

BOOSTING UPWARD MOBILITY

A PLANNING GUIDE FOR LOCAL ACTION

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STEP THREE



Ensure Your Local Government Is Ready to Undertake This Work

At this point, you have a preliminary understanding of some mobility issues in your community. If you feel moved to rally your local government colleagues to join you in undertaking a full Mobility Action Planning process, you're now what we call a Mobility Advocate! Before you call on municipal leadership to assemble a team to carry out this work or make any official announcement regarding the Mobility Action Planning process, you should work with leadership to take stock of what conditions, supports, and commitments are in place to help the process succeed and where your municipality might need to develop further before proceeding.

Much research has been conducted to understand the necessary conditions for effecting large-scale change. We've also learned from our work with the Upward Mobility Cohort that certain readiness conditions are essential to have in place before building a broader team and engaging publicly about this work. There are also necessary readiness conditions for carrying out this work according to our Framework for Boosting Mobility and Advancing Equity; doing so involves centering our [three-part definition of mobility from poverty](#) ([economic success](#), [power and autonomy](#), and [being valued in community](#)), using [Mobility Metrics](#) and other data to inform decisionmaking, and striving for [racial equity](#).

The readiness conditions for a successful Mobility Action Planning process are as follows:

- A clear commitment from local government leadership
- Preparedness for cross-sector partnerships across policy domains
- Sufficient organizational capacity to undertake this work
- An organizational culture that can support large-scale change
- Buy-in from staff across departments
- A desire to build a shared understanding of structural racism and racial equity
- Knowledge of the skills and capacity necessary for data gathering and analysis
- Dedicated resources for meaningful community engagement
- A commitment to ongoing learning and improvement.

Your municipality might already have some or all of these conditions in place, but it may not, and that's okay. The purpose of Step 3 is to determine whether these conditions are in place and, if they aren't, to determine which areas your municipality needs to develop before moving ahead with this work. Many of

these conditions are simply commitments from leadership and/or government staff to undertake critical aspects of the work ahead. At the end of this section, you'll find a Readiness Assessment you can use to evaluate the readiness of your local government and identify any areas for strengthening further.

Step 3.1 Gain Commitment from Local Government Leadership

Clear commitment from government executive leadership (e.g., the mayor, city manager, or county executive) and department heads is a necessary condition for moving forward with the Mobility Action Planning process. Getting government leadership on board with taking on a major planning process will require you as the Mobility Advocate to provide a clear, evidence-based explanation for why the process is necessary and how it will help the municipality live up to its values and promises to the public. The preliminary analysis you undertook with your [Mobility Metrics](#) can help with this, as can our Framework for Boosting Mobility and Advancing Equity. Some of the additional resources below can help with casemaking, as can the information about mobility issues in the Introduction and Step 1 of this guide.

- [Boosting Upward Mobility: Metrics to Inform Local Action](#)
- [Boosting Upward Mobility: Exemplars](#)
- [Boosting Upward Mobility Release Event](#)
- [Boosting Mobility and Advancing Equity Through Systems Change](#)
- [Upward Mobility website](#)
- [Exploring Approaches to Increase Economic Opportunity for Young Men of Color: A 10-Year Review](#)
- [What Would It Take to Overcome the Damaging Effects of Structural Racism and Ensure a More Equitable Future?](#)

You might also share some of the [Mobility Action Plans from the Upward Mobility Cohort](#). Beyond a verbal commitment, leadership must also commit to dedicating sufficient resources—in terms of finances, infrastructure, time, and training—to the process. If possible, it would be helpful for you as the Mobility Advocate to propose ways to identify some of these resources in the budget.

