

BOOSTING UPWARD MOBILITY

# A PLANNING GUIDE FOR LOCAL ACTION

# Table of Contents

01

## Introduction

- 02 Who Is this Guide For?
- 02 How Can You Use This Guide?
- 04 How Did We Develop this Guide?

05

## Our Approach to Upward Mobility

- 06 Familiarize Yourself with Our Framework for Boosting Mobility and Advancing Equity
- 10 Get Acquainted with Our Planning Principles
- 11 Consider the Various Actors Needed for Collaboration
- 14 Understand the Key Components of a Mobility Action Plan

17

## Use Mobility Metrics to Surface Insights

- 17 Learn How We Developed Our Mobility Metrics
- 21 Access the Mobility Metrics for Your Municipality
- 21 Make Note of Preliminary Insights
- 23 Compare Your Data with Data from Other Jurisdictions
- 25 Supplemental Materials

29

## Ensure Your Local Government Is Ready to Undertake This Work

- 30 Gain Commitment from Local Government Leadership
- 30 Prepare to Engage Cross-Sector Partners across Policy Domains
- 31 Ensure Sufficient Organizational Capacity
- 32 Determine Whether Your Organizational Culture Can Support Large-Scale Change

32 Help Leadership Gain Staff Buy-In across Departments

33 Confirm a Shared Desire among Government Staff to Build a Shared Understanding of Structural Racism and Racial Equity

34 Identify the Skills and Capacities Necessary for Data Gathering and Analysis

34 Dedicate Resources for Deep and Meaningful Community Engagement

35 Commit to Ongoing Learning and Improvement

35 Assess Your Readiness to Act

37 Supplemental Materials

45

## Build Your Coalition for Systems Change

47 Assemble the Management Team

50 Identify Key Stakeholder Partners

54 Identify Champions

55 Make the Request

56 Launch the Mobility Coalition

60 Supplemental Materials

69

## Develop an Initial Understanding of Local Mobility Conditions

69 Review Your Local Mobility Metrics as a Coalition

70 Identify and Collect Supplemental Data Sources

74 Analyze Your Supplemental Quantitative Data

78 Supplemental Materials

81

## Build a Fuller Picture of Mobility Conditions in Your Community

- 82 Break the Mobility Coalition into Smaller Working Groups
- 83 Collect Qualitative Information through Stakeholder Engagement
- 83 Collect Qualitative Information through Community Engagement
- 88 Gather Other Qualitative Data to Understand the Systems and Prevailing Narratives in Your Community
- 92 Draft an Initial Summary of Upward Mobility Findings
- 92 Follow Up with Community Members to Share the Upward Mobility Findings
- 93 Write the Relevant Components of Your Mobility Action Plan
- 94 Make a Plan for Sustaining Engagement with the Community
- 99 Supplemental Materials

114

## Determine Your Strategic Actions

- 115 Review and Discuss the Final Upward Mobility Findings as a Coalition
- 116 Develop A Community Vision Statement
- 116 Create Your Theory of Change
- 117 Develop a Systems Change Logic Model
- 129 Seek Review and Approval of Your MAP Logic Model
- 130 Write the Relevant Components of Your Mobility Action Plan
- 132 Supplemental Materials

155

## Develop Your Measurement Plan and Consider Sustainability

- 155 Develop Your Measurement Plan
- 160 Reengage the Community
- 161 Establish Processes for Reporting and Accountability
- 162 Consider Sustainability
- 164 Make a Plan for Continuous Learning and Evaluation
- 164 Write the Relevant Components of Your MAP
- 166 Supplemental Materials

170

## Finalize and Release Your Mobility Action Plan

- 170 Determine the Format of Your Final MAP
- 171 Make a Plan for Releasing your MAP Publicly
- 172 Ensure Your Messaging Is Engaging and Appropriate
- 173 Release Your MAP!

