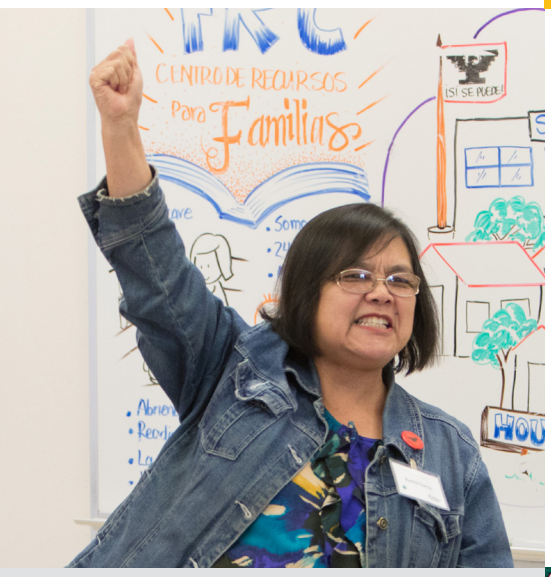
US PARTNERSHIP ON MOBILITY FROM POVERTY



RESTORING THE AMERICAN DREAM

What Would It Take to Dramatically Increase Mobility from Poverty?

DAVID T. ELLWOOD AND NISHA G. PATEL

JANUARY 2018

ABOUT THE US PARTNERSHIP ON MOBILITY FROM POVERTY

With funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Urban Institute is supporting the US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty. Led by chair David Ellwood and executive director Nisha Patel, the Partnership consists of 24 leading voices representing academia, practice, the faith community, philanthropy, and the private sector.

The Partnership's definition of mobility has three core principles: economic success, power and autonomy, and being valued in community. Our collective ambition is that all people achieve a reasonable standard of living with the dignity that comes from having power over their lives and being engaged in and valued by their community.

The ideas in this paper were shaped by discussions within the Partnership but do not necessarily represent the views of all members.

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Responsibility for any errors lies with the authors alone.

Overview

OUR GOAL

Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and staffed and supported by the Urban Institute, the US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty (the Partnership) was tasked with answering one big, bold, and exciting question: *What Would It Take to Dramatically Increase Mobility from Poverty?* Specifically, the Partnership was asked to generate ideas for investment by philanthropy and the public sector that could really make a difference.

THE PARTNERS

The Partnership assembled 24 of the country's leading thinkers and doers on solutions to poverty, representing academia, practice, the faith community, philanthropy, and the private sector.

DAVID T. ELLWOOD, CHAIR
Harvard Kennedy School

ELISABETH BABCOCK
Economic Mobility Pathways

JOSHUA BOLTEN
Business Roundtable

ARTHUR C. BROOKS
American Enterprise Institute

WILLIAM J. BYNUM
Hope Enterprise Corporation

RAJ CHETTY
Stanford University

REV. LUIS CORTÉS, JR.
Esperanza

JENNIFER L. EBERHARDT
Stanford University

KATHRYN EDIN
Princeton University

ROBERT GREENSTEIN
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CHERYL L. HYMAN
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ANTHONY B. ITON
The California Endowment

LAWRENCE KATZ
Harvard University

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Harvard University

AI-JEN POO
National Domestic Workers Alliance; Caring Across Generations

JOHN A. POWELL
Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society

CECILIA ROUSE
Princeton University

JUAN SALGADO
City Colleges of Chicago

ELDAR SHAFIR
Princeton University

SRINIJA SRINIVASAN
Loove

MARTA TIENDA
Princeton University

JEREMY TRAVIS
Laura and John Arnold Foundation

ROXANE WHITE
Aspen Institute

HIROKAZU YOSHIKAWA
New York University

Our Approach

A distinguishing feature of the Partnership is that we did not have a mandate for consensus. Instead, the Partnership had the freedom and flexibility to dream big and think creatively, limited only by our own knowledge and imaginations. Our focus was on learning from both research and practice, as well as from people who have experienced poverty. Site visits and community voices were a key component of the Partnership. We intentionally held our gatherings in very different places to ground our deliberations in community-level perspectives. We spent time in urban, suburban, rural, and tribal communities across the country: Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Brooklyn, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Fort Worth, Lummi Nation in the Pacific Northwest, the Mississippi Delta, Philadelphia, rural Maine, San Jose, Seattle, St. Louis, Tacoma, Tulsa, and West Memphis.

Through a series of design labs and learning sessions, we heard from community residents, policymakers, service providers, business owners, social entrepreneurs, researchers, advocates, faith leaders, and journalists. We also learned from each other. Despite the Partnership members' differing backgrounds and perspectives, we found much we could agree on, including genuine optimism about our nation's capacity to tap into the lost potential of so many and begin restoring the American dream.

The Partnership's collective ambition is that all people achieve a reasonable standard of living with the dignity that comes from having power over their lives and being engaged in and valued by their community.

Our definition of mobility. The Partnership's vision of mobility from poverty emerged at our very first gathering in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood in May 2016. There we discussed the myriad ways we might measure success—both in how the country would look if mobility from poverty increased dramatically, and in how people's personal experiences would change if the ideas we developed were successful. Partnership member john powell said something that immediately resonated with many in our group and has continued to resonate in the communities we have learned from: "Poverty is not just about a lack of money. It's about a lack of power."

> *Lummi people do not consider themselves poor because they are following in the values of elders: family, land and water, balance, love and respect, and voice. There is no word for poverty in their language. It would most closely translate to, "to be without a family," which would never happen.*
>
> —LUMMI WOMAN AND RESIDENT OF LUMMI NATION DURING THE PARTNERSHIP'S VISIT, SEPTEMBER 2016

In other words, while economic success is an essential principle, it does not fully capture people's experiences with poverty and mobility. As important as money are power and autonomy—a sense of control over one's life and a chance to make choices and craft a future. Some refer to this principle as agency.

