



Pathway Profiles

**Network for Southern Economic Mobility
Convenings in Atlanta, GA, Nashville, TN, and
Charlotte, NC**

November 2019

About MDC

For more than 50 years MDC has brought together foundations, nonprofits, and leaders from government, business and the grassroots to illuminate data that highlight deeply rooted Southern challenges and help them find systemic, community solutions. Our approach uses research, consensus-building, and programs that connect education, employment, and economic security to help communities foster prosperity by creating an “infrastructure of opportunity” — the aligned systems and supports that can boost everyone, particularly those who’ve been left behind, to higher rungs on the economic ladder. Since 1996, MDC’s landmark *State of the South* reports have shaped the economic agenda of the region, shining a spotlight on historic trends, deep-rooted inequities, and solutions that offer rural and urban communities a path forward. Read our past reports at www.stateofthesouth.org. Learn more about MDC at www.mdcinc.org.

For more information about the Network for Southern Economic Mobility, contact us at info@mdcinc.org.

Introduction

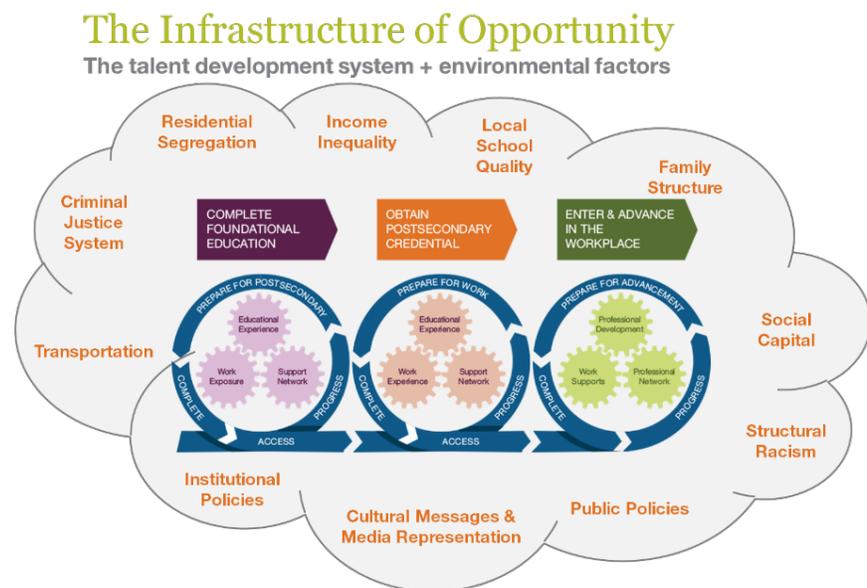
The Network for Southern Economic Mobility has been on the road! Through generous support from JPMorgan Chase & Co., in 2018-2019 MDC hosted three small convenings for the Network in Atlanta, GA, Nashville, TN, and Charlotte, NC. The convenings featured local leaders engaged in innovative work to change the economic mobility odds for low-income youth and young adults in each of these Southern cities.

According to Opportunity Insights data, there are few Southern communities where a child born in poverty has more than a 6 percent chance of moving to the upper income quintile as an adult. In Network communities, 31 to 39 percent are expected to remain in the lowest bracket.¹

Improvements to the talent development system and its surrounding ecosystem are crucial to improving access and economic inclusion along that path to upward mobility and all along the income spectrum to ensure more Southerners have the opportunity to thrive. In response to this challenge, MDC launched the Network for Southern Economic Mobility in 2016, a select group of Southern communities committed to increasing upward economic mobility for youth and young adults in the lowest income

brackets. Network cities include Athens, GA, Chattanooga, TN, Greenville, SC, Jacksonville, FL, Little Rock, AR, Savannah, GA, and Spartanburg, SC. Each city created a cross-sector leadership group to leverage policy and operational changes in the critical systems that directly affect youth economic mobility.

Our road trip traveled the pathway of upward economic mobility, with visits focused on 1) securing a strong educational foundation, 2) connecting to work experience and careers, and 3) navigating the barriers that impede progress through the talent development system.



¹ Chetty, Raj, Nathaniel Hendren, Patrick Kline, & Emmanuel Saez. "Where is the Land of Opportunity? The Geography of Intergenerational Mobility in the United States." *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 129(4): 1553-1623, 2014.

Pathway Profile: Atlanta, GA

Promising Collaborative Efforts in Atlanta

As one of the largest metropolitan areas in the South and home to many thriving industries, Atlanta ranks high on *Forbes'* lists for best cities for young professionals and business and careers.² Despite many signs of increasing prosperity for the Atlanta region, this Southern metro also reflects the reality of stalled upward economic mobility for low-income young people. Research on income and mobility in the United States conducted by Opportunity Insights showed that an individual born in Atlanta's lowest income quintile had less than a 5 percent chance to earn in the top 20 percent of income as an adult.³ In addition, nearly 70 percent of people who grew up in households earning in the lowest income quintile remained in the lowest two income quintiles as adults. The poverty rate in Atlanta is 19 percent with sizeable disparities in rates for black, white, and Hispanic residents of the city.⁴ In the face of Atlanta's low economic mobility odds for low-income young people and high poverty rates for African Americans and Latino populations, we were eager to learn about efforts to create a future where more of Atlanta's low-income youth can enjoy the city's overall prosperity.

