

A Blueprint for the Next Generation of Federal Place-Based Policy

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The places where we live shape both our day-to-day quality of life and our prospects for upward mobility. Our nation's history of racist policies and practices has created profound inequities in place-based resources, blocked intergenerational wealth building, and prevented low-income residents and people of color from fully accessing and participating in democratic processes. Advancing racial equity and upward mobility will require a robust (meaning well-funded, comprehensive, and sustained) national commitment to reversing the legacy of segregation and disinvestment, ensuring that every family can live in a community that supports its well-being and the long-term life chances of its children.

With support from Blue Meridian Partners, the Urban Institute and PolicyLink are collaborating to develop a blueprint for the next generation of federal place-based policy. The blueprint will draw upon community voices, research evidence, and practitioner insights to lay out principles and a structure for incorporating lessons from the past into future place-based policies that confront long-standing racial inequities and injustices. It aims to articulate the ecosystem of supports available to communities and accelerate progress by strengthening federal investments in place-based work.



Urban Institute is a nonprofit research organization that provides data and evidence to help advance upward mobility and equity. We are a trusted source for changemakers who seek to strengthen decisionmaking, create inclusive economic growth, and improve the well-being of families and communities. For more than 50 years, Urban has delivered the facts that inspire solutions—and this remains our charge today.



PolicyLink is a national research and action institute advancing racial and economic equity by Lifting Up What Works®. To advance equity, PolicyLink advocates for groundbreaking policy changes that enable everyone, especially people of color, to be economically secure, live in healthy communities of opportunity, and benefit from a just society. PolicyLink is guided by the belief that the solutions to the nation's challenges lie with those closest to these challenges: when the wisdom, voice, and experience of those traditionally absent from policymaking drive the process, profound policy transformations emerge.



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Policy Working Group Members

This effort to develop a blueprint for the next generation of federal place-based policy is informed by a policy working group, composed of policymakers and civic leaders working at the intersection of policy areas and across a wide range of geographies, that is sharing insights and fostering learning regarding place-based principles, programs, and action.

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Contents

1.0	<u>Executive Summary</u>	page 5
2.0	<u>Introduction</u>	page 7
3.0	<u>Envisioning the Next Generation of Place-Based Policy</u>	page 8
4.0	<u>Defining Place-Based Programs</u>	page 11
5.0	<u>Using This Blueprint</u>	page 15
6.0	<u>Notes</u>	page 31
7.0	<u>References</u>	page 32
8.0	<u>Author Biographies</u>	page 33

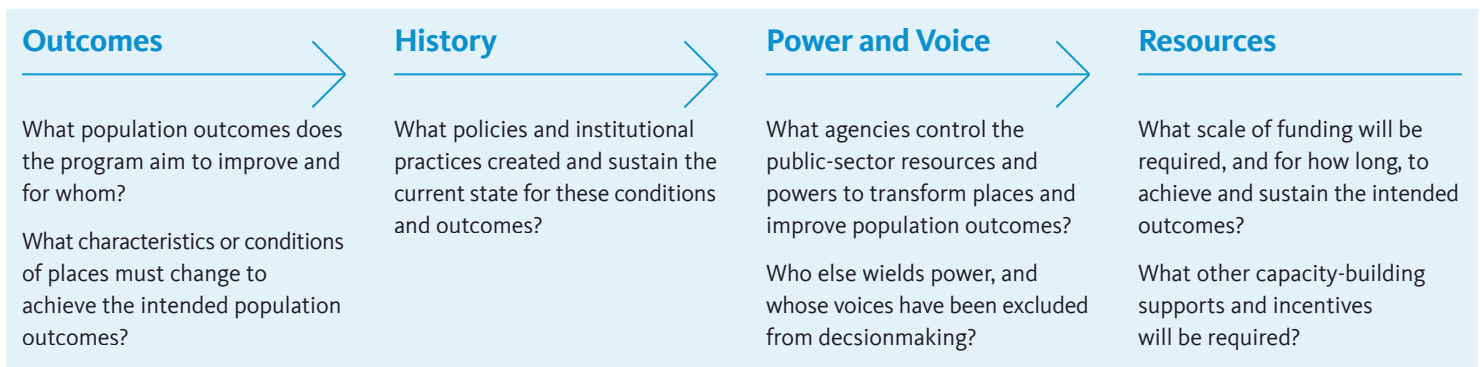
Executive Summary

Place matters. The neighborhoods, cities, rural communities, and metropolitan regions where we live shape both our day-to-day quality of life and our families' prospects for upward mobility. This blueprint aims to help federal agency officials, congressional staff, and policy advocates design a next generation of place-based policies and programs focused on improving the conditions of places that affect people's well-being and advancement.

The blueprint responds to the priorities of local practitioners to actively address racial inequity and injustice, bridge sectors and policy domains, respect and build community voice and power, deliver sufficient resources and lasting system reforms, and promote continuous learning among policymakers and practitioners. It offers a structured process for policy analysis and program design to accommodate the wide diversity of place-based approaches.

This process starts with high-level, analytical questions that will help provide the aspirational framework for subsequent design decisions (figure ES.1).

Figure ES.1



Source: Authors' analysis of federal place-based programs.

Step 1: Analysis Questions

This aspirational analysis lays the groundwork for the next step: addressing a series of more detailed and operational program design considerations. These steps encourage designers to apply lessons from past programs and apply the wisdom and experience of frontline communities in making key design decisions that advance equitable outcomes (figure ES.2). For each design decision, the blueprint offers actionable guidance accompanied by an explanatory rationale.

Figure ES.2

Design Decision	Guidance
Which federal agency or agencies will implement this program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Clearly define roles for lead and contributing agencies. ➤ Specify governance mechanisms for interagency collaboration.
What types of local entities will be eligible to receive funding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Establish requirements that engage and strengthen entities with deep community relationships. ➤ Give weight to the full spectrum of qualifications and capacities required to lead place-based efforts across different geographies.
How will participating local entities be selected from among those eligible?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Clearly specify an equitable formula for allocating funding (if applicable). ➤ Define equitable selection criteria that advance the program's aspirations. ➤ Establish mechanisms to monitor equity outcomes of the selection process.
What scale of federal funding will be provided?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Match funding to program goals for population-level impact. ➤ Consider giving participating organizations preference for other federal funding sources.
What additional supports will the program provide?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Provide flexibility with accountability. ➤ Build in needed technical assistance supports. ➤ Include support for data collection and learning.
What will participating organizations be obligated to do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Specify both authorized and required activities. ➤ Formalize community ownership beyond engagement. ➤ Include pathways to partnership.
How will the program's effectiveness be measured?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Establish a parsimonious set of data requirements. ➤ Encourage the use of multiple sources and types of data. ➤ Plan any formal evaluation from the outset.