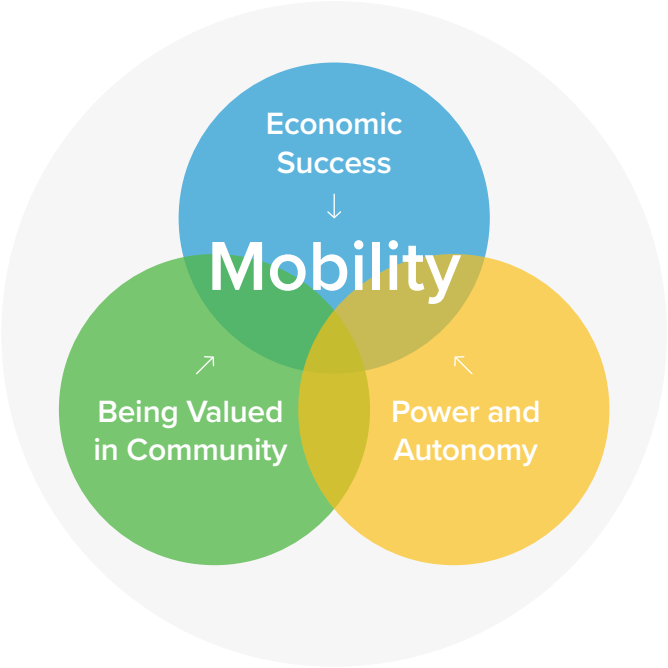
A third and equally important principle of mobility involves community—engaging with others and being seen as doing something of value for that community. Partnership members Arthur Brooks and Kathryn Edin have described this principle as "dignity"; john powell calls it "belonging." Some refer to this principle as social inclusion. Regardless of what they called it, people in communities across the country conveyed a similar message, and we witnessed the concept first hand during our site visits. We saw how being involved in community, whether in places of worship or secular organizations, and being well regarded by that community conferred meaning and opportunity that an economic measure alone would not capture.

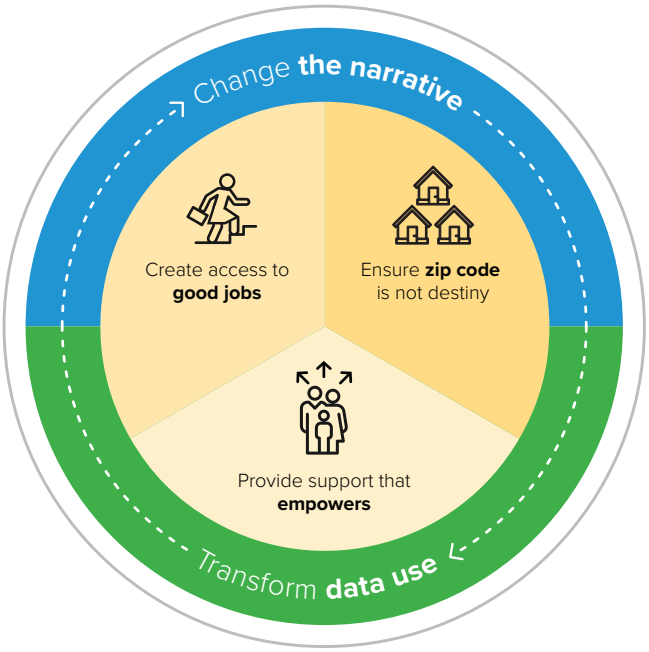
Based on these insights, the Partnership defines mobility across three equally critical dimensions:

- **Economic success**
- **Power and autonomy**
- **Being valued in community**

Our proposed strategies. The Partnership developed a series of idea papers that coalesce around an architecture of five interlocking strategies, described in this document:

- **Change the narrative.**
- **Create access to good jobs.**
- **Ensure zip code is not destiny.**
- **Provide support that empowers.**
- **Transform data use.**





The State of Poverty and Opportunity in the United States

If you ask most people what the American dream is, they will often say one of two things. For many people, it is the idea that if you work hard, you can get ahead. For others—particularly people who are struggling economically—it is the idea that even if you make little progress, your children will have a chance to do better. Unfortunately, reality no longer lives up to that dream.

> *My parents talked about a better future for us and the American dream, but for me the American nightmare was more likely.*
>
> —YOUNG LATINA RESIDENT OF MAYFAIR NEIGHBORHOOD IN SAN JOSE, DURING THE PARTNERSHIP'S VISIT TO SILICON VALLEY, MARCH 2017

Hard work is not enough. For decades, children virtually always earned more money than their parents, signaling significant economic mobility. Today this is no longer the case. Whereas 90 percent of children born in 1940 earned more money than their parents did, only 50 percent of children born in 1980 achieved similar economic advancement, according to research by Partnership member Raj Chetty and several colleagues (figure 1).[1] The changing nature of work, coupled with stagnating wages and increasing wage disparities, are limiting children's chances to exceed their parents' earnings. Virtually nowhere in the US can a full-time minimum-wage worker afford rent on a modest two-bedroom apartment without paying more than 30 percent of her monthly income—even though many states and the District of Columbia have minimum wages higher than the federal minimum.[2]

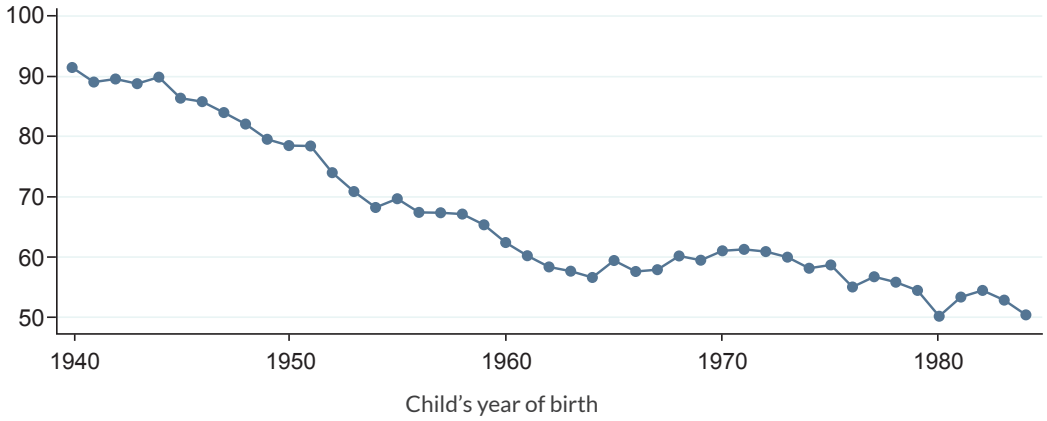
Place matters. The community where a child grows up greatly influences her or his opportunities for upward mobility. Comparing children in the same family who move from a low-opportunity to a high-opportunity area makes this clear. Children who move at age 12 fare significantly better than their older siblings.[3] Children who move at age 6 or younger fare the best. Figure 2 displays high- and low-opportunity communities in the US and the benefits to the child of each additional year lived there. These geographic results bear a clear resemblance to maps (not included here) showing the concentration of African American people in low-opportunity counties in the Deep South.[4] A child growing up in a community with the lowest level of mobility can expect to earn up to 40 percent less than the same child would if growing up in a community with the highest level of mobility. Related experimental work from the Moving to Opportunity program, which allowed randomly selected low-income families to move to better neighborhoods, showed similar patterns. Children who moved when they were very young earned considerably more as adults than did children who moved late in adolescence.[5]

Disparities by race, gender, and immigration status persist. Long-term historical legacies and structural forces shaping opportunity further limit pathways to upward mobility for people of color, women, and immigrants. Race, gender, and immigration status are among the most powerful predictors of who is doing low-paying work (defined here as offering hourly wages of less than $12.50).[6] Figure 3, based on the latest available data from the Current Population

