

EMAN INTERMEDIATE COHORT

CFLeads Economic Mobility Action Network Case Study

Building hope, economic mobility, and wealth in Greater Pittsburgh, PA

It's a time of hope in Pittsburgh, PA, and surrounding Allegheny County. This metro area of 1.2 million people, once known as the City of Steel, boasts a remade, diversified economy with advances in tech, robotics, education, medicine, professional services and manufacturing that's stabilizing its population and strengthening its quality of life.



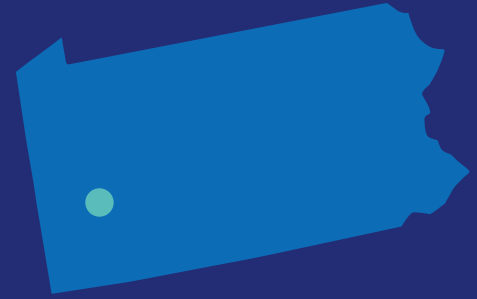
Leaders across the region recognize that it can reach greater potential if everyone has equal opportunity to participate in its economic restructuring. Nearly 11% of households live in poverty in Pittsburgh. Of those, 76% are headed by single mothers and 70% are black households in persistent, high-need communities. Helping families realize a better future and move from surviving to thriving will require partners in Pittsburgh and Allegheny County to prioritize scaling regional models of economic mobility and wealth building.

Local organizations are gathering data, engaging families, and designing strategies to include innovative, human service partnerships that help residents grow their wages, own homes, pursue entrepreneurship and build wealth. In this way, the Pittsburgh region is working toward solutions that remove obstacles and respond to families' real needs.

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

CFLeads

Community Foundations
Leading Change



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION:

The Pittsburgh Foundation

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES USED:

Engaging residents, commissioning and sharing local data, working across sectors

SUMMARY:

Partners in Allegheny County, PA, aim to close the racial wealth gap. To get there, they're committed to accelerating the economic mobility of black women and single mothers.



“To effectively unlock economic mobility opportunities in southwestern Pennsylvania, the strong partnership in our region of nonprofits, civic leaders, and policymakers is clearing barriers for individuals and families to build wealth. People deserve chances to achieve stability and create generational gains. Creating more opportunity will help establish a region where everyone has the chance to thrive.”

Lisa Schroeder
CEO, The Pittsburgh Foundation

The Vision

“Reducing the County’s wealth gap is a priority of our coalition of partners across the region,” says Joshua Devine, Economic Mobility Officer for The Pittsburgh Foundation. “Our nonprofit sector is partnering and collaborating with funders, civic leaders, elected officials and their teams, and more to remove barriers to economic mobility and support people on a pathway to building generational wealth over time.”

The Strategy

Partners in Pittsburgh are leaning into the pillars of the Foundation’s five-year strategic plan, which launched in 2023 and aims to create a vibrant, equitable, and just Pittsburgh region that helps everyone—regardless of

race, identity, or circumstance—thrive and fulfill their potential. Economic mobility is a philanthropic priority of the plan, and the Foundation is committed to supporting upward mobility for low-income families using data, best practices, and investment strategies that enable the wide adoption of solutions.

The EMAN Challenge

The Pittsburgh team entered the EMAN Intermediate Cohort wanting to identify and build up the supports and interventions that could break down barriers to mobility for female and unmarried heads of households in Allegheny County. They focused on:

1. Exploring data-driven financial mobility frameworks that could help identify challenges, evaluate opportunities, and assess impact
2. Identifying and investing in financial supports and mobility supporting the most vulnerable households
3. Brainstorming how to maximize policy and advocacy to achieve these goals.

