

Creating Pathways to Stability, Mobility, and Prosperity for District Residents

The DC Upward Mobility Project is an interagency initiative from the District of Columbia Government to increase upward economic mobility and make pathways to prosperity more accessible for our residents. Washington, DC, is recognized as a regional and national leader for its commitment to equity. But progress can still be made on pronounced disparities across race and ethnicity. For example, in 2019, Black residents were three times more likely than white residents to experience poverty; Latinx and Asian residents were about twice as likely.¹

In early 2021, the District government was selected for the inaugural Upward Mobility Cohort, hosted by the Urban Institute. Eight counties were selected from nearly 30 applicants for this new program. The DC Upward Mobility team worked with agency and community partners to develop an inventory of District mobility programs, identify key mobility metrics, and establish a new Stability-Mobility-Prosperity framework to guide program alignment.

The DC Upward Mobility Project focuses on three priority policy areas: housing, financial well-being, and workforce development and adult education. Building on existing District agency efforts, this work produced a cross-agency Mobility Action Plan that will align District programs and improve the systems that help residents achieve greater financial security, stronger self-determination, and deeper connections to the community.

WASHINGTON, DC, GOALS

HOUSING

All residents live in safe, stable housing that is large enough for their family and affordable for their income.

FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

All residents have a financial safety net that enables them to navigate financial emergencies while building wealth over their lifetimes.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND ADULT EDUCATION

All residents have access to the education and training they need to obtain careers with family-sustaining wages.

¹ Estimate from the 2019 5-year American Community Survey.

WHO'S GUIDING THIS WORK

To reach the project's goals, the District worked with community-based organizations, affected residents, and District agencies. Insights from these partners helped identify obstacles and opportunities to orient work that will help more residents overcome barriers to prosperity.

OPPORTUNITIES TO BOOST UPWARD MOBILITY IN THE DISTRICT

Using the Urban Institute's [Mobility Metrics](#) for the District and other local data, the DC Upward Mobility Project decided to initially focus on the policy areas of housing, financial well-being, and workforce development and adult education. The project brought together core agencies that lead policy and program development within these realms. Many other policy areas, such as public health and transportation, are important to a resident's upward mobility, and the District will continue to incorporate relevant programs across these policy areas to promote a more holistic and accessible experience for residents.

This project identified opportunities to advance upward mobility within the three focus areas. For example, the District does not have enough housing to meet the needs of all people who want to live here. As a result, many residents with lower incomes have problems finding housing they can afford, because people with higher incomes drive up the price of limited housing.

Further, many residents with lower incomes face challenges to their financial well-being. For example, in 2019, the median income for Black households in the District was about one-third of the median income for white households.² In the same year, median incomes for Latinx and Asian households in the District were about two-thirds of the median income for white households.³ These differences mean that many people of color in the District face persistent challenges, such as paying for housing, saving for emergencies, and preparing for retirement.

Finally, many residents who would benefit from workforce development and adult education programs face barriers to success. These include problems with reading and math proficiency, computer skills, internet access, transportation access, child care, and English-language proficiency.

WHAT WE ARE ALREADY DOING

The District has one of the nation's most robust housing toolkits, with resources aimed at supporting affordable housing production, affordable housing preservation, homeownership, and long-term resident stability. Since 2015, the District has made major investments to support this toolkit, including \$1.4 billion dollars for its [Housing Production Trust Fund](#), which has produced more than 6,000 units of dedicated affordable housing. Other programs in the District's housing toolkit include down-payment assistance to help residents with low and moderate incomes buy homes, inclusionary zoning that requires that up to 12.5 percent of units in new apartment buildings are

² Estimate from the 2019 5-year American Community Survey.

³ Estimate from the 2019 5-year American Community Survey.

permanently affordable, and locally funded housing vouchers that help the District's lowest-income residents find housing.

To overcome barriers to financial well-being, the District offers one of the only [Temporary Assistance for Needy Families](#) programs that does not limit how long benefits can be received. The District also has a \$15 minimum wage that grows automatically with inflation and one of the largest state [earned income tax credit](#) programs, both of which help residents make and keep more money. These programs align with financial navigators, direct cash transfers, Baby Bonds, and incentivized savings programs to help residents meet their financial goals over the long term.

Finally, the District has high-impact workforce development programs, such as its [Infrastructure Academy](#), on-the-job training, and paid apprenticeships. Innovative work is under way to better connect residents' education needs with workforce development opportunities by creating a seamless handoff between adult education and workforce development programs. These programs align with the District's summer youth employment program, its community college, and the University of the District of Columbia to prepare residents for good jobs.

AN UPDATED FRAMEWORK FOR BOOSTING UPWARD MOBILITY IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

The District established a guiding framework for the DC Upward Mobility Project that highlights the progression from stabilization to economic prosperity using the following definitions:

- **Stability:** Programs that provide emergency support and address basic services following an emergency or life event.
- **Mobility:** Programs that advance residents toward greater economic autonomy and dignity.
- **Prosperity:** When residents reach their personal and financial goals.

POLICY AREA: HOUSING

EXAMPLES

STABILITY PROGRAM	STABILITY OUTCOME	MOBILITY PROGRAM
Rapid rehousing; youth homeless services; emergency shelter	Achieve and maintain stable safe housing	Housing vouchers; DC Flex; Home Purchase Assistance Program; and the Employer-Assisted Housing Program

Prosperity goal: All residents live in safe, stable housing that is large enough for their family and affordable for their income.

POLICY AREA: FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

STABILITY PROGRAM	STABILITY OUTCOME	MOBILITY PROGRAM
Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance for Women, Infants and Children; financial navigators	Save for predictable expenses and potential emergencies	Direct cash transfers; opportunity accounts; Bank on DC

Prosperity goal: All residents have a financial safety net that enables them to navigate financial emergencies while building wealth over their lifetimes.

POLICY AREA: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT AND ADULT EDUCATION

STABILITY PROGRAM	STABILITY OUTCOME	MOBILITY PROGRAM
Project Empowerment; Summer Youth Employment Program	Attain a job that meets basic living costs	Career Mobility Action Plan program; Career Coach DC; DC Futures; DC Infrastructure Academy; Supported Employment program

Prosperity goal: All residents have access to the education and training they need to obtain careers with family-sustaining wages.

WHAT WE CAN DO GOING FORWARD

The District and its partners identified the following key approaches to improve resident outcomes:

- Improving the resident experience of District programs
- Aligning programs that help residents achieve stability and mobility toward prosperity
- Measuring progress for upward mobility
- Evaluating program effectiveness to improve resident outcomes

Specific improvements from these approaches include refining the District's website to help residents find programs more easily, setting District-wide resident economic mobility goals as part of the next update to the District's economic strategy, and enhancing program evaluation.

MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

The District's Mobility Action Plan introduces an updated approach to boosting mobility from poverty in the District. The approach recognizes that by closely aligning systems and programs for housing, financial well-being, and workforce development and adult education, the District and its partners can unlock new opportunities for residents to achieve upward mobility. The action plan will be implemented by the government and its partners, which will track progress, make connections to related work, and collect stakeholder feedback.

The District's Mobility Action Plan and data dashboard is available on upwardmobility.dc.gov.