

BOOSTING UPWARD MOBILITY

# A PLANNING GUIDE FOR LOCAL ACTION

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## STEP TWO

# Use Mobility Metrics to Surface Insights

In the previous step, you learned about Urban Institute’s Framework for Boosting Mobility and Advancing Equity. As a second step, you will learn more about our Mobility Metrics, including how we developed them, how to access them, and how to use them to gain preliminary insights about mobility issues in your community.

## Step 2.1 Learn How We Developed Our Mobility Metrics

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In Step 1, you learned that one of our recommended planning principles is **data-informed decisionmaking**. We champion the use of both quantitative and qualitative data because it can help actors prioritize areas that most need support, highlight interconnections across policy domains, set targets for improvement, and monitor progress over time. In this vein, we have developed a set of 26 evidence-based **Mobility Metrics** to help local governments track progress on mobility in their communities. **Mobility Metrics** stem from the **Five Pillars of Support**, discussed in Step 1.

The pillars were identified in 2019 by an Urban Institute working group composed of 11 distinguished scholars with expertise in economics, sociology, political science, and psychology and with diverse perspectives with respect to race, geography, policy domains, and political ideology. The working group systematically reviewed various factors that influence mobility from poverty for adults, families, and children. The group’s ultimate aim was to connect the longer-term mobility outcomes identified in the five pillars to specific measures that can be tracked in the short and medium term.

The next step in that process was identifying key predictors that are strongly associated with the five pillars and that can be influenced by state and local policies in the near term. These predictors can be used to convert high-level concepts into areas for action. The working group came up with 24 predictors across the five pillars.<sup>1</sup>

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### Pillar: Opportunity-rich and inclusive neighborhoods

**Predictors:** housing affordability, housing stability, economic inclusion, racial diversity, social capital, and transportation access

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### Pillar: High-quality education

**Predictors:** access to preschool, effective public education, school economic diversity, preparation for college, and digital access

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### Pillar: Rewarding work

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**Predictors:** employment opportunities, jobs paying living wages, opportunities for income, financial security, and wealth-building opportunities

**Pillar:** [Healthy environment and access to good health care](#)

**Predictors:** access to health services, neonatal health, environmental quality, and safety from trauma

**Pillar:** [Responsive and just governance](#)

**Predictors:** political participation, descriptive representation, safety from crime, and just policing

Finally, the working group assigned each of the predictors at least one observable metric that could measure how a community fares according to each predictor, both at baseline and over time. The group proposed metrics that were valid measures of the predictors, collected at regular intervals, available for important subgroups and subareas in cities and counties nationwide, and not overly sensitive to residential moves in and out of jurisdictions. Importantly, the proposed metrics also reflected structural conditions rather than individual-level outcomes.

To vet the proposed metrics, the Urban Institute held a series of discussion sessions and webinars with policymakers, researchers, and practitioners in San Francisco, New Orleans, Chicago, and Cleveland. Participants considered the relevance and potential value of the metrics to local changemakers and generated important insights about how they could inform local advocacy, planning, action, and accountability. These insights were used to refine the initial metrics further. Ultimately, the process resulted in 26 [Mobility Metrics](#) that are supported by strong evidence of predictive relationships to mobility and can be influenced by local and state policies.

### OPPORTUNITY-RICH AND INCLUSIVE NEIGHBORHOODS

Predictor	Mobility Metric
Housing affordability	Ratio of affordable and available housing units to households with low, very low, and extremely low income levels
Housing stability	Number and share of public school children who are homeless
Economic inclusion	Share of people experiencing poverty who live in high-poverty neighborhoods
Racial diversity	Index of people’s exposure to neighbors of different races and ethnicities

Social capital	Number of membership associations per 10,000 people Ratio of Facebook friends with higher socioeconomic status to Facebook friends with lower socioeconomic status
Transportation access	Transit trips index Transportation cost index

## HIGH-QUALITY EDUCATION

Predictor	Mobility Metric
Access to preschool	Share of children enrolled in nursery school or preschool
Effective public education	Average per-grade change in English Language Arts achievement between third and eighth grades
School economic diversity	Share of students attending high-poverty schools, by student race or ethnicity
Preparation for college	Share of 19- and 20-year-olds with a high school degree
Digital access	Share of households with broadband access in the home

## REWARDING WORK

Predictor	Mobility Metric
Employment opportunities	Employment-to-population ratio for adults ages 25 to 54
Jobs paying living wages	Ratio of pay on the average job to the cost of living
Opportunities for income	Household income at 20th, 50th, and 80th percentiles
Financial security	Share of households with debt in collections
Wealth-building opportunities	Ratio of the share of a community's housing wealth held by a racial or ethnic group to the share of households of the same group.

## HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT AND ACCESS TO GOOD HEALTH CARE

Predictor	Mobility Metric
Access to health services	Ratio of population per primary care physician
Neonatal health	Share of low-weight births
Environmental quality	Air quality index
Safety from trauma	Deaths due to injury per 100,000 people

## RESPONSIVE AND JUST GOVERNANCE

Predictor	Mobility Metric
Political participation	Share of voting-age population who turn out to vote
Descriptive representation <sup>2</sup>	Ratio of the share of local elected officials of a racial or ethnic group to the share of residents of the same racial or ethnic group
Safety from crime	Reported property crimes per 100,000 people and reported violent crimes per 100,000 people
Just policing	Juvenile arrests per 100,000 juveniles

Although the [Mobility Metrics](#) are designed to measure progress toward the [Five Pillars of Support](#), their quality and availability are not uniform across all communities in the US. To better understand how these metrics reflect their local reality, users of this guide should pay close attention to the data quality documentation provided with each set of local metrics.



To observe important inequities in the data, scholars from the Urban Institute’s Racial Equity Analytics Lab recommend that all data gathered are disaggregated by race and ethnicity, across multiple domains, and at the smallest geographies possible. Being able to examine data and community outcomes by race, ethnicity, and other factors allows us to better identify patterns that could be masked by aggregate data. For example, in areas where white people account for the vast majority of the population, a positive community-level metric could mask worse outcomes for Black, Hispanic, or Indigenous populations because the reported value is averaged across the whole community. Presenting metrics at the community-level and by race or ethnicity illuminates racial disparities in outcomes that might not have been captured otherwise. Beyond exposing racial disparities, disaggregated data also allow for better program and policy targeting, implementation, and monitoring according to the needs of different subgroups.

For more on the importance of disaggregation of data by race and ethnicity, see <https://www.urban.org/racial-equity-analytics-lab>.

To the extent possible, the Mobility Metrics draw on nationally available sources so that local governments can compare reliable and consistent data with other cities and counties nationwide. Importantly, some of the Mobility Metrics rely on data that may not be available for all geographic units at the ideal frequency, recency, reliability, or level of disaggregation. Depending on the data available about your community, it may not always be properly adjusted for changes over time in jurisdictions’ demographic compositions.

Even with these limitations, the Mobility Metrics perform a valuable function: they provide communities with a tool for surfacing areas of strength and weakness across multiple domains. They aim to catalyze important conversations about boosting mobility from poverty.

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## Step 2.2 Access the Mobility Metrics for Your Municipality

As a first step, you should access your municipality’s Mobility Metrics on <https://upward-mobility.urban.org/data>.

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## Step 2.3 Make Note of Preliminary Insights

The next step involves looking at the data and making note of outcomes in the data. The purpose of this step is to become more familiar with the Mobility Metrics and to gain a high-level view of mobility issues in your community. You can then use this information to communicate to your department the importance of creating a MAP to boost mobility in your community.

A brief **Mobility Metrics Data Review Guide** is included at the end of this section to help you record your notes. The example insight below demonstrates the type of information you might find when reviewing your Mobility Metrics.

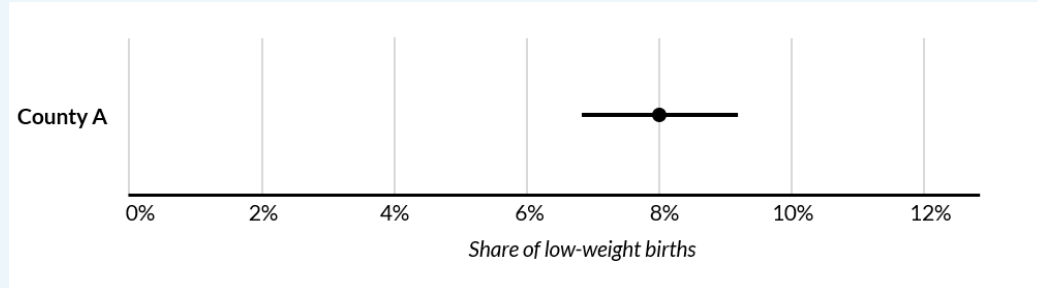




**Pillar: Healthy environment and access to good health care**

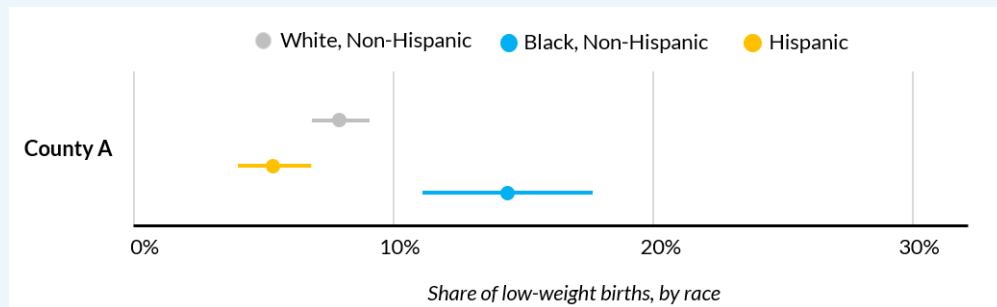
**Predictor: Neonatal Health**

Mobility Metric: Share of low-weight births



*Figure 3: Share of low-weight births in County A*

This graph shows us that in County A, 8 percent (plus or minus 1 percentage point<sup>3</sup>) of all babies are born with low weights (less than 5 pounds 8 ounces). One question that might immediately come to mind is whether this share of low-weight births is being experienced equally by babies of all races and ethnicities across County A? To find out, take a look at this metric disaggregated by race and ethnicity:



