US PARTNERSHIP ON
MOBILITY
FROM POVERTY

Opportunity Neighborhoods: Building the Foundation for Economic Mobility in America's Metros

Margery Austin Turner, Solomon Greene, Anthony Iton, and Ruth Gourevitch
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Executive Summary

Every family should be able to live in a neighborhood that supports its well-being and boosts its children's chances to thrive and succeed. But today, the neighborhoods where many low-income families live—especially low-income families of color—suffer from disinvestment and distress that harm their residents. And many low-income families—especially low-income families of color—are excluded from neighborhoods that offer their residents opportunities critical to economic stability and mobility, including thriving schools, good jobs, healthy environments, and access to public transportation.

This did not happen by accident, nor is it the result of unconstrained housing choices or freely functioning housing markets. Rather, over many decades, the United States built separate and unequal neighborhoods through public policy and institutional practices. Low-income families and families of color have been blocked from areas rich in amenities and opportunities by housing discrimination and exclusionary zoning, while low-income communities of color have been starved of capital and resources.

So, what can we do to lift place-based barriers to upward mobility in US metros? We can invest in distressed neighborhoods so they become springboards for their residents. In neighborhoods experiencing revitalization, we can preserve affordable housing and discourage displacement. And we can make more affordable housing available in opportunity-rich neighborhoods so that families are no longer excluded based on their race or ethnicity, country of origin, or income.

Organizations across the country are already doing important work on all these imperatives. These organizations warrant continued support. However, they rarely work in tandem or across jurisdictional boundaries to coordinate strategies at a regional scale. Investing neighborhood by neighborhood or family by family cannot achieve lasting impact if the underlying patterns of segregation, disinvestment, and exclusion persist in the surrounding region. Rather, we need to support metro-wide investment strategies that combine revitalization, preservation, and inclusion—each targeted to the neighborhoods where they are needed and reinforced with policy reforms that respond to local barriers, opportunities, and dynamics.

This paper lays out a proposal to "go big" in a handful of metropolitan areas to test whether a coordinated regional strategy—planned and executed over a decade and supported by residents' voices and power—can reverse the 20th century legacy of segregation, disinvestment, and exclusion. We recommend investing in institutional capacity building, monitoring, and continuous learning to achieve and sustain real progress in improving neighborhood quality and access to opportunity. Specifically, we propose developing and implementing "opportunity neighborhood" plans in select metropolitan regions that test strategies to

- restore well-being and opportunity to historically distressed neighborhoods,

- preserve affordable housing in revitalizing neighborhoods, and

- expand access to opportunity-rich neighborhoods for people living in distressed communities.

Participating regions would commit to engaging residents of low-income neighborhoods and low-income people across the region in data-driven, participatory planning to identify and address place-based barriers to opportunity.

If successful, this proposal could go far to sever the stubborn link between zip code and destiny in US metros and ensure that all people have a fair shot at achieving economic success, regardless of where they live.

Impact on Three Dimensions of Mobility

The Partnership's definition of mobility has three core principles: economic success, power and autonomy, and being valued in community.

Investment: We recommend expanding access to opportunity for low-income families and families of color using metro-wide investment strategies that combine revitalization, preservation, and inclusion—each targeted to the neighborhoods where they are needed and reinforced with policy reforms that respond to local barriers, opportunities, and dynamics. We envision an investment of $100 million ($15 million in grant funding from public, private, and philanthropic sources for three sites over a 12-year period, plus $85 million in capital through social impact investments to support implementation).

Impact:

- Economic Success: Communities will see their ratings on the Neighborhood Opportunity Score (a newly developed index) rise, and will experience lower crime rates and better public and private amenities. Improvements in neighborhood quality and choice also can be expected to lead to higher employment rates, higher incomes, and lower poverty. Because the investments will be site-specific and tailored to the communities' needs and priorities, the projected monetary return will vary.
- Power and Autonomy: Community collective efficacy will rise, as will indicators of civic activity such as voting.
- Being Valued in Community: Residents of all races, ethnicities, and incomes will report a greater sense of belonging and have higher perceived standing in the community and society. Also, experiences of discrimination and racial resentment should fall.

The History and Consequences of Separate and Unequal Neighborhoods

Where people live profoundly affects their well-being and long-term life chances. Every parent wants their children to grow up in a safe neighborhood, with great schools, a healthy environment, and good role models. But in neighborhoods with high levels of crime and violence, failing schools and other public services, and few places to work, shop, or play, families face especially difficult challenges finding work, earning a decent living, and raising their children. Today, almost 14 million people live in extremely poor neighborhoods (census tracts with poverty rates of 40 percent or more)—more than twice as many as in 2000.[1]

A growing body of research suggests that growing up in a poor neighborhood amplifies the effects of growing up poor.[2] As a recent *Vox* article evocatively framed it, living in a distressed neighborhood is "like breathing in bad air; the more you're exposed to it, the more it hurts you."[3] Partnership member Raj Chetty and colleagues find that every year of exposure to a more opportunity-rich community improves a child's chances of economic success as an adult.[4] The Center on Society and Health and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation find that life expectancies can differ by as much as 20 years between rich and poor neighborhoods within the same city.[5] And Patrick Sharkey's research demonstrates that neighborhood disadvantage is passed on from generation to generation.[6] Simply put, the evidence tells us that when tackling poverty, place matters.

