Assessing Existing Programs for Alignment with the Upward Mobility Framework

This worksheet is part of the Upward Mobility Initiative's *Toolkit for Increasing Upward Mobility in Your Community*. Use it to understand whether existing programs in your community embody the principles and factors that evidence shows boost mobility from poverty.

How to Use This Assessment

Select a program operating in your community that is intended to support mobility from poverty. Respond to the series of questions below in the spaces provided. Terms in **bold** text are defined in footnotes. Once you have finished responding to the questions, review your responses to identify areas of strength and elements the program might be lacking. You can find additional resources for each of these question groups at the end of the document.

Keep in mind that individual programs are insufficient for boosting mobility from poverty. Rather, places seeking to increase upward mobility and advance racial equity must be prepared to make transformative, systems-level changes. The goal of this assessment is to understand whether your community's program environment is suitable and to what extent it can bolster mobility from poverty and advance equity.

This assessment is not an evaluation tool and will not tell you whether programs are succeeding in boosting mobility from poverty. Organizations interested in understanding the answer to this question might consider engaging evaluators or internal research teams to design and execute an impact evaluation. This assessment is also not a budgeting or prioritization tool.

Program Name:

Operating Department or Organization:

Other Program Information:

Assessment Group 1: Alignment with the Three-Part Definition of Mobility from Poverty

Does your program positively affect your participants' economic success? How?	
Does your program positively affect participants' power and autonomy? How?	
Does your program help participants to feel a sense of dignity and belonging? How?	

Assessment Group 2: Program Evidence Base and Continuous Learning

What "outputs" are you tracking for this program? Outputs are the short-term, more immediate results produced by the program that could plausibly lead to your desired outcomes (defined below).	
Which of the Mobility Metrics or predictors do these outputs align with?	
What are the intended "outcomes" of this program? Outcomes are medium- to long-term measurable effects that a program is meant to accomplish for people or places.	
What evidence do you have that your intended outputs and outcomes will help advance upward mobility?	
Has a **program evaluation** been conducted on this program?[1] If yes, what type of evaluation was conducted, and what was found? If not, does it replicate a program from another place that *has* been evaluated?	
What is the evidence base behind this program?[2]	

[1] Program evaluation is a method of determining a program's effects on the people, families, or communities it serves. It is a discrete effort that answers a predetermined set of questions and typically involves collecting data beyond what is routinely collected during program implementation (Tatian 2016).

[2] Information on the evidence base of some programs can be found in scholarly journals, from impact evaluations or randomized controlled trials, or in evidence resource libraries—catalogs that aggregate scholarly research on a topic to provide evidence for specific policies or programs. Examples of evidence resource libraries include the Urban Institute's Boosting Upward Mobility Evidence Resource Library, Results for America's Economic Mobility Catalog, and County Health Ranking's What Works for Health tool.

Do you have a mechanism for regularly gathering and analyzing program data? For example, you might use a survey, intake form, satisfaction interviews, or a regular data review. Do you have ways to adjust the program in response to poor results?	
What will be the process for collecting data and analyzing it over time? Will there be resources to continue this analysis even if the program itself ends? This is important to detect effects that would only be measurable after the intervention has ended.	

Assessment Group 3: Community and Practitioner Engagement

Have direct service providers (for example, program staff or grantees) been engaged to help shape the program or provide feedback on the program's delivery? If so, how were they engaged?	
Have community members or program recipients been engaged to shape the program or provide feedback on its delivery? If so, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being no community engagement, 3 being you solicited feedback from community members on the program, and 5 being you engaged community members in the *design and delivery* of the program, how would you rate your community engagement? Please describe your engagement in more depth.	

Assessment Group 4: Scale of Impact

Who does the program support (that is, residents with incomes below 50 percent of the area median income, Asian American and Pacific Islander residents, residents living in the Tall Oaks neighborhood, residents receiving Medicaid, and so on)? How many people does the program currently serve? What share of the eligible population does the program serve?	
If it were feasible, would you want to expand this program to reach more people? If yes, what is needed (for example, political capital, financial resources, council approval)? If no, why not?	
Are there other programs (governmental or nongovernmental) that are similar to this program? If yes, would you consider aligning efforts to increase the scale of your work?	
If there are other aligned programs, have you worked to learn about and, if possible, adopt best practices from these programs?	

How will this program be funded in the future (for example, through funding from the local/state/federal governments, philanthropic funding, other sources)?	

Assessment Group 5: Targeting Inequities

Does this program allocate resources, services, or funds based on a **universal approach**, a **targeted universal approach**, or a **targeted approach** aimed at eliminating disparities?[3] Please describe.	
How is the program designed to be **culturally appropriate** for the communities it aims to serve?[4]	
Does this program address the **root causes of inequities**?[5] If yes, how does it do that?	

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[3] A *targeted approach* singles out specific populations or makes provisions for selected groups. These programs are generally tailored to the needs of the people they aim to serve (powell, Menendian, and Ake 2019). For a *targeted universal approach*, program designers set universal goals but apply targeted approaches to achieving them based on the varying circumstances of different groups (powell, Menendian, and Ake 2019). With a *universal approach*, an intervention or service is available to everyone without regard to their group membership, status, or income (powell, Menendian, and Ake 2019).

[4] Culturally appropriate programming is designed to reflect the culture, community norms, traditions, and values of the populations it aims to serve.

[5] See "Understand and Identify Root Causes of Inequities," County Health Rankings and Roadmaps, accessed October 30, 2022, https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/take-action-to-improve-health/learning-guides/understand-and-identify-root-causes-of-inequities#/.

Assessment Group 6: Removing Barriers

What have you heard about any obstacles (unintentional or intentional) that program participants face when accessing this program? How might you address these barriers?	
Does this program help participants meet immediate, basic needs (that is, having enough to eat, being able to pay housing and utility bills, having a safe place to live, being able to pay medical costs and debts)? Meeting basic needs may be a necessary precondition to ensuring participants can access and make use of other services.	

Additional Resources

Assessment Group 1: Alignment with the Three-Part Definition of Mobility from Poverty

- *Boosting Upward Mobility: Metrics to Inform Local Action Summary* (Urban Institute)

- *Measuring Mobility from Poverty* (US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty)

Assessment Group 2: Program Evidence Base & Continuous Learning

- *Performance Measurement to Evaluation* (Urban Institute)

- *Performance-Based Strategies: Defining Terms and Comparing Common Strategies* (Urban Institute)

- Economic Mobility Catalog (Results for America)

- *Evaluating Programs and Impact with Promise Neighborhoods* (Urban Institute)

Assessment Group 5: Targeting Inequities

- *Next 50 Catalyst Brief: What Would It Take to Overcome the Damaging Effects of Structural Racism and Ensure a More Equitable Future?* (Urban Institute)

- Targeted Universalism: Policy & Practice (Haas Institute at the University of California Berkeley)

- *Action Learning Guide: Understand and Identify Root Causes of Inequities* (County Health Rankings & Road maps)

- *Building Culturally Relevant Nutrition Assistance on Tribal Lands* (Urban Institute)

Assessment Group 6: Removing Barriers

- *Many Families in Arlington, Virginia, Struggle to Afford Basic Needs. A Flexible Safety Net Can Help* (Urban Institute)

Assessment Group 7: Mitigating Unintended Consequences

- Reducing the Cliff Effect to Support Working Families (Aspen Institute)

- The Benefits Cliff Effect in Arlington (Arlington Community Foundation)

- *Guide to Measuring Neighborhood Change to Understand and Prevent Displacement* (National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership)

- *To Understand a City's Pace of Gentrification, Look at Its Housing Supply* (Urban Institute)