



Request for Proposals

Network for Southern Economic Mobility

June 7, 2017

Introduction

In the *State of the South: Building an Infrastructure of Opportunity for the Next Generation*, MDC examined the current patterns of economic mobility for youth and young adults aged 14-24 in the South, focusing on who in the region is stuck with limited economic opportunity and who is on the path to success. According to the Pew Charitable Trusts, nationally, a child born in the lowest income quintile has a 43 percent chance of staying there as an adult. Data from the Equality of Opportunity Project show it is harder in the South than anywhere else in the nation for a low-income young person to become middle- or higher-income as an adult.¹ The region has the highest levels of poverty and the lowest levels of educational attainment, making the odds for advancing even more difficult.

Prospects for our young people are widely variable, depending on the circumstances of their birth, the inclusiveness of their communities, the dynamism of the economies in which they live, and the quality of the education and workforce systems that serve them. The economic situation of a person's parents matters tremendously to the likelihood of their educational and economic success, but the place where they grow up also matters, regardless of family income. There are five place-based factors that are correlated with low levels of mobility: higher levels of residential segregation, lower school quality, higher levels of inequality, fewer two-parent households, and lower levels of social capital.² Historical and continuing patterns of discrimination and disinvestment in the South mean that these five factors manifest in particularly intractable ways in our region, with school quality often varying by neighborhood, far too many low-wage jobs, and too little investment in human capital. The South's future economic competitiveness and social cohesion depend on its capacity to change longstanding cultural and structural inequities that continue to stunt its productivity and the wellbeing of its people.

While these mobility data paint a stark picture of opportunity in the region, they also provide a framework on which to build a response: If individual mobility rests on a combination of personal drive, deliberately supportive institutional practices, community supports, and the eradication of structural barriers, how can we make sure all of those factors are operating in the lives of the young people who start out furthest from opportunity?

Federal and state policy provide a broad framework for improvements, but it is at the local level that strategy must be set and where relationships between individuals, institutions, and employers are formed. Many Southern cities have already begun to tackle the longstanding and complex issues identified in the *State of the South* report. Few however, have built the durable infrastructure needed to connect, systematically and at scale, those young people furthest from opportunity with

¹ "Where is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States." Raj Chetty, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, & Emmanuel Saez. *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129(4): 1553-1623, 2014. <http://equality-of-opportunity.org/images/Geography%20Executive%20Summary%20and%20Memo%20January%202014.pdf>

² Ibid

rewarding careers in high-growth sectors. In fact, it is possible for communities throughout the South to do as they are doing now and never change the odds of educational and economic success for the majority of those youth and young adults in the lowest income brackets—the very ones who face the most significant barriers to economic security.

Shifting these mobility patterns requires a reengineering of the systems that are essential for connecting economically stranded youth and young adults to postsecondary credentials that can unlock entry to family-sustaining employment. In 2016, to help accelerate the necessary systems change, MDC launched the Network for Southern Economic Mobility (the “Network”). Our inaugural cohort included four cities: Athens, Ga., Chattanooga, Tn., Greenville, S.C., and Jacksonville, Fl. We are inviting a second cohort to join them in the Network in 2017. Our objective is to help selected communities deepen, accelerate, and align strategic investments that position youth and young adults furthest from opportunity for economic success.

The Network for Southern Economic Mobility

The 2017 cohort will participate in two-years of Network activity, with multiple opportunities for cross-site and community-level learning, systems analysis and strategy development, and implementation coaching. Network members will examine how their existing systems support economic mobility for young people facing the most difficult barriers to advancement; analyze the policies, systems, and culture that impede or accelerate their progression; and adapt relevant systems to improve pathways to family-sustaining employment and income. The bulk of the costs associated with the Network’s development and implementation is being supported with philanthropic investing, including the Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation, the Kresge Foundation, and the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Each community will commit to attending three in-person convenings over the two-year period and contribute an annual participation fee of \$25,000 to support the work of the Network. (In addition to the participation fee, sites will be responsible for team travel to the three convenings. Room and board at the convenings will be covered by MDC.)