In December 2018, NSEM communities heard from three Atlanta organizations working to strengthen transitions from secondary to postsecondary education in the metro area: Achieve Atlanta, the College Advising Corps serving Atlanta Public Schools, and Georgia State University's Student Success Programs. These efforts illustrate how the region is leveraging community investment, collective action, and systems approaches to create an infrastructure of opportunity for youth and young adults in the region.

Achieve Atlanta

Achieve Atlanta is an intermediary organization for community-wide degree attainment efforts in Atlanta. In 2014, through a partnership between the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta, the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation, and Atlanta Public Schools, Achieve Atlanta was founded to

² Sharf, Samantha, *Updated Full List: The Best Cities for Young Professionals 2017*, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/samanthasharf/2017/05/22/full-list-the-best-cities-for-young-professionals-2017/#49979d45f17d> (May 22, 2017)

Forbes, *The Best Places for Business & Careers*, <https://www.forbes.com/best-places-for-business/list/> (October 24, 2018)

³ Chetty, Hendren, Kline, and Saez 2014

⁴ U.S Census Bureau, *2017 American Community Survey Single-Year Estimates*

increase degree attainment in Atlanta, by focusing on students and graduates of the Atlanta Public Schools district.

Achieve Atlanta seeks to increase college access and success in three ways: supporting college access partners in Atlanta, awarding the need-based Achieve Atlanta Scholarship to mitigate college costs for Atlanta Public School graduates, and partnering with postsecondary institutions and college success experts to provide coaching and direct support to students.

Sam Rauschenberg, Vice President of Data Strategy at Achieve Atlanta, characterized the leadership of the Whitehead Foundation and the Community Foundation for Greater Atlanta as “audacious” in establishing an intermediary focused on college degree attainment. As a funder and partner, Achieve Atlanta has brought significant investments and other partners to the table. The strong partnership based on shared goals, trust, and the additional capacity that Achieve Atlanta adds in data analysis and as a convener helps partners *stay* at the table.

To do this they have extensive data-sharing agreements with key partners. Achieve Atlanta has MOUs for coaching and data sharing with at least 10 colleges in the area, and they coordinate with Atlanta Public Schools (APS) for district-level data. They use this data-sharing and tracking to guide continuous improvement and coordinate a district-level college access working group that sets targets and mutual accountability. The working group works in concert with individual school-based college access teams on district-wide goals.

Achieve Atlanta’s intermediary role to align efforts, support college access and success partners, and award scholarships to APS graduates has strengthened the efforts to increase postsecondary degree attainment and economic mobility in Atlanta.

**Data & Collaboration Spotlight:
District-level College Access Working
Group & School-based College Access
Teams**

Achieve Atlanta staff, key district leaders, college access partners, and individual school representatives participate in a district-level college access working group. Working group meetings offer regular opportunities for partners to review data and progress toward agreed upon goals.

At a fall 2018 meeting, the working group shared the FAFSA (Federal Application for Student Aid) completion data for each high school in the district. They discussed who met the goals, who did not, what they learned from their progress and challenges, and finally how to adjust the strategy to move closer to their goal.

The meetings demonstrate the importance of building trust among partners to create relationships that allow for honest conversations about progress and resources. The honest conversations at these meetings help create public support for one another as they work toward shared goals that will benefit young

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

If you are thinking about community-wide efforts to support increased attainment of postsecondary degrees and credentials, consider the following questions and data points:

1. How are you aligning efforts in your secondary schools to help people gain access to and achieve success in postsecondary institutions?
2. What efforts exist that support low-income young people to be prepared for, gain access to, and succeed in postsecondary education? What were the results of those efforts? How can those programs be strengthened and scaled to support all the students who need them?
3. What opportunities exist for data sharing to create a clearer picture of the community landscape around degree attainment? What opportunities exist for greater accountability?
4. Are there opportunities in your community to address issues through institutional, philanthropic, and community partnerships?

KEY DATA POINTS TO CONSIDER INCLUDE:

- FAFSA completion rates
- Number of students applying to postsecondary institutions
- Summer melt rates & efforts to counteract summer melt
- Retention rates at higher education institutions serving the community and for students graduating from high school in your community
- College attendance and college success rates

All data should be disaggregated by race, gender, income, and school; further disaggregation is encouraged if your data information system supports it.

College Advising Corps

The second organization NSEM participants learned from was the College Advising Corps (CAC). Their presence in Atlanta and approach illustrate the importance of collaboration in helping low-income youth and young adults learn about and reach the postsecondary options open to them.

College Advising Corps works to increase the number of low-income, first-generation college students and underrepresented high school students who enter and complete higher education. CAC works towards this goal nationally through an in-school model or through a virtual model. In Atlanta, the CAC model is primarily an in-school model, which hires recent college graduates to serve as full-time college advisers in all the high schools in Atlanta Public Schools. CAC seeks to strengthen the transition from secondary to postsecondary education by supporting low-income, first generation, and underrepresented students in the application, financial aid, and decision-making processes for postsecondary education.

As a leader collaborating with others, Dr. Yarbrah Peeples, now Senior Regional Director—East, spoke about a posture of humility when entering a partnership. “We need to be able to walk into a room and minimize our ego. We walk into a partnership to listen and learn, knowing you are really

good at some things, but may not be good at everything.” Dr. Peebles implored Network members to have patience because the partnerships and work to increase postsecondary access for young people may not unfold as expected, especially as leaders create and implement a plan, then reflect and refine the approach. When partners fall short of goals, collaborators must honestly reflect on challenges, the assumptions that informed the approach, and what future adjustments must be made.

