



Laying the Groundwork for School-Centered Neighborhood Development

A GUIDE TO
BACKBONE
ORGANIZATIONS

MassINC
Policy Center

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A BRIEF NOTE ON OUR TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this analysis, we use three terms with particular meanings in the fields of education and community development. It is helpful to start with an understanding of their similarities and differences, and how we see them working in combination.

Place-Based Initiatives aim to improve quality of life, access to opportunity, and economic mobility for people who live in high-poverty neighborhoods. These efforts generally include collaborative partnerships that design and implement solutions tailored to a particular community. While many place-based initiatives involve significant real estate development to bring capital into communities that have suffered from disinvestment, some focus on aligning efforts to improve service delivery to children and families, with varying levels of involvement from the local public schools.

Community Schools is a strategy to position public schools to serve as neighborhood hubs, bringing together families, educators, and community partners and empowering them to work together to provide all students with high-quality academics, enrichment, health care, and social services.

School-Centered Neighborhood Development (SCND) is a long-term strategy to build strong neighborhoods and schools in tandem. More specifically, MassINC Policy Center defines the approach as a two-part formula: planning for the physical development of neighborhoods to promote the success of mixed-income neighborhoods with a full range of amenities. And designing and operating mixed-income public schools to provide the entire neighborhood with more services, social connections, and a pipeline of civic leaders. Building community-wealth to foster economic mobility and the growth of more economically integrated neighborhoods and schools from the bottom up, as opposed to through gentrification processes, is central to the strategy.

While place-based initiatives and Community Schools have many commonalities, and some stakeholders may even see them as interchangeable, there are subtle differences. The pages that follow show how an SCND strategy can tap the unique strengths of each approach, with the expressed goal of creating more economically integrated neighborhoods and schools.

Executive Summary

This brief offers guidance to cities stepping up to tackle the difficult work of School-Centered Neighborhood Development (SCND). With rising costs and growing economic segregation steadily eroding access to opportunity, these ambitious efforts to build more mixed-income neighborhoods and schools are absolutely essential to sustaining upward economic mobility in Massachusetts.

Fundamentally, this approach seeks to break down the silos between education, planning, housing, and community development. Backbone organizations are the key ingredient to this technically and politically challenging work. Their core functions include elevating resident voice and leadership, developing data-driven strategy, building cross-sector partnerships, and mobilizing resources.

This analysis draws on a landscape scan of 10 established backbones across the US to better understand how these organizations operate. In particular, it homes in on linkages between **place-based initiatives** and **Community Schools**. When these closely related models work together, each can strengthen and extend the other's efforts, amplifying their impact on neighborhoods that have suffered from decades of disinvestment.

As summarized below, this implementation brief provides guidance for cities seeking to build strong and sustainable backbone organizations to lead SCND initiatives across five foundational areas:

1. Start-up. Simultaneously launching a place-based initiative and a Community School is a daunting proposition that could overwhelm any neighborhood. Several backbones in the landscape integrate these two approaches, but they reached this point through slow and steady evolution. Massachusetts cities laying the

groundwork for SCND initiatives must think carefully about sequencing. Some already have Community Schools (or schools with many of the core capacities of Community Schools). Increasing parent and community leadership in these schools is a logical incremental step toward a more holistic SCND strategy, and the formation of a dedicated backbone organization to execute it. Other Massachusetts cities have major housing redevelopment projects underway that can provide a catalyst for launching an SCND backbone that will bring more resources and opportunities to the neighborhood over the long-term.

2. Governance and strategic alignment. Backbone organizations must balance resource development with community ownership, while also ensuring strong alignment with local school systems. Most of the backbones in the scan recruit high-level business and civic leaders to create connections to resources. These well-respected leaders can also help ensure that governing board members prioritize the collective interests of the initiative to the greatest extent possible. Most of the initiatives in the scan lack school district leaders on their governing boards. In neighborhoods with Community Schools, the Community School Coordinator can provide executive level representation to help ensure strategic alignment with the neighborhood public schools.

3. Core functions and staffing. Effective backbones require multidisciplinary teams with expertise in executive leadership, education, real estate, community engagement, fundraising, communications, and data and evaluation. Most backbones in the scan have in-house staff to cover several of these core capacities. To fill gaps, many draw support from local or regional partners or large national intermediaries, such as Purpose Built Communities and StriveTogether.