Step 3.2 Prepare to Engage Cross-Sector Partners across Policy Domains

Government alone cannot sufficiently create all necessary conditions for boosting people out of poverty. Strong cross-sector partnerships across policy domains can help you brainstorm new ideas; gain expertise in content areas where you have less familiarity; and connect with residents who can help shape the

Mobility Action Planning process. As mentioned in Step 1 of this guide, partners can come from a wide range of sectors, including the following:

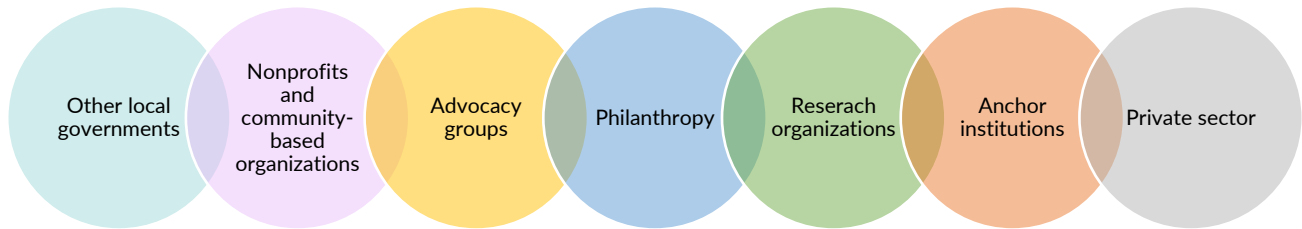


Figure 5: Sectors from which to invite partners for the Mobility Coalition



In **Lansing, Michigan**, the [BOLD Lansing](#) initiative supports upward mobility by empowering students and families to attend college and become financially independent. The initiative brought together a wide range of partners who support students and families along different steps of the educational ladder and across the domains of financial well-being, neighborhoods, education, and work. The initiative's partners include the Lansing School District, the City of Lansing's Office of Financial Empowerment, a local credit union, the Capital Area United Way, the Capital Area College Access Network, and the Community Economic Development Association of Michigan.⁴

The Mobility Advocate should work with leadership to consider external organizations with whom the municipality might partner on the project. Standing together with a broad coalition of community leaders, including members of the business community, anchor institutions, financial institutions, private-sector actors, advocacy groups, and nonprofits can show the public that the municipality intends to have a coordinated strategy that impacts the actions of a wide swath of public-serving organizations. Ideally, partners will represent multiple domains covered by the [Mobility Metrics](#). Partners should also be those who can commit to this work for the long haul, because not all of the actions that are needed to boost mobility from poverty can be done by government.

Assessing the municipality's ability to be a *good* partner is an important element of ensuring your readiness to act. Often when engaging partners, the norm is to ask how *they* can be good partners to you. However, forging strong partnerships requires doing the opposite—asking how *you* can be a good partner to *them*.

Step 3.3 Ensure Sufficient Organizational Capacity

Organizations need sufficient capacity to take on large-scale systems change work. The Project Management Institute defines organizational capacity as the people, processes, technology and support resources, physical resources, and organizational systems available to support an initiative (Combe 2014). Although you will be engaging external partners as part of your planning process, perhaps the most important capacity consideration for launching this work is whether there are municipal staff who can

dedicate significant time to facilitating the Mobility Action Planning process on top of their existing priorities (staff roles are discussed further in Step 4). Relatedly, it's important to consider whether staff have relevant knowledge or experience to undertake this type of work and what additional trainings or resources might be helpful in building knowledge.

As highlighted in the Project Management Institute definition, it's also important to think through the necessary systems and processes—including policies, procedures, and practices—that can support this planning effort. Your municipality will need to facilitate the planning process, even if certain tasks are actually carried out by external partners. Consider whether there are municipal staff who have experience with and are capable of managing large projects and facilitating meetings with external partners. If additional capacity is needed, consider how your jurisdiction might train or recruit staff with these skills.

Step 3.4 Determine Whether Your Organizational Culture Can Support Large-Scale Change

It is important to assess whether the municipal government's organizational culture will support the necessary systems changes required in the Mobility Action Planning process. What does it mean to have a culture that is ready to plan for and implement large-scale change? Research conducted in the field of implementation science has found that there should be “a degree of alignment between cultural norms and the proposed change” (Combe 2014) and that organization members should be “psychologically and behaviorally prepared to take action” (Weiner 2009). What's more, research has found that organizations that want to change (rather than those that merely have to change) have the most success (Weiner 2009).

