

## EMAN INTERMEDIATE COHORT

CFLeads Economic Mobility Action Network Case Study

# A public-private strategy with affordable housing at its heart in Boulder County, Colorado

Boulder County, CO, population 328,000, boasts a mix of rural plains and open spaces, midsize cities and mountain towns. As in many parts of the country, the county's cost of living has steadily risen over the past two decades, while wages have not kept pace.



Community Foundation Boulder County

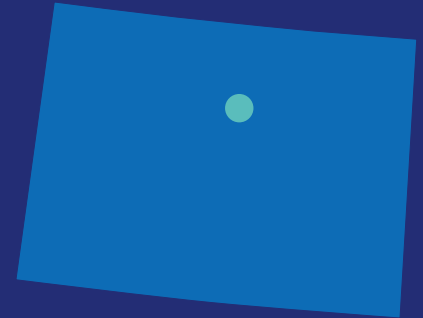
Affordable, attainable homes are especially needed in Boulder County, where median housing costs are higher than the Colorado and national medians. Almost a quarter of the county's households move within a year, often in search of less expensive dwellings in Boulder County or elsewhere.

Since 2017, Boulder County communities have begun forward-thinking policies meant to increase and diversify housing stock. A regional housing strategy was developed with nine cities and towns, creating Boulder County Regional Housing Partnership. Now, leaders in the county are focused on bringing all the pieces together to create housing that gives working families more options for where to live while also supporting economic mobility.

Led by [Community Foundation Boulder County](#), the region was part of [CFLeads](#)' Economic Mobility Action Network (EMAN) Intermediate Cohort in 2024-2025.

CFLeads

Community Foundations  
Leading Change



### COMMUNITY FOUNDATION:

Community Foundation Boulder County

### COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES USED:

Working across sectors and marshalling resources

### SUMMARY:

To promote economic mobility for working people and their families, leaders in this mountainous county are leaning into a bold regional housing goal.



“While Boulder County is known as a place that has beautiful open spaces for recreation and preservation, it is increasingly becoming an unaffordable and less diverse place to live in. The county is aligning through collaborative, focused leadership to meet the need for affordable, attainable homes.”

**Sarah Harrison**

*Vice President of Programs, Community Foundation Boulder County*

## The Vision

*“We’re working to make Boulder County a place everyone can call home and ensure belonging—economically, culturally, and environmentally,” says Tatiana Hernandez, CEO of Community Foundation Boulder County. “As a community that has the resources and values to live this vision, we want to be a model of equity for the entire country.”*

## The Strategy

Leaders in Boulder County are raising funds and building will to meet the Regional Housing Partnership’s bold goal of having 12% of the housing inventory be permanently affordable for low, moderate, and middle-income households by 2035.

## The EMAN Challenge

Boulder County partners came to the EMAN Intermediate Cohort wanting to learn how to better coordinate and collaborate to secure funding for housing projects that increase

stability for those at risk of losing housing. They wanted to pursue philanthropic funding, including impact investing options, that could supplement government funding for Boulder County Regional Housing Strategy projects.

## How Community Foundation Boulder County Is Leveraging a Community Leadership Approach

Community Foundation Boulder County is **working across sectors** and **marshalling resources**. While working with the county to allocate American Rescue Plan Act funds during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Foundation deepened its relationships with elected officials and staff leading regional affordable housing efforts and connected them to nonprofit partners.

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*“While the Regional Housing Partnership has made strides, we recognized that this is a critical issue for our community and we were interested in working together to support progress toward the community goal,” says Sarah Harrison, Vice President of Programs at Community Foundation Boulder County.*

In February 2025, the Foundation hosted a meeting to help partners better understand the landscape of housing services provided by the county’s municipal governments and nonprofit organizations. “Participants had rich discussions about the services and opportunities for alignment in our community,” Harrison says.

The Foundation is also using its discretionary funds to provide community education, support cross-sector relationship building, and advance affordable housing solutions in Boulder County.



