

## EMAN INTERMEDIATE COHORT

CFLeads Economic Mobility Action Network Case Study

# Charting a unique path forward in Yellow Springs, Ohio

Outside the city of Dayton in western Ohio lies Yellow Springs, a picturesque and historic village of 3,700 people. It's a place with a lineage of civil rights activism and home to famously iconoclastic Antioch College. Yellow Springs' communal spirit is reflected in residents' 1960s decision to preserve a green belt of nature reserves surrounding their village.



That tucked-away feeling is Yellow Springs' superpower—and its kryptonite. Once a center of innovation and creativity, today Yellow Springs is one of the few towns with a downtown in Ohio's Greater Miami Valley, attracting tourists and retirees. Housing costs have risen, some employers have left, the college has shrunk, and there's little room to grow.

Leaders here want to hold onto the village's communal, artsy spirit. They're taking steps to ensure families who've lived here for generations can stay, newcomers are woven into the community fabric, diversity thrives, and the village uses its size to its advantage by supporting innovative programs to address homelessness and poverty.

Led by the [Yellow Springs Community Foundation](#), the village was part of [CFLeads](#)' Economic Mobility Action Network (EMAN) Intermediate Cohort in 2024–2025.

CFLeads

Community Foundations  
Leading Change



### COMMUNITY FOUNDATION:

The Yellow Springs Community Foundation

### COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES USED:

Working across sectors and engaging residents

### SUMMARY:

Leaders in this Ohio village are taking steps to ensure families who've lived here for generations can stay, newcomers are woven into the community fabric, diversity thrives, and the village uses its size to its advantage by supporting innovative programs to address homelessness and poverty.



Photo Credit: Reily Dixon, Yellow Springs News

“We’re small enough that we should be able to solve the problem of affordability and economic mobility. We should be able to serve our 300 families in poverty. We’ve got the resources to do it.”

**Chloe Manor**  
Programs Manager, Yellow Springs  
Community Foundation

## The Vision

*Partners in Yellow Springs envision a welcoming small-town community where neighbors are deeply engaged, people come together to support each other and their village, diversity is valued, people can choose to stay, and everyone can thrive.*

## The Strategy

Leaders in Yellow Spring are focused on expanding the village’s guaranteed income program, [YSEQUITY](#), finding ways to support affordable housing development, and ensuring those affected by poverty can build power and contribute to decision-making in the community.

## The EMAN Challenge

Yellow Springs’ EMAN partners entered the EMAN Intermediate Cohort asking what strategies and models they could use to partner with local stakeholders to advance their economic mobility strategy while building trust in the community and among the Foundation’s donors.

## How the Yellow Springs Community Foundation Is Leveraging a Community Leadership Approach

The Yellow Springs Community Foundation is **working across sectors** and **engaging residents** by facilitating community conversations, including:

- Leading negotiations for a shared agreement on the federal Low Income Housing Tax Credit application, a project that ultimately was not funded but led to stronger partnerships in the village
- Bringing nonprofit leaders together as they faced federal funding cuts
- Gathering a diverse group of business, nonprofit, and village leaders to discuss downtown building transfers, deferred maintenance, and gentrification
- Convening community leaders to discuss acquiring the local grocery store and creating a community-owned cooperative

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*“These convenings aren’t just about processing ideas about local issues and opportunities,” says Chloe Manor, the Yellow Springs Community Foundation’s Programs Manager. “They’re also about shifting resources and taking action when and where we can.”*

Another way the Foundation is **engaging residents** is its Community Action Project, launched in 2025. Villagers who have experienced poverty and housing instability will meet monthly to help shape future programming and goals of the Foundation, YSEQUITY, and the village government.



## CONSIDER THIS:

Imagine you're planning bimonthly convenings in your community for the next year. What six topics would top your list? Consult others in your community to make sure the list reflects what matters to them.



### The Partners

Among the partners working with the Yellow Springs Community Foundation on economic mobility are:

- [Yellow Springs Development Corporation](#)
- [The Baseline Institute](#), a consulting firm that advances community power building
- Yellow Springs Village Council and the Village Manager
- The Community Outreach Department of the Village of Yellow Springs

Among the village's 120 or so nonprofits, the Foundation regularly works with about three dozen, including emergency funds.

### The Journey

*“Over the past 10 years, says Executive Director Jeannamarie Cox, the Yellow Springs Community Foundation has gone from exclusively making grants to taking on the role of convener on social justice issues that had previously been the domain of Antioch College.*

With the College much smaller than before, the Foundation is stepping in to fill the gap, Cox says.

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*“Every year, we’ve done a little more,” she says. “COVID pushed us in front, and we kept building our leadership just by listening and realizing we can do it.”*

The EMAN Intermediate Cohort showed the Yellow Springs team how far ahead they were as a small town that has long focused on social justice within its borders, but also the limits of data for a village like theirs. For example, says Angie Hsu, a Yellow Springs Community Foundation Board Member and newly elected member of the Village Council, when the Urban Institute presented its [Upward Mobility Dashboard](#) to the Intermediate Cohort, Yellow Springs did not show up in the search bar. The village was too small to be included in the tool listing 24 factors that predict economic mobility in communities.

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*“We realized we need to be creative about how we collect that information ourselves,” Hsu says. “Not all national resources are applicable to us.”*

The EMAN cohort also shaped the Yellow Springs' Community Action Project, and the Foundation is using its EMAN stipend to pay participants for each meeting they attend.

“As a small place, we’re asking ourselves, ‘How do we not get bogged down by all the things we aren’t?’ Instead, we want to lean into the sense of neighbors taking care of each other in deep, meaningful ways that systems have failed to do.”

Angie Hsu

Board Member, Yellow Springs Community Foundation, and Village Councilmember

## Wins So Far

- YSEQUITY, which pays low and moderate-income residents \$300 a month for two years, is the second guaranteed income program in Ohio, and Yellow Springs is the only U.S. small town to have such a program. With 75 people having benefited so far, Manor says, “Everybody who lives here knows people who are or have been in the program, even if they don’t necessarily know they’re participants. That’s a big deal.”
- When Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, benefits were in jeopardy during 2025’s federal government shut down, “Responding did not overwhelm us,” Hsu says, “because we have been doing so much work in the last few years and since COVID to [provide food relief](#) and map out all the different organizations and resources. It’s a real safety net, now, not a one-off.”

## What’s Next

- The Yellow Springs partners are focusing on building trust in the community and communicating more strategically about the ways economic mobility benefits all villagers.
- They’re working with the University of Pennsylvania’s [Center for Guaranteed Income Research](#) on a paper studying the impact of YSEQUITY, and they’ve set an ambitious goal to extend the program to all eligible households within the next decade. That effort will include launching a capital campaign to fund the program and adding asset-building for low-income families to its goals.



### CONSIDER THIS:

**Create a map of all the organizations in your community that help people when they are in crisis—and after.**

# 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.