Like many large urban school districts, the population of Atlanta Public Schools has a larger percentage of people of color (85 percent⁵ in 2015 in APS versus 63 percent⁶ in the Atlanta City school district community) and a higher percentage of low-income students (77.1⁷ percent free and reduced-price lunch in APS versus a 19 percent⁸ poverty rate in Atlanta) than the broader community population. In serving all APS seniors, the College Advising Corps efforts to streamline the college application and enrollment process for students, both at an individual level and at the institutional level, serve the populations most affected by low-mobility rates.

CAC advises every senior in APS to ensure students are meeting key milestones like completing standardized testing and completing the FAFSA to increase a

student’s likelihood and ability to enroll in a “best fit, best match” college. These are colleges that provide the financial aid, academic rigor and supports, and college environment that help students be successful once they enroll. College advisers supplement the work of counselors with large caseloads and a broad range of responsibilities, who often are unable to spend the necessary time counseling students on postsecondary education preparation.

For Dr. Peebles, not only does the CAC partnership with Achieve Atlanta allow CAC to work throughout the school and widen their reach, the partnership also facilitates collaboration and coordination at the institutional level for the district. The advisers provide counsel to students and their families by building relationships and collaborating with principals, teachers, counselors,

Lost in Transition: Reducing Summer Melt in APS

One threat that many high school graduates face is summer melt: when students have been accepted and intend to attend college at the end of high school but ultimately do not enroll. This phenomenon, which affects low-income and first-generation students at a greater rate, can be caused by many factors, including missed paperwork, financial barriers, and disconnection from the supports and educators who helped students through the application process. College Advising Corps is addressing summer melt head-on by engaging parents in the college process early and more often and by continuing support and advising for students and their families during the summer. CAC runs a texting program to help students and their families stay on track during the summer months.

⁵ Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection, *Atlanta Public Schools LEA Summary of Selected Facts*, ocrdata.ed.gov/Page?t=d&eid=28846&syk=8&pid=2493. Survey Year 2015

⁶ National Center for Education Statistics, Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates Atlanta City School District, GA District Demographic Dashboard 2013-2017, <https://nces.ed.gov/Programs/Edge/ACSDashboard/1300120#>

⁷ Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection

⁸ U.S Census Bureau, *2017 American Community Survey Single-Year Estimates*

students, families, and postsecondary admissions representatives. Connecting with principals to learn their perspective, priorities, and needs aids CAC in supporting a principal's goals while working toward the key performance indicators for college success. While Dr. Peeples is a member of the district-level college access working group, individual college advisers work on school-based college access teams to coordinate with principals, district leadership, Achieve Atlanta, and other community partners to set goals and hold one another accountable toward those goals. These efforts illustrate the power of creating a culture of information-sharing that supports shifts in institutional structures, policies, and behaviors that can have long-term positive effect on student outcomes.

Georgia State: Forecasting the future through predictive analytics

Georgia State University has made significant strides in closing achievement gaps while raising the overall completion outcomes of its students. Eric Cuevas, Senior Director of Student Success Programs, discussed the university's approach to student success and their number one goal to become a national model of student success. Just one of the many indicators of their progress toward becoming a national model is the increase in its graduation rate from 32 percent in 2003 to 55 percent in 2017.⁹

Cuevas stated that Georgia State is the “realest” university in Georgia, reaching the “new traditional student.” These new traditional students are parents, working, and commuting. The demographics paint the picture of a university educating a large, diverse student body with student outcomes on the rise.

In 2016, after consolidation with the two-year Georgia Perimeter College campuses, Georgia State University became the largest university in Georgia.¹⁰ There are more than 51,000 students, nearly half of whom are Pell grant recipients¹¹ (a federal grant given to undergraduate U.S. citizens who demonstrate financial need), and a large percentage of whom are people of color. Thanks to the student success efforts at GSU, the university is helping low-income and historically under-served young people obtain a postsecondary credential, a key accomplishment on the pathway to upward economic mobility. In addition to a rising graduation rate at a university serving a large percentage of low-income and first-generation college students, Georgia State has made significant progress in closing outcome gaps for these populations. In recent years they have even seen higher graduation rates for Pell grant recipients and students of color.

So how have they accomplished this? It has taken many steps to achieve the progress GSU has made. For NSEM members learning together in Atlanta, Cuevas highlighted the following: leadership actions, culture shifts, technology updates, and internal systems-changes that have made a difference for the students at Georgia State.

⁹ McMurtrie, Beth. *Georgia State U. Made Its Graduation Rate Jump. How?* <https://www.chronicle.com/article/Georgia-State-U-Made-Its/243514> (May 25, 2018)

¹⁰ *About Perimeter College* <https://perimeter.gsu.edu/about-perimeter-college/>

¹¹ *Distribution of Federal Pell Grant Program Funds by Institution 2016-2017*, <https://www2.ed.gov/finaid/prof/resources/data/pell-institution.html>

Cuevas emphasized how he and his staff think of their students as the university's clients. They thought about how students, who may be unfamiliar with the inner workings of a large university, approach the university and its student support services. Students often do not know about all the different departments, how they relate to one another, and how they can serve the student. In response to these realities, the university worked to shift its culture so that student-facing functions were seamless—at least for students. This required communicating more effectively and consulting with one another so departments were connected, so students could get their needs met without having to navigate a maze of departments and university personnel.