FIGURE 1

Fewer Children Are Earning More Than Their Parents

Percent of children earning more



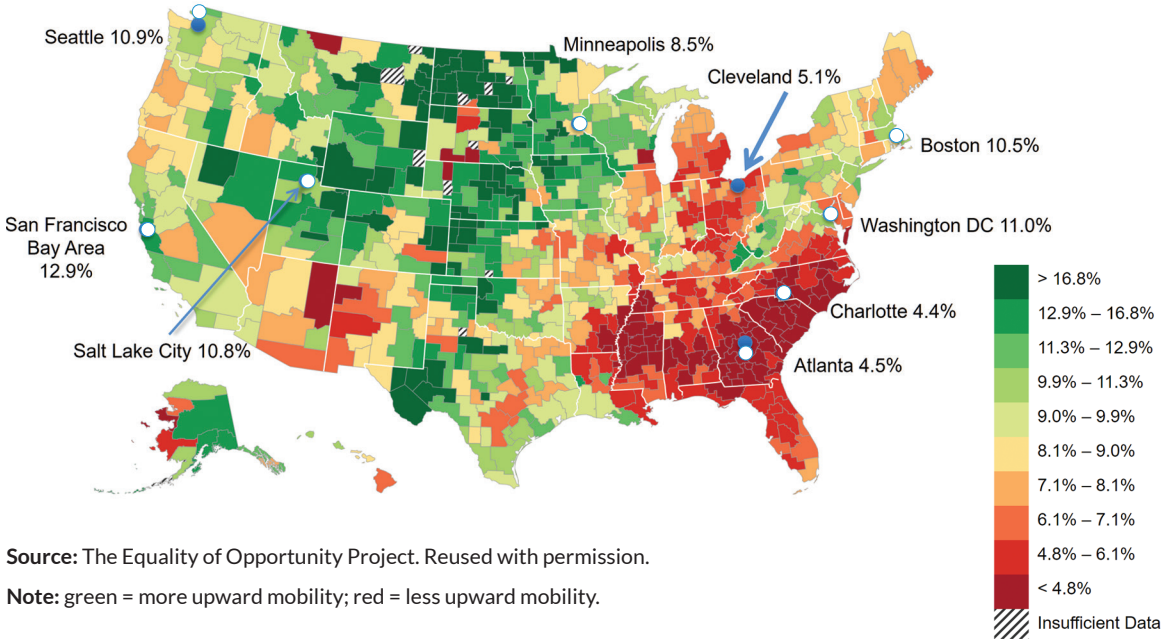
Source: Raj Chetty, David Grusky, Maximilian Hell, Nathaniel Hendren, Robert Manduca, and Jimmy Narang, "The Fading American Dream: Trends in Absolute Income Mobility since 1940," *Science* 24 (2017). Used with permission.

Note: When measuring mobility, 50 percent is considered stagnancy.

FIGURE 2

The Geography of Upward Mobility in the United States

Chances of reaching the top fifth of the income distribution starting from the bottom fifth, by metropolitan area



Source: The Equality of Opportunity Project. Reused with permission.

Note: green = more upward mobility; red = less upward mobility.

Survey,[7] demonstrates the stark realities. Women are far more likely to be working for low wages than are men. Far greater shares of black and Hispanic people are working in low-paying jobs than are white people. These disparities are amplified by the intersection of race/ethnicity, gender, and immigration status. Only 20 percent of white men are working in low-wage jobs, versus almost 40 percent of black women and 46 percent of Hispanic women. More than 60 percent of Hispanic women noncitizens, including legal permanent residents, are working in low-wage jobs.

Poverty is isolating and stigmatizing. Americans systemically "other" people in poverty—meaning they reinforce their own bonds within groups by devaluing others and assigning them outsider status. john powell and Arthur Brooks, two Partnership members often seen as falling on opposite sides of the political spectrum, emphasize "othering" in their recent essay for CityLab.[8] While "othering" occurs across many groups, we can examine its repercussions for people in poverty by comparing attitudes toward low-income people and middle-class people—something few researchers have considered. Some studies of college students find dramatic results. Figure 4 displays results from a study by Cozzarelli and colleagues[9] based on students from a "large midwestern university." Using a five-point scale, the researchers found strikingly large differences in beliefs about the attributes of "the poor" and "the middle class" across a wide range of attributes. People in poverty were far more likely to be seen as "dirty," "unpleasant," and "violent" and far less likely to be seen as "responsible," "family oriented," and "hardworking."

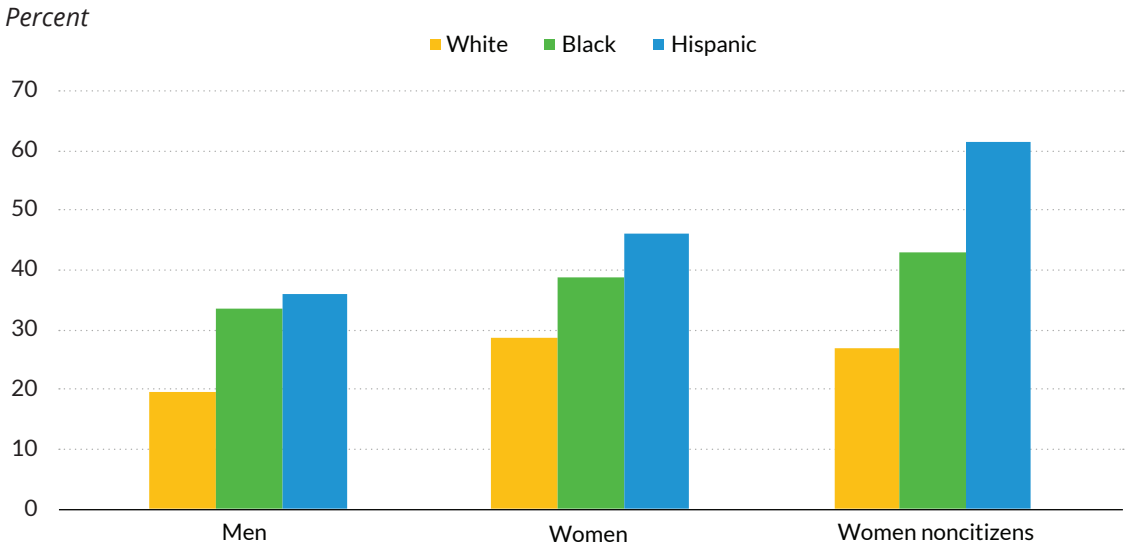
The nation will have a difficult time mustering the courage and the commitment necessary to dramatically increase mobility from poverty as long as hard work is not enough; a place can determine a person's fate; disparities by race, gender, and immigration status persist; and low-income people continue to be stigmatized. Yet this is the reality in America today. And it is against this backdrop that the Partnership set about looking for answers.

