social services, philanthropy, and public agencies in community, economic, and workforce development. Coalition members meet regularly to listen, learn, brainstorm and co-create powerful messages, effective tools and resources, and an intentional plan for sharing them collectively. The Coalition has helped spark a regional movement where organizations and leaders are encouraged to have courageous conversations that address hatred, racism and discrimination and build a sense of belonging.



“The words “equity” and “justice” are not always viewed positively or used accurately in our rural communities. We are committed to being authentic and direct while still working to include the widest reach possible as we bring people together across different experiences and views.”

from the foundation’s Network report

“We looked at so many models of how we can provide entrepreneurship education that’s culturally competent and tuned in to the entrepreneurs in our region but really focusing on people that the market has historically failed, disinvested in, and not taken seriously their passions, their hopes, their dreams.”

Scott Marquardt,
Senior VP

“We generated so many thoughts about what could we do with the resources, with the connections, with the capacity that this opportunity was providing us. We’ve been able to move several of those important ideas forward, which is so exciting to see as they continue to unfold. And we’ll be able to keep working that list.”

Karen Grasmon,
Communications Director

The Impacts of the Network

Reflections from Participants

Participation in the Economic Mobility Action Network gave credibility to the community foundations’ efforts to build new collaborations and marshal more resources to support their economic mobility and racial equity work.

The conversations and exchanges the Network made possible also led to direct inspiration and cross-pollination between community foundations.

The Foundation for Louisiana, for example, was inspired by the San Francisco Foundation’s theory of change and began undertaking a strategic review process that will include developing and designing a theory of change

that similarly highlights their work’s interconnecting and iterative nature.

Community foundations also reflected that their ongoing participation in the Network allowed for dedicated time for their teams to pause and reflect on their goals before moving into the execution stage of their economic mobility agendas. The Chicago Community Trust noted that participation also led to much-needed resources to launch and support the work and allowed for ongoing pressure-testing of ideas and approaches with peers.

“Participating in the Network has provided a level of accountability and glue for us across our team that may not have been there [otherwise]. It provided time for us to connect and work together outside the pushes and pulls of our daily lives.”

Fred Blackwell,
CEO, San Francisco Foundation



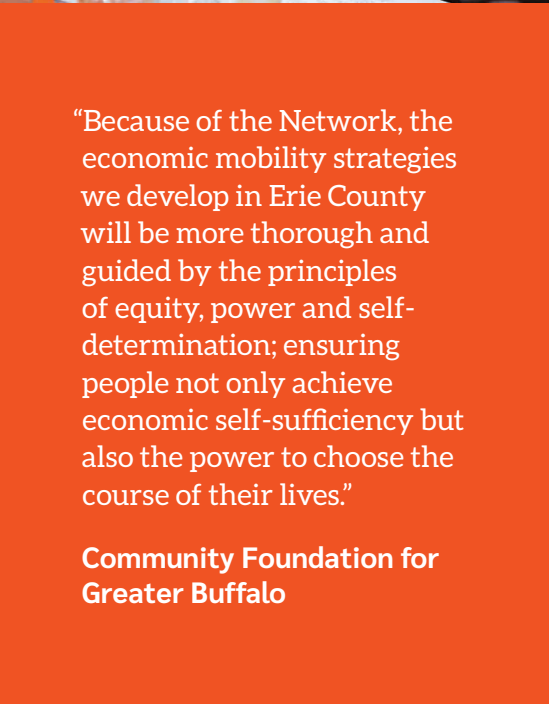
"The Network participation has been transformational. ... We have developed new partnerships with other community foundation colleagues across the country, we expanded our own economic mobility knowledge through peer and facilitated learning, and we have considered new and innovative approaches led by community foundation colleagues to address racial equity."

The Chicago Community Trust



"Along with providing access to peer foundations who shared their ground-breaking work, the Network challenged us through peer learning and constructive responses to our challenges. We know these colleagues are a short phone call away for advice, connections or simply a sounding board."

Greater Cincinnati Foundation



"Because of the Network, the economic mobility strategies we develop in Erie County will be more thorough and guided by the principles of equity, power and self-determination; ensuring people not only achieve economic self-sufficiency but also the power to choose the course of their lives."

Community Foundation for Greater Buffalo



"Engaging with other community foundations was an incredible learning experience. The diversity of approaches and partners broadened our sense of the possibilities for our work in HOPE SF and beyond. Moreover, receiving feedback from colleagues in other community foundations was incredibly valuable. The thoughtful suggestions from such experienced colleagues raised difficult questions and pushed us in very productive ways."

San Francisco Foundation



"The Network created a phenomenal space for learning and exchange. We learned so much not only from the incredible speakers but also from the incredibly talented network of community foundations from across the country."

Foundation for Louisiana



"If the need arose, we would not hesitate to call on cohort members from the other foundations for help. That alone is much more than we had prior to participation."

Southwest Initiative Foundation

“CFLeads made the national fabric stronger by bringing this cohort together.”

Greater Cincinnati Foundation



We would love to hear from you!

Please contact Leonard Brock, Vice President for Learning and Impact, at lbrock@cflleads.org to learn more about our economic mobility work and community foundation learning networks.

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