175

## Sustain Momentum

- 176 Report on Early Wins
- 176 Build on Your Foundation
- 176 Protect the Work from Political Cycles
- 177 Support Continuous Community Engagement
- 177 Demonstrate the Need for Sustained Funding

## STEP ONE



# Learn about Our Approach to Boosting Mobility and Advancing Equity

The first step in the Mobility Action Planning process is familiarizing yourself with our approach, which includes three main elements: (1) the **Framework for Boosting Mobility and Advancing Equity**—the core knowledge base around which this work is focused—which (a) presents key pillars and predictors of upward mobility and a broad definition of mobility that includes measures of economic success, power and autonomy, and belonging and (b) centers racial equity; (2) **planning principles** that will help you and your team stay focused on critical aspects of boosting upward mobility; and (3) recommendations for a set of **actors** to engage in order to develop a full and nuanced understanding of barriers to mobility and identify the right solutions for overcoming those barriers.

Having a shared approach helps focus and strengthen collective action for boosting mobility from poverty and advancing equity. Throughout this guide, we will help you harness and apply our approach to your Mobility Action Planning. This approach will help you

- **champion** evidence-informed systems change that will remove barriers blocking upward mobility and equity;
- **engage partners** who are committed to this work for the long haul;
- **change the narrative** on poverty in your community;
- **identify a set of comprehensive solutions** that respond to the root causes of inequities and the full range of a community's needs and assets;
- **build your and your partners' capacity** to track progress over time and adjust your work as needed; and
- **stay focused** on your goals and hold yourself and your partners accountable for action.