Each participating city will form an imaginative, high-level leadership group that includes individuals who can leverage policy and operational changes in the critical systems that directly affect youth mobility within their community. We will challenge Network members to make strategic investments in youth and young adults that support the acquisition of postsecondary credentials that can position them for entry and success in verified living wage sectors of the regional economy. This will require a dual-customer education-to-career system that serves youth *and* employers and attention to the place-based factors that influence mobility and how they play out in your community. Network activities will be designed to provide the necessary analysis and expertise to build the appropriate foundation for this systems change.

The design and delivery of the Network's two-year program will be done with full collaboration of member cities and will include:

- Focused peer-learning and technical assistance related to systems and data analysis, institutional policy reform, innovative program strategies, youth and employer engagement, and funding strategies needed to connect economically disadvantaged youth to postsecondary credentials and rewarding work, drawing on expert policymakers and practitioners in systems change and programs proven to help young people.
- Customized coaching to tackle deep-seated institutional and cultural practices that create barriers to youth development and economic mobility

Completed proposals are due at 5 p.m. EDT on July 28, 2017, and should be submitted to Anna Shelton-Ormond at aormond@mdcinc.org. Applicants will be notified of their status by August 30, 2017.

Network Overview

Network Activities

While content and design of the Network will be informed by member cities, activities are certain to include:

- Three two-day convenings over the course of two years, at least one in Durham, N.C., and one in a Network-member community. The opening convening will take place in Durham on November 2-3, 2017.
- Customized coaching to address institutional culture and practices that create barriers to youth development and economic mobility
- Focused virtual and on-site technical assistance and peer-learning related to analysis of the current system of supports for youth, policy reform, innovative program strategies, youth and employer engagement, and funding strategies needed to connect economically disadvantaged youth to postsecondary credentials and rewarding work
- Cross-city knowledge development among Network participants, supported through ongoing dialogue (via convenings, webinars, and teleconferences), with expert practitioners from the field

Expected Outcomes

At the conclusion of the two-year commitment, Network members will have a:

- Strong, informed leadership group equipped to challenge institutional inequity and implement an integrated action plan that fosters a dual-customer system (youth and employers) to accelerate youth mobility efforts

- Detailed data analyses of those youth in the lowest income brackets and the principal barriers to economic mobility
- A systems analysis of institutions and environmental factors that support or impede youth mobility
- Set of actionable priorities to help strengthen organizations with the culture, skills, and management capacity to refine existing programs, leverage new resources, and spur innovation
- Cross-regional peer group of Southern community leaders working together on a cutting-edge issue of national significance
- Knowledge of how other cities are implementing structural reforms in the Southern economic and political context
- The development of an integrated action plan that will define the mutually agreed upon strategy developed by the leadership team, agreements between partner organizations, roles in moving an action agenda forward, and timetable and funding scenarios.

Selection Criteria

Participation is by invitation only to ensure Network members are committed to making a sustained investment in increasing youth economic mobility within their cities and have relevant experience to share. Leadership group requirements will enable genuine peer exchange amongst individuals with the power to influence institutional and employer practice. A small number of cities will be selected based on the following considerations:

- A small, cross-sector, cross-institution leadership team fully committed to participating in all Network activities that is responsible and has sufficient staffing and influence to carry this work forward, engaging a broader group of designers and implementers
- Evidence of community concern about upward economic mobility and demonstrated commitment to implementing policies and programs most likely to improve economic and social outcomes for youth and young adults in the lowest income brackets, including, but not limited to, postsecondary attainment and employment
- Effective mechanisms for consulting wider constituencies (youth, community based organizations, employers, parents, expert practitioners, etc.) in program design and implementation
- The presence of industries within high-growth sectors, offering well-paying entry-level and middle-skill jobs with career potential
- An existing foundation of proven strategies and promising programs on which to build
- Advanced knowledge and skills in a relevant system or program area that can be shared with and are of significant value to other Network members
- Ability to invest local funds to support the effort and implementation of identified strategies, including the \$25,000 annual participation fee; in addition to the participation fee, sites will be responsible for team travel to the three convenings; room and board at the convenings will be covered by MDC