Local governments that are culturally ready to take on large-scale change processes will promote energy and excitement across departments about moving away from the status quo. Leadership can actively invite staff to contribute ideas and speak openly about what practices or processes aren't working—particularly among past change initiatives.

Step 3.5 Help Leadership Gain Staff Buy-In Across Departments

It will be helpful for all staff to have a clear understanding of *why* your city or county wants to undertake a Mobility Action Planning process around this specific framework and how it will help the municipality live up to its values and promises to the public (Combe 2014). An introduction to our approach (including our framework, planning principles, and the suggested actors to work with) from the municipality's executive leadership can signal the importance of the work. Leaders can gain staff buy-in by identifying organizational champions who will bridge work across departments and provide opportunities for staff to give input and shape key project priorities.

Depending on the size of the municipality, leadership may consider inviting municipality staff to a brownbag to learn about the [Mobility Metrics](#) and our approach, or they could send out an all-staff email

that shares information about the proposed work. At the brownbag, be sure to share a sign-up sheet for staff who are interested in being part of the work. At the end of this step, we provide a sample outreach email to staff and sample talking points that elected officials and other local leaders can use to talk about why they have chosen to take this work on in the supplemental materials at the end of this step.



In Upward Mobility Cohort participant **Washington, DC**, the Office of Planning and the Deputy Mayor of Planning and Economic Development, the co-leads for the District’s Upward Mobility project, hosted an interagency kickoff meeting at the start of the initiative where department heads and their staff could learn more about the **Mobility Metrics**, discuss project goals and deliverables, and determine a structure for future cross-departmental engagement. Ultimately, the interagency group brought together representatives from 15 agencies monthly for the duration of the project.

Step 3.6 Confirm a Desire among Government Staff to Build a Shared Understanding of Structural Racism and Racial Equity

Making systems change requires that local governments take the time to learn about, reflect on, and acknowledge their role in creating and sustaining **racial inequities**. This is particularly challenging because **structural racism** is so deeply embedded in at all levels of American government and because people who have historically benefited from it may not want to see movement away from the status quo. As the City of Portland’s Racial Equity Toolkit states, “Past harm is likely to still have current day impacts on people’s quality of life and most certainly on communities’ lack of trust in government.”⁵ Organizations that want to prioritize racial equity must have a willingness among staff across departments to talk about race, racism, and privilege and confront histories of systemic racism in your community.

Although your municipality does not need to have “completed” this work already—in fact, investigating structural racism and privilege is an ongoing process—it is imperative that government leadership commits to building a shared understanding of structural racism in your community throughout the Mobility Action Planning process. Municipal governments can use several resources to host discussions among staff, examine past and current policies creating inequities, and undertake a **shared analysis** about race and racial inequity in their communities. Organizations like the [Government Alliance on Race and Equity](#), [Race Forward](#), the [Frameworks Institute](#), and [PolicyLink](#) offer a number of resources, and we share a few of our favorites here:

- [Communicating about Intergenerational Urban Poverty and Race in America: Challenges, Opportunities, and Emerging Recommendations](#)
- [The State of Michigan’s Racial Equity Toolkit](#)
- [Advancing Racial Equity and Transforming Government: A Resource Guide to Put Ideas into Action \(GARE\)](#)

- [Building the We: Healing-Informed Governing for Racial Equity in Salinas](#)
- [Smithsonian Magazine's 158 Resources to Understand Racism in America](#)
- [National Museum of African American History & Culture's Talking About Race site](#)
- [Washington Race Equity & Justice Initiative's Organizational Race Equity Toolkit](#)



In **Fresno, California**, the [Fresno DRIVE Initiative](#), a 10-year community investment plan to develop an inclusive, vibrant, and sustainable economy for residents, began its work by hosting “Shared Analysis” sessions in which members of its executive committee reflect on their own experiences with race and racism and work toward a common framework and language for understanding and communicating about race and equity matters in their community.⁶

Step 3.7 Identify the Skills and Capacities Necessary for Data Gathering and Analysis

The Mobility Action Planning process will involve gathering, cleaning, storing, and analyzing additional data sources beyond the **Mobility Metrics** data. Assessing the municipality's ability to assign ownership over the analysis, safe storage, and organization of the quantitative and qualitative data that will need to be collected (and learned from) is a key aspect of assessing your readiness to act. Oftentimes, there will be one or more partners best suited for these tasks, but when necessary, it can be valuable to consider investing time or money into expanding government capacity to collect, analyze, and visualize data in ways that can improve your ability to learn, plan, and adapt your MAP.