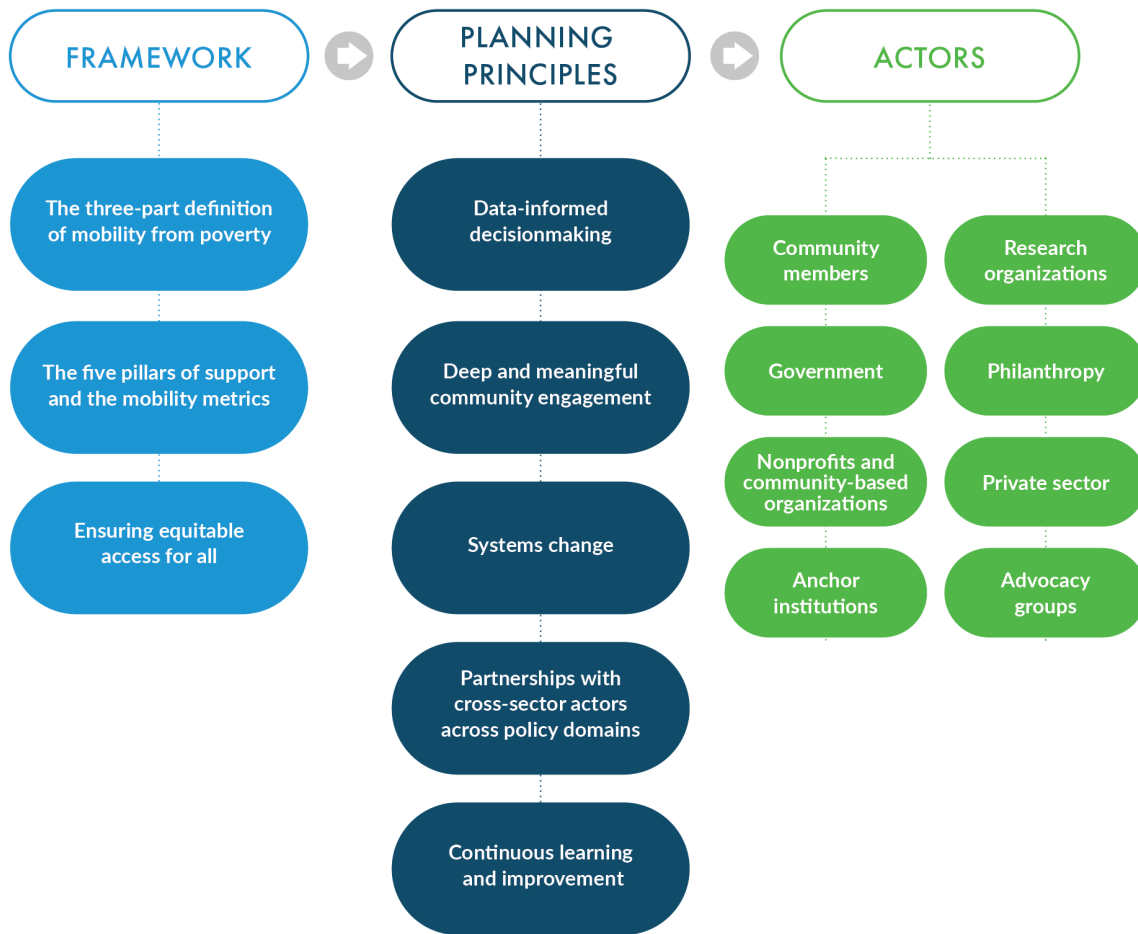


Figure 1: Our Approach for Boosting Mobility and Advancing Equity.

## Step 1.1 Familiarize Yourself with Our Framework for Boosting Mobility and Advancing Equity

The Framework for Boosting Mobility and Advancing Equity is the core knowledge base around which this work is focused. It was developed by distinguished scholars and Urban Institute researchers, field-tested by people working in local governments across the country, and updated to more explicitly center racial equity and the local systems that either block or boost the efforts of individuals and families to achieve mobility. The framework has three key elements, based on a deep foundation of research and evidence. These elements will be referenced in **bolded, light-blue font** throughout this guide.

The first element of the framework is the **three-part definition of mobility from poverty**, advanced by the US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty. This definition holds that meaningful and sustainable mobility from poverty requires movement across three mutually reinforcing dimensions: **economic success, power and autonomy, and being valued in community**

**Economic success:** Having rising income and assets.

**Power and autonomy:** Having control over one’s life, the ability to make choices, and the collective capacity to influence larger policies and actions that affect one’s future.

**Being valued in community:** Feeling the respect, dignity, and sense of belonging that come from contributing to one’s community.

## UPWARD MOBILITY PREDICTORS

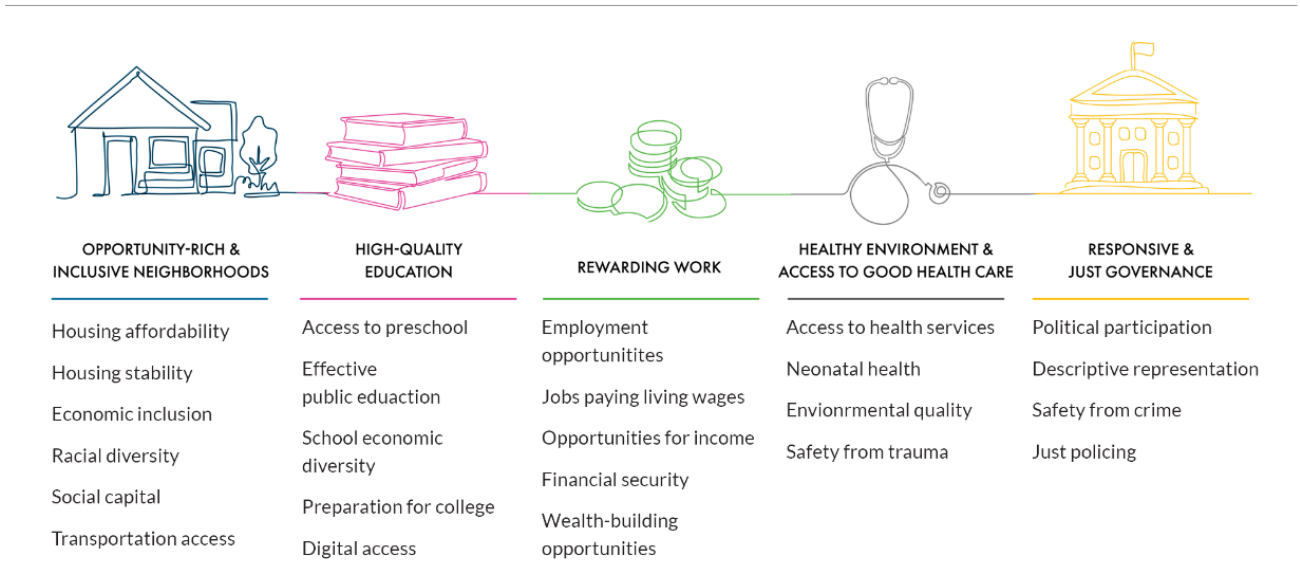


Figure 2: The Framework for Boosting Mobility and Advancing Equity.