Disparities in neighborhood quality and severe distress in high-poverty neighborhoods did not result from unfettered housing market choices or natural sorting mechanisms. Historically, high housing costs have intersected with racially discriminatory market practices and exclusionary land-use policies to block low-income families and people of color from communities that offer safety, good schools, a healthy environment, and access to jobs.[7] At the same time, many neighborhoods where housing is more affordable—and where low-income people of color have been constrained to live—have been starved of capital by both public- and private-sector institutions, leaving them with failing schools, inadequate services, physical and environmental blight, and high levels of crime and violence. Higher-income people have fled from these communities, further increasing the concentration of poverty and accelerating the cycle of disinvestment, powerlessness, isolation, and distress.[8]

This history began early in the 20th century as a story of racial prejudice and segregation in which public and private actors built separate and unequal neighborhoods for black and white people. In the 1980s, a surge in immigration brought new residents, many of them people of color, to communities across the country. Immigrants increased the racial and ethnic diversity of cities, suburbs, and rural areas that had

previously been homogeneous. Although settlement patterns vary widely across immigrant groups and across metros, evidence suggests that when recent immigrants settle in or near high-poverty communities, their upward mobility is impaired.[9]

Another relatively recent trend shaping the geography of opportunity is the rise of poverty outside central cities. Between 2000 and 2015, suburban communities accounted for almost half of all growth in the nation's poor population. And more poor people now live in suburban areas (16 million) than in cities (13 million) or rural areas (8 million). Consequently, concentrations of poverty have emerged in suburban areas, with the number of poor people living in high-poverty neighborhoods growing faster in the suburbs than in cities or rural areas. High-poverty suburban neighborhoods pose similar challenges for their residents as their central city counterparts and, in some cases, may be more distressed because many suburban jurisdictions have fewer supportive services.[10]

In recent decades, racial segregation in most metros has been slowly declining, but both economic segregation and concentrated poverty are on the rise, trapping more low-income families in neighborhoods that lack the resources, amenities, access to capital, and political and market power most middle- and high-income communities take for granted.[11] At the same time, gentrification pressures threaten to displace lower-income families—often immigrants and people of color—from urban neighborhoods that are seeing renewed investment and improving amenities, shifting neighborhood demographics while preserving disparities in access to opportunity.[12]

What We Know about Solutions

Beginning with the settlement houses of the late 19th century, practitioners and policymakers have worked to tackle the challenges of concentrated poverty through evolving "place-based" strategies.[13] The most promising of today's models are coordinated by strong, highly professional community-based institutions that support residents' empowerment to set and pursue priorities for community investments, assemble capital from public and private sources, and build toward multisector strategies that address the interconnections between community safety, quality education, and access to affordable credit, health care, food, and employment.[14] Over time, progress in each sector contributes to gains in the others. The work of these institutions does not stop at the boundaries of their target neighborhoods. Instead, they cultivate and activate relationships with private- and public-sector institutions at city, regional, state, and national scales to change policies and mobilize capital to address neighborhood needs and support residents' economic mobility.

A recent review of rigorous research on the impacts of major place-based policy interventions targeting distressed urban neighborhoods concludes that they have achieved incremental change, but few were fully transformative.[15] The limited success of place-based interventions may be driven in part by insufficient scale and truncated funding cycles that provide "short-term funding for long-term work."[16] The evidence suggests that full-scale transformation will result not from any single policy endeavor, but through a long-term process that extends beyond investments in the distressed neighborhoods themselves to also address the economic, political, and social systems that helped create and sustain neighborhood disparities.

When neighborhoods do revitalize (whether through planned reinvestment or market forces), it is important to preserve affordable housing and minimize displacement. Doing so can help expand opportunities for low-income families to live in well-resourced, mixed-income communities. In high-cost markets, housing affordability and displacement pressures can prevent stable economic integration and threaten socioeconomic diversity by driving lower-income families out of rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods. Most recent neighborhood revitalization efforts have sought a sustainable mix of incomes, and practitioners across the country have developed tools for preserving affordable housing or preventing displacement in neighborhoods experiencing market pressures.[17]

These preservation tools can intervene at different geographic scales and at different stages of neighborhood change. Some target individual properties, such as housing subsidies or below-market financing tools that reserve some or all apartments in a modernized building for low-income families. Others focus on entire neighborhoods, like community benefit agreements that commit private developers to invest in essential services, facilities, or jobs for neighborhood residents. And many involve citywide protections or mandates for affordable housing preservation, including inclusionary zoning provisions and strengthening of legal protections for tenants.[18] Little systematic evidence exists regarding the

effectiveness of these tools, and very little is known about sustainable antidisplacement and income-mixing strategies or how they might contribute to economic mobility.[19]

Strong evidence shows that enabling a family to move out of a high-poverty neighborhood dramatically improves the children's chances for upward mobility. Local programs have used federally funded housing vouchers to help low-income families move from neighborhoods of poverty and distress to neighborhoods that offer greater opportunity.[20] The latest evidence finds that such "moves to opportunity" yield long-term economic gains, particularly for children who are young at the time of the move and when the move can be sustained.[21] When assisted housing mobility programs are adequately funded and effectively implemented, the combination of a housing voucher and hands-on help with housing search and relocation empowers families that want to participate, enabling them to choose the neighborhoods that best meet their needs and giving them greater control over their housing and locational outcomes. However, not all families currently living in distressed neighborhoods want to move, nor is it realistic to argue that neighborhood disparities can be eliminated through housing mobility alone.