Source: Authors' analysis of federal place-based programs.

Step 2: Design Decisions

We recognize that every policy design effort is unique—with its own political context, timing, constraints, and constituencies—and may not always allow the luxury of starting with the recommended analysis or progressing sequentially through all the design questions. And the process is rarely linear; in some cases, key decisions may already have been made, constraints may limit the available options, or one of the design questions might not apply. Nonetheless, we encourage program designers to give serious consideration to both steps and to all the questions posed (even if they have to be addressed out of order), because they build upon each other and upon insights from past experience and offer the potential for achieving greater impact in the future. Ultimately, we aspire for this blueprint to inform—and even drive—the development and implementation of federal policies that catalyze lasting improvements in places for the benefit of current and future residents.

Introduction

This blueprint provides a framework for individuals and teams working to design new place-based programs or strengthen existing programs. It prioritizes equity in both process and outcomes. The blueprint can be applied to programs that focus on neighborhoods, cities and counties, Tribal lands, and multijurisdictional regions—and on different outcomes in these places, including safety, health, education, and the built environment. It aims to help federal agency officials, congressional staff, and policy advocates design a next generation of place-based policies and programs that respond to the priorities of local practitioners to actively address racial inequity and injustice, bridge sectors and policy domains, respect and build community voice and power, deliver sufficient resources and lasting system reforms, and promote continuous learning. Ultimately, we aspire for this blueprint to inform—and even drive—the development and implementation of federal policies that catalyze lasting improvements in places for the benefit of current and future residents.

3.0

Envisioning the Next Generation of Place-Based Policy



Place matters. The neighborhoods, cities, rural communities, and metropolitan regions where we live shape both our day-to-day quality of life and our families' prospects for upward mobility. Ensuring the equitable distribution of opportunity across the diverse places in our country is critical to the well-being of people and communities. But our nation's history of racial segregation and discrimination in public policies and individual and institutional practices has built profoundly separate and unequal places that sustain and exacerbate racial inequity and injustice.¹

Efforts to advance racial equity and boost upward mobility require a robust national commitment to reverse the legacy of segregation and disinvestment that disproportionately harms low-income communities of color.² Researchers and policymakers have long debated the relative merits of place-based programs (that aim to strengthen communities) versus people-based programs (that provide direct assistance to individuals and families). However, policymakers and practitioners are now rejecting this dichotomy as they seek to design policies focused on improving the conditions of places that affect people's well-being and upward mobility.³

This blueprint will support the development and design of the next generation of federal place-based policies and programs. It builds upon findings from a scan of 33 past and ongoing federal place-based programs (box 1) and reflects advice and input from a working group of policymakers and civic leaders with broad and deep experience working in communities across the country.

Members of the policy working group envision that the next generation of federal policies focused on places will

- **confront racial inequity** and injustice,
- **bridge sectors and policy domains** and activate both resources and policy reforms at local, regional, state, and federal levels,
- **respect and build community voice and power** in decisionmaking and governance,
- **deliver sufficient resources and lasting system reforms** to achieve meaningful change for people and places, and
- **promote a culture of continuous learning** among policymakers and practitioners.

The guidelines offered here will help programs realize these principles through the development and implementation of federal policies that catalyze lasting improvements in places for the benefit of current and future residents. And they emphasize local ownership and stewardship of funds, so communities can more equitably support people's well-being and long-term life chances.

Box 1

Key Findings from Our Scan of Past and Ongoing Place-Based Policies

Federal programs rarely center racial equity. Few federal place-based programs have explicitly centered racial equity, although many programs have focused on economically disadvantaged communities and some have addressed racial disparities by directing resources to communities and institutions of color. Barriers include policymakers' limited sensitivity to the pervasive impact of structural racism, political risks associated with explicitly naming racial injustices, and in some cases, legal constraints to making race an explicit factor in resource allocations.

Definitions of “place” and goals for improving places vary widely across federal programs. Place-based programs target areas as small as individual neighborhoods and as large as multicounty regions. Many focus primarily on conditions inside the boundaries of their target places, and few have engaged at multiple geographic scales by explicitly addressing the interconnections between neighborhoods, cities, and regions. Although all place-based programs ultimately aspire to promote the well-being and life chances of the people who live in the areas they target, most have invested primarily in improvements to the built environment.

Bridging across multiple policy domains poses significant challenges. Most place-based programs are housed in a single federal agency and focus their work on that agency's goals. Collaboration with other relevant agencies has generally been limited, despite important interconnections across their domains. Statutory, regulatory, and oversight constraints can all make coordination challenging. A handful of programs offer promising models for formally aligning and coordinating work across federal agencies in support of place-based work.

Programs have invited community input but generally have not aimed to build community power. Many place-based programs acknowledge the importance of community engagement activities by referencing “consultation” and “input” as elements of their implementation. Some go further, mandating inclusive planning processes that bring new voices to governance, decision-making, and resource allocation. In addition, some place-based program grantees have shared resources with community partners that invest in local power building.

Funding for federal place-based programs has often been insufficient to achieve their goals. Although the federal government has established ambitious and transformative objectives for many of its place-based programs, it generally has not provided sufficient funding to achieve those objectives. Despite some innovative models to make efficient use of scarce federal funds and streamline grantees' access to multiple funding streams, insufficient and inflexible funding has largely impeded efforts to deepen, scale, or sustain place-based programs.

Few federal place-based programs have advanced comprehensive systems change. Most place-based programs strive for lasting improvements in community conditions, and many support activities that aim to strengthen or reform systems. Few, however, have pursued comprehensive systems change—that is, efforts to identify the root causes of community problems and change policies, practices, relationships, and thinking to address those causal forces. In fact, few programs have examined underlying issues such as structural racism. And the federal government has not provided local organizations or intermediaries with dedicated support that could drive transformative systems change.

Evidence about place-based program impacts and effectiveness is weak. To date, only a handful of federal place-based programs have been independently evaluated, in part because conventional evaluation methods are not well suited to their breadth and complexity. As a result, policymakers and practitioners lack definitive evidence about the impacts of these programs on people and places, particularly on low-income communities and communities of color. Some programs have required (and supported) grantees to collect data and use existing evidence. But few programs explicitly define desired outcomes or metrics from the outset, and data collection has focused more on process measures than on results. And few programs have effectively engaged community members in data collection or interpretation.

Source: Margery Austin Turner, James Ladi Williams, Megan Randall, Gabriella Velasco, and Ayesha Islam, *Designing the Next Generation of Federal Place-Based Policy* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute 2021), <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/designing-next-generation-federal-place-based-policy>.