> *I think it's amazing that a circumstance sets other things in motion. You get sick, then you lose your job, then your house, etc., and you have to innovate in different ways. There's a societal shrug or frown that you're in this situation. Sometimes if people haven't walked in your shoes they don't know what you're going through. What is that, empathy? They don't know what you're going through.*
>
> —MIDDLE-AGED WHITE MAN AND SUBURBAN DETROIT RESIDENT DURING THE PARTNERSHIP'S VISIT TO SOUTHEAST MICHIGAN, OCTOBER 2017

FIGURE 3

People of Color and Noncitizens Often Have Low-Paying Jobs

Share of workers ages 18–64 earning less than $12.50 an hour in 2015

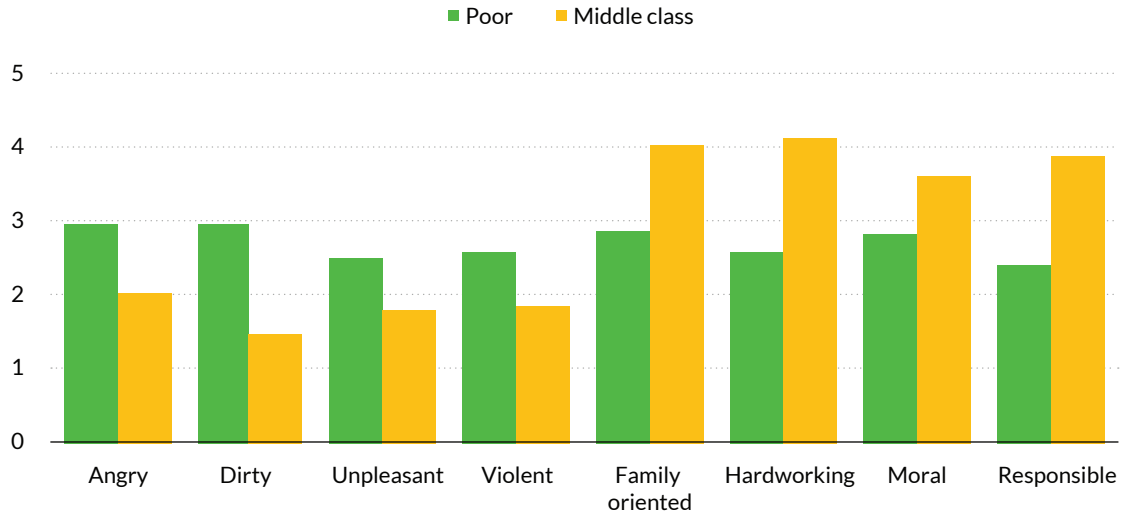


Source: US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty calculations, based on March 2016 CPS-ASEC data.

FIGURE 4

Beliefs about Attributes of "the Poor" and "the Middle Class"

Agreement with each attribute, on a scale of 1 (not at all characteristic) to 5 (extremely characteristic)



Source: Data from Catherine Cozzarelli, Anna V. Wilkinson, and Michael J. Tagler, "Attitudes toward the Poor and Attributions from Poverty," *Journal of Social Issues* 57, no. 2 (2001): 207–27, table 1.

Strategies to Dramatically Increase Mobility from Poverty

Partnership members believe that the challenge of dramatically increasing mobility from poverty is great but not insurmountable. To achieve it, we put forward five strategies that must be pursued simultaneously to achieve the greatest impact. And, each strategy should embody the principles of economic success, power and autonomy, and being valued in community. Importantly, the Partnership worked to identify and develop strategies that would complement the commendable and intensive efforts already under way—particularly acknowledging significant existing work in education and health. In some cases, we sought out innovations that would require testing and refinement. In others, we focused on proven ideas that could reach more people. In still others, we were excited by new opportunities for understanding from research.

In every case, we seek to offer ideas that we see as powerful. We believe that a coalition of stakeholders—from government to philanthropy to private industry to faith-based communities—can work to restore the American dream to a reality by pursuing five interrelated and complementary strategies. These strategies can be pursued nationally, as well as in and across local communities.

Change the narrative. The narratives we use to make sense of the world shape our attitudes and ultimately the policies we devise and endorse. At least three prominent narratives about poverty and mobility persist: people in poverty have no one to blame but themselves, people in poverty are helpless victims, and truly exceptional "rags-to-riches" stories prove that the American dream is still achievable. All three narratives are overly simplistic and inaccurate, and their continued popularity is debilitating. We must dispel these myths by humanizing people in poverty, exposing structural forces that contribute to poverty, and partnering with nontraditional allies who can help reshape the narrative.

Create access to good jobs. Everyone who is willing to work should have access to a path to a good job. We must not only work to improve our schools, reduce employment discrimination, and strengthen our economy; we must build the training and informational pathways that offer the chance to connect people who are out of work with employers who sometimes cannot find the workers they need. As important, we can and must transform jobs with low wages, erratic work hours, and/or limited or no benefits into good ones.

Ensure zip code is not destiny. Every child and adult should have the chance to thrive in a place of opportunity and safety within a caring community. Informed by the voices and perspectives of residents, we must transform communities and the institutions that serve them, remove the barriers that limit where people can live and learn, and encourage more economically diverse neighborhoods.

Provide support that empowers. Too many public and private human services programs assist low-income people without supporting autonomy, offering dignity and respect, or fostering engagement within the community. Program design and service delivery should support people's aspirations and capacity. The support offered should give people the chance to control their destiny and take responsibility for their own actions.

Transform data use. Programs contain rich information that could be used to help people move up the mobility ladder and to hold programs accountable. Unfortunately, those data are rarely linked and shared in ways that low-income people can access and use to connect to opportunity. Increasing access to state and local data could help individuals make more informed choices; it could also help researchers and policymakers better understand which programs are most effective and why.

While addressing any one of these five strategies is valuable, addressing them in combination magnifies the impact exponentially. Without a new narrative that recognizes our common humanity, we will never achieve the understanding or harness the fortitude required to

invest in and restore the promise of the American dream for every person striving for a better life. If too few good jobs exist, even empowered people living in opportunity communities cannot necessarily climb out of poverty. Without support that allows people to gain control over their own destinies, they will be hard pressed to overcome obstacles. If children grow up in communities that undermine their safety and healthy development, they may not build the skills or networks they need to succeed. And without transformed data systems, people struggling with mobility from poverty and those who support them cannot see opportunities and hold the other strategies to account.

By approaching these strategies as mutually reinforcing pieces, we can better overcome structural forces that constrain mobility, decrease the likelihood of working at cross-purposes, and transform mobility and opportunity at significant scale. Individual actors should not work in isolation. No one organization, government, or philanthropy alone can deliver on all these strategies. Success will require a concerted and coordinated cross-sector effort.