The university also began collecting data to understand what it was doing to support or hinder student success. For example, faculty and staff looked at how often students earned a D, F, or withdrew from a course, what they call “DFW rates.” They learned they had high DFW rates in math, so they changed how they taught math and created an interactive learning environment for math where they could better understand students’ learning needs. As a result, GSU was able to cut its math DFW rates in half.

They also examined time-to-graduation by investing in the Student Success Collaborative, a membership of more than 500 colleges and universities working to improve student outcomes and student experience. Their goal was to predict the future—and that they did. They found 800 data points that could predict successful student outcomes. They track each predictive data point every 24 hours, so they can identify any concerns and provide the support necessary to help students stay on track.

Finally, Cuevas shared that in the Student Success department they adopted the practice that no idea is a bad idea and encouraged everyone to innovate and create ideas to increase student success. There are four principles to spur innovation in their department:

1. Look at the data to find problems
2. Pilot to find solutions with an understanding that it will not be perfect
3. Tweak the solution
4. Scale the solution

These principles have helped Georgia State’s Student Success Programs create student-informed and effective programs that are addressing the needs of their students.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

If you are thinking about the postsecondary outcomes for young people in your community, consider the following questions as a starting point:

1. What are the graduation and retention rates (disaggregated by race, gender, and Pell Grant status) at the postsecondary institutions in your community and the institutions that students in your community attend? How is this data used?
2. What data are the higher education institutions collecting to understand their student success? What interventions or approaches are they taking to increase student success for low-income students? Students of color? First-generation college students? All students?

3. What is the rate of summer melt for young people in your community? What efforts are in place to reduce summer melt?
4. What institutions are serving low-income students in your community? What are their outcomes?

RESOURCES: The National Center for Education Statistics' College Navigator and the College Scorecard from the U.S. Department of Education are a good place to start for information on the postsecondary institutions serving your community.

Conclusion

Increasing educational access and attainment is a goal that the Atlanta region is investing in and working together to achieve. The three local speakers lifted up the importance of partnership and collaboration, data collection and analysis, and leadership action to increase college degree attainment for low-income youth and young adults in Atlanta. Their efforts show examples of practices to imitate and test as Southern communities seek to increase educational attainment—and subsequent economic mobility—for youth and young adults across the South.

Pathway Profile: Nashville, TN

Pathways to Employment: Regional and Community Perspectives

The City of Nashville has nearly 666,000 residents and a median income of just under \$58,000. Key industries are health care management, automobile production, finance, higher education, insurance, printing and publishing, technology manufacturing, tourism and a thriving music industry. For those 25 years and older, 87.8 percent have a high school diploma or equivalent, 19.5 percent have some college, but no degree. In addition, about 38 percent have a bachelor's degree or above. This is higher than the Southern region's overall 28 percent.¹² By many measures, Nashville is a thriving region but not everyone has the opportunity to take advantage of the metro's education and employment opportunities. In 2016, the poverty rate was about 14.6 percent with higher rates of poverty for Latino (21 percent) and African American (20 percent) individuals.¹³ Research on income and mobility in the United States conducted by Opportunity Insights showed that an individual born in Nashville's lowest income quintile had less than a 6 percent chance to earn in the top fifth of income as an adult and as a result Opportunity Insights ranked Nashville number 41 out of the 50 largest commuting zones in intergenerational mobility.¹⁴

Despite Nashville's economic growth gaps remain for youth and young adults in the talent development system and for how communities can work together to invest in solutions that improve economic mobility. To address these gaps, local government, philanthropic, and private sector investment are engaging systems *and* individuals in the work of changing the economic mobility trajectory for low-income youth and young adults.

Nashville and its surrounding areas have a rich history of systemic and programmatic efforts that support, prepare and connect youth and young adults to career pathways leading to employment. These efforts include strong partnerships between workforce development agencies, employers, school districts, postsecondary institutions, chambers of commerce, nonprofit organizations and others in the community. During the Network's February 2019 visit to Nashville, local and regional leaders discussed how they connect to and work with employers, government and community partners to support youth and young adults on a pathway to upward mobility.

¹² 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

¹³ 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

¹⁴ Chetty et al.

Nashville Career Advancement Center

“You learn to work by working. There is evidence that the earlier you work, the higher your earnings (will be) over your lifetime” stated Ellen Zinkiewicz, Director of Youth Services at the Nashville Career Advancement Center (NCAC). NCAC is city agency for workforce development, that among many other roles, operates and funds youth employment programs in the city. Zinkiewicz described Nashville’s youth employment efforts as a public-private partnership with funding of approximately \$4 million dollars, with 75 percent funded by the city and the rest supplemented by private funding. Nashville’s recent investment in youth employment was the largest investment in young people outside of the school system in the city’s history.

NCAC offers summer and year-round youth employment through Opportunity NOW and other programs. Opportunity NOW began three years ago with 50 opportunities and grew quickly to over 11,000 opportunities for Nashville youth and young adults. Key factors supporting this growth are mayoral leadership, local funding and intentional execution by practitioners.

PENCIL

Local intermediaries such as PENCIL also play a key role in Nashville, linking community resources and employers to Metro Nashville public schools. PENCIL often serves as a, “matchmaker, counselor, and occasionally a divorce attorney to manage relationships,” commented Bob Kucher, Vice President of Programs and Partnerships at PENCIL. PENCIL builds relationships and matches employers and other community partners with the Nashville public schools to create internship and other work-based learning opportunities for students in the metro area. PENCIL has dedicated staff that develop relationships, onboard business partners and celebrate their success. A key goal is to help Nashville youth gain exposure to careers that offer family-sustaining wages and to build their social capital by making strong connections with local business leaders.

Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce

Representing the fast-growing nearby community of Murfreesboro, Senior Vice President of Education and Workforce Development at the Rutherford County Chamber of Commerce, Beth Duffield highlighted the role of industry-led councils in influencing career and technical education curriculum and internship programs in the local school system. Industry-led councils are organized into five sectors: construction, health care, supply chain, tech community, and manufacturing. They operate under the umbrella of Rutherford Works, a division of the Chamber that operates and funds workforce and economic development programs in the county. The councils consist of leaders in each industry along with partner organizations within that same industry. The goals are unique to each council, but generally work to connect local education offerings to industry needs, increase opportunities for young people to learn about the industry, support students preparing for the industry, and address workforce needs in that industry.¹⁵

¹⁵ Rutherford Works, *About – Workforce Development*, Accessed September 20th, 2019, <https://rutherfordworks.com/building-tomorrow-s-workforce/about-workforce-development>

Duffield noted that, “she is an intermediary and dot connector.” Businesses came to her and said they had a problem. She went to the school system and asked if they could work together to better connect young people to employers. They set expectations and memoranda of understanding with companies and schools. Through their Rutherford Works Division the Chamber established youth-centered programs that include an internship program for high school students, a career pathways fair for 8th graders, a hiring event for high school seniors, a teacher externship program for teachers to gain exposure to key industry sectors, and a middle school externship program. The high school internship program includes 50 students—the chamber pays one-third of the salary and two-thirds are paid by the employer.¹⁶

An additional piece of the Chamber’s Rutherford Works strategy is to connect employers and the local schools using an online tool that demonstrates multiple career pathways and includes a point of contact at the high school and within the industry. Duffield also noted that the chamber’s role has been to reduce frustration for employers and educators. To further develop business-school relationships, the Chamber opened a seat on their chamber councils for K-12 and elementary education administrators. This step helped all parties develop a better understanding of how hard it was for businesses to build relationships with educators that help connect students to employment.

Chattanooga State Community College - Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship programs offer an opportunity for people to “earn and learn” while connecting to a meaningful work experience that can lead to long term living wage employment. Apprenticeship programs provide jobs that come with substantial training and the development of transferable skills beneficial to both the employer and the employee. These programs offer businesses the opportunity to strengthen and build their workforce providing a tailored high-quality talent pipeline, and they provide workers with advanced skill sets that meet the specific needs of employers.¹⁷

Bo Drake, Chattanooga NSEM team member and Vice President of Economic and Workforce Development at Chattanooga State Community College, discussed how the community college is connecting students to employment through a new apprenticeship program launched in the fall of 2019. The apprenticeship program, created by a partnership between Chattanooga State and the Chattanooga Area Chamber of Commerce, established the first college-sponsored, registered non-union apprenticeship program. Apprenticeships in industrial maintenance and welding are currently registered and the following are pending approval:

- Industrial Electrician
- HVAC Tech

¹⁶ Rutherford Works, *Building Tomorrow’s Workforce*, Accessed September 20th, 2019, <https://rutherfordworks.com/building-tomorrow-s-workforce/programs>

¹⁷ Chattanooga State Community College, *Apprenticeships*, Accessed September 23rd, 2019 www.chattanoogaastate.edu/apprenticeships

- Chemical Operator
- Certified Nursing Assistant
- Construction Equipment Mechanic
- Class B Commercial Driving License

These programs are unique in that it offers a registered apprenticeship program that is sponsored by the community college rather than the U.S. Department of Labor, which helps to expand employer and partner engagement in the program.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Are you interested in learning more about how to engage employers? Consider some of the following questions to get you started:

- What do workforce development agencies, community colleges and chambers of commerce have in place already to connect and engage with employers in your community?
- What career pathway, training and skill development programs are currently offered at your local community college?
- Are there any apprenticeship and/or other “earn and learn,” opportunities in your community? How are they designed and funded?

Connecting Youth to Employment

Following a discussion with system and business leaders, NSEM communities visited the Oasis Center (See sidebar) and heard from practitioners and advocates supporting youth to develop skills as they both navigate and influence workforce systems. They stressed the need to provide academic and non-academic support, career preparation and exposure for young people, especially those who are disconnected, face multiple barriers to employment and are in transition.

Brandon Hill, Director of the Mayor’s Youth Council and Community Engagement and Action Coordinator at the Oasis Center discussed the importance of positive youth development and seeing youth as assets in community, organizations, and beyond. The Mayor’s Youth Council provides ongoing and direct input on government policies and practices that may affect young people; advocates on issues and initiatives that may impact the lives of young people; recommends and fosters initiatives for and by youth; acts as a communication link between the Metropolitan Government and the young people of Nashville, and; promotes and recognizes the abilities, accomplishments, and contributions of young people in their communities.¹⁸

¹⁸ Nashville.gov, *Mayor’s Youth Council*, Accessed September 20th, 2019. www.nashville.gov/Mayors-Office/Neighborhoods/Youth/Mayors-Youth-Council.aspx.