No universally agreed-upon definition of “place-based” policy currently exists. The only consistent requirement that researchers and policy analysts have used to identify place-based programs is that they target a discrete, geographically delineated area. Some definitions focus on programs that operate at a neighborhood scale, while others encompass programs serving larger geographies. Some are limited to programs that support community or economic development activities, while others encompass programs in domains such as education, safety, or health. Some include only programs that invest primarily in physical infrastructure, while others extend to programs that deliver human services, build social capital, or support advocacy. Local practitioners often think more flexibly about their place-based work, pursuing strategies that bridge policy domains and geographic scales.

We define place-based policies broadly, considering policies to be place based if they meet three criteria:

1. They aim to improve multiple physical or social conditions in designated places (e.g., neighborhoods, towns, cities, rural counties, regions, Tribal lands) to support residents’ upward mobility—marked not only by economic success, but also by people’s collective ability to influence the policies and practices that affect their lives and to feel the dignity of being respected and valued for their contributions.⁴
2. They channel resources primarily to government agencies, nonprofit organizations, or private-sector entities situated in places, rather than directly to individuals.⁵
3. They explicitly address multiple predictors of upward mobility.⁶

This definition encompasses a wide diversity of programs, including some that focus on improving conditions in selected neighborhoods; some that engage at the jurisdictional level with cities, counties, and Tribal authorities; some that support collaboration among jurisdictions at the regional scale; and some that incentivize local investment by private-sector entities (box 2).

Box 2

Examples of Place-Based Programs

Programs that **support work in selected neighborhoods** and are often competitively awarded and time limited:

- *Choice Neighborhoods* aims to redevelop severely distressed public and HUD-assisted housing to transform neighborhoods with high levels of poverty into viable mixed-income neighborhoods with access to economic opportunity.
- *Promise Neighborhoods* funds communities to implement a continuum of cradle-to-career educational, family, and community supports at the neighborhood level, with the goal of improving academic and developmental outcomes for children.

Programs that **engage with cities, counties, and Tribal authorities**, sometimes allocating funds annually, based on formulas:

- *Community Development Block Grants* provide flexible funding to states and local governments for activities directed toward neighborhood revitalization, economic development, and community services, facilities, and other improvements.
- *Strong Cities, Strong Communities* was an interagency effort to boost local capacity for community and economic development by providing localities with a combination of planning grants, embedded community solutions teams made up of federal agency representatives, connections to a national resource network, and the opportunity to host a public service fellow.

Programs that **support or incentivize regional collaboration**:

- The *Appalachian Regional Commission* administers multiple programs in a 420-county, 13-state region, including planning and technical assistance to Local Development Districts, Appalachian Development Highway System construction and other area development, technical assistance, research, and demonstration project grants.
- The *Sustainable Communities Initiative* awarded grants to support regional and local planning efforts, helping communities integrate their housing, transportation, infrastructure, and environmental goals as part of a comprehensive and equitable planning process.

Programs that **offer tax advantages and other incentives to private-sector investors**:

- The *Bank Enterprise Award Program* rewards federally insured depository institutions that increase their level of community investment by channeling loans, investments, services, and technical assistance to highly distressed communities or by providing assistance to certified community development financial institutions.
- *Empowerment Zones* provide tax incentives to encourage businesses to operate in—and hire residents of—distressed urban and rural communities.

This blueprint is intended to guide policy design for all types of federal place-based investment and engagement. It can inform the development of an entirely new place-based program, the allocation of one-time stimulus or recovery dollars, or the refinement of an existing program. In partnership with the policy working group, we illustrate the use of the blueprint by applying it to the design of five diverse place-based initiatives:

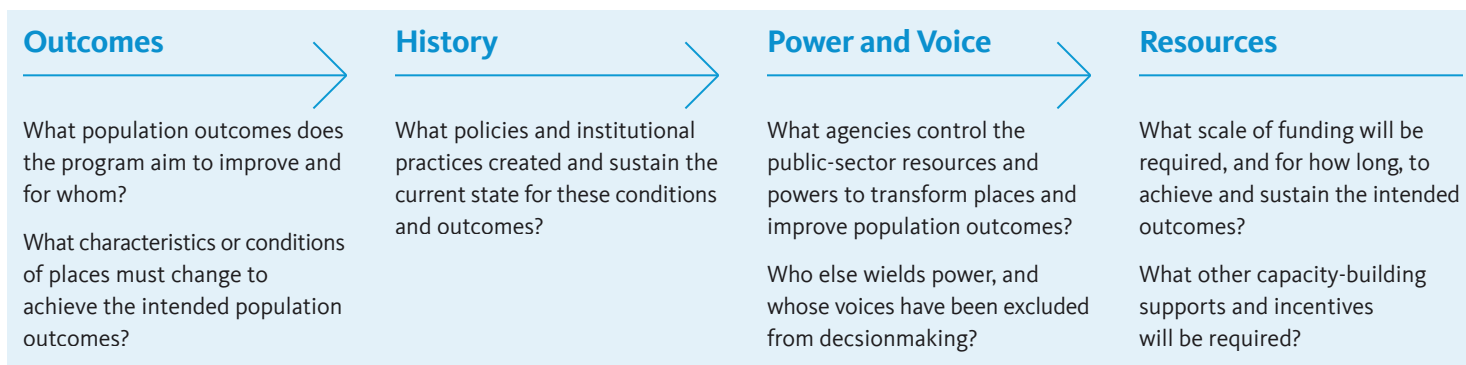
- A new ***Community Revitalization Fund*** to support community-led civic infrastructure projects in disinvested communities.
- An expanded and enhanced ***Promise Neighborhoods program*** that delivers social and educational interventions, from cradle to career, to ensure the long-term success of children and families in disinvested neighborhoods.
- A revived ***Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing requirement*** equipped to achieve its goal of overcoming the legacy of segregation and fostering inclusive communities free from barriers to opportunity.
- A new ***interagency collaboration model*** to support regional planning for equitable and sustainable development, aligning federal resources and initiatives to drive change in communities.
- ***Major new investments in transportation infrastructure*** that expand residents' mobility and access to opportunity and promote environmental sustainability, while centering equity in planning processes.

In the coming months, these designs will be published, providing exemplars of how the blueprint's guidelines can help shape a next generation of federal place-based policy.



This blueprint offers a structured process for policy analysis and program design that allows sufficient flexibility to accommodate the wide diversity of place-based program approaches while reinforcing consistent principles of equitable analysis and design. This process starts with high-level, analytical questions that will help provide the aspirational framework for subsequent design decisions (figure 1).

Figure 1. Step 1: Analysis Questions



Source: Authors' analysis of federal place-based programs.