Step 3.8 Dedicate Resources for Deep and Meaningful Community Engagement

As stated at the outset of this guide, **deep and meaningful community engagement** is defined as “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, and engaging and redistributes power, uplifts local values and knowledge, and builds trust among community members.”

Achieving the dimensions of “power and autonomy” and “being valued in community” means creating opportunities for community members to make choices about their lives and contribute to efforts that shape their community. Achieving these two dimensions is not solely an outcome for this work, it is also an *input* that shapes how the MAP should be developed.

Engaging the community requires that the municipality has set aside adequate funds to cover staff time to plan and execute engagements and funds to compensate community members who will participate. Community engagement activities should also be carefully coordinated across departments and even with

external partners to minimize participation fatigue among community members. Step 6 will cover best practices for community engagement in greater depth.

Step 3.9 Commit to Ongoing Learning and Improvement

As one of our key planning principles, **continuous learning and improvement** is defined as “the continuous gathering and use of information to assess progress, improve organizational practices and services, and drive better outcomes in the long run.” Methods for learning from the MAP and improving practices will be covered in greater detail in Step 8. For now, leadership needs to acknowledge the long-term horizon for this work and commit to engaging in a continuous learning and improvement process through which the municipality reflects on its work and makes changes as needed.

Step 3.10 Assess Your Readiness to Act

There is no magic threshold for determining when each of the above steps can be considered complete, but the Readiness Assessment at the end of this section can serve as a guide. It is ultimately up to each jurisdiction to determine whether the appropriate conditions for readiness are already in place, where there may be gaps, and how to go about filling them. It is also important to consider whether the project should launch even if some conditions are not met or whether your municipality doesn’t appear ready to take on this work just yet.

If you find that you have met *most* of the readiness conditions, you may proceed further with officially launching your Mobility Action Planning process while crafting a plan to develop your missing readiness conditions in the course of the project.

If you find that you have met *some* of the readiness conditions but remain extremely interested in taking on this work, you might begin by crafting a preparedness plan where you focus on building up your missing readiness conditions and then come back to this work when you’ve made progress.

Based on our own experiences and the experiences of the counties in the Upward Mobility Cohort, we have found that proceeding further without having many of these readiness conditions in place means it is highly unlikely you will be able to develop a Mobility Action Plan that has the scope, scale, buy-in, and solutions necessary for achieving meaningful results toward boosting mobility from poverty and reducing racial inequities in your community.



If you find that you have met *few to none* of the readiness conditions, we highly recommend postponing the next steps.

STEP THREE REVIEW CHECKLIST

- You (the Mobility Advocate) have shared the readiness conditions with leadership and understand the steps necessary to meet these conditions.

- You have worked with leadership to complete the Readiness Assessment to determine your jurisdiction's current level of readiness for moving ahead with the Mobility Action Planning process.

- Based on the outcome of your readiness assessment, leadership has determined whether to proceed with the Mobility Action Planning process, start with a preparedness plan, or postpone further action until a later date.