Examples abound of promising policies and initiatives to revitalize distressed communities, prevent involuntary displacement, sustain mixed-income communities, and support residential moves to opportunity. But the available evidence about what works (and how) varies in strength and is incomplete. Evidence and experience argue strongly that no single program or policy can reverse the legacy of racial segregation and poverty concentration, deliver opportunity-enhancing investments to distressed communities, and provide access to opportunity-rich communities for low-income families and families of color. Meaningful and sustainable change requires more ambitious strategies, better described as "place-conscious" than place-based.[22] Instead of focusing neighborhood by neighborhood, these strategies work hand in hand and aim to restore neighborhoods that have been starved of opportunities, to prevent displacement from revitalizing neighborhoods, and to break down barriers that exclude low-income people and people of color from communities rich in resources and opportunities.

A few such place-conscious efforts have emerged over the last decade, with the goal of significantly narrowing disparities across communities within a metropolitan region (see box 1). Early experience suggests that the specific steps required to overcome the legacy of racial segregation and poverty concentration vary from place to place, requiring strategies tailored to local realities. These strategies take a long time to plan and implement and will likely require substantially more time to achieve results. Strong and committed leadership (political, business, civic, and faith) appears essential to progress, but leadership alone is not enough. Instead, leadership must engage and empower multiple voices, including low-income people, people of color, and residents of distressed communities. Creating meaningful venues for shared learning and decisionmaking requires collaboration between public and civic leadership and strong community-based institutions.

The Sustainable Communities Initiative

The Sustainable Communities Initiative was an interagency federal program administered by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that provided grant support and technical assistance to 143 rural, suburban, and urban communities. These communities identified strategies to advance "livability principles," including increased transportation options, equitable and affordable housing, and economic competitiveness.[a] After launching the program in 2010, HUD requested that grantees also conduct a regional fair housing and equity assessment (FHEA) to help grantee communities evaluate access to opportunity in their regions. These assessments included many key elements of this proposal.[b] Congress eliminated funding for the Sustainable Communities Initiative in 2012, so only two cohorts of regional grantees completed FHEA plans, and federal funds were never made available to implement these plans.

Recent research on the Sustainable Communities Initiative suggest that it has had lasting impact in many regions, even in the absence of federal resources for implementation.[c] Most grantees reported that the collection and analysis of data on residential segregation, concentrated poverty, and regional inequalities, when combined with community knowledge and input, revealed powerful new insights into spatial barriers to accessing opportunity for low-income families and communities of color.[d] And these insights led to specific recommendations about how to better leverage federal investments to increase affordable housing in high-opportunity areas and improve accessible and affordable public transit links between high-poverty areas and job centers. In several regions, the FHEA plans directly led to changes in local policies and regional allocation of resources.[e]

Despite these accomplishments, the Sustainable Communities Initiative and FHEA had limitations. The lack of infrastructure to support robust community engagement was a common barrier to full and effective participation, particularly in rural areas where poverty is more dispersed and organizational capacity weak.[f] The uniform data provided by HUD to support FHEA planning were a good starting point for analysis, but for many grantees, those data were neither reliable nor comprehensive enough for an accurate assessment. And because the FHEA requirement was introduced after the Sustainable Communities Initiative grants were awarded, budgets had already been allocated and few funds were available to prepare the FHEA in most regions. In some places, though, earlier "sustainability" planning efforts also created an appetite for deeper equity analysis.[g]

[a] Dwayne S. Marsh, "The Sustainable Communities Initiative: Collective Impact in Practice," *Community Investments* (Washington, DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2014).

[b] "The Fair Housing and Equity Assessment (FHEA)," US Department of Housing and Urban Development, accessed February 2, 2018, https://www.hud.gov/program_offices/economic_development/place_based/fhea.

[c] Denise G. Fairchild and Patrick J. Revord, "Planning Livable Communities: Findings from HUD's Regional Planning and Community Challenge Grant Programs" *Cityscape* 19, no. 3 (2017): 3–7; Rolf Pendall et al., *Can Federal Efforts Advance Federal and Local De-siloing? Lessons from the HUD-EPA-DOT Partnership for Sustainable Communities* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2013).

[d] The Opportunity Agenda, "Realizing the Promise: How to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing" (New York: The Opportunity Agenda, November 2014).

[e] US Department of Housing and Urban Development, "FHEA Case Studies: Sustainable Communities Initiative Grantees" (Washington, DC: US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2016).

[f] Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, "The Fair Housing and Equity Assessment in Rural and Smaller Metropolitan Regions: Reflections on Implementation of the FHEA from the Field" (Columbus: Ohio State University, 2016).

[g] Thomas G. Kingsley, "Metropolitan Kansas City: Creating Sustainable Places," National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, September 2015).

Proposal: Develop and Implement "Opportunity Neighborhood" Plans

We propose a significant and sustained effort to support the development and implementation of "opportunity neighborhood" plans in select metropolitan regions. These plans would be developed through an inclusive process that engages residents of distressed neighborhoods. The plans would rigorously test strategies to (1) restore well-being and opportunity to historically distressed neighborhoods, (2) preserve affordable housing in revitalizing neighborhoods, and (3) expand access to opportunity-rich neighborhoods for people living in distressed communities.

Participating regions would

- commit to giving real voice and authority to residents of distressed neighborhoods and other low-income people across the region;

- engage in a data-driven, participatory planning process to
  » identify place-based barriers to opportunity;
  » develop a tailored portfolio of place-conscious programs and policy reforms that include revitalizing distressed neighborhoods, preserving affordable housing and other supports in gentrifying neighborhoods, and improving access to high-opportunity neighborhoods; and
  » receive sustained support—funding, data and knowledge resources, and technical assistance—to bring their plans to fruition; and

- track and evaluate progress using high-level indicators that reflect two core objectives:
  » increase assets that support family well-being and economic mobility in more neighborhoods across the region, and
  » increase the number of the region's low-income people and people of color who live in neighborhoods that support their well-being and economic mobility.