4. Sustainable financing. Backbones included in this scan typically launch with less than \$500,000; over time, their operating budgets grow to between \$2 million and \$5 million annually. Most organizations creatively braid public and private capital to fund their place-based strategies. However, as these initiatives multiply and competition for limited state, federal, and philanthropic resources increases, they will need to find strategies to generate revenue from local real estate value creation. In Massachusetts, District Improvement Financing and other existing community development finance tools position cities to take this approach.

5. Geographic scope and support from intermediaries. Most initiatives in the scan focus on relatively small areas (0.5–1 square mile) to demonstrate commitment to the targeted strategy and to concentrate resources for impact. However, some organizations serve as backbones for place-based initiatives in multiple neighborhoods. Strong regional intermediaries can further expand this model by creating economies of scale, allowing neighborhood backbones to operate more efficiently, while still accessing the full range of capabilities needed to be effective.

A CLOSER LOOK AT THE OPPORTUNITIES IN MASSACHUSETTS

This report includes photos from a recent tour of Community Schools and cities exploring school-centered neighborhood development (SCND) in Massachusetts. The MassINC Policy Center made this learning journey with leaders from the Legislature's Joint Committee on Community Development and Small Businesses and the United Way of Massachusetts Bay in March 2025.

Our tour began with a virtual visit to Lowell (due to inclement weather). Lowell has spent nearly a decade building Community Schools with support from the US Department of Education's Full-Service Community Schools grant. With the \$400 million transformation of Lowell High School and the Lowell Innovation Network Corridor project, these longstanding efforts are beginning to align with broader place-based redevelopment initiatives.

The second stop—the Mario Umana Academy in East Boston—illustrated how a Community School can strengthen its neighborhood. In a largely immigrant community facing gentrification, immigration enforcement, and post-pandemic economic pressures, the school has served as a stabilizing force. By embracing the Community Schools framework, the Umana provides essential resources such as food, clothing, and other supports, while also fostering connections among residents and creating opportunities for mutual support and collective advocacy on behalf of children and families.

The third stop highlighted how public housing redevelopment can provide the spark for SCND. The Worcester Housing Authority is leading a public-private effort to revitalize the Great Brook Valley neighborhood, beginning with the replacement of the 372-unit Curtis Apartments. Originally built for returning World War II veterans, the aging complex has been transformed into 527 modern homes. The redevelopment will also include an Economic Opportunity Center, a new branch of the Worcester Public Library, and a planned 37,000-square-foot Boys & Girls Club.

Our tour concluded in New Bedford, where leaders are exploring the potential to anchor SCND with a new school in one area and emerging transit-oriented development in another. In both neighborhoods, infill and adaptive reuse projects create opportunities to build mixed-income neighborhoods and schools that will meet the needs of all children and families in this growing port city.



The Mario Umana Academy's leadership team welcomes visitors and describes how they employ Community School frameworks to serve their students and neighborhood.

Introduction

In 2024, the MassINC Policy Center and the United Way of Massachusetts Bay convened leaders from across the commonwealth to develop the [School-Centered Neighborhood Development Playbook](#). This strategy paper outlined high-level approaches for aligning local school improvement and neighborhood revitalization efforts. Although the Playbook had an action-oriented title, it functioned more as a proof of concept than a practical field guide. We are gratified that the Playbook has helped to spur several cities to initiate such efforts in specific neighborhoods. Now, as cities move to pilot the approach, they are seeking more detailed, implementation-focused direction. This brief responds to that need with practical advice on the design and role of backbone organizations to spearhead these initiatives.

Backbones are fundamental to the success of SCND because they bring neighborhood leaders and other key stakeholders together to work toward a shared vision. This core organizing capacity is critical, especially in historically disadvantaged communities, where residents often lack voice and where “change” is seen primarily as a threat.

Backbones can do many things: they can empower and train residents for active participation; they can bring in trustworthy experts to support collaborative decision-making; they can marshal resources from diverse funding sources; they can provide or procure necessary programs and services; and they can responsibly communicate successes and failures. Above all, backbone organizations can be a stabilizing force, helping SCND initiatives stay focused on long-term goals amid the ups and downs that efforts with true ambition will inevitably face.

To offer guidance for how cities can build and sustain backbone organizations with this full suite of capabilities, we scoured the country looking for models. We were particularly interested in learning from backbones that include partnerships with neighborhood schools operating under the Community Schools framework.