The three dimensions of this definition are inseparable. In other words, work that serves only to promote new economic opportunities but does not consider how to increase power/autonomy and belonging among residents with low incomes may not sufficiently boost mobility from poverty and advance equity. Similarly, work that seeks to engage residents in decisionmaking but does not also consider whether they can financially afford to participate or are positioned to benefit from the outcomes may not effectively boost mobility from poverty or advance equity.



The national **Educare** early childhood program is an example of a program that promotes all three dimensions of upward mobility. Providing families with steady, reliable, year-round child care may increase labor force participation and, as a result, increase household income. The program also supports the capacity of primary caregivers to cope with stress and exercise increased agency by taking parents through goal-setting activities and training them to tell their stories. Finally, the program helps parents and children feel valued in their community because it creates informal networks for building social capital. To see an analysis of other programs that promote all three dimensions of mobility from poverty, see [Boosting Upward Mobility from Poverty: Exemplars](#).

The second element of the framework is actually a group of three elements: the **Five Pillars of Support**, **the Predictors**, and the **Mobility Metrics**. Local communities aspiring to boost upward mobility and narrow equity gaps should focus on building or bolstering five essential and interconnected pillars of support that families and individuals need to achieve economic success, power, and dignity.

The Five Pillars of Support are as follows:

**Opportunity-rich and inclusive neighborhoods:** Inclusive and well-resourced neighborhoods play a central role in shaping families' stability, their access to social and economic opportunities, and their children's chances to thrive and succeed. Neighborhoods are where children experience critical stages of socioemotional and physical development, where social ties form, and where people access resources and life opportunities (Minh et al. 2017). The ability to find and afford quality housing, to feel welcomed and respected in one's community and social circles, and to have equitable access to local resources all reflect essential aspects of an inclusive neighborhood.

**High-quality education:** Education—from prekindergarten through postsecondary—provides a crucial avenue to economic and social mobility. High-quality preschool programs, elementary schools, and high schools boost academic achievement, college enrollment, and adult success (McCoy et al. 2017). Schools also provide children and teens with networks of friends, peers, and mentors, helping to shape their social identity and feeling of belonging (Grusky, Hall, and Markus 2019). And adults can continue to build skills and credentials throughout life, expanding their prospects for upward mobility (Baum, Ma, and Payea 2013).

**Rewarding work:** Jobs and wages constitute the primary source of income and economic security for most people in the US today. Steady work enables people to gain skills and experience so they can advance to higher-paying jobs, building both income and wealth to support their families and boost their children's prospects (Chenevert and Litwok 2013; Mincer 1975). Work can contribute to one's sense of personal autonomy and power and provide feelings of accomplishment and dignity. Reliable income and sufficient savings enable people to better weather life's inevitable challenges and disruptions and to provide a stable and supportive home for their children (Lerman and McKernan 2008).

**Healthy environment and access to good health care:** Good and stable health helps people of all ages surmount life’s challenges, excel in school and on the job, ensure their families’ well-being, and fully participate in their communities. Environmental quality reduces people’s risk of health complications that may undermine school or work performance (Evans and Kantrowitz 2002). Access to and utilization of health services can help parents ensure their children receive basic care through critical formative years (Devoe et al. 2012) and enable adults to obtain tests needed for early detection of diseases, enhancing the likelihood of effective treatment (Ettner 1996).