Building Blocks

Drawing from empirical research, lessons from previous efforts to reduce neighborhood disparities or mitigate their effects, case studies, and discussions within the US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty and with other experts in the field, we have identified six key building blocks for a comprehensive strategy to transform the geography of opportunity for low-income families.

1: Adopt a Regional Approach

The intervention should be at a regional scale.[23] As discussed above, the share of poor people who live in neighborhoods of concentrated poverty continues to rise, and these neighborhoods have spread beyond central cities. Regional collaboration can help close some gaps in regional capacity that limit individual jurisdictions' ability to address growing needs.[24] In addition, a focus on a single distressed neighborhood or even a single city within a metropolitan region is likely to miss larger market dynamics or the effects that policies outside the jurisdiction have on locational choices for poor families (e.g., exclusionary zoning or discrimination against voucher holders in higher-income areas). Adopting a regional lens for understanding barriers to opportunity and the resources available to overcome them can encourage collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries and a sense of regional "shared fate." It can also expose the role that racial exclusion has played in perpetuating "separate and unequal" neighborhoods and schools, and help cultivate champions for diversity and inclusion from residents and political leaders in opportunity-rich communities as well as disinvested and distressed ones.

2: Pursue Place-Conscious Strategies

The investment should include a portfolio of place-conscious programs and policy reforms that respond to local needs and market dynamics. These interventions should all work in concert to advance the shared goals of (1) reducing neighborhood disparities, (2) ensuring that low-income families can afford and feel welcome in neighborhoods of opportunity, and (3) expanding neighborhood choices for low-income families and families of color.[25] In some neighborhoods, this will involve restoring access to opportunity through investments in strong civic institutions, mixed-income housing, high-performing schools, and access to financial services. In others, it will involve preserving and expanding affordable housing and other supports for low-income families to prevent displacement and ensure that existing residents will benefit from improvements. Still others will focus more on improving access to high-opportunity neighborhoods for all people through residential mobility programs, regional siting of affordable housing, and access to reliable and affordable transportation. We anticipate that most regions will require a mix of strategies.

It's not an either/or. It's the individual, the institution, and the structural elements. You build [a place-conscious initiative] to the heart of a place, but it has to be institutional and get at larger policies. Ultimately, it's a both/and approach.
—Dr. Leonard Brock, United Way of Greater Rochester

3: Support Residents' Empowerment as Leaders

Residents of neighborhoods suffering from disinvestment and distress must play a leading role in designing solutions and engaging their fellow community members. All too often, interventions across the spectrum of place-conscious strategies are designed through planning processes and implemented by institutions that leave out the residents most affected by segregation and poverty. As a result, these interventions often misinterpret community needs or assets. They also exacerbate disparities in power and in access to resources that perpetuate uneven regional development patterns.[26]

Ensuring that residents have authentic voice and power is far more easily said than done. The challenges are many and daunting: reaching past self-appointed "representatives" of distressed communities; equipping people with tools and supports for effective participation; overcoming resistance from those with power who benefit from the status quo; managing through conflict; and balancing inclusion with efficiency. Without carefully crafted engagement strategies and resources to support them, navigating these thorny issues can stymie decisionmaking and action. But in the absence of resident voice, strategies and investments are less likely to achieve the most meaningful and sustainable outcomes. Strengthening residents' voices and power will not only help organizations identify where pathways to opportunity are "blocked" (and why), but also create ongoing mechanisms for accountability in overcoming these barriers.

Community engagement and leadership development should not be limited to residents of distressed neighborhoods. Effective implementation of opportunity neighborhood plans will also require residents of suburban or opportunity-rich communities to champion intentional strategies to unwind exclusionary practices, especially in the areas of land use regulations, transportation, and school financing. Suburban leaders will also need to be a part of the solution and exposed to the ways in which they can and should participate in opening doors to communities of opportunity.

The people with lived experience have expertise. Nobody knows the crises in this community more than the people who are here every day.
—Camille Llanes-Fontanilla, Executive Director, Somos Mayfair

4: Partner with and Strengthen Effective Organizations

The investments should strengthen the institutional capacities of local organizations working to support mobility from poverty at the neighborhood, city, and regional scales. At the neighborhood level, strong community-based institutions support residents' empowerment to set and pursue priorities for investments and mobilize capital to address neighborhood needs. They are the lynchpin of successful community

revitalization efforts, weaving together activities to address such wide-ranging goals as safety, school quality, health, and employment. They also help residents learn about and tap into resources and opportunities throughout the city and region. Although community-based organizations can ensure meaningful engagement with residents, citywide organizations can help coordinate efforts across sectors to ensure that no neighborhood is left behind. And regional organizations—such as metropolitan planning organizations, councils of government, or regional chambers of commerce—will need to focus on "access to opportunity" and recruit member jurisdictions to break down the exclusionary barriers that block mobility from poverty. Strengthening institutional capacities at all three levels will be essential not only to support a participatory planning process, but also to hold partners accountable for implementation, press for systems change, and sustain progress over time.