Partnership ideas and insights. The Partnership was created, in part, to identify particularly compelling, high-impact ideas that deserve far more attention than they have received. By design, we did not seek to create consensus strategies. Instead Partnership members, in collaboration with experts from the Urban Institute and colleague organizations, developed a series of idea papers that offers pathways for mobility within five interlocking strategies. Each idea paper provides information on a proposed level of investment and on potential return and impact.

The remainder of this paper highlights the core ideas and insights that emerged through the Partnership's efforts. A complete list of the idea papers can be found at the end of this paper. The papers are not intended to be exhaustive. Indeed, invaluable work is already going on in each of the strategies. Rather, the papers capture ideas that Partnership members believe add particular value because they either fill a critical gap in existing efforts or offer the opportunity to build upon promising initiatives already under way. These idea papers are the work of their authors and are not necessarily supported by all Partners.

Change the Narrative

A narrative is the collection of stories we tell ourselves and others to help us make sense of the world and understand cause and effect. Through our narratives, we decide who is good or bad, who is deserving or undeserving, whether someone is a hard worker, or whether he or she is a responsible parent. These decisions shape not only our willingness to offer support, but the type of support we offer, the way we think about—and possibly judge—the recipients, and what we expect recipients to feel and do in return for the support.

> *Narratives are like the air we breathe; it's the context for everything. And there are so many people that I have met in the course of this Partnership who have incredible stories. These are stories of resilience, of courage, of human potential. How do we make these stories the story of who we are as a country?*
>
> —AI-JEN POO, PARTNERSHIP MEMBER

Participants at a Narrative Change Strategy Lab cosponsored by the Partnership identified three prominent narratives about poverty and mobility: people in poverty have no one to blame but themselves; people in poverty are helpless victims; and the rare, spectacular "rags-to-riches" stories prove that the American dream is still achievable. All three narratives are excessively simplistic and

erroneous, and their continued use is damaging to efforts to increase mobility from poverty.

Changing narratives as powerful as these is extremely difficult and requires a multifaceted approach. Participants at the Strategy Lab determined three elements critical to effectively recasting narratives around poverty and mobility:

Humanize people living in poverty. Changing the poverty narrative begins with a goal of better understanding the lives and travails of low-income people. It is important to recognize and identify with the strength, perseverance, and ingenuity of people who are living in poverty, people who are working to make a dignified life for themselves and their families against steep odds. We can highlight this tenacity and determination through new narratives and, in doing so, help people find commonality with people of different races, ethnicities, genders, privilege, and personalities. Just one example of a proposal offered in the Strategy Lab is the creation of a "pop culture hub" made up of storytellers who have experienced poverty. Their authentic voices could guide the creation of compelling television that could establish a narrative of poverty in America that has never been seen in mainstream media. Notably, some participants worried that attempts to shed light on the lives of low-income people could ignore the unique challenges facing different groups. But, as Partnership member john powell points out, the opposite of "othering" is not "same-ing;" it is belonging.

Expose the structural forces that shape poverty. People's behavior emerges as a function of at least two critical factors: the attitudes and proclivities of the person, and the situation the person is in. Increasing understanding of the structural forces that shape poverty requires connecting personal stories to those forces, as author Wes Moore does in *The Other Wes Moore*—his story of two men with the same name whose lives unfold in dramatically different fashion, almost from birth, due largely to forces beyond their control, such as the opportunity to attend a good school and live in safe, affordable housing.

Such narratives are powerful and important tools. The Strategy Lab participants emphasized that the most compelling structural narratives would show who wins and who loses when only some people can access the opportunities fundamental to mobility.

Partner with allies who can help reshape the narrative among people who might otherwise resist it. Embraced narratives vary by race, gender, geography, religion, income, and other demographic factors. For example, women, people with high levels of education, and Democrats are more likely to believe circumstances beyond a person's control are to blame for poverty than men, people with less education, and Republicans.[10] A great risk of any campaign to change popular narratives is that it will effectively "preach to the choir," resonating most with the audience who needs to hear it least. To help ensure that narrative campaigns reach the target audience, Strategy Lab participants recommended nontraditional partnerships among organizations that may have differing world views but share a similar desire to dispel the popular myths surrounding poverty and mobility. For example, one proposal was to work with evangelical Protestants, who are the largest religious subset in America today, to launch a media campaign that draws on religious tenets. The campaign could create shareable, viral videos that amplify the original teachings of Jesus, who consciously worked and lived among people in poverty, to destigmatize people in poverty.

Changing the narrative is perhaps the most challenging strategy we have identified. A successful endeavor to increase mobility from poverty requires the goodwill and participation of multiple players across social, economic, and political divides. It is imperative for such players to share an understanding of what drives behaviors in the context of poverty, and of the policies and approaches most likely to prove effective. Without this shared understanding, the prospects for significantly greater mobility from poverty seem limited.

Create Access to Good Jobs

The American dream is predicated on the notion that hard work pays off—that motivated, dedicated workers who are willing to learn can get good jobs with decent pay, benefits, and opportunities for advancement. Arguably, the nation has had an implicit promise that by working together, businesses and their workers at all levels would succeed. While such a model of shared prosperity reigned for a generation after World War II, in today's economy the fortunes of firms and many of their workers seem to diverge.

> *Let's harness the power of the market. America is nearing full employment, but big employers are having trouble finding skilled workers. Community colleges that are responsive to this market demand will be able to place their graduates in the high-quality jobs businesses around the country are struggling to fill.*
>
> —JOSH BOLTEN, PARTNERSHIP MEMBER

Compared to previous generations, today's workers are much less likely to work for one long-term employer, belong to unions, or have jobs that provide good wages, benefits, and protections. The result is the demise of the long-held idea that anyone can succeed in America if they are willing to work hard.[11] Many of the good jobs that were once available to lower-skilled workers—jobs that offered reasonable pay and benefits with a natural career ladder but did not necessarily require postsecondary education, such as those in manufacturing—are disappearing. In their wake is a growth of low-paying, insecure jobs that lack access to benefits and career progression, offering instead an ambiguous route to economic security. Today we have a labor market in which an hourly employee earning the minimum wage can work full time, year round and still struggle to make ends meet.

To restore the American dream, everyone willing to work hard and learn new skills must have a pathway to a good job. Many working to reduce poverty are engaged in this domain, often focusing on K–12 education or new job creation. The Partnership identified two underemphasized approaches for increasing the availability of high-quality jobs and improving access to them:

Improve pathways to good jobs, including education and skills training. As a nation, we have been ineffective at creating access to good jobs for the 67 percent of people who do not obtain four-year degrees.[12] We have certainly tried, through technical schools, community colleges, online courses, limited apprenticeships or internships, and for-profit schools. However, the quality of such programs varies enormously, professional networks are limited, and the consequences of various postsecondary choices are mostly unknown to job seekers. To dramatically increase mobility from poverty, we must significantly improve the effectiveness of these programs and institutions to ensure that more of our nation's young people can successfully pursue a career.