A note about the leadership team and the lead organization

The work that Network communities will undertake requires many actors and leverage points. Thus, the composition of the leadership team is critical. As you assemble your team, consider that an effective team should collectively hold a complement of assets:

- Credibility within relevant demographic groups, networks, and institutions
- Creative thought leadership to see new connections and generate new ideas
- Positional authority to move ideas onto official agendas, execute implementation, and secure leverage within key institutions
- Authentic, lived experience so that analyses and resultant priorities are grounded in the reality of current, local context of youth and young adults experiencing limited prospects for economic mobility
- Perspective from which to critique the current system
- First-hand knowledge of employer needs in high-growth sectors
- Knowledge of policy and finance within critical systems
- Existing relationships with key stakeholders whose engagement is required for successful policy change and implementation
- Understanding of and existing relationships with local philanthropy
- A designated position and/or staff person to provide the necessary coordination and administrative support to unite a cross-sector team (This staffing is not expected to be full time, but the coordination of the team should be considered part of someone's job. This role does not have to be filled by the organization leading proposal development.)

As you assemble your team of 7-8 individuals, consider representatives from the systems in your community that need to work in a more effective way. This work will necessitate new connections and action in secondary and postsecondary education (both two and four-year), workforce development boards, alternative education, justice system, local government, and employers. Think carefully about who can influence and engage these sectors and institutions. Your analysis of how deep systems change happens in your community might lead you to consider elected or appointed officials, leaders from the faith community, or career and technical education experts. The ability to deepen good practice within and across organizations will require certain levels of positional authority as well as understanding of day-to-day operations within organizations: for example, a community college vice president, a provost from a local HBCU, the executive director of a forward-thinking employment training program, a human resources director of a local employer, and a local judge concerned with the school-to-prison pipeline. The team should have a racial and gender balance that reflects your community.

Note: Network communities in Cohort 1 are generally finding that they want and need a broader group of leaders devoted to the Network effort. The core team of 7-8 people will be those who attend MDC-hosted convenings; a broader team can be formed as long as clear communication mechanisms are established. It is also possible to develop an advisory committee of additional leaders who can advise and support the work of a core team. The efficacy of these approaches can be determined after a site joins the Network.

MDC Commitments

To ensure a productive experience for Network members, MDC commits to the following:

- Building the Network with participants—what you know and what you want to learn will be the basis for an inclusive design process.
- Providing a series of analytic tools and frameworks to guide discussion, local analysis, and planning
- Facilitating genuine peer exchange among members of the leadership teams
- Providing customized coaching to support and counsel teams as you tackle deep-seated institutional and cultural practices that create barriers to youth development and economic mobility
- Offering focused technical assistance and peer-learning related to systems and data analysis, institutional policy reform, innovative program strategies, youth and employer engagement, and funding strategies needed to connect economically disadvantaged youth to postsecondary credentials and rewarding work
- Promoting cross-region knowledge development with local and national expert policymakers and practitioners

Proposal Guidelines

Please complete the following proposal narrative. We encourage you to include members of your proposed leadership team in the preparation of the narrative. The narrative should not exceed 10 pages. All materials should be submitted to aormond@mdcinc.org by 5 p.m. EDT on Friday, July 28, 2017. Please include the words “Network for Southern Economic Mobility” in the subject line.

If you have questions regarding proposal completion or submission, please contact Anna Shelton-Ormond at MDC at aormond@mdcinc.org or 919.381.5802 x371.