The Playbook made the case for anchoring SCND in Community Schools. This novel approach works with intentionality to blend the place-based initiative strategy and the Community Schools strategy, two similar models that each have distinct advantages.

Throughout the US, there are many examples of place-based initiatives led by nonprofit backbone organizations. These efforts recognize that neighborhood conditions have a major influence on life outcomes, as documented with increasing precision by Raj Chetty and others.¹ In addition to drawing capital to build new homes, child care centers, storefront businesses, and other catalytic brick-and-mortar projects in high-poverty neighborhoods, place-based initiatives provide services that help families meet basic needs and give children a richer set of opportunities.

Similarly, there are many examples of Community Schools that work with nonprofit lead agencies to ensure that students and families have access to a wide range of services and supports. While the Community Schools strategy generally does not include efforts to physically transform neighborhoods, sustainably designed Community Schools have exceptional reach and staying power. By connecting residents, engaging them in school governance, and organizing them to tackle broader community concerns, they build power in neighborhoods. Over time, these Community Schools draw higher levels of public and private investment to the neighborhoods they serve, generating revitalization with more equitable outcomes.

The explicit focus on civic capacity building as a central mechanism to improve outcomes for students means Community Schools operate at the same steady and deliberate pace as community development. This is a sharp contrast to the typical rhythms of urban education, where state and federal accountability pressures and frequent leadership churn make root-cause problem-solving difficult to pursue. In this regard, Community Schools and place-based initiatives are well-positioned to link up. By moving at similar velocities, they can overcome one of the strongest structural forces siloing education from neighborhood planning, housing, and community development.

Backbones that take advantage of this opening to fuse the physical redevelopment power of place-based initiatives with the civic capacity-building power of Community Schools are still relatively rare (and in

many instances, accidental rather than deliberate), but notable examples can be found in a handful of places.

Chicago has substantial infrastructure to support and sustain Community Schools, as well as a long history of neighborhood revitalization efforts led by community-based organizations. With over 20 years of Community Schools experience and many well-established community development organizations, Baltimore is a similarly rich setting. And Maryland recently strengthened Baltimore's position by entering into a statewide partnership with the national field-building organization Purpose Built Communities (PBC).