**Responsive and just governance:** Governance that is attentive to the needs of all community members and residents who are deeply engaged in collective decisionmaking are hallmarks of a community that supports upward mobility (Pastor, Terriquez, and Lin 2018). A responsive local government empowers the people it serves by ensuring their concerns are addressed. By allocating resources equitably, local governments can help ensure all residents have good prospects for economic success (Hajnal and Trounstein 2010). And when public institutions that are intended to serve and protect communities act with justice and restraint, residents feel they are valued and respected members of the community (Goff et al. 2019).

Communities interested in boosting mobility from poverty and advancing equity must develop a plan that is inclusive of all five pillars. To help communities assess their baseline and measure progress along each of these pillars, a working group of distinguished scholars identified key **predictors** that are strongly associated with the five pillars—and that can be influenced by state and local policies in the near term—and a set of 26 **Mobility Metrics**. The table below highlights the primary uses of the metrics, which are covered in depth in the next step of this guide.

<b>Compare</b> ...your community’s metrics with those of peer communities so you can assess the extent of the local mobility challenge and build public support for tackling it	<b>Prioritize</b> ...mobility predictors where the community’s attention and action can have the greatest impact	<b>Highlight interconnections</b> ... among predictors from different policy domains to recruit partners and identify the roles different actors can play
<b>Set targets</b> ...for improving local mobility metrics and narrowing inequities as part of a strategy for meaningful changes in investments, policies, and practices	<b>Reveal</b> ...persistent racial inequities and the structural barriers that perpetuate them	<b>Monitor</b> ...the metrics over time, to assess your community’s progress and hold local stakeholders accountable

The third element of our framework is a focus on **ensuring equitable access to upward mobility for all, including people of color and other marginalized groups**. By now, the challenges and disadvantages faced by communities of color are more widely acknowledged in policy discussions. Here we present some key terms and definitions that we will use throughout this guide:



**Racial equity:** Racial equity is both an outcome and a process. As an outcome, racial equity is when people receive just treatment, receive fair compensation for their contributions, and can reach their maximum social and economic potential regardless of race or where they live.

As a process, we achieve racial equity by removing the structural barriers that prevent people of certain racial and ethnic groups from reaching their maximum social and economic potential and by meaningfully engaging these groups in decisionmaking.

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**Inequity:** An unfair or unjust outcome that is caused by structural or institutional policies, practices, and barriers.

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**Structural racism:** The historical and contemporary policies, practices, and norms that create and maintain the dominant position of white people in US society and perpetuate inequities among people of different races and ethnic backgrounds. The compounding effects of structural racism are why we see racial disparities in many outcomes today.

## Step 1.2 Get Acquainted with Our Planning Principles

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In addition to the core elements that underscore the necessity of undertaking this work, we also follow a set of planning principles based on our research; our experience working with actors trying to make systems change at the state, local, and federal levels; and the lived experiences of people experiencing poverty and structural racism. These principles will be referenced in **bolded, dark blue font** throughout this guide.

**Data-informed decisionmaking:** The use of data to prioritize areas of greatest need, highlight interconnections across policy domains, set targets for improvement, and monitor progress over time. The data that inform such decisionmaking can be both quantitative (for example, local administrative data, national Census data) and qualitative (for example, insights derived from community engagement focus groups or community advisory boards, surveys, or storytelling).

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**Deep and meaningful community engagement:** A process by which community members come together to reflect on and make decisions about the future of their community. When done properly, this process is accessible, fair, engaging, redistributes power, uplifts local values and knowledge, and builds trust among community members.

**Systems change:** A fundamental shift in practices, underlying values, or norms by local actors that can reshape policies, processes, relationships, and power structures and addresses the root causes of racial and economic inequities in our communities.

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**Partnerships with cross-sector actors across policy domains:** Engaging with different types of stakeholders (e.g., from the public, private, nonprofit, and philanthropic sectors) across multiple policy areas.

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**Continuous learning and improvement:** The continuous gathering and use of information to assess and reflect on progress, improve organizational practices and services, and drive better outcomes in the long run.