## CONSIDER THIS:

# What public offices and nonprofit organizations can you bring together to boost collaboration on economic mobility?

## The Partners

Important partners striving to promote economic mobility through housing in Boulder County include:

- Boulder County Regional Housing Partnership, which is made up of [ten jurisdictions](#) that signed a resolution supporting the Regional Housing Strategy and its 12% goal: Boulder County, City of Boulder, Jamestown, Town of Erie, City of Lafayette, City of Longmont, City of Louisville, Lyons, Town of Nederland, and Town of Superior
- [Boulder County Housing Authority](#)
- [Family Resource Network Regional Council](#), made up of 20 representatives from nonprofit organizations and local governments
- [Homeless Solutions for Boulder County](#), a public-private partnership among county and local governments and nonprofits that serve people experiencing homelessness

## The Journey

Public and private leaders throughout the county have long agreed that Boulder County needs more diverse housing options. The county's Regional Housing Strategy came out of a process that involved public officials and community members from the county and nine towns and cities committed to increasing their stock of affordable housing to meet the shared goal of 12% affordable housing.

While participating in the EMAN Intermediate Cohort, the Foundation and its partners took stock of community assets and gaps. The Regional Housing Strategy is a key asset, as are high-performing local school districts, post-secondary pathways to local community colleges and universities, and residents' interest in having an affordable community.

Topping the list of things the community needs to support overall economic mobility were affordable housing, land on which to build housing, childcare openings, affordable childcare, and strong public transportation infrastructure.

“Being part of the EMAN Cohort was incredibly encouraging. It sparked new ideas, new talking points, and new ways to rebuild trust—and most importantly, it reminded me how powerful creative problem-solving becomes when we work in true partnership. EMAN showed that none of us have to innovate alone.”

**Susana Lopez-Baker**

*Executive Director, Boulder County Housing Authority*

The Boulder County team also recognized the need for stronger connections between the public sector and the nonprofits that support the housing ecosystem.

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*“Family resource centers, nonprofit housing developers, organizations that support economic growth for families, and organizations that support those experiencing homelessness have a key role to play in helping the county meet its housing affordability goal,” Harrison says.*

## Wins So Far

- The Foundation provided leadership and funding to ensure community input was at the center of Boulder County’s decisions on how to distribute its \$64 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding. By engaging with the community, the steering committee that advises the county on funding decisions identified three focus areas that mattered

to residents: affordable housing, economic mobility, and mental health.

- The City of Boulder allocated \$3 million of its ARPA funding to Elevate Boulder, a pilot universal basic income program that was the second of its kind in Colorado. It paid \$500 a month to 200 low-income Boulder households for two years.
- In 2023, Boulder County residents approved Ballot Issue 1B to fund affordable and attainable housing and related support services.

## What’s Next

- In 2026, the Foundation will set aside \$5.5 million for affordable housing in communities affected by the devastating 2021 Marshall Fire.
- The Foundation is organizing a collective impact workshop for members of the Regional Housing Partnership. It will be facilitated by EMAN technical assistance provider [FSG](#), experts in systems change.



### CONSIDER THIS:

**Does your area have a bold goal for economic mobility? If not, how will you set one? If so, how will you reach it?**

# Why Economic Mobility Matters



No matter where you live or what background you come from, we all want—and deserve—to build a better future for ourselves, our families, and our neighbors.

But not everyone in every community has the same access to quality education, good life-sustaining jobs, housing they can afford in the places they want to live, a safe environment, and civic participation and justice.

“True economic mobility comes when communities work together to remove barriers and create pathways for people to succeed. The EMAN community foundations and their partners are showing how local leadership, collaboration, and trust can create lasting change for everyone.”

**Mary L. Thomas**  
*President and CEO, CFLeads*

CFLeads utilizes [Urban Institute's three-part definition](#) and defines economic mobility as the ability of people to improve their economic status, have power and autonomy over their lives, and be engaged in and valued by their community.

To communities, economic mobility means that people are able to put food on the table and have more time to spend with their kids or doing things they love. It means kids have good education options, and adults can build generational wealth through buying a home, leave a legacy, and retire comfortably. It means people feel at home in their community, can find good jobs there, and have the power to shape a brighter future for everyone who lives there.

Economic mobility means people have enough, however they define it.

## CFLeads Economic Mobility Action Network (EMAN)

Community foundations catalyze change and are trusted place-based partners who work across the nonprofit, public, and private sectors to create thriving communities where all people can prosper.

In that spirit, from September 2024 to October 2025, CFLeads brought together 19 communities to learn from each other as they worked to boost economic mobility over the long term.

The 19 community foundations represented in EMAN are leading the way toward economic mobility by engaging residents, sharing data, working across sectors, marshalling resources, and shaping public policy.

## How will YOU advance economic mobility in your community?

Start your journey by learning more about [CFLeads' work on this issue](#) and exploring economic mobility resources from Urban Institute, Results for America, and Opportunity Insights.