How The Pittsburgh Foundation Is Leveraging a Community Leadership Approach

The Pittsburgh Foundation is **engaging residents, commissioning and sharing local data, and working across sectors.**

In 2025, the Foundation developed a participatory evaluation process, inviting three of the region’s premiere organizations with differing yet connected financial readiness models (the Design Team) into its data and funding decision making. This six-month engagement included lived-experience perspectives from residents benefiting from their programs:

- Allegheny County Housing Authority, an affordable housing owner and manager that runs a family self-sufficiency program

- Neighborhood Allies, a community development organization whose Financial Empowerment Center provides coaching and counseling
- Catapult Greater Pittsburgh an economic development catalyst that supports entrepreneurship, home ownership, and community development

Together, the group has established community-informed indicators to measure the pace of mobility for female, unmarried heads of households. They've developed a six-cluster strategy to evaluate interventions and ensure barriers to families' economic mobility are addressed. They've curated innovative ideas for collaboration between financial service, workforce, housing, and continuum-of-care partners to facilitate funding that responds to gaps and opportunities in program and service design and delivery.



CONSIDER THIS:

Who would you bring together to map out barriers to economic mobility in your community and ways to address them?

The Partners

Important partners in the work in Allegheny County include:

- [City of Pittsburgh](#)
- [Allegheny County](#)
- [Catapult Greater Pittsburgh](#)
- [Neighborhood Allies](#)
- [Allegheny County Housing Authority](#)
- [The Pittsburgh Foundation](#)

The Journey

As part of its 2023 strategic plan, the Foundation made economic mobility one of its five grantmaking pillars. The portfolio supports programs and system interventions that help people build wealth through homeownership, entrepreneurship, post-secondary education, and career advancement.

During the EMAN Intermediate Cohort, the Foundation launched the Design Team to bring together their region's most prominent financial readiness initiatives.

“Considering how large our economic grantmaking area is, we’ve used ‘financial readiness’ as a proxy for economic mobility,” Devine says. “This narrow focus has allowed us to examine more closely the data and metrics that most align to wealth building, as well as the programs directly serving female, unmarried heads of households.”

The Pittsburgh Team used several of EMAN's technical assistance resources to support the Design Team, including Urban Institute's Upward Mobility Framework and Theory of Change, which enabled them to better understand how to create

pathways to economic mobility for female, unmarried heads of households in the county. They've built a stronger, more quantitative financial overview of the population, Devine says, and have worked with the community to identify what "success" looks like, which will inform how the Foundation measures impact. Working with EMAN technical assistance provider TheCaseMade, experts in will-building, and FSG Consulting, experts in collective impact, the Foundation has reframed its grantmaking criteria to focus on assets and solutions and aligned its community partnerships strategy to better collaborate with larger funders and necessary partners disconnected from existing financial intervention models.

An economic mobility readiness assessment of grantees has helped the Foundation pinpoint gaps in their work. Now, the Foundation's Board is brainstorming how to build relationships with donors, boost funding to economic mobility grantees, and strengthen connections between the Foundation's policy advocacy and its grantmaking.

Wins So Far

- Within a year of launching its strategic plan, the Foundation granted nearly \$11.7 million to nonprofits focused on creating a more vibrant, equitable and just Pittsburgh. This is 89% of its five-year goal of committing 50% of grants to those types of organizations.
- The Foundation has made 61 investments in local workforce, housing, and entrepreneurship organizations totaling \$6.95 million. These grants have helped place people in jobs at or above \$20/hour, impacted nearly 45 families and their access

“By convening the Design Team, we’re expanding our partnership table to impact more people in our community. This holds us more accountable and, importantly, increases the success of economic mobility across the region.”

Michael Yonas

*Vice President of Partnerships and Learning
The Pittsburgh Foundation*

to affordable mortgages, and facilitated 25% growth in revenue of entrepreneurs connected to local technical assistance and capital.

What's Next

- In 2026, the Foundation will hold three focus groups with clients of Design Team organizations to further refine its understanding of the system-wide access and resource navigation gaps hindering families' economic mobility.
- The Foundation will use insights from the Design Team's work to create a plan to fund and build out models addressing system inefficiencies, partner collaborations, and other resources for single women who head households and their families.



CONSIDER THIS:

What economic mobility wins will you build on this year?

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.