Turn so-called "bad" jobs into good ones. The American labor market has no shortage of undervalued jobs: hourly positions that do not offer family-supporting wages, benefits, or career pathways; low-wage jobs that can keep a worker living in poverty even when working more than 40 hours a week; and jobs that do not offer full-time, year-round, or stable hours. Perversely, many of these jobs are essential to society, including care workers and food service providers. These sorts of low-wage jobs could and should be converted into good jobs by upgrading their skills and status, making work pay, ensuring portable benefits, creating greater job security, and building upward career ladders. Transforming these occupations would help nearly all low-income families and would disproportionately benefit people of color, immigrants, women, and their children.

Ensure Zip Code Is Not Destiny

As described earlier, where you live as a child helps determine your outcomes as an adult. Given the critical role of place in a person's destiny, every family should be able to live in a community that supports its well-being and boosts its children's chances to thrive and succeed. However, today, many low-income families—especially low-income families of color—live in communities suffering from disinvestment and distress. These communities do not offer the opportunities critical to economic stability and mobility, including safety from crime and violence, thriving schools, good jobs, and healthy environments. Nor do families have many avenues for moving out of these communities into ones richer with opportunities.

> *The community [should] work with the people for solutions. It works if you feel like you're both understanding why you're doing it and you have a choice in it. As opposed to something being done to you.*
>
> —AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN AND DETROIT RESIDENT DURING THE PARTNERSHIP'S VISIT, OCTOBER 2017

The concentration of low-income families, particularly low-income families of color, in distressed neighborhoods is not an accident.[13] Over many decades, the United States built separate and unequal communities through public policy and institutional practices that excluded low-income families and families of color from areas rich in amenities while starving these same families of capital, resources, and public services.

Rural communities can be opportunity deserts as well. From the Mississippi Delta to Appalachia to Indian Country to the Rio Grande Valley, residents are often isolated from both jobs and opportunity pathways. In parts of the Great Lakes region, many formerly middle-class urban neighborhoods and suburbs are slipping into despair as well-paid work disappears and infrastructure decays.

Even in places with comparatively greater economic opportunity, low-income families, including immigrant families, are isolated in desperate situations. When the Partnership visited with predominantly Mexican immigrant families in the Mayfair neighborhood in east San Jose, they shared with us that renting a couch to sleep on can cost $600 a month; renting a garage for a family to live in can cost $1,000 a month. These families live within 30 minutes of some of the biggest technology companies in the world. Yet one woman we spoke with asked us in Spanish, "*What is this 'Silicon Valley' you keep talking about?*"—highlighting the economic and cultural divides in the region.

Ensure access to opportunity communities through a multipronged strategy. For every person to live in a safe community that offers the opportunities fundamental to mobility, we must revitalize historically distressed communities, preserve and increase affordable housing in newly restored communities, and expand access to opportunity-rich communities and institutions for people living in low-mobility areas. We must pursue all three approaches together. Too often, "successful" development has crowded out existing residents or prevented people of color and low-income residents from accessing amenities found in higher-opportunity areas. We can unlock opportunities for more people with intensive place-conscious approaches that combine revitalization, more affordable housing, and access to higher-opportunity areas. Success will likely require tapping into local leadership while tackling city, county, and regional disparities through policy changes and increased public and private investment.

Some Partnership members pointed to several elements as essential to the larger effort to transform access to opportunity communities:

Reform the justice system to better address the needs of people living in communities of concentrated poverty. Many low-income communities experience high levels of violence and a criminal justice system that incarcerates large numbers of residents, particularly young men of color. Both violence and incarceration remove men and women from the community and leave them with dramatically reduced prospects for mainstream employment, further constraining mobility from poverty. Violence and a heavy criminal justice footprint might be reduced if residents of low-income, high-crime communities have the power and autonomy to work together with police departments and other key stakeholders to identify what they want and need from the justice system to feel safe.

Improve access to the financial services necessary to pursue vital economic opportunities. Without access to capital, retail stores dwindle, homeownership is rare, and homeowners and landlords are unwilling or unable to properly maintain or upgrade housing. Plus, residents of disinvested communities must turn to payday loans and check cashing at exorbitant rates that further reduce their already low incomes and often leave them mired in debt. Promising ideas include establishing universal access to bank accounts and extending financial services to banking deserts by increasing investment in community development financial institutions.

Immediately increase the availability of safe, stable, affordable housing in high-opportunity communities for families with young children. Transforming communities will take time, but some things cannot wait. Having a stable and secure home is especially important to very young children, whose brain development is influenced by their environment. Yet, families rarely get subsidized rental assistance in the form of housing vouchers while their children are young. Compounding the problem is the very limited availability of housing vouchers relative to demand: local housing authorities often have waiting lists that are years long. A starting point solution is to create vouchers dedicated to high-need, low-income families with young children and enable more children to grow up in high-opportunity communities.

Provide Support that Empowers

Support to individuals and families takes many forms, reflecting the diverse needs of people struggling to move ahead and the complex political process required for crafting policy. The supports that exist are often essential for families to get by. Yet too often we deliver services in ways that can stigmatize and isolate, depriving people of the autonomy and responsibility that is ultimately essential for genuine upward mobility. Brain scientists are also learning just how pernicious the stress of deprivation and the challenge of coping with competing demands can be over different stages of life.

> *People need to be the architects of their own liberation…the church's role is to be the facilitator of that process of empowerment, discovery, and mobilization.*
>
> —FATHER JON PEDIGO DURING THE PARTNERSHIP'S VISIT TO THE MAYFAIR NEIGHBORHOOD IN EAST SAN JOSE, MARCH 2016

Our service delivery systems should take "whole person" and "whole family" approaches, recognizing both the *strengths* and needs *people* have during different phases of human development. Partnership members believe that support can and should be delivered in ways that recognize people's humanity and individual capacities and challenges. To achieve their own ambitions, people must have the chance

to make informed choices about how to take advantage of support and address the opportunities and obstacles they face.

Invest in solutions for families with young children. There is powerful scientific evidence that the very earliest years of a child's life are critical to healthy brain development. Research shows that poverty affects children's brain development in areas important to adult success, including setting goals, prioritizing tasks, and controlling impulses. Growing awareness of this research has led many jurisdictions to focus on early childhood education. But school- and center-based programs cannot reach all the nation's children in the critical first 24 months of life. We need additional avenues for reaching children in their earliest years. Early childhood home visiting programs—evidence-based approaches that connect pregnant women and parents of young children with nurses, mental health clinicians, and other relevant specialists—have proved some of the most effective.