5: Evaluate and Refine Based on Data

The investment should support the collection, use, and application of data and knowledge to support evidence-based decisionmaking, community engagement, and continuous learning and program improvement. This starts with the development of high-level metrics (discussed further below) that document current patterns of neighborhood disadvantage, disparity, and exclusion. Then, those data and performance metrics can be used to measure progress on implementing plans, evaluate plan effectiveness in improving access to opportunities within each region, and share lessons across regions.

6: Confront Racism

Regional planning and implementation strategies to create and expand neighborhoods of opportunity must explicitly confront and overcome racism and its pervasive influences. America's tragic history of slavery, racial violence, and oppression has produced not only today's patterns of neighborhood segregation and concentrated poverty, but also racist narratives about the inferiority of black people. These narratives carry profound implications for people's beliefs about who "belongs" in their neighborhood and who "deserves" to be a member of their community.[27]

Unwinding the legacy of racial segregation and poverty concentration will require changing these destructive narratives. Indeed, the Partnership has recognized that changing prevailing narratives that perpetuate poverty by "othering" people is essential to its overarching goal of increasing mobility from poverty and has offered strategies for pursuing narrative change.[28] But at the same time, systematic efforts to narrow neighborhood disparities and expand people's residential choices can *contribute* to antiracist narratives by creating more opportunities for white and black people—and all people of color—to know each

other as neighbors,[29] and by restoring ladders of economic opportunity in the neighborhoods where many people of color live.

Explicit adoption of a race-conscious approach will also determine and shape how the other building blocks of an opportunity neighborhoods strategy are implemented. For example, supporting high-capacity organizations will require recognizing that local community change organizations have different capacities and that organizations tapped to lead "big" initiatives like this are often headed by boards and executives that are predominantly white. Explicitly confronting racism and its pervasive harms would suggest the need to support and build capacity among organizations led by people of color.

Each of these building blocks has been and continues to be implemented, with varying degrees of success, in communities across the country. What is new and potentially powerful about this proposal is that it would combine these elements at a regional scale and pursue them over a longer period to reverse the legacy of segregation, exclusion, and disinvestment so every family can live in a neighborhood that supports upward mobility. Supporting the development and implementation of this strategy in several regions will yield insights about what works and what it takes to achieve progress in different contexts, thereby influencing advocacy, practice, norms, and policies in other regions.

We recognize that tensions between these six building blocks may arise. For example, residents living in distressed neighborhoods might find regional discussions too abstract or disconnected from their daily lives, and community groups working to improve conditions in these neighborhoods might contend that a regional scope distracts from a much-needed focus on highly localized challenges. At the same time, mobility advocates might argue that scarce resources should be targeted to helping families gain immediate access to high-opportunity neighborhoods, regardless of preferences expressed by community leaders.

We think these tensions actually motivate and energize our approach and that integrating all six building blocks will yield innovative solutions that are both pragmatic and transformative. For example, strong engagement by residents living in distressed communities can help "ground-truth" data analysis and investment strategies. Similarly, taking a regional view of neighborhood revitalization strategies might reveal income-mixing opportunities that capitalize on regional housing market dynamics.[30] And when low-income families are equipped with information and a voice, some are likely to commit their time and energies to neighborhood revitalization strategies, while others take advantage of opportunities to move. We also believe each of these tensions can be addressed through a well-designed planning process, a commitment to shared principles at the outset, and dedicating sufficient resources to supporting meaningful and informed engagement by resident leaders and community-based organizations throughout the process.

Philanthropic Investment Strategy

This effort would engage community-based institutions, advocates, civic and business leaders, researchers, philanthropy, and policymakers in three to five regions to design and implement a 10-year plan to transform the region's geography of opportunity. This is an ambitious proposal. Success will require support from both philanthropy and government. Broadly speaking, the role of philanthropy is to help set a diverse and representative table, support strong institutions and evidence-based decisionmaking, and make catalytic investments during implementation.[31] The role of governments will be to remove structural barriers to opportunity through policy reforms, strategic investments, and improved coordination to deepen impact, as discussed in more detail below.

We envision a philanthropic investment strategy that includes three phases.

Phase 1: Laying the Groundwork

In the first year, investments would focus on the following activities:

- Support research that helps fill targeted gaps in our knowledge about place-based barriers to mobility from poverty and strategies to overcome them (see the appendix).

- Refine metrics for defining opportunity-enhancing neighborhoods (described in the next section), drawing from past research as well as ongoing work by Raj Chetty and the Equality of Opportunity Project to identify neighborhood characteristics that correlate with upward mobility.

- Develop a training curriculum for resident leadership development and engagement on regional equity, building off models such as the Institute for Leadership in Equity and Development, developed by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council and Action for Regional Equity in Boston,[32] and the Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute, developed by Urban Habitat.[33] This training curriculum should be adopted and used for residents of both high-poverty neighborhoods and high-opportunity neighborhoods who can serve as champions for regional inclusion strategies.

- Identify a few regions to engage in an opportunity neighborhoods planning process. Selection criteria should include the presence of a regional planning organization or collaboration with a demonstrated commitment to improving regional equity, ability to collect and analyze data and set and monitor progress toward performance goals, and experience with engaging diverse stakeholders and community residents in meaningful decisionmaking roles.

Phase 2: The Planning Process

In the second phase, investments would support a one-year opportunity neighborhoods planning process in three to five regions. This would include the following activities:

- Identify and engage diverse public- and private-sector stakeholders to lead this effort, including community-based organizations working to improve areas of concentrated poverty and fair housing organizations working to remove barriers to residential mobility, as well as business and civic leadership of the city and region.