This aspirational analysis lays the groundwork for the next step: addressing a series of more detailed and operational program design considerations. These steps encourage designers to apply both lessons from past programs and the wisdom and experience of frontline communities in making key design decisions that advance equitable outcomes (figure 2).⁷ For each design decision, the blueprint offers actionable guidance accompanied by an explanatory rationale.

Figure 2. Step2: Design Decisions

Design Decision	Guidance
Which federal agency or agencies will implement this program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly define roles for lead and contributing agencies. Specify governance mechanisms for interagency collaboration.
What types of local entities will be eligible to receive funding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish requirements that engage and strengthen entities with deep community relationships. Give weight to the full spectrum of qualifications and capacities required to lead place-based efforts across different geographies.
How will participating local entities be selected from among those eligible?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly specify an equitable formula for allocating funding (if applicable). Define equitable selection criteria that advance the program's aspirations. Establish mechanisms to monitor equity outcomes of the selection process.
What scale of federal funding will be provided?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Match funding to program goals for population-level impact. Consider giving participating organizations preference for other federal funding sources.
What additional supports will the program provide?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide flexibility with accountability. Build in needed technical assistance supports. Include support for data collection and learning.
What will participating organizations be obligated to do?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Specify both authorized and required activities. Formalize community ownership beyond engagement. Include pathways to partnership.
How will the program's effectiveness be measured?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a parsimonious set of data requirements. Encourage the use of multiple sources and types of data. Plan any formal evaluation from the outset.

Source: Authors' analysis of federal place-based programs.

We recognize that every policy design effort is unique—with its own political context, timing, constraints, and constituencies—and may not always allow the luxury of starting with the recommended analysis or progressing sequentially through all the design questions. And the process is rarely linear; in some cases, key decisions may already have been made, constraints may limit the available options, or one of the design questions might not apply. Nonetheless, we encourage program designers to give serious consideration to both steps and to all the questions posed (even if they have to be addressed out of order), because they build upon each other and upon insights from past experience and offer the potential for achieving greater impact in the future.

Throughout this process, program designers should systematically and respectfully engage frontline communities directly affected by the challenges and inequities the program aims to address. They should strive to establish mechanisms for sustaining this engagement for continuous improvement over the life of the program. Wherever possible, program designers should coordinate these efforts with other federal agencies, field offices, congressional representatives, and outside organizations to connect with and build relationships with frontline communities.

Step 1: Analysis Questions

Too often, program designers plunge into the consideration of operational details before thinking more broadly about their intended outcomes, major challenges to their achievement, and pathways for overcoming those barriers. We recommend starting, to the greatest extent feasible, with analysis that will lay a solid foundation for more detailed and specific design decisions. Responses to the questions below should incorporate data on baseline conditions, evidence regarding the impacts (both helpful and harmful) of past policies, and the experience and perspectives of stakeholders working in frontline communities.

What population outcomes does the program aim to improve and for whom?

Even when a program intends to focus on places—and to transform conditions within places—its design should start by identifying how this transformation will improve outcomes for the people living there (today and in years to come). Answering this question means making explicit both the intended population-level outcomes and the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the people experiencing the disinvestment, poverty, and injustice that the program aims to remedy. A detailed and thoughtful response can help identify and shape decisions about how to advance racial equity in all aspects of program design and implementation by anchoring all subsequent work around addressing structural inequities perpetuated by existing policy and programs.

What characteristics or conditions of places must change to achieve the intended population outcomes?

Programs considered to be place-based focus on different types of places and different geographic scales. Too often, connections between place-based conditions (such as poorly performing schools; lack of affordable access to transportation; exposure to violence; or absence of parks, health facilities, and grocery stores) and a program's intended benefits for residents are unstated or poorly defined. Clarity about the conditions of places that a program aims to change should reflect the priorities of frontline communities, supported by existing evidence and evaluation findings, and drive the use of evidence to inform local strategies, monitor implementation, and measure results (for both places and people).

What policies and institutional practices created and sustain the current state for these conditions and outcomes?

Effective problem solving starts with systematically assembling evidence (including narratives, personal stories, and existing policy analyses and agendas) about current conditions and about the historical forces that produced them. Race-based discrimination, exclusion, disinvestment, and marginalization have created and perpetuated place-based disparities. And some policies and programs have inhibited upward mobility despite their design because they were ineffectively executed or inadequately funded. Making the specifics of this history explicit and understanding the persistence of discriminatory barriers and practices constitute essential first steps toward diagnosing systemic inequities and pursuing actions and investments with the potential to catalyze lasting systems change to correct them. Agencies and designers should seek out and invite frontline communities to inform this assessment of institutional practices—the people most directly affected are often already attempting to convince public-sector actors to consider the barriers they experience, and their wisdom is not always codified in formal policy analysis.

What agencies control the public-sector resources and powers to transform places and improve population outcomes?

Identifying the agencies that control resources and policy levers will reveal challenges and inform strategies for bridging policy domains. Addressing this question at city, county, and state levels as well as at the federal level may identify tensions between federal goals and state or local realities, including both the willingness and the capacity of state and city or county governments to advance federal priorities. Program designers should also assess whether and how discriminatory barriers and practices prevail across multiple agencies, and particularly how they may preclude frontline communities accessing resources.

Who else wields power, and whose voices have been excluded from decisionmaking?

Transforming long-established conditions in disinvested places requires fundamental changes in entrenched systems. Public-sector agencies play critical roles, but they function within the larger context of political, economic, and social power. Identifying the other institutions and people (businesses, civic leaders, and anchor institutions, for example) that exercise power in these systems—both formally and informally—is essential to the design of programmatic mechanisms that support shifting or building power. Program designers should also make explicit the ways in which frontline communities have been excluded from decisionmaking, implementation, funding, and assessment of place-based initiatives.

What scale of funding will be required, and for how long, to achieve and sustain the intended outcomes?

Although estimating the full cost of achieving a program's aspirational vision is difficult, producing such an estimate helps match the program's funding level to the scale of the problems it aims to overcome. Not all required resources necessarily come from programmatic funding. The philanthropic sector can play a complementary role, such as by supporting capacity building for emerging organizations that amplify voice and power or demonstrations that test new tools and strategies. The long-term sustainability of place-based efforts also requires private-sector investment on a par with the resources flowing to communities that have not suffered from decades of disinvestment and neglect. Funding requires special attention in the context of rural and Tribal communities that have experienced disinvestment by the private sector, inequitable investment from the federal government attributable to biased funding formulas, and lack of connection with large-scale philanthropic partners.

What other capacity-building supports and incentives will be required?

A place-based program's implementation and impacts hinge not only on dollars but also on the capacities of both public and private institutions in frontline communities. In some circumstances, capacity gaps may be addressed through technical assistance, embedded staff, or other forms of support. In others, operating resources may be needed to sustain a "backbone" institution coordinating a complex, cross-sector effort. Community-led initiatives are likely to have widely differing capacities, calling for supports tailored to a spectrum of strengths and needs.