Heidi King, Work-Based Learning Coordinator for Hamilton County Schools Gestamp Internship, highlighted the importance of champions who understand how systems work in the formation and execution of the district’s U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) internship program with Gestamp. This work-based learning program is the first in Tennessee to earn the USDOL’s registered apprenticeship designation. The program is now a registered apprenticeship in advanced manufacturing that allows high school students to get a full-day, work-based learning experience while also completing their education.

Students take online academic classes in a computer lab at Gestamp and get actual work experience during the school in the Gestamp plant.¹⁹

Oasis Transitions, a workforce development program of the Oasis Center, works with youth and young adults ages 18-24 involved, or have been involved, with the juvenile and/or adult criminal justice system. Austin Lewis, the Program Manager for Oasis Transitions, discussed the importance of partnerships and understanding youth challenges in the program’s work with young people who had been involved in the justice system.

To connect Oasis participants with work experience and employment opportunities, Oasis works with Tara Morgan, Zone Coordinator with Opportunity NOW onsite at the Oasis Center. Morgan discussed the preparation for youth and employers in the Opportunity NOW youth summer internship program operated by NCAC as noted earlier. In addition to coordinating this program for Oasis participants, Morgan assists them in navigating the workplace environment—a crucial element for young people as they are exposed to and enter internship and employment opportunities.

When asked about new efforts and possibilities for innovation, Hill discussed how the city has built an infrastructure, championed by municipal leadership, to support youth leadership. Hill also shared that Oasis in partnership with the Mayor’s Youth Council recently completed some youth action research with Opportunity Youth, young people between the ages of 16 and 24 who are

Oasis Center

Celebrating its 50th anniversary, the Oasis Center began in 1969 in Nashville as a community center for runaway teens and youth struggling with addictions. Today, the Oasis Center, serves over 3,000 youth and families every year offering a wide range of opportunities that reflect the diverse needs of youth and their families, from crisis intervention to youth leadership and community engagement to college and career access.

The Center’s nearly 20 programs and services are based on the foundation of four areas for youth success: safety, belonging, empowerment, and generosity. All of the Center’s work is rooted in the evidence-based principles of Positive Youth Development and Trauma-Informed Care.

To learn more about the Oasis Center visit oasiscenter.org

¹⁹ Hamilton County Schools, *Governor Lee visits state’s first U.S. Department of Labor apprenticeship program at Gestamp*. Accessed September 23rd, 2019. www.hcde.org/newsroom/governor_lee_visits_gestamp_program

neither enrolled in school nor participating in the labor market, to assess youth opinions and perspectives. It incorporated the feedback of over 500 young people who attended annual Mayor Youth Summits. The Youth Council presented the findings to the Mayor in the State of Nashville Youth Report. The Youth Council will release the report to the public in the fall of 2019. Since our visit to Nashville, the city has launched We City—a four-day civic leadership camp designed to help young people better understand how the city works and how it tackles issues.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Are you interested in learning more about how to connect youth to work experience and employment opportunities? Consider some of the following questions to get you started:

- What programs are in place to support, prepare and train youth and young adults for employment in your community? Are there programs for students in public school settings and on ramps for those who have dropped out?
- Does your community have a youth council or a similar entity?
- What partnerships are in place between community workforce and education systems, employers and youth-serving community-based organizations?

Conclusion

Nashville and the surrounding region have a strong infrastructure in place to help connect low income youth and young adults to employment. Local leaders highlighted the importance of place-based strategies, community college and high school apprenticeship programs, strong cross-sector collaboration, and partnerships with community-based organizations as key strategies for engaging employers and youth. These efforts offer examples to adapt and test for other southern communities seeking to support entry and advancement in the workplace for youth and young adults in their cities.

Pathway Profile: Charlotte, NC

Showcasing Charlotte

Our last stop was Charlotte, N.C., in March 2019. Charlotte is a good example of the “New South”: it has grappled with racial divides, seen significant demographic change with in-migration from Northern and Southern states, as well as Central and South America and Asia. During the Great Recession, the city experienced job losses at the high and low ends of the economy revealed weakened pathways to economic security—and some signs of skepticism in Charlotte’s culture of public/private partnerships.

The City of Charlotte has nearly one million residents, a median income of just over \$58,000, and a poverty rate of about 15 percent. Key industries are finance, energy, and health care. For those 25 years and older, 18 percent have a high school diploma or equivalent, 20 percent have some college, but no degree, and about 40 percent have a bachelor’s or graduate degree. The Charlotte area bachelor’s or graduate degree attainment rate is much higher than the South’s percentage of 28.8 percent.²⁰ But not everyone in Charlotte has the opportunity to take advantage of the metro’s education and employment assets. Indeed, the city was at the bottom of a list of economic mobility rankings for the 50 largest commuting zones in an Opportunity Insights analysis.²¹

Charlotte’s spot on that list and its response created an interesting intersection for a discussion of the ecosystem that surrounds the talent development system and how communities can work together to invest in solutions that improve economic mobility. There is national and local philanthropic investment and a public-private response that is trying to engage systems *and* individuals in the work of changing the economic mobility trajectory for low-income youth and young adults.

Investing in Economic Mobility

Not everyone was shocked by Charlotte’s mobility odds: “Charlotte’s economic mobility ranking was the least surprising bit of research,” said Laura Clark, President and CEO of United Way of Central Carolinas. Indeed, Charlotte follows a pattern where high growth in part of the economy led to growth in low-wage service sector jobs, sometimes masking an increase in the poverty rate that exacerbates the stalled mobility revealed by the Opportunity Insight analysis. Clark is glad the community is focused on economic mobility now, including investors from the philanthropic and corporate sectors. At our Charlotte convening, we heard from local, regional, and national funders

²⁰ 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

²¹ Chetty et al

about their approach to systemic challenges and building the capacity of local organizations to take on those challenges.