- Launch a leadership development program that trains resident leaders from high-poverty communities and low-income residents who have participated in residential mobility programs. The program would give these resident leaders tools and skills to fully and equally participate in the regional planning effort.

- Create an opportunity map—an assessment of existing patterns of neighborhood disparities and place-based barriers to economic opportunity, as well as mobility-enhancing assets in the region—using data analysis and broad community engagement. Based on the map, identify key barriers to upward mobility and set and prioritize broad goals to improve access to opportunity in the region.

- Develop strategies to overcome barriers to opportunity, leverage community assets and regional opportunities, and achieve goals. Incorporate strategies that cut across policy domains (including housing, safety, transportation, land use, education, and workforce development), as well as across jurisdictional boundaries.

- Identify existing local, regional, state, and federal funding programs that can be leveraged to implement strategies and achieve goals.

- Establish benchmarks and evaluation mechanisms to measure progress toward top-level goals, described in the next section.

Phase 3: Implementation

In the third phase, philanthropy would invest in implementing strategies and achieving goals laid out in each 10-year regional plan. This would include the following activities:

- Strengthen institutional capacity for high-performing civil society organizations that can either directly implement elements of the plan or support advocacy and ongoing accountability mechanisms to influence public policies and resource allocation. This would include proven

community-based institutions with a strong track record of resident engagement, professionalism, and accomplishment.

- Make strategic impact investments that can attract additional public and private investment to place-conscious efforts.

- Conduct continuous, iterative data analysis and program improvements, including periodically revisiting assessment and opportunity mapping to determine progress.

- Build a learning community across sites to share best practices and lessons learned. Support research and knowledge development to replicate successes in other regions and to inform local, state, and federal policies. Conduct analysis within and across participating regions to produce generalizable evidence about what works under what circumstances.[34]

Role of Government

Federal, state, and local governments will be critical partners in this effort and should have a seat at the decisionmaking table.

Local Governments

Local governments within the region are likely best positioned to directly address recommendations made in the opportunity neighborhoods plans, by revising policies and investments that perpetuate patterns of segregation and concentrated poverty. For example, if the assessments find that regulatory restrictions on housing development create affordability barriers in higher-opportunity areas, local governments could adopt reforms to spur affordable housing production, including easing density restrictions, allowing accessory dwelling units, eliminating off-street parking requirements, and adopting inclusionary zoning laws.[35] Local tax and regulatory policies can also create hedges against involuntary displacement from gentrifying neighborhoods and help preserve affordable housing.[36] In addition, local governments may need to break down silos between agencies. Increased cooperation can better target resources, increasing the effectiveness of funds to revitalize distressed neighborhoods or preserve housing affordability and stability in neighborhoods facing displacement pressures.

Local governments often have strong fiscal and political incentives to maintain patterns of racial and economic segregation.[37] As discussed below, federal fair housing and civil rights enforcement efforts can limit exclusionary actions by local governments, but the threat of federal action cannot, on its own, drive all

changes needed to significantly narrow neighborhood disparities.[38] Adoption of inclusionary policies at the local level is likely to require enlightened self-interest, as well as the development of compelling new campaigns about how segregation and inequalities stunt regional economic growth and prosperity and initiatives to address them,[39] such as the emerging "Yes In My Back Yard" movement.[40]

State Governments

State governments have a crucial role, especially in incentivizing solutions that spill across jurisdictional boundaries. States play a large and growing role in providing funding for transportation and infrastructure, and these investments can have profound implications for regional equity, especially in improving essential infrastructure in low-income communities and connecting residents to jobs.[41] States are also responsible for setting formulas for allocating credits under the federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit program, which is responsible for virtually all affordable housing production in the United States today. State formulas can have a powerful effect on the siting of tax credit properties, determining whether they function to concentrate or disperse affordable units.[42]

More broadly, state laws and constitutions define the boundaries of what local governments must, may, and may not do in ways that vary substantially across the nation, with implications for local budgets, land-use decisions, and programmatic autonomy.[43] For example, the Minnesota Fiscal Disparities Act shifts the fiscal calculus for local governments to promote more regional collaboration. It has reduced tax disparities between high- and low-income areas, allowing for reinvestment in distressed communities and helping give residents access to essential public services regardless of where they live.[44]

Federal Government

The federal government can and should play a critical role in improving access to opportunity within regions. As discussed above, federal policies and subsidies helped create and reinforce the patterns of segregation and concentrated poverty we see today, and they will also be essential in unwinding them. Under President Obama, the federal government began to break down interagency silos and improve the coordination of investments to build local capacity and revitalize distressed communities through place-based initiatives, such as Choice Neighborhoods, Promise Neighborhoods, the Byrne Criminal Justice Innovation program, Promise Zones, the National Resource Network, and Strong Cities, Strong Communities.[45] More broadly, many federal programs provide resources that local governments can use to advance place-conscious strategies.

HUD and Department of Justice share responsibility for eliminating discrimination in housing and lending markets. In July 2015, HUD adopted the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule, which implements a provision of the Fair Housing Act requiring state and local governments to administer federal funds in a way that promotes more inclusive neighborhoods, cities, and regions.[46] Along with providing clarity to jurisdictions that receive HUD funds on the scope of this requirement, HUD now provides local communities with data across a broad range of indicators to assist in the fair housing planning process. It also requires local governments to engage community members in setting fair housing priorities and goals that respond to local needs.[47]

The future of these efforts is uncertain.[48] If the AFFH rule persists, it could serve as the foundation for the investment strategy outlined in this proposal. With philanthropic support, neighboring jurisdictions could join forces to produce a much more robust assessment of barriers to housing choice and look beyond housing to understand how else policy could increase regional access to opportunity. They could also rely on a much broader set of data than HUD provides and ensure that residents in areas of concentrated poverty participate in decisionmaking about their neighborhoods, cities, and regions. However, if the AFFH rule is rescinded or weakened, this proposal perhaps gains urgency, as it can help local jurisdictions overcome place-based barriers to opportunity even without federal guidance or enforcement. Either way, this work will extend over many years, and lessons learned in the near term could inform a next generation of federal incentives and supports.