STEP THREE

Supplemental Materials

1. Readiness Assessment
2. Sample Internal Launch Language
3. Talking Points for Department Heads and Elected Officials

Readiness Assessment

Readiness condition	Readiness steps	What do you need to address to ensure you have the conditions needed for success?
<p>A clear commitment from local government leadership</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Advocate has shared Mobility Metrics, findings, and Framework for Boosting Mobility and Advancing Equity with executive leadership <input type="checkbox"/> Executive leadership has explicitly agreed to begin a Mobility Action Planning process <input type="checkbox"/> Executive leadership has gotten buy-in from department heads <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Advocate and/or leadership has identified and committed resources to fund the development of a Mobility Action Plan 	
<p>Preparedness for cross-sector partnerships across policy domains</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Advocate has taken stock of current municipal partnerships that could be critical to the success of this work <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Advocate has surveyed municipal leadership (even if informally) to learn about whether staff have the time, resources, and humility to manage new relationships <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Advocate has considered ways that local government can be a good partner 	
<p>Sufficient organizational capacity to undertake this work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership has assessed whether there are staff who can facilitate the Mobility Action Planning process, and if needed, identified resources to add staff capacity <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Advocate and/or leadership has assessed relevant skills and knowledge among existing staff <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Advocate and/or leadership has identified potential trainings or resources to support knowledge-building and capacity of staff 	

Readiness condition	Readiness steps	What do you need to address to ensure you have the conditions needed for success?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Advocate has examined policies, procedures, and data systems to ensure sufficient infrastructure is in place for supporting the planning process 	
<p>An organizational culture that can support large-scale change</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership believes there is a general culture among staff that welcomes progress and improvements to the status quo <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership is prepared to actively invite staff to contribute ideas and speak openly about what practices or processes aren't working 	
<p>Buy-in from staff across departments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership has identified organizational champions who will bridge work across departments and provide opportunities for staff to give input and shape key project priorities <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational champions have shared the approach for Boosting Mobility and Advancing Equity with staff across departments <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational champions and/or leadership have held brownbags or other information-sharing sessions to discuss the approach <input type="checkbox"/> There is a structure or process in place for future cross-departmental engagement with the process 	
<p>A desire to build a shared understanding of structural racism</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Leadership has explicitly expressed a commitment to working toward dismantling structural racism and boosting mobility from poverty <input type="checkbox"/> The government has publicly acknowledged its role in creating racial inequities (i.e., with a municipal declaration) <input type="checkbox"/> The city or county provides opportunities for individual or team-based learning about structural racism, the policies, norms, and 	

		What do you need to address to ensure you have the conditions needed for success?
Readiness condition	Readiness steps	
	<p>practices that have held structural racism in place, and diversity, equity, and inclusion principles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Individual or team-based learning about structural racism and diversity, equity, and inclusion is required for all staff <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Advocate and/or leadership have a plan for hosting discussions among staff, examining past and current policies, and undertaking a shared analysis about race and racial inequity with staff 	
Knowledge of the skills and capacity necessary for data gathering and analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Advocate and/or leadership understand the tenets of data quality and what capacity is necessary for assessing the quality of any supplemental data collected <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Advocate and/or leadership understand the importance of secure data storage infrastructure and protocols, as well as analysis software <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Advocate and/or leadership has identified possible funds for training, recruiting, or dedicating staff with the technical skills to clean, integrate, or leverage supplemental data as needed <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Advocate and/or leadership has considered the types of graphics and data visualizations that might be useful for communications 	
Dedicated resources for deep and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Advocate and/or leadership have identified potential funding sources for hosting events and compensating community members and staff for their time 	

Readiness condition	Readiness steps	What do you need to address to ensure you have the conditions needed for success?
meaningful community engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Municipal staff have experience conducting deep and meaningful community engagement, or Mobility Advocate and/or leadership has considered how to develop that capacity among staff or identify an external partner with these skills. 	
A commitment to ongoing learning and improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Executive leadership has explicitly committed to undergoing continuous evaluations and assessments related to the Mobility Action Planning process <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Advocate has identified any existing evaluation protocols within local government <input type="checkbox"/> Mobility Advocate and/or leadership have identified staff and/or external partners with experience in evaluation, learning, and performance management 	

Sample Internal Launch Language

Starting this month, we will be launching a new planning process to boost upward mobility from poverty and reduce racial inequities in [city/county]. This planning process will utilize data from the Urban Institute’s Boosting Upward Mobility from Poverty and Advancing Equity project to identify key racial and ethnic disparities and barriers to boosting mobility from poverty in our community. **We are launching this planning process because** [city/county] is falling behind on indicators that demonstrate how likely someone in our community is to advance out of poverty. We plan to use this opportunity to assess systems in our community against the Mobility Metrics and identify weaknesses or gaps. **This project will not duplicate** planning already being done by our government.