Invest in solutions for adolescents. Adolescence is one of the most turbulent and significant periods in people's lives. Research shows that adolescence is a second major period of brain development, and that adolescents may not yet possess the necessary skills to make long-term decisions. Nevertheless, adolescents face life-altering situations, some of which are exceptionally hard to reverse, such as dropping out of high school, having a child, or becoming involved in the criminal justice system. Despite the significance of this developmental period, adolescence does not receive enough policy or philanthropic attention, with some few and important exceptions. One potentially promising solution is to increase the availability of evidence-based positive youth development programs (e.g., some of those offered by Boys and Girls Clubs and 4-H), paired with access to better birth control options that reduce unintended early childbearing.

Invest in solutions for adults. Some programs discussed above include a focus on adults, which we define as people ages 18 and older. Home visiting programs explicitly support both child and parent and are a multigenerational approach. Still, the need remains for approaches that put adults—and their families—at the center and support them to reach their full potential. Brain science research shows that deprivation and the impossibility of meeting competing demands can severely hamper adults' abilities to set and achieve short- and long-term goals. In response, more comprehensive programs for adults have begun to emerge. One compelling approach uses "coach-navigators," highly trained staff who work with people to identify goals, craft plans to achieve those goals, and provide information and tools for accessing resources, changing behavior effectively, and improving executive function. Another promising approach, which would reach large numbers of families, is to test a "family-building" child support system that encourages more positive relationships between nonresident fathers and their children and facilitates better coparenting between fathers and mothers. Transforming the child support system to take a whole-family approach could reach more low-income men, who often have less interaction with other human services programs, and connect them with employment and other supportive services.

Expand income support that reinforces work and autonomy. Partners strongly support the expansion of existing refundable tax credits that reward work while increasing income and autonomy. Partnership member Kathryn Edin reported that benefits delivered through the tax system and tied to earnings and family (particularly the earned income tax credit and the child tax credit) are highly valued by recipients and command bipartisan political support. Research shows that while receipt of "charity" often evokes feelings of stigma and shame, benefits accrued through the tax system stoke feelings of pride and belonging.[14] Programs like these help make work pay and are an important part of turning low-paying jobs into better ones.

Transform Data Use

The data revolution is transforming how people live, executives manage operations, and businesses deliver goods and services. Yet, when it comes to helping people escape from poverty, the revolution is only just beginning. Invaluable data already exist in federal, state, and local governments; nonprofits; and the private sector. There are some promising projects, but in many locales, data are mostly unused and inaccessible to low-income families, program executives, or researchers.

> *As part of Child Fatality Review, department heads in Baltimore City government get together once a month. We review every child death that happened in the city since the previous meeting. We ask what more we might have done to prevent that tragedy. In many cases, each of us has a file on the child or the family at least an inch thick. It's tragic to compare notes after the child has died—what more could we have done when the child was alive?*
>
> —DR. LEANA WEN, COMMISSIONER OF HEALTH, CITY OF BALTIMORE

Some data critical to understanding the economic trends that influence mobility are becoming available, including IRS and Census Bureau data (all gathered by and held with the federal government), and more may be on the way.[15] However, many of the data required to understand poverty and enhance mobility are collected by local and state governments, including data on income, employment, health services, crime and incarceration, program usage, education inputs and outcomes, job vacancies and hiring, unemployment, housing, and child support.

Progress is hampered here because there is no standardized model for data sharing across programs or levels of government. The limited access and knowledge sharing means that the quality and availability of state and local data vary tremendously and measurement is not necessarily reliable. Some efforts have successfully used state and local data to answer specific questions, but these projects are frequently one-offs, where one or possibly two agencies and a very limited number of scholars collaborate. Often, once the project ends or one party moves on or loses interest, the data sharing ends. Scholars do not often provide operational insights back to the agencies, thus limiting the value of the engagement. Where more stable partnerships have evolved, they tend to focus on narrow problems and the data are slow to be linked and hard to use for many critical problems.

Much could be done with better state and local data and operational applications. Students could see the employment and earnings prospects for different community colleges or training programs and use that information to make a more informed decision about the best program for their needs. Researchers could examine the interaction between early exposure to violence and later school performance, criminal justice involvement, and future employability to better inform the targeting of policies. Policymakers and evaluators could assess performance of various initiatives, explore the joint impact of multiple programs, and rapidly adjust programs to improve performance.

Unleash the power of data by starting with the willing. It is not an exaggeration to say that each policy and program proposed by Partnership members would be much easier to access, manage, evaluate, and hold to account with both better data and better use of existing data. Without such data access and use, it will take many years just to get a sense of what is working. There are several existing data relationships, but it seems most promising to create

an initiative that starts with a small group of willing and committed communities. Such an initiative could generate highly visible successes, which can be used to consciously build out to additional communities and data sources. The initiative would provide proven templates and metadata standards, as well as accepted effective privacy and use protections. The value of such a core infrastructure would be championed and marketed by credible, successful "data shepherds" who can demonstrate the value of using specific types of data. The approach would both demonstrate the power of trusted data sharing and dramatically lower the barriers for each new community to take advantage of secure, linked data usage.

Conclusion

The US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty brought together a remarkable, diverse, and committed group of people, each tackling the issue of mobility in her or his own way. Many were drawn by a sense that America may be reaching a critical turning point, a time when we either restore the shared dream of prosperity and common cause or slide into social, economic, and political division and dysfunction. Though some were initially skeptical, Partners came away energized by all we learned from our many site visits and learning sessions with communities, from examination of the evidence from both research and practice, and from listening to and debating with each other. From those experiences came a sense of possibility and genuine optimism, a sense that the nation really can dramatically increase mobility from poverty and restore the American dream.

It cannot be done by any one group or organization or government policy. Some public and private investors are already beginning to coordinate their efforts around increasing upward mobility, and there are opportunities for new actors to join them. The nation must come together, with leaders across a range of institutions and sectors working to advance mobility from poverty. It will not be easy, but it is achievable. We hope that the Partnership's work sparks others to get involved, dream big, and move to action.

IDEA PAPERS

Change the narrative

Changing the Narrative (Ai-jen Poo and Eldar Shafir)

This paper discusses the overarching nature of narrative and the importance of shifting narratives about poverty in order to make real progress on increasing upward mobility.

Create access to good jobs

Imagining a Future of Work that Fosters Mobility for All (Lawrence F. Katz, Ai-jen Poo, and Elaine Waxman)

This paper discusses how to turn so-called "bad" jobs into good ones and proposes using care work as a case study on how to transform essential jobs now offering limited opportunities into sources of real upward mobility.

Stepping on the Gas: Community Colleges as Engines of Economic Mobility (Pamela Loprest and Cheryl Hyman)

This paper explores ways to transform community colleges, a vital mobility building block, particularly by creating more concrete pathways to specific skilled jobs or higher education.