Step 2: Design Decisions

The big-picture, aspirational analysis of step 1 lays the foundation for decisionmaking about more concrete program design details. For each of seven key design questions, we offer specific guidance alongside the underlying rationale for the guidance.

Which federal agency or agencies will implement this program?

The challenges facing disinvested places typically span intersecting domains—housing, safety, and schools, for example, or workforce development, jobs, and transportation. Deciding where to house a place-based program within the federal bureaucracy and how to ensure collaboration across relevant agencies requires serious consideration of agency capacities and powers as well as incentives for collaboration. These decisions should build upon the analysis from step 1, understanding the desired and necessary mix of solutions and investments in each community, identifying the agencies that control resources and regulations relevant to the program’s goals, and acknowledging past policies and institutional practices that created and sustain current conditions.

Guidance

➤ **Clearly define roles for lead and contributing agencies.**

If a single agency is assigned lead responsibility, consider the statutory and regulatory limits on its authorities and resources and identify intersections with the authorities and resources of other federal agencies. Then, explicitly define the roles that other agencies will play. Decide which agency or agencies should play each of the following roles: selecting grantees, contributing funding, providing preferences for other programs they administer, resolving conflicts in administrative requirements, waiving regulations, exercising oversight, collecting or contributing data, streamlining reporting requirements, and coordinating touchpoints with field offices and program managers. Ultimately, this assignment of responsibilities should articulate how each agency’s contributions will complement, reinforce, or advance the goals of the program and the participating communities, minimizing burdens, barriers, and unnecessary resource depletion on grantees.

Rationale

- Collaboration is often the key to success. It is highly unlikely that a single federal agency possesses the expertise, authority, and reach to effectively span the intersecting domains relevant to a program’s intended outcomes. And some agencies may lack the expertise and relationships necessary to work in rural as well as urban areas or in Tribal communities.

Guidance

➤ Specify governance mechanisms for interagency collaboration.

A formal interagency structure, with specified governance mechanisms, can strengthen interagency coordination and program effectiveness. Options include establishing a formal interagency working group or council, providing leadership and oversight from the White House, or creating a new agency with overarching authority. Program designers should also seek out and activate informal champions for interagency collaboration within agency bureaucracies.

Rationale

- Interagency collaboration poses significant challenges and can be difficult for federal agencies to sustain without formal structures and agreements in place that incentivize participation and provide mechanisms for resolving conflicts between differing funding requirements, regulatory mandates, or eligibility criteria. In some cases, however, congressional committees with authority over agency resources and actions have opportunity to facilitate collaboration. With a rich history of interagency partnerships, the federal government has several models from which to build. And given the central role that place-based programs play in coordinating and strategically deploying disparate federal funds locally, a formal entity focused on coordinating investments across agencies is timely and appropriate.

Case in Practice

The **US Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH)** uses interagency working groups at the regional, state, and local levels to coordinate activities, policies, and priorities. These interagency working groups are organized around key demographics. During the COVID-19 crisis, USICH created the COVID-19 Homelessness Interagency Work Group to work in hand in hand with the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the US Department of Homeland Security, coordinating federal partners and resources. This approach resulted in the dissemination of recovery information vital to communities experiencing homelessness, the streamlining of funding flows to direct emergency homelessness service providers, and the distribution of federal resources in coordination with state and local partners. The USICH model demonstrates the importance of articulating shared goals among agencies. Doing so not only enables agencies to gain a clear understanding of their role within local initiatives, but also equips them to direct resources toward activities and places where they will be most impactful. With shared goals defined, outreach strategies that emphasize the need for cross-sectoral collaboration and put partners in regular contact with one another (e.g., interagency working groups) can further promote investment among collaborating agencies.

What types of local entities will be eligible to receive funding?

Place-based programs create working partnerships between the federal government and local entities—government agencies, nonprofit organizations and intermediaries, and private-sector investors. Deciding what types of local organizations will receive program funding and spearhead local implementation has important implications for ensuring local capacity to achieve a program's goals while not inadvertently perpetuating inequity by excluding key voices and perspectives. This is particularly important when considering investing in communities where smaller, locally led organizations have historically experienced inequitable or disparate investment compared with larger institutions. These decisions should reflect and build upon the analysis from step 1 identifying the local entities that are led by and work closely with frontline communities, especially those already stewarding cross-sectoral initiatives to address inequities. Programs should also identify the types of local entities that control public- and private-sector resources or powers relevant to the program's goals and how those entities may have contributed to current place-based inequities.

Guidance

➤ **Establish requirements that engage and strengthen entities with deep community relationships.**

Programs should establish or build upon formal partnerships with community-led entities. Instead of defaulting to conventional criteria that prioritize past experience administering federal programs, designers should broaden the federal government's definition of entities best positioned to lead program implementation locally to include those working in and with frontline communities, as well as local and federal government agencies, established nonprofit organizations, and philanthropy.

Rationale

- Achieving lasting systems reforms that advance more equitable outcomes requires amplifying the voice and power of frontline community organizations and residents. Limiting participation to entities with established track records of administering federal programs may exclude organizations with strong community relationships and legitimacy that are already working to advance program goals. As discussed further below, this will require a complementary suite of technical assistance and capacity building to ensure that participating organizations are equipped for success.

Guidance

➤ **Give weight to the full spectrum of qualifications and capacities required to lead place-based efforts across different geographies.**

Eligibility requirements should reflect the diverse circumstances and needs of frontline communities and the varying capacities of organizations proximate to and deeply connected to those communities. Requirements should also consider the program's intended geographic scale and the capacities needed to effectively engage at neighborhood, city, county, or regional levels.

Rationale

- Organizations stewarding partnerships and initiatives in rural and Tribal communities will inevitably have distinct, adapted capacities that differ from the strengths and capacities of organizations operating in and for urban and suburban communities. And programs that aim to span jurisdictional boundaries and build regional partnerships demand different capacities than those focused at a neighborhood scale. To meet the diversity of community needs, it may be necessary to make more than one type of organization eligible to participate in the program, although this will likely complicate many other aspects of program design, including selection criteria, funding mechanisms, and accountability mechanisms.

Case in Practice

Promise Neighborhoods awards grants to local education agencies, Tribal organizations, and neighborhood nonprofits representative of communities they serve. In contrast, small, community-based organizations were not the focus of the **Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI)**, as they did not control the levers to address inequities in regional planning processes. However, SCI grantees, including state and local governments and metropolitan planning organizations, may include local nonprofits as partners in planning processes supported with federal funds. While the **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)** program uses formulas to allocate resources to cities, urban counties, and states, these grantees often, through subgrants, depend on partnerships with community-based organizations (subgrantees) to carry out planned projects. Not only has this approach channeled resources to community organizations of varying levels of capacity, but it has also helped bring local knowledge to bear and strengthen resident engagement in the execution of CDBG projects.