Understanding Impact and Measuring Success

To define a concise set of high-level metrics that could be applied across sites to track and evaluate progress, we return to the proposal's starting premise: ***Every family should be able to live in a neighborhood that supports its well-being and boosts its children's chances to thrive and succeed***. To advance that goal, more neighborhoods in a region must have the attributes that support family well-being and boost children's long-term success. In addition, we want to ensure that more low-income families and families of color live in neighborhoods with these attributes.

The first step is to score every residential neighborhood (census tracts with a minimum number of households) in the region based on attributes that research suggests support family well-being and children's long-term success:[49]

- safety and just policing[50]

- quality schools and early learning programs

- decent and affordable housing

- health-promoting environments (grocery stores, absence of toxins)

- access to financial services (having a bank account, credit scores)[51]

- access to jobs (proximity to employment centers and access to affordable and reliable transportation)

- access to recreational and cultural facilities

Using data from frequently updated sources, a score will be constructed for each factor, with values ranging continuously from low to high. These factor scores will themselves provide valuable insight into disparities between neighborhoods in a region and help identify priority areas for investment in different neighborhoods. Then, the individual factor scores will be combined into a composite neighborhood opportunity score, with values ranging continuously from low to high.

The neighborhood opportunity score will be used to classify neighborhoods based on the level of support for economic mobility they offer residents: low, moderate, or high. One way to set thresholds is to rely upon expert judgment of what levels really are low, moderate, or high support with respect to family well-being and children's long-term success. Another approach would be to key classifications to the highest

neighborhood scores achieved in the region. It is important to note that composite scores can fall short of providing the insights necessary to design solutions because they sometimes mask information that reflects specific community needs. Therefore, individual factor scores should be used when tailoring local initiatives.[52]

Note that the neighborhood opportunity score *does not* include measures of resident income or race. It is designed to measure what a neighborhood offers its residents, not who lives in it. It does not assume that a neighborhood occupied by people with low incomes or people of color is by definition distressed. And it explicitly leaves open for local judgment the question of whether income mixing or racial and ethnic integration are necessary to achieve the fundamental goal that every family should be able to live in a neighborhood that supports its well-being and boosts its children's chances to thrive and succeed.

The first success metric for our proposal is that the share of residential neighborhoods with composite scores of "low" or "high" will climb. The only way to make progress on this metric is to improve conditions in at least some of the neighborhoods currently scoring "low", so that their scores rise into the "moderate" or "high" range. This top-level metric embodies the US Partnership for Mobility from Poverty's focus on economic advancement, because strong evidence links neighborhood quality to long-term indicators of economic success for children. We are not proposing to track individual family or child outcomes as measures of success; the opportunity neighborhoods plans explicitly aim to change the neighborhood environments in which families live and children grow up.

We do, however, propose a pair of additional metrics that reflect who is able to gain access to the neighborhoods that support family well-being and boost children's chances:

- Share (percentage) of the region's low-income population living in neighborhoods that score "moderate" or "high."

- Share (percentage) of the region's people of color living in neighborhoods that score "moderate" or "high." Depending upon the racial and ethnic composition of the region, it might also make sense to track the share of particular racial or ethnic groups (such as African Americans or Latinos) living in "moderate" or "high" neighborhoods.

These two metrics are essential because a region could conceivably increase its share of high-quality neighborhoods, while continuing to exclude (or displace) low-income families and families of color from them. In such a scenario, low-income families and families of color would become increasingly concentrated in a shrinking number of low-opportunity neighborhoods, belying the fundamental goal of the opportunity neighborhoods plan.[53]

These three primary metrics concisely capture the outcome goals of our proposed initiative without dictating exactly how these goals can best be achieved in any metropolitan region. Informed by evidence about local conditions and trends—and by the preferences articulated by residents of all incomes, races, and ethnicities—regions will make their own determinations about the most effective combination of investments in the revitalization of distressed neighborhoods, preservation of affordable options in revitalizing neighborhoods, and expanded access to opportunity-rich neighborhoods. We anticipate that a focus on the high-level outcome metrics will help regions identify portfolios of investments that, over time, will achieve meaningful and sustainable improvements in the neighborhood environments of low-income families and families of color.

Finally, we propose additional metrics that explicitly address two core principles of the US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty's definition of mobility: power and autonomy and being valued in community:

- incidence of housing instability or involuntary mobility

- voter turnout for local elections

- qualitative measures of social cohesion and sense of belonging

The final set of metrics should be concise, comparable across sites, and supported by existing data. Too often, data-driven initiatives can get bogged down by a proliferation of metrics, losing sight of the fundamental outcome goals.

The metrics proposed here rigorously measure a region's progress toward our normative vision: a future in which every family—regardless of income, race, ethnicity, or country of origin—can find a place to call home in a neighborhood that supports its well-being and boosts its children's chances to thrive and succeed. Whether that neighborhood is in the heart of the city or in the suburbs, whether the family has lived there for generations or is a newcomer, it should offer the safety, schools, parks, shopping, public services, and social networks we all seek for our families. Until that vision is realized, too many families—especially families of color—will remain trapped in poverty, and too many children—especially children of color—will be denied the chance to thrive and contribute.