Ensure zip code is not destiny

Helping Young Children Move out of Poverty by Creating a New Type of Rental Voucher (Barbara Sard, Mary Cunningham, and Robert Greenstein)

As a starting point to increase access to affordable housing in higher opportunity communities, this paper proposes creating 100,000 Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers each year for five years, available to pregnant women or families with children under the age of 6 who are homeless or live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty.

Opening Mobility Pathways by Closing the Financial Services Gap (William Bynum, Diana Elliott, and Edward Sivak)

This paper offers concrete proposals to overcome a lack of financial services in unbanked or underbanked communities, including establishing universal basic accounts and extending development of financial services to banking deserts by tripling public and private investment in community development financial institutions.

Opportunity Neighborhoods: Building the Foundation for Economic Mobility in America's Metros (Solomon Greene, Margery Austin Turner, Anthony Iton, and Ruth Gourevitch)

This paper offers comprehensive elements to tackle revitalization, affordable housing, and expanding access to opportunity-rich neighborhoods; it emphasizes adopting "place-conscious" strategies that draw on local leadership and organizations in a data-driven learning and development strategy in low-opportunity neighborhoods.

Participatory Justice (Jesse Jannetta, Jeremy Travis, and Evelyn McCoy)

This paper proposes that both violence and a heavy criminal justice footprint might be reduced if residents of low-income, high-crime communities have the power and autonomy to work with police departments and other key stakeholders to identify what they want and need from the justice system to feel safe.

Provide support that empowers

Improving the Child Tax Credit for Very Low–Income Families (Robert Greenstein, Elaine Maag, Chye-Ching Huang, and Chloe Cho)

This paper tackles the challenges facing low-income families with young children and offers a solution to reward work and increase income.

Scale Evidence-Based Home Visiting Programs to Reduce Poverty and Improve Health (Heather Sandstrom and Roxane White)

This paper focuses on the demonstrated success of programs that connect parents of infants and toddlers with specialists who visit families in their homes to provide tools, guidance, and support to promote parent and child health, as well as family economic security.

SPARKS for Young People's Mobility out of Poverty (Heather Hahn, Kathryn Edin, and Lauren Abrahams)

This paper argues that helping young people find a sense of purpose and a vision for their future can reduce unintended early childbearing, particularly when paired with access to better birth control options.

Transforming Child Support into a Family-Building System (Heather Hahn, Kathryn Edin, and Lauren Abrahams)

This paper argues that the current child support system sometimes damages relationships among mothers, fathers, and children; and calls for testing a "family-building" child support system that encourages more positive relationships between fathers and their children and facilitates better coparenting between fathers and mothers.

Using Brain Science to Transform Human Services and Increase Personal Mobility from Poverty (Elisabeth Babcock)

This paper describes brain- and behavioral-science based "coach-navigator" approaches that increase upward mobility by enabling people to take advantage of opportunities and support systems that they may miss in the pressure of immediate crises and the stress and scarcity created by significant exposure to poverty, trauma, and social bias.

Transform data use

A Locally Based National Initiative to Support People and Communities and Transform the Use of Government Data (Julia Ingrid Lane, David C. Kendrick, and David T. Ellwood)

This paper proposes engaging a small group of willing and committed communities to generate initial highly visible successes. The initiative would provide proven templates and meta data standards, as well as effective privacy and access protections. The value of such a core infrastructure would be championed by credible "data shepherds" to help build out to additional communities and data sources.

NOTES

[1] Children's incomes at age 30 are compared to their parents' incomes at 30 and adjusted for inflation and family size. The levels of mobility measured in this way differ depending on the adjustments made. For example, a smaller adjustment for inflation can mean mobility between the early 1940s and mid-1980s changes from 90 percent to 50 percent instead of from 92 percent to 58 percent, as shown in figure 1. But the dramatic decline in the fortunes of children relative to parents remains.

[2] Andrew Aurand, Dan Emmanuel, Diane Yentel, Ellen Errico, and Marjorie Pang, *Out of Reach: The High Cost of Housing* (Washington, DC: National Low-Income Housing Coalition, 2017).

[3] Raj Chetty and Nathaniel Hendren, "The Impacts of Neighborhoods on Intergenerational Mobility I: Childhood Exposure Effects," Working Paper 23001 (Cambridge, MA: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2017).

[4] The map can be found here: http://www.censusscope.org/us/map_nhblack.html.

[5] Raj Chetty, Nathaniel Hendren, and Lawrence Katz, "The Effects of Exposure to Better Neighborhoods on Children: New Evidence from the Moving to Opportunity Experiment," *American Economic Review* 106, no. 4 (2016): 855–902.

[6] $12.50 an hour is approximately 50 percent of the median wage. Annualized, $12.50 an hour is $25,000, which is approximately the federal poverty level for a family of four.

[7] The universe includes nonelderly adults with earned income for whom a wage rate can be computed—meaning, hours of work are available. The wage rate is computed as total annual earnings divided by the estimated total hours worked annually, where hours of work are derived from the reported usual hours worked a week, the number of weeks of full-time work, and the number of weeks of part-time work.

[8] john a. powell and Arthur Brooks, "America Can't Fix Poverty Until It Stops Hating Poor People," City Lab, October 10, 2017, https://www.citylab.com/equity/2017/10/america-cant-fix-poverty-until-it-stops-hating-poor-people/542397/.

[9] Catherine Cozzarelli, Anna V. Wilkinson, and Michael J. Tagler, "Attitudes Toward the Poor and Attributions for Poverty," *Journal of Social Issues* 57, no. 2 (2001): 207–27.

[10] Samantha Smith, "Why People Are Rich and Poor: Republicans and Democrats Have Very Different Views," Pew Research Center, May 2, 2017, http://pewrsr.ch/2p1Y8Y7; and "Political Values: Government Regulation, Environment, Immigration, Race, Views of Islam," in *Low Approval of Trump's Transition but Outlook for His Presidency Improves* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2016) 32–40, http://pewrsr.ch/2gimnwL.

[11] David Autor, "The Polarization of Job Opportunities in the U.S. Labor Market: Implications for Employment and Earnings" (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress and The Hamilton Project, 2010).

[12] United States Census Bureau, "Highest Educational Levels Reached by Adults in the U.S. Since 1940," press release CB17-51, March 30, 2017, https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2017/cb17-51.html.

[13] Solomon Greene, Margery Austin Turner, and Ruth Gourevitch, "Racial Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Disparities" (Washington, DC: US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty, 2017).

[14] Jennifer Sykes, Katrin Križ, Kathryn Edin, and Sarah Halpern-Meekind, "Dignity and Dreams: What the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Means to Low-Income Families," *American Sociological Review* 80, no. 2 (2015): 243–67.

[15] Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking, *The Promise of Evidence-Based Policymaking* (Washington, DC: Commission on Evidence-Based Policymaking, 2017).

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