How will participating local entities be selected from among those eligible?

Some place-based programs (the Community Development Block Grant program, for example) engage all eligible entities and allocate funding based on formulas that reflect local conditions such as population or poverty rate. But many programs select a subset of eligible organizations through competitive processes. Funding formulas should be carefully crafted to avoid perpetuating past inequities in patterns of federal investment. Competitive selection criteria should be grounded in step 1, the aspirational analysis about outcomes the program aims to improve. These criteria should also give weight to analysis from step 1 about who wields power over these policies and practices and whose voices should be included in decisionmaking going forward.

Guidance

▶ **Clearly specify an equitable formula for allocating funding (if applicable).**

In doing so, systematically assess the implications for equity. Ensure that program resources are flowing to places historically denied them and are equitably allocated to urban and rural places, Tribal lands, and communities where people of color, recent immigrants, refugees, and other underresourced groups live. This should also proactively address communities experiencing gentrification or displacement from economic development.

Rationale

- ▶ Formulas applied uniformly across the US can sometimes have unintended consequences, excluding or underfunding communities despite evidence of profound needs. For example, rural areas, Tribal lands, and communities experiencing rapid population change can be deprived of needed resources by formulas that rely on decennial census data or primarily emphasize population density. Carefully evaluating the distributional consequences of any formula, identifying supplemental indicators of need, and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of alternative formulas can help ensure that resources reach the communities and people they are intended to serve.

Guidance

▶ **Define equitable selection criteria that advance the program's aspirations.**

These criteria should reflect the full spectrum of organizational strengths and capacities needed to achieve the program's goals, including deep engagement with frontline communities and leadership by community members. Programs should not exclude organizations based on size, total funding, or a track record of federal grant management. They should encourage the formation of local partnerships that enable established "backbone" organizations to engage with and build capacity among newer, smaller, and more representative organizations to participate.

Rationale

- ▶ Giving the selection criteria explicit attention and weighing trade-offs between them can help ensure that a program advances its goals, including commitments to advancing equity and building community voice and power. We acknowledge that some traditional selection factors—including experience managing federal grants or participation on other related programs—may exclude organizations with the strongest community ties, including those with BIPOC leadership.

Guidance

- **Establish mechanisms to monitor equity outcomes of the selection process.**
Establish a mechanism for analyzing data on the applicant pool and cohort of grantees to determine if the selection process has resulted in the exclusion of organizations, geographies, or populations crucial to the realization of program outcomes. Establish targets and benchmarks against which performance can be assessed. If this analysis reveals inequities in selection processes or outcomes, direct the lead agency to identify and implement corrective actions. A clearly articulated continuous improvement strategy for the selection process, including accountability mechanisms, should be established.

Rationale

- Inequities in the selection process may not be apparent from preliminary analysis of the selection criteria but may only be revealed after the process has been implemented and the criteria have been applied.

Case in Practice

Using interagency review teams, HUD and USDA evaluated nominated communities for the **Empowerment Zone (EZ)** designation based on the extent to which—and how well—nominees' strategic plans addressed the program's four principles: promoting economic opportunity, building livable communities, fostering community based-partnerships, and pursuing comprehensive approaches to meet community needs. The use of interagency review teams encouraged agencies to offer designated EZs a preference in receiving assistance under other federal programs. And in some cases, rural communities that did not receive the EZ designation were offered Champion Community status, which granted them access to technical assistance from USDA.

What scale of federal funding will be provided?

Too often, the funding appropriated for place-based programs has fallen woefully short of what would be required to achieve the promised outcomes—in both scale and duration. This undermines program impact and fuels perceptions that place-based investments are ineffective. Although it would be naïve to ignore political and fiscal constraints on funding levels, decisions about funding levels should reflect and build upon the analysis from step 1 about the scale and duration of funding required to achieve intended outcomes. If available resources do not align with a program's stated aspirations, it may be necessary to reduce the number of participating sites or otherwise scale back the program.

Guidance

- **Match funding to program goals for population-level impact.**
For a new program, set funding at a level that aligns with the scale of the challenge and the program's intended outcomes. Consider the duration of funding required to achieve the program's aspirations as well as the costs of local planning efforts and the technical assistance resources needed to support the full spectrum of local organizational capacities. If funding levels have already been set or are otherwise constrained, align the scale of the program and its goals to match the available resources. And if an existing program's funding levels are being expanded, consider the trade-offs between funding more sites and deepening per site funding.

Rationale

- Program designers often face pressure to expand the number of participating communities, thereby delivering resources to more communities facing the challenges a program is designed to solve. But this may dilute the effectiveness of a program that would achieve more transformative or lasting impact if resources were focused on a smaller set of places.

Guidance

- ▶ **Consider giving participating organizations preference for other federal funding sources.**
In addition to funding appropriated specifically for the program, participating organizations could be given preference or priority for other federal funding streams or place-based programs, including funding and programs administered by other agencies.

Rationale

- ▶ Combining funding from multiple federal sources offers the potential for achieving greater impact in the participating places, although it has the disadvantage of limiting the number of sites receiving federal resources. It may also impose an administrative burden for local implementers unless the federal government creates coordinating mechanisms that work across agencies to smooth the process.

Case in Practice

The **Building Neighborhood Capacity Program**, part of the **Neighborhood Revitalization Initiative**, was funded through allocations from several federal agencies and core place-based programs operating in multiple policy domains, including the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation Program, Choice Neighborhoods, and Promise Neighborhoods. Though not a grantmaking program, **Promise Zones** similarly envisioned the braiding of funding streams from the US Departments of Agriculture, Education, Housing and Urban Development, and Justice to ensure that federal programs aligned resources to accelerate local efforts to tackle poverty in select urban, rural, and Tribal communities.

What additional supports will the program provide?

Although adequate funding is vital, federal place-based programs may also provide other valuable resources to participating entities, including regulatory waivers and funding flexibility, technical assistance and training, and data and analysis. Deciding exactly what the federal government will deliver, and how, is critical to the design of a place-based program. The analysis from step 1 about the policies and institutional practices that created and sustain current challenges will offer insights about the capacities and supports local partners need and the regulatory constraints or institutional barriers standing in their way. It may also surface additional capacities or practice changes federal agencies must make to meet local needs.

Guidance

- ▶ **Provide flexibility with accountability.**
Allow participating organizations significant flexibility and discretion in the use of program funds, provided they advance the intended outcomes and implement equitable processes for local planning and implementation. In addition to deciding how much flexibility to allow with respect to program-specific funding, consider whether participating organizations should receive administrative or regulatory waivers with respect to other relevant programs or flexibility in how they use other federal funding streams.