Appendix. Areas for Further Research

The initiative proposed here would create opportunities for learning and evaluation, within and between participating communities. Data collection and analysis conducted along the way would generate lessons about the effectiveness of particular interventions and approaches (and how their effectiveness varies with contextual conditions). Perhaps more importantly, we can examine their combined impact on neighborhood disparities and, ultimately, on economic mobility. But policymakers and practitioners pursuing initiatives of this ambitious scope and scale could also benefit from targeted research investments to address unanswered questions before developing and implementing plans.

1. *How should place-based strategies in rural areas differ from those in urban communities?*

Rural communities experience a higher prevalence of persistent poverty than do metropolitan communities. In 2010, of the 429 persistently poor counties nationwide, 85 percent were rural. Some rural communities face growing inequality between higher-wealth tourists and retirees and low-wage service workers.[54] But the vast majority of empirical research exploring the effects of concentrated poverty and residential segregation has focused on urban areas and their residents. Similarly, studies of economic mobility from poverty generally focus on urban geographies and adopt assumptions that may not apply to rural communities.

Several place-based initiatives to build rural opportunity have been tried recently, but they have not yet been fully evaluated.[55] And no systematic research has addressed the question of what exercising choice to move to opportunity areas would mean in rural areas or if it could even be supported. The field sorely needs a systematic and sustained program of research focused on what works to address the challenges of poverty and place in rural communities.

2. *How is immigration changing the geography of opportunity?*

The research literature on trends in immigration and the economic mobility of immigrant children is vast, largely reflecting the complexity of immigrant and refugee populations. The evidence highlights diverse settlement patterns, socioeconomic status, and opportunities for economic mobility for immigrant communities depending on country of origin, economic and social capital, legal status upon entry, and ethnic and racial background. Moreover, research focusing on immigrant settlement patterns and how "place" affects economic outcomes is disparate and often inconclusive.

As our country continues to become more diverse, research should be conducted and effectively synthesized to better understand the socioeconomic implications of immigrants' decentralized geographic movement at both the national and neighborhood levels. Do current or anticipated demographic trends change the link between spatial mobility and economic mobility? What physical or infrastructural elements

of place best address the needs of immigrants and their families? What features of communities allow them to either support or limit immigrants looking to integrate more fully into the US culture and economy?

3. *How might technological changes reinforce or reduce place-based disparities in the future?*

Rapidly evolving information and transportation technologies could simultaneously exacerbate and mitigate patterns of racial and economic segregation, and they are likely to complicate established thinking about the "neighborhood effects" of living in areas of concentrated poverty. For example, peer-to-peer technologies and sharing platforms can generate home-based employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, enhance social interactions, and reduce costs for transportation, credit, and basic services. But to date, the benefits of these innovations have not been equally "shared" across races, places, and income groups.[56] Social networking applications could be designed to lift the constraints that people in areas of concentrated poverty face when accessing information, jobs, basic services, and housing opportunities.[57]

However, early research suggests that online social networks often reflect patterns of spatial segregation and reinforce neighborhood stereotypes.[58] And innovations in transportation, such as autonomous vehicles, can be a boon or a bust for families living in areas of concentrated poverty, serving as a low-cost and more flexible alternative to fixed public transit systems but reducing the convenience and safety of these systems and eliminating jobs in the transportation sector.[59] The intersection of technological innovation and spatial segregation is rarely explored, even less often through a "mobility from poverty" lens. Further research could allow communities to incorporate technological change into their understanding of the geography of opportunity and harness current opportunities and future innovations to mitigate the adverse effects of concentrated poverty.

Notes

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19   Robert J. Chaskin and Mark L. Joseph, *Integrating the Inner City: The Promise and Perils of Mixed-Income Public Housing Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

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23   In the urban context, the regional scale would include communities included in a metropolitan statistical area, defined by the Office of Management and Budget as an urban core area of at least 50,000 people plus adjacent territory with a high degree of social and economic integration as measured by commuting ties. In the rural context, the region would have to be defined more flexibly and would likely include a rural area covered by a federal-state regional development authority. (Mark Partridge, "The Geography of Rural American Poverty," testimony before the House Ways and Means Committee, Subcommittee on Human Resources, February 15, 2017.)

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36 Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement, "Gentrification and Neighborhood Change: Helpful Tools for Communities" (Chicago: UIC College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs, 2015).

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50 Jesse Jannetta, Jeremy Travis, and Evelyn McCoy, "Participatory Justice" (Washington, DC: US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty, forthcoming).

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53   We recognize that a region could progress on these metrics while still becoming less inclusive. Low-income people and people of color could be forced out of the entire region, for example, as housing costs increase rapidly. This would partially be mitigated by our proposed secondary metric on involuntary displacement; however, particularly high-cost regions may include additional goals for sustaining or improving racial and socioeconomic diversity. In such regions, interventions more directly focused on housing affordability should be prioritized. Examples include the range of interventions described in Jesse Mintz-Roth, "Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategies in Hot Housing Markets" (Cambridge, MA: Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, 2008); Lance Freeman and Jenny Schuetz, "Producing Affordable Housing in Rising Markets: What Works?" *Cityscape* 19, no. 1 (2017): 217–36; and Lubell, "Preserving and Expanding Affordability."

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