

PENNSYLVANIA

PHILADELPHIA

Strengthening City Government to Achieve Upward Mobility Outcomes for Philadelphians

The Philadelphia Upward Mobility Project is an interagency initiative of the Philadelphia city government intended to alleviate poverty and provide more opportunities for upward mobility for Philadelphia residents. Through this project, Philadelphia will focus on strengthening four key systems behind our antipoverty work: community engagement, data management, performance evaluation, and coordinated benefits-access strategies.

A VISION FOR UPWARD MOBILITY

Philadelphia strives to be a city where every resident is healthy, is safe, and has economic prosperity and a good quality of life. We aim to be an equitable city that eliminates the barriers to health, safety, and connectedness that exist based on race and ethnicity, disability status, age, and gender identity.

KEY STAKEHOLDERS

The Philadelphia Upward Mobility Project, led by the Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity and the Division of Housing and Community Development, engaged key stakeholders from across city government and from nonprofit and community-based organization partners to analyze data on barriers to mobility, conduct community engagement activities, and develop strategic actions that could boost mobility from poverty and eliminate racial disparities in the city. These stakeholders include Department of Planning and Development; the

PHILADELPHIA GOALS

Expand the city's data-management operations.

Strengthen departmental capacity for person-centered evaluations of upward mobility program performance

Improve the quality of equitable community engagement.

Expand benefits access and departmental collaboration around service delivery.

Mayor's Office of Education; the Office of Homeless Services; the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; several other agencies within the city government; and external partners JEVS Human Services, Clarifi, and the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC).

UPWARD MOBILITY INSIGHTS

To understand the current structural barriers in Philadelphia that block people with low incomes and people of color from achieving prosperity, the Upward Mobility Project conducted several rounds of information-gathering and data analysis. We began by analyzing the Urban Institute's [Mobility Metrics](#) for Philadelphia, then we gathered additional local administrative data and assembled an inventory of plans and programs in operation or recently proposed in Philadelphia to learn more about the current state of initiatives and gaps in services. Next, we convened key stakeholders within and outside of government and conducted community engagement with individuals in reentry—a key population that faces upward mobility challenges—to learn more about the specific challenges they face in accessing housing. Finally, we participated in a training on equity-centered performance-management practices. Based on these efforts, the Upward Mobility project gathered the following key insights about barriers to mobility in each of the project's four priority policy domains:

- **Housing:** The current supply of affordable housing in Philadelphia is gravely insufficient, particularly for extremely-low income households. Further, well over half of low-income renter households, and two-thirds of extremely-low income renter households, are housing cost burdened, meaning they spend over 50 percent of their income on rent. Current Philadelphia residents are struggling to find safe and affordable housing in Philadelphia. Philadelphia's current community engagement with individuals in reentry about their housing needs is revealing the significant barriers they face in accessing safe, affordable housing. More details on those findings will be released later in 2022.
- **Financial well-being:** Over half of Philadelphia residents living in predominantly nonwhite zip codes have debt in collections, compared with less than a quarter of residents living in majority non-Hispanic white zip codes. Black and Hispanic households who may be slightly above income limits for benefits programs but who have significant household debt are at a disadvantage, and Philadelphia should acknowledge this benefits cliff when structuring programs.
- **Neighborhoods:** Philadelphia has high rates of income segregation relative to comparison cities. About 35 percent of residents experiencing poverty live in high-poverty neighborhoods. This rate is worse for Black and Hispanic residents. Philadelphia must consider this when determining where investments are made so we can boost the availability and quality of amenities, goods, and services.

- **Work:** Philadelphia continues to struggle with a higher unemployment rate than the nation and peer cities. In 2018, only 74.2 percent of Philadelphians ages 25 to 54 were employed. The employment rate is even worse for Black and Hispanic Philadelphians: only 67.1 percent of Black Philadelphians and 63.9 percent of Hispanic Philadelphians ages 25 to 54 were employed in 2018.

The Kenney administration and leaders in the City Council have long recognized these challenges, and together they have produced several plans over the past six years that recommend policies and programs to advance inclusive neighborhood growth, expand housing programs, create job and workforce development programs, and spur an equitable economic recovery. For this Upward Mobility project, Philadelphia recommends four key strategic actions that we believe would strengthen our ability to implement the recommendations in those plans and achieve more equitable outcomes for Philadelphians.

KEY STRATEGIC ACTIONS

EXPAND THE CITY'S DATA-MANAGEMENT OPERATIONS

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Strong and effective data collection and management as well as use of person-level data can help us to solve the challenges that our residents face in accessing program and services. Expanding and improving the city's data management operations will help us design better, more targeted programming and to monitor implementation more closely.

STRENGTHEN DEPARTMENTAL CAPACITY FOR PERSON-CENTERED EVALUATION OF UPWARD MOBILITY PROGRAMMING

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Philadelphia currently operates many policies and programs aimed at boosting upward mobility and addressing the causes and conditions of poverty. To know whether they are having the intended effect on upward mobility, Philadelphia must strengthen its ability to evaluate our current programs, with a focus on measuring their impact on residents' outcomes.

IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EQUITABLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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Intentional and meaningful community engagement will allow city government to have a greater impact on upward mobility from poverty by helping us (1) better understand community challenges and how they affect people in different ways, (2) build trust and civic infrastructure within communities, and (3) generate solutions from people closest to the problems.

EXPAND BENEFITS ACCESS AND DEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION AROUND SERVICE DELIVERY

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Philadelphia can continue leading locally by growing its benefits access work, modernizing our technology, streamlining systems, and advocating for similar efforts at the state and federal level.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Following the completion of Philadelphia's Mobility Action Plan, we anticipate the following next steps:

- The release of a detailed report describing what we learned from our community engagement with Philadelphians in reentry about their housing needs and challenges, and recommendations on how the four strategic actions in this plan can be applied to those learnings to strengthen housing stability for Philadelphians in reentry, who face significant barriers to upward mobility.
- Exploration of how to coordinate and align Philadelphia's ongoing work to create department-level racial equity strategies with these strategic actions.
- Discussions with key city leaders on the resources, technical assistance, and capacity that would be needed to implement the four key strategic actions, including which departments are well-positioned to lead pilot projects.