Rationale

- ▶ Imposing too many constraints prevents local leaders from using program funds in transformative ways to meet local needs *and* makes it harder to braid and blend resources from multiple programs. Moreover, regulatory flexibility centers local leadership and can build community voice in both design and implementation. However, requiring adherence to equitable process is critical to ensuring that strategies are centered on not only equitable outcomes, but also equitable governance and ownership over initiatives—which are critically tied to long-term power building.

Guidance

► **Build in needed technical assistance supports.**

Ensure that participating organizations receive high-quality training and technical assistance tailored to help them build capacity for the program's planning and implementation activities. Note that technical assistance needs may extend beyond the specific activities supported by the program to include organizational capacity building. Give careful thought to where the expertise and capacity to deliver effective technical assistance actually resides, how technical assistance will be designed and mobilized, and how its results will be assessed. Federal technical assistance can be delivered by agency staff or by contractors or may involve the placement of new staff in local agencies or organizations. Philanthropic support can also play a valuable role in capacity building; lining up this support in advance (rather than leaving it to local grantees) can ensure greater equity in its allocation.

Rationale

- As discussed, the next generation of place-based programs should engage more organizations working in and connected with frontline communities, including those that have been excluded in the past and therefore may lack some forms of organizational capacity. Instead of excluding these local partners, programs should include them and deliver the supports they need. Technical assistance can help equip place-based organizations to use federal resources effectively, to braid and blend resources across programs, to engage community members in planning and decisionmaking, to collect and analyze data, or to reform policies and practices.

Guidance

► **Include support for data collection and learning.**

Ensure that the program enhances participating organizations' ability to collect data, learn from it, and apply it to program design and implementation. Essential supports may include data that can be collected nationally and provided to local communities (including administrative data that can be matched and tracked over time). Participating organizations also need funding to support data collection and analysis as well as technical assistance to help build local capacity. Peer-learning opportunities and communities of practice can also help organizations build capacity to make effective use of data.

Rationale

- Collecting and analyzing data and using these data to inform strategy and continuous improvement necessitate substantial staff time, technical skill, and experience. Requiring data collection and analysis without providing needed funding and technical support undermines data quality and is unlikely to build a culture of learning and evidence-based improvement.

Case in Practice

The **Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth (P3)** grant allows sites flexibility in their use of funds received from multiple federal programs, in exchange for accountability for results. Under the partnership, sites can pool funds from at least two federal discretionary programs and obtain waivers from program requirements as needed. Specifically, the program relaxed requirements for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act spending on out-of-school youth, allowed grantees to apply broader definitions of "out-of-school youth," and gave grantees flexibility to define eligibility at the school level, rather than at the individual level. Grantees credit P3 for providing waivers that enhance their ability to deliver and expand youth services.

What will participating organizations be obligated to do?

Place-based programs depend on local organizations to make plans, take action, and invest resources that transform communities and boost people's well-being. Therefore, delineating participating organizations' obligations goes hand in hand with defining the federal role. The aspirational analysis from step 1 about the policies and institutional practices that created and sustain current place-based challenges can help program designers identify critical reforms and investments. In addition, the analysis of who currently wields power locally and whose voices have been excluded should inform requirements aimed at ensuring that those historically excluded can exercise power in setting priorities, allocating resources, and holding others accountable for action.

Guidance

➤ **Specify both authorized and required activities.**

Explicitly identify the categories of activities and investments participating organizations will be authorized to pursue with program funding and those they must implement, including requirements to obtain matching funds from state and local governments. As discussed earlier, allow significant flexibility, focusing on accountability for achieving the program's intended outcomes—first advancing equity in process and then advancing equity in outcomes. And provide technical assistance and support to build the capacity of frontline organizations to meet their obligations.

Rationale

- Restoring equitable investment in communities and improving outcomes for people requires a broad range of interconnected activities, some of which may evolve over time. These may include planning activities, delivery of services, development and management or sale of properties, advocacy for policy and systems change, support for arts and cultural programs, and partnerships with businesses or private-sector investors. Requiring state or local matching funds can help mobilize additional resources to meet program goals. Matching requirements may also help ensure that available resources are being channeled toward the program's intended outcomes and that key local actors are committed to the program goals and will remain engaged after the federal support ends. But these requirements can also create insurmountable barriers for some local organizations, so programs should provide assistance in meeting them to ensure they do not deny communities much-needed federal resources.

Guidance

➤ **Formalize community ownership beyond engagement.**

Specify that activities and implementation partnerships must include community members and community-led organizations, particularly those who have historically been excluded, and create formalized roles and tools to hold lead organizations accountable for designing and implementing agreed-upon plans.

Rationale

- Many place-based programs require local planning activities to determine how federal resources will be used to improve outcomes for people and places. But these programs have not always provided sufficient time, funding, and technical assistance to support inclusive and effective planning activities. Establishing clear criteria for scope and inclusiveness can help ensure that the resulting plans reflect community priorities and build community power.

Case in Practice

Promise Neighborhoods has different matching requirements for rural and Tribal communities, in recognition of the high needs such communities face. While the program requires grantees in nonrural and non-Tribal places to obtain 100 percent (or more) of their grant award in matched funds, grantees in rural and Tribal places have a reduced matching requirement of at least 50 percent of the federal grant award. More broadly, the program may also waive or reduce its matching requirement for entities that demonstrate significant financial hardship.

Guidance

▶ **Include pathways to partnership.**

Provide clear guidelines about whether and for what purposes federal funds can be subgranted to other local organizations, encouraging participating organizations to provide resources to support organizations and people that have historically been excluded from federal funding. As initiatives are planned and funded, require equitable contracting and procurement processes to ensure that funding is equitably dispersed across partnering organizations.

Rationale

- ▶ Many community-based organizations, including those led by people of color and other marginalized groups, represent voices too often excluded from federal place-based investments. These organizations may lack the scale and capacity to become federal grantees (at least in the near term). But requiring larger, more established organizations to subgrant federal funding can ensure that the priorities and perspectives of community-based organizations are advanced and can help build their capacities over time.

Case in Practice

Promise Neighborhoods allows grantees to engage in activities that improve educational and developmental outcomes for youth. These include activities that support a child's transition from elementary school to middle school through high school and into the workforce, activities that support workforce readiness, and activities focused on health, nutrition, and mental health.

The **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)** program permits grantees to carry out a wide range of activities (e.g., rehabilitation of community infrastructure, public services, and economic development activities) as long as those activities benefit people with low incomes or address community development needs. However, the CDBG prohibits certain activities, including lobbying and other political activities.