In addition to our planning principles, a few key assumptions underlie our overall approach. Based on our research, our experience working with actors trying to make policy change at the state, local, and federal levels and listening to people with lived experiences of poverty and structural racism, we know that boosting mobility from poverty and advancing equity cannot occur without the following:

- Addressing the root causes of inequities in our communities
- Changing the narratives about people of color and people with low incomes
- Acknowledging that systems are run by people, so efforts to shift mental models and behaviors are critical to changing systems
- Creating space for reflection and learning in performance management systems
- Investing in the capacity-building of community members and nonprofit organizations
- Being realistic about how budgets, political cycles, and public will can impact work
- Bringing about policy change at all levels of government

## Step 1.3 Consider the Various Actors Needed for Collaboration

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Although government has a primary role to play in boosting upward mobility, there is increasing recognition that other actors can bring unique resources, expertise, and social capital to this mission. Many local governments have built cross-sector, cross-policy teams to take on poverty from all sides. These actors will be referenced in **bolded, light green font** throughout this guide.

In this guide, you'll encounter various ways to work collaboratively with local leaders from some of the following groups (which are not mutually exclusive):

## Government

Your upward mobility work may include elected representatives or staff from city, county, or state government or other organizations and agencies like public school systems, housing authorities, economic development agencies, and regional planning authorities. The focus of this work is local in nature, but representatives of the federal government (for example, program managers of locally based federal programs like Choice Neighborhoods or Promise Neighborhoods) may be invited to join the work.

- Government officials can use their policy and regulatory authority to draft laws and create programs that enable systems change. They can use government resources to scale effective strategies, collect and analyze administrative data to understand how well government programs are working, and convene diverse stakeholders around particular issues.



**Community Members:** A “community” can refer to a group of people living in a specific geographic area or who share characteristics such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, faith, or political ideology. A community could also be made up of people who work for the same company, belong to the same social clubs, or attend the same school.

- Community members can cocreate policies and programs with policymakers and other stakeholders by participating in community visioning exercises and deliberative forums, sharing their lived experience and providing feedback on plans, helping collect and analyze community data, and serving on citizen panels. Community members also have the power to hold stakeholders accountable by voting in local elections, donating to campaigns, and organizing.

## Nonprofits and Community-Based Organizations

Local and national nonprofits may include charitable and direct service organizations, volunteer service organizations, labor unions, chambers of commerce, and child care organizations. They may be based around a specific issue (such as homelessness) or they may serve an intermediary role and provide technical assistance to boost the capacity of other organizations. Intermediaries are organizations that work to link groups working on the same topics or in the same geographic areas. Community-based organizations, or CBOs—such as community development corporations, community development financial institutions, social service providers, advocacy groups, and neighborhood groups—are typically structured as nonprofits and work at the local level to meet community needs.

- Nonprofits and community-based organizations can use their programmatic expertise and relationships in the community to help elevate issues of concern for residents and connect them to resources. Service-providing organizations deliver public programs and services to community members. Nonprofits that serve an intermediary role can provide training and technical assistance and conduct policy research.

### Advocacy Groups

Advocacy groups are organizations that advocate on behalf of a specific cause. Because they are typically nonprofit organizations, they may also function similarly to the nonprofit and community-based organizations listed above. Their goal is to elevate and promote policy priorities to powerful private and public actors who can draft policy and enact systems change in favor of their goals.

- Advocacy groups can help provide research on a specific policy topic. They are also helpful in building support for priorities and holding other actors accountable in following through on their commitments. They may also help develop and execute narrative change strategies.

### Philanthropies

Philanthropies are organizations that provide financial support to other organizations that is typically charitable in nature.

- Philanthropies can contribute financial support to a cause and can use their status to advocate for policy change. Through their relationships with grantees, philanthropies can encourage program evaluation and promote specific goals and outcomes. Philanthropies can also play important research and development functions by funding local pilot projects.

### Research Organizations

Research organizations include universities, think tanks, and advocacy groups that can assist with collecting and analyzing data and evaluating programs and policies.

