

EMAN ADVANCED COHORT

CFLeads Economic Mobility Action Network Case Study

Powerful collaboration lifts a community in Northeastern Pennsylvania

Scranton, PA, and surrounding Lackawanna County—an area of a little over 200,000 people—aspires to be a place where housing, transportation, and jobs are interconnected in a system that enables everyone to thrive.



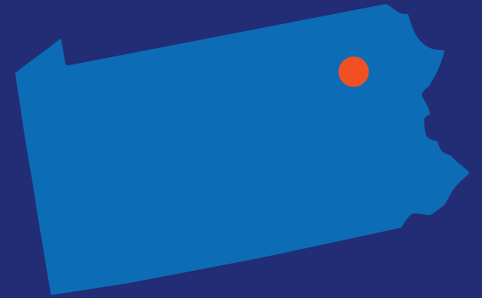
Leaders here envision more and better collaboration among government, business, nonprofit, and philanthropic partners throughout the broader region of Northeastern Pennsylvania, or NEPA. They believe taking a big picture approach to what people in their region need will lead to better, lasting solutions that don't leave anyone behind.

They're also using data to pinpoint funding strengths and gaps and to decide where to direct grants and investments so they will have the most impact.

Led by [Scranton Area Community Foundation](#), the region was part of [CFLeads](#)' Economic Mobility Action Network (EMAN) Advanced Cohort in 2024–2025.

CFLeads

Community Foundations
Leading Change



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION:

Scranton Area Community Foundation

COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES USED:

Commissioning and sharing local data and marshalling resources

SUMMARY:

Leaders in Scranton, PA, and surrounding Lackawanna County believe more and better collaboration and a big-picture approach will lead to lasting solutions that don't leave anyone behind.



“As a community foundation, we have the social capital to pull people together. Our only skin in the game is to improve life for the people of Lackawanna County.”

Vivian Williams

Vice President of Strategy, Scranton Area Community Foundation

The Vision

“The biggest pie-in-the-sky goal for us is collaboration—among the area’s governments, nonprofits, transportation and housing agencies, schools and universities, employers, and others—to make infrastructure and systemic changes easier and give everyone a better quality of life,” says Vivian Williams, Scranton Area Community Foundation’s Vice President of Strategy.

The Strategy

Scranton Area Community Foundation’s approach to its economic mobility strategy has evolved because of its involvement in EMAN, Williams says.

“We’ve moved from ‘systems thinking’ to ‘systems change,’” she says. “That means concentrating on the conditions that underly problems like transportation and housing—whether they’re policy gaps, misaligned resources, or inequitable structures—and working to shift them.”

The EMAN Challenge

The Foundation joined the EMAN Advanced Cohort with the goal of building greater regionwide collaboration and changing community leaders’ and partners’ mindsets from one of scarcity—focused on limitations and lack—to abundance mindsets that embrace possibilities, growth, and collaboration.

How Scranton Area Community Foundation Is Leveraging a Community Leadership Approach

The Scranton Area Community Foundation is **commissioning and sharing local data** it can use to **marshal resources**. With its local research partner The Institute, the Foundation commissioned a [report](#) on Northeastern Pennsylvania’s resiliency and its vulnerability to safety net funding losses, such as cuts in healthcare, housing, education, and social services.

The Foundation is also working with Denver’s Impact Finance Center on an “opportunity scan” that will pinpoint the potential to fill funding gaps, scale innovative solutions, and advance inclusive economic development through impact investing and philanthropy.

The Foundation aims to use these two reports to create pipelines for investment in critical areas such as affordable housing, workforce development, and small business growth.



CONSIDER THIS:

How might you use and share data to identify funding gaps and boost philanthropic funding and impact investments that benefit economic mobility efforts in your community?

The Partners

Important partners in the work in Lackawanna County include:

- [City of Scranton](#)
- [Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia](#)
- [Impact Finance Center](#)
- [The Institute](#), a data analysis, research, and consulting organization and partnership of 14 colleges and universities and the Northeastern Pennsylvania business community
- [NeighborWorks Northeastern Pennsylvania](#)
- [NEPA Moves](#), the region's transit initiative, convened by the Foundation
- [NEPA Thrives](#), the region's workforce development initiative, launched by the foundation
- [Moses Taylor Foundation](#)
- [The Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation](#)

The Journey

During their participation in the EMAN Advanced Cohort, leaders in Scranton say they refined the strategic framework they are using to advance economic mobility. Now, it focuses on changing systems that drive underlying causes of financial inequity and instability, rather than merely fixing problems caused by systems such as unaffordable housing and transportation barriers.

In addition, Williams' role has been reframed. Now, she serves in a strategic leadership capacity and is tasked with advancing innovation, strengthening partner alignment, and guiding how the Foundation's strategic pillars and vision support organizations working together to address regionwide challenges at scale.

Williams says that in the EMAN Advanced Cohort, she and her Lackawanna County colleagues saw and learned from the things other communities are doing to help people not only survive economically, but thrive. They also came to recognize their own accomplishments.

“We don’t give ourselves enough credit,” she says of partners in the county. “We saw things our peers were doing and said, ‘Wow! We already do that!’ Now we’re more confident in our region’s framing.”

Wins So Far

- The Foundation has experimented with impact investing by making a “gap loan” to [WRC](#), formerly Women’s Resource Center, which provides housing, counseling, crisis intervention, and other services to survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault and abuse. Because the organization relies on state and federal funding for 90% of its budget, the investment was meant to help it continue services until the new state budget passed.
- The resiliency report coauthored by the Foundation and The Institute provides a blueprint for future action. “The report has allowed us to really know how to focus on systemic thinking and how we can best serve the community in addition to the things we have been focusing on,” Williams says.

What’s Next

- Together, the resilience report and the opportunity scan will create a powerful framework for cross-sector partnerships and strategies, Williams

“Closing disparities, collaborating among systems, and reducing fracture in our responses to the issues our region faces will lead to a rising tide that really does lift all boats and benefit everyone, rather than just a few.”

Jill Avery-Stoss
President, *The Institute*

says. “We’ll be able to convene nonprofits, government, and private sector partners around a shared understanding of local challenges and opportunities. And we’ll be able to strategically direct resources toward immediate risks while also advancing long-term, systemic change.”

- The Foundation has revised its vision statement to include economic stability, community safety, opportunity, and resources. The Foundation’s leaders and staff will also continue to explore impact investing, alongside philanthropy, as a powerful tool for advancing economic mobility.



CONSIDER THIS:

What missing information could help your community bring on new partners and encourage new investments?

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.