The **Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI)** required all grantees to complete the Fair Housing and Equity Assessment. To complete the assessment, grantees documented disparities in housing need as well as barriers to opportunity for marginalized groups within their jurisdiction, and the assessment findings informed the regional plans communities developed through the SCI grant.

How will the program's effectiveness be measured?

Despite decades of investment in place-based programs, definitive evidence about their impacts and effectiveness is lacking because of competing demands for resources, weaknesses of traditional evaluation methodologies, and weak data infrastructure. Building a culture of learning requires serious, up-front attention to data gathering (from multiple sources), performance measurement, and evaluation, with the ultimate intention of supporting continuous improvement toward scalable, equitable outcomes. The expertise of community members and the evidence they produce should be integrated with quantitative data and expert analysis. The aspirational analysis (from step 1) about intended population outcomes and the conditions of places required to achieve them are the starting point. Programs can then decide what metrics to collect and track over time and whether and how to conduct a formal program evaluation.

Guidance

▶ **Establish a parsimonious set of data requirements.**

Begin by identifying the outcomes all participating organizations will be responsible for advancing, then identify the essential data to collect and report, keeping the list of requirements tightly focused on the most important information. Only require the collection of data that will be used for continuous learning, performance assessment, or evaluation. Be intentional about avoiding a proliferation of measurement requirements across federal agencies. And align requirements with local agendas, particularly in communities braiding multiple funding streams.

Rationale

- ▶ Collecting data and tracking metrics can easily become a burdensome exercise of limited practical use. It can also create inequitable dynamics in which community knowledge and lived experience are ignored or undervalued. Explicitly articulating a use case for the data elements participating organizations are required to collect will help drive a focus on results that matter and hold participating organizations accountable, while sparing them unnecessary, unfunded, and often burdensome data-collection activities. In addition, data requirements should capitalize on existing sources and processes, both inside and outside of government.

Guidance

▶ **Encourage the use of multiple sources and types of data.**

Local leaders should be encouraged to supplement required data elements with a broader array of locally relevant information, reflective of local circumstances and priorities. Stories matter: community-based data, qualitative indicators, personal narratives, and lived experience should all be valued alongside more “official” information sources. In addition, data and metrics should be disaggregated (by race, ethnicity, gender, and other relevant factors) to help reveal any disparate or disproportionate effects, reflect the needs and experiences of different population groups, and allow for ongoing equity assessments.

Rationale

- ▶ Data collection and continuous learning should lift the voices of the people the program aims to serve, reflect community priorities, and advance racial equity. Data assembled by and with community members are often undervalued by experts, and the perspectives and insights of lived experience considered less valid than quantitative data or academic expertise. Excluding the wisdom of community members or failing to analyze inequities in outcomes undermines continuous learning.

Guidance

▶ Plan any formal evaluation from the outset.

Decide whether to mandate a formal evaluation to assess the program's impact, how such an evaluation should be designed, what baseline data must be assembled, and how an evaluation will be funded.

Rationale

- ▶ A formal program evaluation goes beyond the data and metrics needed to support program implementation and accountability, providing information about key outcomes for people and places at baseline and over time. A well-designed evaluation builds knowledge about what works, for whom, and at what cost. Designing a rigorous impact evaluation poses substantial challenges for programs that aim to strengthen multiple, intersecting conditions of places *and* provide sufficient flexibility for communities to tailor activities for local needs and priorities. Moreover, the systemic changes place-based programs often pursue require time to materialize. For an evaluation to fairly assess program impact, it should measure short- or intermediate-term outcomes associated with the longer-term changes sought.

Case in Practice

Like many place-based programs, **Promise Neighborhoods** allows for significant variation in grantees' design and implementation tactics to allow programming to reflect the unique needs of specific places. As a result, it is not conceptually sound to evaluate Promise Neighborhoods as a fixed model. Despite this evaluation challenge, Promise Neighborhoods' results-based orientation has helped build a culture of effective data use, including collecting original data from surveys and administrative data from local education agencies, supporting not only continuous improvement but also shared accountability for results among all entities involved. A key factor enabling this outcome is the extensive data support the program provides.

- 1 For summaries of how systemic racism created and sustains separate and unequal neighborhoods and their role in driving racial inequities in health, education, employment, income, and wealth, see Turner and Gourevitch (2017) and Margery Austin Turner and Solomon Greene, “Causes and Consequences of Separate and Unequal Neighborhoods,” Urban Institute, accessed March 21, 2021, <https://www.urban.org/racial-equity-analytics-lab/structural-racism-explainer-collection/causes-and-consequences-separate-and-unequal-neighborhoods>.
- 2 Greene, Turner, and Rush (2020) and Turner, Briggs, and coauthors (2020) make the case for a robust federal commitment to dismantling the system of separate and unequal neighborhoods by pursuing a portfolio of “place conscious” policies.
- 3 Recent research estimating the independent impact of children’s neighborhood environments on their economic success as adults, including Chetty and Hendren (2017) and Chetty, Hendren, and Katz (2016), has highlighted the importance of place as a key determinant of outcomes for individuals and families.
- 4 The US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty was convened by the Urban Institute to address the question, what would it take to substantially increase mobility from poverty? The Partnership articulated a compelling definition of upward mobility that goes beyond economic success to encompass power and dignity (Ellwood and Patel 2018).
- 5 Note that some place-based policies also support pooling or sharing of resources across different types of local entities, and some result in direct support to individuals or families.
- 6 In Turner, Acs, and coauthors (2020), the Urban Institute provides a concise set of evidence-based metrics that reflect 25 key predictors of upward mobility—place-based conditions that boost or block mobility from poverty.
- 7 We use the term “frontline communities” to refer to the places where place-based policies and programs are implemented—mostly communities of color and low-income communities.

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Jessica Pizarek, senior associate, fcc supports PolicyLink's federal policy and place-based strategies through coalition building, policy analysis, legislative advocacy, and partnership building with federal administrations and agencies. Building upon a decade of partnership with Promise Neighborhood communities, the US Department of Education, and national partners, Pizarek also organizes annual appropriations advocacy with congressional champions to secure continuing support for the program.

Ashleigh Gardere, executive vice president of PolicyLink, guides the development and execution of programs to ensure that the 100 million people in America living in or near poverty—particularly those who face the burdens of structural racism—can participate in a just society, live in a healthy community of opportunity, and prosper in an equitable economy. Gardere has been recognized by Living Cities as one of the nation's Top 25 Disruptive Leaders working to close racial opportunity gaps. She is an expert in economic and workforce development, organizational leadership and culture change, and large-scale systems transformation. Gardere holds a bachelor's degree in urban studies from New York University and a master's degree in public policy from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.



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