- Research organizations can provide training and technical assistance, collect and analyze data, evaluate programs and policies, and conduct original research on a specific policy topic. Research organizations may also serve as neutral conveners that bring groups together around a specific policy topic.

### Anchor Institutions

Anchor institutions are the local for-profit and nonprofit organizations that have a significant and long-standing presence in a community, such as universities, health care systems and hospitals, financial institutions, religious organizations, and arts and cultural organizations.

- Anchor institutions can use their status in a community and their political and financial capital to support cross-sector goals. They are often major regional employers and buyers of goods and services, which gives them additional power over mobility-boosting systems. They may also play a convener role and lend financial or technical capacity to support other actors.

### Private-Sector Actors

Private-sector actors are businesses whose primary interest is in gaining profits. Their funding largely comes from investors and product sales, and they are responsive to the supply and demand requests of the market. Private-sector actors include banks, major companies, and developers.

- Private-sector actors, especially large regional employers and housing developers, can support specific policy agendas or interventions and adopt equitable business practices (for example, living-wage policies). They may also contribute financial support or other resources to supporting social causes. Private-sector actors may need to be brought in with a persuasive strategy that sells them on their value to the work and that aligns with their goals and principles, which are naturally more profit oriented.

## Step 1.4 Understand the Key Components of a Mobility Action Plan

The purpose of the planning process laid out in this guide is to help you create your MAP. The final MAP document will include the following sections:

**How we got here:** A description of the steps you took to learn about mobility conditions in your community, including why you decided to pursue the work and who has been involved.

**Summary of upward mobility findings:** A summary of the key findings from your exploratory research. The summary should be written in a narrative format that interweaves the quantitative data with the qualitative data and tells a story about how your current mobility conditions (both good and bad) were created and are sustained, who they impact most, and what outcomes they're leading to.

**Theory of change and/or logic model:** A theory of change articulates how a group believes change happens in their community or organization. It reflects a set of assumptions that connects preconditions (what you need for change to happen) to expected outcomes (the improvements you want to see in your city or county). A logic model is a tool that displays a project's inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes in a brief visual format.

**Measurement plan:** A table that includes a list of the inputs, outputs, and outcomes from your logic model with agreed-upon indicators for how you will track success and a list of sources from where you will gather this information and that assigns responsibility for who will track progress.

**Sustainability considerations:** A short section that shares how you plan to steward and sustain the actions described in the MAP, including responsible actors and the resources needed.

The content for each of these sections will come from the activities you undertake throughout the Mobility Action Planning process, which are detailed in each of the subsequent steps of this guide. For each step, as relevant, we'll include boxes like this one:

**MAP Component: How We Got Here**

to signal the relevant content from your planning process that will inform each section of your final MAP.

Now that you've become familiar with our Framework for Boosting Mobility and Advancing Equity, our planning principles, the types of actors who should be engaged in this work, and what the MAP will include, you'll want to gain an initial understanding of issues related to mobility and poverty in your own community. In the next step, you'll learn more about our Mobility Metrics and how they can help you gain an initial understanding of conditions in your community.

## STEP ONE REVIEW CHECKLIST

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- You possess a strong understanding of the Framework for Boosting Mobility and Advancing Equity, including [the three-part definition of mobility from poverty](#), [the Five Pillars of Support and the Predictors](#), and the [Mobility Metrics](#). This may require you to have read some of the additional materials linked in this section.

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- You are familiar with the five planning principles for Mobility Action Planning, including [data-informed decisionmaking](#), [deep and meaningful community engagement](#), [systems change](#), [partnerships with cross-sector actors across policy domains](#), and [continuous learning and improvement](#).

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- You understand the various types of cross-sector actors that might be engaged throughout the Mobility Action Planning process, including [government](#), [community members](#), [nonprofits and community-based organizations](#), [advocacy groups](#), [philanthropies](#), [research organizations](#), [anchor institutions](#), and [private-sector actors](#).

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- You have reviewed the types of content that will be included in your Mobility Action Plan, which will be informed by each step of this guide and should be written and released at the completion of the planning process.

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