A SYSTEMIC RESPONSE

A systemic problem like stalled economic mobility requires a systemic response from funders, employers, local governments, and community-based organizations. Having broader impact is what drew the Annie E. Casey Foundation to work in the South, including North Carolina. Casey Senior Associate Don Baylor, Jr., notes that “at the root of the Foundation’s mission is the conviction that stable families create successful children. When we looked at the data, kids’ outcomes are worst in the South.” Part of the Foundation’s response is the Southern Partnership to Reduce Debt (SPRD), an initiative that addresses specific debt types with local and state policy to influence and improve systems that keep families from getting ahead. *(See sidebar for more details on SPRD).*

Southern Partnership to Reduce Debt (SPRD)

MDC is partnering with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to support SPRD, a multi-year, multi-state effort to close the racial-ethnic wealth gap and bring financial security to households of color. Organizations in AL, AR, GA, NC, SC, TN, and TX are working to reduce household debt in communities of color throughout the South, focusing on four types of debt: medical bills and hospital fees; high-cost consumer products and services (such as payday loans); criminal and civil judicial fines and fees; and student loans.

Another argument for a systemic approach: avoiding compartmentalization of the issue *and* the response. Laura Clark reminded our NSEM teams that “a child is not one data point.” A narrow focus on issues and programs—and no root causes—can sometimes exacerbate the misalignment and disconnects that make it difficult for a family to access resources, duplicates efforts, or even cancels out positive work that’s happening without coordination. But calling for an end of compartmentalizing needs care; sometimes calls for collaboration from funders to community organizations actually create silos and competition (some call it “collabetition!”). Collective *impact* requires collective *giving*, as Clark says, and that may require loosening reins, trusting community organizations to find collaboratives that work for them versus dictating specific partnerships. Flexibility in design and partnership must be matched with what Rodney Hood, former National Corporate Responsibility Manager at JPMorgan Chase & Co., called “patient capital.” The desired outcomes may be a long way out. Communities need learners and investors who understand that and are willing to stay connected through difficult work of untangling historic inequities and the current status quo. It took more than three years to get current outcomes, so partners and funders have to be prepared to spend more than that changing those outcomes.

MDCs’ framework for new outcomes in the long-term happen at the intersection of leadership, systems, and culture. Culture is shaped by leaders, who influence systems and structures—and the policy and practices that make up those structures. Changing community narrative about success and shifting mindsets of actors across systems is crucial to changing the underlying

system and structures. These factors play out differently for national, regional and local funders; those differences influence how local partnership efforts work with a particular funder.

Don Baylor, Jr. shared a provocative perspective from his view at a national foundation: “I don’t think we’re in the job of changing mindsets; we’re in the job of understanding and analyzing mindsets in order to guide our investments.” Understanding those mindsets helps answer the question “who is able to mobilize the people you want to mobilize?” National funders can provide national perspective, research, and experience that then can be tailored to local context; at the same time, local experience informs a national understanding of trends and can identify peers across an issue or policy arena, building support and reducing isolation in what can be difficult work.

For Rodney Hood, “the duty is promoting a shared vision of prosperity and economic inclusion.” As a corporate foundation with a distinct regional market focus, they may be more limited in funding scope, but also deeper ties in particular communities. Relationships in the business and finance sector could expand conversations locally and create new champions and supports, linking existing efforts with local funds.

Laura Clark sees one role of the local funder as “educating people on how and why we got here.” Local funders can play a part in changing mindsets of people who are setting policy and making structural decisions, in addition to their financial investment. Thoughtful funders have a responsibility to pay close attention to the stories and needs of the affected communities that have experienced disinvestment. One way of sharing positional power can be “helping people who are outside the game learn how to play the game.” That support can come through helping nonprofits in the community present their value proposition more clearly, connecting to additional resources, and—perhaps most importantly—providing unrestricted or general operating support that enables organizations to build capacity to accomplish their missions more effectively.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Are you interested in learning more about how investments related to improving economic mobility are being deployed? Consider some of the following questions to get you started:

- Which local, regional and national funders are investing in your state and community?
- Which pieces of your community’s infrastructure of opportunity need “patient capital”? Who could provide it? How do you make the case?
- What local opportunities exist for collective *giving* that could support collective *action*?

RESOURCES: Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, the Council of Foundations, and the Southeastern Council of Foundations all have resources for foundations and their partners with examples and guidance on how to work together strategically.

Leading on Opportunity

As noted above, in 2014, an Equality of Opportunity study (now Opportunity Insights) ranked Charlotte last among the 50 largest U.S. cities and Mecklenburg County 99 out of 100 largest counties in upward mobility. Leading on Opportunity is the city’s public-private partnership to “increase pathways of opportunity for children, youth and families in Charlotte-Mecklenburg.” After the report release, a task force examined the data and local outcomes more closely, releasing a report in 2017. The Leading on Opportunity Council was convened in March of that year to prioritize and implement the task force’s extensive recommendations. In 2018, Stephanie Kripa Cooper-Lewter was named as Leading on Opportunity’s executive director; Cooper-Lewter assembled a staff to carry the work forward, administratively housed in the Foundation for the Carolinas. Taking their agenda from the report, Leading on Opportunity has prioritized three “key determinants”—early care and education, college and career readiness, and child and family stability—and two cross-cutting factors that affect all three—segregation and social capital. They describe their effort this way: “We ENGAGE diverse voices uplifting community; we AMPLIFY stories and data shifting the narrative and celebrating community success; we INFLUENCE policies and practices building public will and shared community accountability ultimately resulting in transformative CHANGE.”

