



## TOOLKIT FOR INCREASING UPWARD MOBILITY IN YOUR COMMUNITY

# Collecting Data to Complete Your Mobility Metric on Descriptive Representation

This worksheet is part of the Upward Mobility Initiative's [Toolkit for Increasing Upward Mobility in Your Community](#). Use it to collect the information you need to complete your Mobility Metric for the [Descriptive Representation predictor](#): the ratio of the share of local elected officials of a given racial or ethnic group to the share of residents of the same group.

This metric is widely used by political scientists to reflect the extent to which groups are represented by their communities' elected leadership because 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.

Though we provide a community's shares of residents by racial and ethnic group on the [Upward Mobility Data Dashboard](#), we do not have data on the racial or ethnic makeup of local, elected officials. To complete this metric, you will need to collect information on the race or ethnicity of your community's elected officials.

If you do not already possess an exhaustive list of local elected 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 into 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 able to collect this information, your next step will be to categorize it into a data format that is compatible with the race- and ethnicity-based population figures we provide in the [Upward Mobility Data Dashboard](#). The Dashboard provides the denominator of the Descriptive Representation mobility metric in the following four categories: “Black, non-Hispanic;” “Hispanic;” “White, non-Hispanic;” and “Other races and ethnicities.” If your respondents answer “Yes” to the first question, they should be categorized as “Hispanic,” regardless of what they answer to the second question. If they answer “No” to the first question, they should be categorized as either “Black, non-Hispanic,” “White, non-Hispanic,” or “Other races and ethnicities” depending on their response to the second question.

Once you have determined the race or ethnicity of all the elected officials in your community, you can calculate the first half of the Descriptive Representation metric by dividing the number of elected officials who identify as a given race/ethnicity by the total number of elected officials. For example, if you have 10 elected officials in your community, and 4 of them identify as “Black, non-Hispanic,” then the share of local elected officials who are Black is 40 percent. Next, compare this result to the share of residents who identify as “Black, non-Hispanic,” which you can find on the [Upward Mobility Data Dashboard](#). These two figures together provide the ratio of the share of local elected officials of a given racial or ethnic group to the share of residents of the same group and can tell you whether specific groups are under- or overrepresented by elected officials in your community.

If you are unable to collect or complete this information through direct outreach (because of 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 as self-reported through their websites or public communications. However, be aware that this approach may provide less reliable information and result in poorer quality data.