Working with nonprofit, business, philanthropic, anchor institution, and faith-based leaders in our community, we will publish a Mobility Action Plan next year that plots a new course forward for [city/county] and addresses the systems and policies that have created barriers to advancement in our community. **This effort will be coordinated alongside** the [city’s/county’s] comprehensive planning effort and build off of last year’s poverty action plan.

This effort will be run by the Department of Human Services. DHS will be creating a **cross-departmental working group** to engage staff across all county departments. **Staff at all levels are invited to attend working group meetings**—your expertise and knowledge of departmental strategies will be necessary to identifying gaps in our current policies and programs.

The [municipal leader] has set aside \$300,000 for the execution of the mobility action planning process and development of the Mobility Action Plan. **These funds will be used for** staff training, new technology to support the gathering and analysis of local data, the development of cross-sector partnerships, and staff time on the project, as well as for pass-through funds that we can use to engage nonprofit partners and community members.

Rationale for the new planning process

Details about execution of the work

Who can be involved

Talking Points for Department Heads and Elected Officials

Purpose: These talking points can help Mobility Advocates, department heads, elected officials, and other leadership provide a high-level overview of why their city or county should take on the work to develop a Mobility Action Plan that proposes strategic actions to boost upward mobility from poverty. These points can be adapted as needed.

What Is a Mobility Action Plan?

- A Mobility Action Plan (MAP) is a document that details the strategic actions we will take to boost upward mobility and promote racial equity in our community. It is developed through a Mobility Action Planning process that our government will undertake with cross-sector partners and community members.
- We will use a set of evidence-based, community-level Mobility Metrics developed by the Urban Institute, in combination with other local data and community and stakeholder engagement, to draft a MAP for our community. The MAP will propose new evidence-based strategies to achieve our community's goals.

Why Should We Take on This Work?

- Now is the time to tackle inequities in our community that result from longstanding structural racism, discrimination, and disinvestment. Addressing these inequities will boost the economic competitiveness and prosperity of everyone in our community.
- Our government and many other governments across the country have contributed to inequities by developing racist and discriminatory policies and failing to rectify the disparities that these policies have created.
- These inequities disproportionately impact [people of color, people with low wages, immigrants, youth, people with mental and physical disabilities, people who are justice-involved, the elderly, and people living in rural communities] in our community. When inequities exist in our community, everyone suffers, and our economy is not as strong as it can be.
- With a comprehensive approach that changes the way we and our partners work, we can boost mobility from poverty and reduce racial disparities. Government cannot do this alone—we need everyone in our community to work together.
- Our leaders have the right tools and teams in place to provide resources that promote upward mobility from poverty.

How Do We Do This Work?

- We will undertake an [insert length of time] Mobility Action Planning process, where we will develop partnerships with cross-sector actors across policy domains, conduct deep and meaningful community engagement, access and use data to inform our decisions, and continuously learn and improve from our challenges and successes.

- Boosting mobility from poverty is a pressing need in our community that demands action now. Although we will work with urgency to tackle challenges in our community, boosting mobility from poverty for everyone will likely take years. We commit to doing this work as long as it takes to improve prosperity, health, belonging, and quality of life for everyone.

Who Does This Work?

- We will develop a coalition of committed regional actors, including other local governments, anchor institutions [like the local hospital and university], nonprofits and community-based organizations, research organizations, philanthropic partners [like the local community foundation], members of the private sector, and advocacy groups.
- Collaborating with these key partners will grant us greater access to
 - a diverse group of community members who can help us learn about what's working and what's not,
 - better data that can provide a more complete picture of conditions in our community,
 - more resources and capacity for boosting mobility from poverty, and
 - the levers we need to make lasting systems change.