Race Matters for Juvenile Justice (RMJJ)

RMJJ was formed by the juvenile judges of North Carolina’s 26th District. This collaborative leadership group uses organizing, education, and workforce development to reduce disparate outcomes—particularly in the juvenile justice system—for children and families of color in Mecklenburg County. Through research, a speakers’ bureau, racial equity and implicit bias training, and youth and family programming, they are working to change the mindsets *and* practice within the juvenile justice system and related public and private institutions.

In an address to the NSEM members gathered in Charlotte, Cooper-Lewter emphasized that “you can’t change systems without being honest about what’s working and not working.” The Leading on Opportunity Council is charged with taking the lead on that honest examination of current outcomes and systems that keep them in place—and they must do it in a way that engages a broad Charlotte community. That means grappling internally with how to make decisions together and supporting an infrastructure for Community Impact Alliances—made up of funders, elected officials, the school system, health department, and community members—to listen and learn from more Charlotte residents.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Kevin Loux and Don Thomas, Community Impact Directors for college and career readiness and impact of segregation and social capital, respectively, shared their experience supporting engagement and accountability, two key pieces of any collaborative initiative.

Each of Leading on Opportunity’s key determinants is informed by the Community Impact Alliances (CIAs), which include “people who are proximate to the problem.” Gathering voices of people and institutions that are sometimes in partnership, sometimes in conflict, sometimes not acquainted

with each other “brings some humanity to the numbers,” they said, and though it may make for more complicated conversations, it makes for a clearer picture of reality. The first activity the Community Impact Alliance groups participated in was a thought exercise that begin with this premise: You all have one million dollars. What would you do in your area?

Loux noted that most people come up with individual solutions, and the first step is helping people see “your success or failure doesn’t happen in isolation.” That means getting people to see how the city is simultaneously flourishing and flailing in Charlotte’s segregated opportunity ecosystems—one functions quite well to keep affluent people in high-income brackets, the other functions to keep people from getting ahead. Failing out of one orbit or escaping the gravity of the other is rare, though not impossible. Helping people recognize who they need to work with to ensure that opportunity is accessible is foundational to any implementation of a policy, practice, or program. As Thomas pointed out, “Systems don’t work in isolation and they can’t be changed in isolation.” The CIAs provide a venue where people can identify leverage points that affect more than one factor to, ideally, create a snowball of success rather than barriers that reinforce the status quo.

But how do you know if you have picked a leverage point that will actually change outcomes? Leading on Opportunity is already talking about metrics, but they also know that just assembling a dashboard at the end of the year can show surface-level modifications without ever addressing underlying causes. They refer to it as “the iceberg model of system change”: if you’re only working at the tip of the iceberg and not getting below the surface, you won’t see lasting change. What’s under the surface are the mental models held by individuals and institutions about who can be successful, which systems are worth investing in, and how or if people or institutions can actually change. Loux spoke about reimagining mental models to create incentive structures that support upward mobility—a scaffolding that might help move the narrative in a more inclusive direction. Leading on Opportunity is still identifying some intentional moves it can take to change the narrative in Charlotte, and leaders know they have to be willing to wrestle with the hard truths about equity and opportunity in their city. (One group that is getting in that ring is Race Matters for Juvenile Justice. Learn about their efforts in the sidebar.) Thomas acknowledged that it will be a few years before they see some impact, but he offered this perspective: “We have to see ourselves as cathedral builders; the designer doesn’t get to see the finished cathedral. Dealing with the hard truths is something that is a struggle for some, but it is essential to transform a community.”

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Are you interested in shifting how your community approaches engagement and mutual accountability? Consider some of the following questions to get you started:

- What engagement models or venues already exist? Who is doing community engagement well? How do voices of people proximate to the problem inform analysis and strategy?
- What accountability structures or progress measures exist? At what level—institutional? sector-based? community-wide?

- What hard truths on history, race, and class remain to be examined? Are there people who have the skills to lead those conversations? Are they being included in design and leadership of your efforts? What successes can you build on to bridge fault lines?

RESOURCES: For further reading on measuring community progress, see the Urban Institute’s report “Changing Workforce Systems: A Framework for Describing and Measuring Systems Change”; for more information about addressing inequity, see the Racial Equity Institute’s report “The Groundwater Approach: building a practical understanding of structural racism.”

Conclusion

In Charlotte, Atlanta, Nashville, and many localities across the South, there are institutions and individuals holding the status quo in place and there are institutions and people making changes in the system. Sometimes there may be institutions and people that do both. This tension requires leaders across the community to work together to create the change needed to increase economic mobility for low-income youth and young adults. The aim of NSEM is to support cities that are working to create a pathway that provides equitable access, supports, and opportunity for all young people who are making their way through the talent development system. In Atlanta, Nashville, and Charlotte, the Network for Southern Economic Mobility learned from local leaders engaged in innovative work to shore up existing pathways and create new pathways to change the economic mobility odds for low-income youth and young adults in the South.