Proposal Narrative

1. Provide name, title, and contact information for your community’s Network proposal lead.
2. Provide a brief analysis of the principal challenges and opportunities facing youth and young adults, ages 14-24, (both in-school and out-of-school) in your city.
 - a. Give an example of something you have done to make a systems change to support education and employment for youth in the lowest income brackets. What happened? What did you learn about the systems and how they respond to change efforts? What would you do differently next time?
 - b. In your view at this time, what two to three significant changes in systems, program design, resource allocation, and/or other factors are most likely to be required to achieve improved mobility and enhanced income prospects for young people in the lowest income brackets?
3. What employment sectors offer entry-level jobs with career potential for the population of youth and young adults that are the focus of this initiative?
4. What is the history of employer involvement in addressing the gap between low-income or marginalized young people and economic opportunity?
5. Investment in young people furthest from opportunity is likely to be resource intensive: people, time, funds. What evidence is there that this is a high priority for your city?
6. Describe your community’s experience in cross-system collaboration to-date related to improving outcomes for low-income youth and young adults.
 - a. Reflecting on these efforts, where does your community perform well when it comes to ambitious efforts to change existing policy, practice, and systems?
 - b. Where have you been bold? Where have you struggled?

7. What practices have been used in your community for seeking authentic input of and engaging critical stakeholders, in this case economically marginalized young people, as well as employers?
 - a. What has been challenging about this?
 - b. What has worked?

8. Using data to drive structural reform is an important element of systems change. In what way(s) has your community embraced data-based change? This might be at a cross-systems level, within institutions, or even a longitudinal data-tracking system to gauge progress for youth within a system.
 - a. If this has not been integral, why not?
 - b. What barriers exist for sharing data?

9. Describe your proposed leadership team and your rationale for its composition. Provide short bios for proposed team members, including information on race and gender.

10. What is the organization that will provide coordinating and administrative support for this effort? Include a short description of mission and ability to fulfil this role.

11. Describe local investors (public sector, philanthropies, corporations, etc.) that have the capacity and willingness to support improving education and employment for low-income young adults. Describe the source(s) of your Network participation fee.

12. What issues, knowledge and/or skills would be most helpful to gain as a result of participation in the Network? Consider your city as well as members of the leadership team.

13. We aim to build a strong network of peer learners within the Network. What special areas of experience and expertise relevant to upward economic mobility for youth do members of your team possess and/or can you share from your city's experience?

Proposal Submission and Timeline

Proposals should be submitted electronically as a single PDF file that includes a cover letter on letterhead with electronic signatures from the CEO or Executive Director of the organization that is submitting the proposal on behalf of your team. The proposal should be submitted to aordmond@mdcinc.org by 5 p.m. EDT, Friday, July 28, 2017. Please include "Network for Southern Economic Mobility" in the subject line.

- June 7:** Request for Proposals released
- June 21:** Conference call for communities interested in responding to this Request for Proposals
- July 28:** Completed proposals are due at 5 p.m. EDT
- Aug. 14-18:** Phone interviews with finalists

- Aug. 30:** Applicants notified of results
- Sept. 29:** Participation fee due
- Nov 2-3:** Opening convening and design workshop in Durham, N.C.

2017-2019 Network Activities

November 2-3, 2017: Opening convening in Durham, N.C.; opening reception on evening of November 1; activities conclude at 4 p.m. on November 3

November 2017-April 2018: Planning and design with individual cities; onsite and virtual coaching and technical assistance from MDC and other experts; opportunities for peer-networking

Spring 2018: Second two-day, cross-site design/strategy convening

Summer 2018-Spring 2019: Ongoing community-level design and implementation; onsite and virtual coaching and technical assistance from MDC and other experts, as well as opportunities for peer-networking

Summer 2019: Final cross-site convening; community change work continues; final coaching calls; MDC summarizes significant learnings in a report to funders and other Southern leaders

Selection and Notification

MDC will conduct phone interviews with finalists during the week of August 14-18. The contact person for each submitted proposal will be notified by MDC by August 30, 2017, of the results.

MDC is a nonprofit based in Durham, N.C. Our mission is to help communities, organizations, and leaders close the gaps that separate people from opportunity. Founded in 1967 to help North Carolina make the transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy and from a segregated to an integrated workforce, MDC now focuses on increasing educational attainment, connecting people to work that pays, and helping them get the resources they need to become successful. To accomplish that, MDC publishes research that highlights the importance of removing inequities; organizes leaders community-wide to create a will for change; develops programs that strengthen the workforce and foster economic development; and incubates those programs so they can be made sustainable and replicated at scale.



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