*Figure 4: Share of low-weight births in County A, by race*

This graph shows us that although less than 10 percent of white and Hispanic babies are born with low weights, over 14 percent of Black babies are born with low weights. Disaggregating our original birth statistic by race and ethnicity paints a much more detailed and informative picture of what is happening in County A. We can see that a greater share of Black, Non-Hispanic babies are born with low weights. This disparity reveals that poor neonatal health is a particularly serious challenge for Black families and highlights the importance of digging deeper to understand what conditions and challenges are contributing to that outcome. As you review your own data, make note of disparities you see in the disaggregated data.

## Step 2.4 Compare Your Data with Data from Other Jurisdictions

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Another key step at this preliminary phase is to put local data into context. It can be difficult to interpret how meaningful **Mobility Metrics** outcomes are without comparing them to outcomes for other localities. By observing how other communities compare with your own across the same metrics, you can get a clearer sense of the range of outcomes that can be expected for each measure. Some factors you might consider in selecting peers include similarities among various dimensions, such as geographic proximity, size, overall population, population density, socioeconomic and racial diversity, or similarities in structures of governance. When comparing your jurisdiction with your peers', remember to consider their metrics within their local context as best as possible. For example, you might compare your metrics data to data from a jurisdiction with a similar population density to your own, but that jurisdiction might have a larger immigrant population or higher incomes because of their main industries of employment. As a final step in the preliminary data gathering process, note in your **Mobility Metrics Data Review Guide**, included at the end of this step, how your jurisdiction's mobility data compares with the data of two or three other localities. Your preliminary insights will prepare you for the next step in the MAP process: assessing your readiness to act.

## STEP TWO REVIEW CHECKLIST

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- You understand how and why the **Mobility Metrics** were developed

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- You have accessed the **Mobility Metrics** for your jurisdiction

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- You have noted preliminary insights about local outcomes on your Mobility Metrics Data Review Guide and noted how your jurisdiction compares to two or three others

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STEP TWO

# Supplemental Materials

1. Mobility Metrics Data Review Guide
2. Descriptive Representation: Collecting Data to Construct Your Mobility Metric

### Mobility Metrics Data Review Guide

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What stands out to you about these metrics data? How do they reflect (or not reflect) your existing opinions on mobility in our jurisdiction?

Walking through each metric, where do outcomes differ by race or another form of disaggregation (e.g., age, gender, zip code)? Which disparities interest or concern you the most, and why?

How does your county compare with peer counties? What was most notable to you about these differences?

## Descriptive Representation: Collecting Data to Construct Your Mobility Metric

As mentioned, you can choose to use or collect local information to help further inform your understanding of mobility conditions in your community. As a metric, “Descriptive Representation” refers to a ratio of the share of local elected officials of a given racial or ethnic group to the share of residents of the same racial or ethnic group in your community. This ratio is a valuable insight: research shows that when the demographic characteristics of elected officials match that of their constituents, people feel more able to exercise power over the actions of their government (Gleason and Stout 2014). This metric is widely used by political scientists to reflect the extent to which groups are represented by their communities’ elected leadership.

To calculate this metric, you should divide the numerator (a count of the number of elected officials that belong to each racial or ethnic subgroup) by the denominator (your local population numbers by race and ethnicity). If you are interested in creating the Descriptive Representation metric, here are some steps you can follow:

If you do not already possess an exhaustive list of local government officials, use the official web portal for the federal government (<https://www.usa.gov/local-governments>) to look up and record every individual who holds elected office in your jurisdiction.

Using their public contact information, send out correspondence asking for each official to self-identify their race or ethnicity. Sample language for this email is provided here:

*Dear XX,*

*My name is YY, and as an employee of ZZ, I am collecting information to better understand our local status on boosting upward mobility from poverty in our community. We are conducting this analysis using the Urban Institute’s Mobility Metrics Dashboard, which provides data on 26 metrics associated with upward mobility. We need your help to complete one of these metrics, Descriptive Representation. This metric refers to the share of local elected officials of a given racial or ethnic group to the share of residents of the same racial or ethnic group in your community. Research shows that when the demographic characteristics of elected officials match those of their constituents, people feel more empowered and involved with the actions of their government. By answering the following questions, you will help us gain insight to how well our local racial and ethnic communities are represented by their elected leadership.*

*Please answer the following:*

*Do you identify as Hispanic or Latinx?*

- Yes
- No

*Among the following races, with which do you identify? (Please select all that apply)*

- Black or African American

- Asian
- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- White
- Other race

*Many thanks in advance for your participation.*

If you are unable to collect or complete this information through direct outreach (due to lack of response), consider filling in the gaps or consolidating this information by independently gathering the race/ethnicity of each elected official as reported in public outlets or self-reported through their websites or public communications. Because this approach provides less reliable information, it is important to note that data gathered this way would be of poor quality. For further documentation or information on data quality, please consult your municipality's Mobility Metrics.