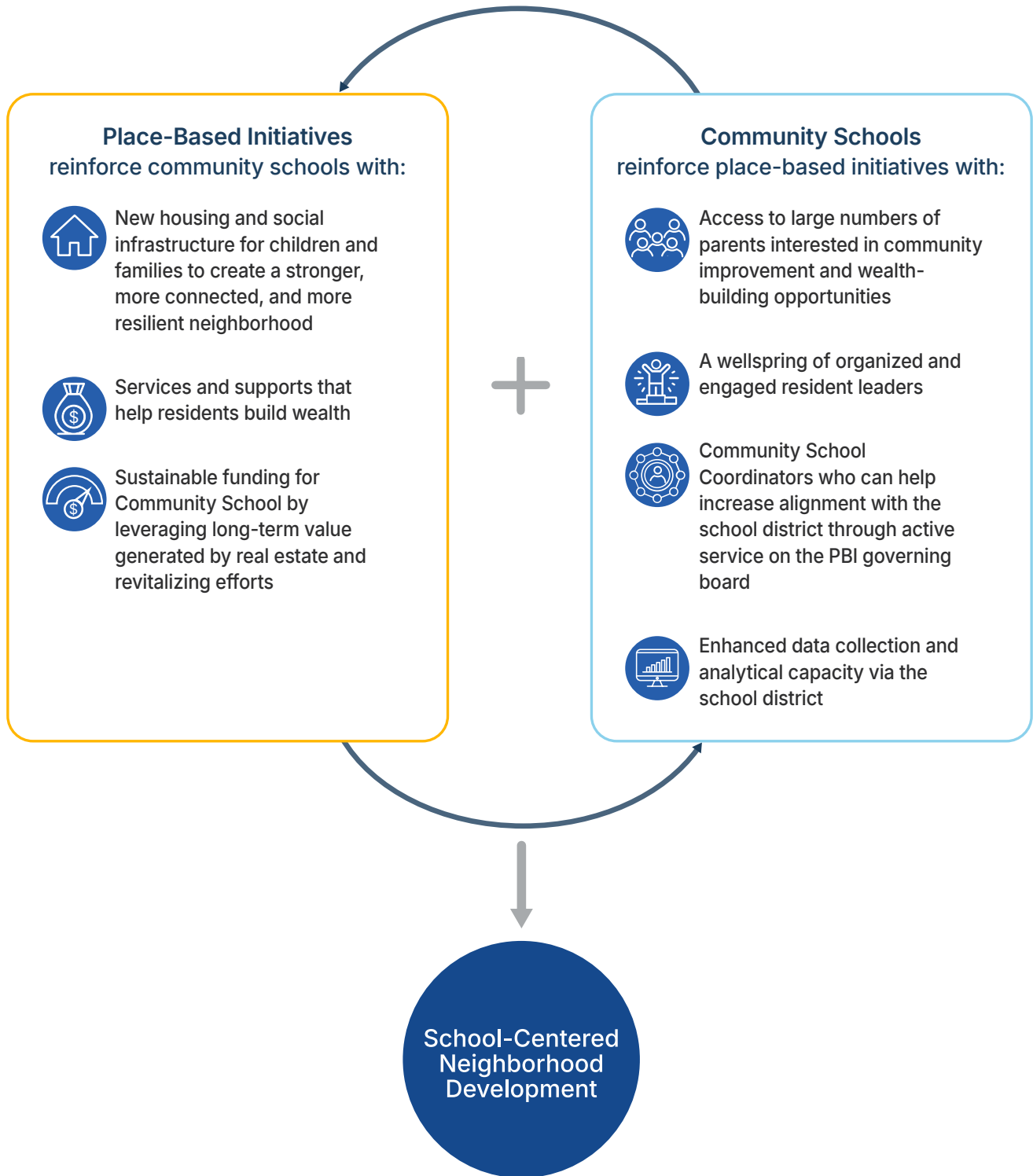
As detailed in the Playbook, PBC supports a network of backbone organizations that are working across the US in cities of all sizes to stimulate investment in mixed-income housing, cradle-to-career education, community well-being, and economic vitality. Consistent with our North Star goal for SCND, PBC believes that helping cities build and sustain economically-integrated neighborhoods and schools is fundamental to boosting student achievement, increasing economic mobility, and reducing income inequality.

While most PBC sites are not currently employing the Community Schools model, there are other lessons that can be gained by examining their backbone organizations. Similarly, Massachusetts cities looking to launch SCND initiatives can gain insight from Promise Neighborhoods grantees. Launched by the US Department of Education in 2010, the federal program aimed to replicate the success of the Harlem Children's Zone by helping collaborative, place-based efforts build cradle-to-career education pipelines. Promise Neighborhoods tend to have a narrower focus on expanded education services, and few grantees incorporate the Community Schools model. However, community development corporations (CDCs) have served as the lead applicant in a handful of cities. In these instances, the CDC can serve as a backbone that incorporates new educational partnerships into broader and more sustainable long-term neighborhood revitalization efforts.

STRONGER TOGETHER:

Place-based initiatives and Community Schools have more power working in tandem

When place-based initiatives and community schools work together, they can amplify their impact on children, families, and neighborhoods by reinforcing and expanding each other’s efforts, as illustrated below.



To learn more about backbones operating in these various contexts, we attended national conferences hosted by Purpose Built Communities, the Harlem Children’s Zone, and the National Coalition for Community Schools. We then conducted online research and interviewed executives from a diverse sample of 10 backbone organizations. We draw from these exemplars to help Massachusetts cities in the exploratory phase of SCND answer five foundational questions:

1. How can communities lay the foundation for a strong backbone during the start-up phase?
2. How will the backbone’s governance structure support collective decision-making, balance resource development and community ownership, and create strategic alignment with the public school district?
3. What key staff positions does the backbone need to fulfill its core function?
4. Which revenue sources will produce sufficient and sustainable funding for the backbone?
5. Can backbones serve more than one neighborhood or initiative?

In the pages that follow, you will find detailed responses to each of the questions. Those looking for

condensed answers will find a list of do’s, don’ts, and maybes on page 26. The table on the next page summarizes the 10 exemplary organizations for reference. The appendix offers more detail on several of them.

Finally, it is important to note some limitations. This analysis gives insight into the structure and operations of backbone organizations leading place-based initiatives. We cannot provide guidance on how different structures impact performance because rigorous impact evaluations have not been completed for most of these efforts. Also, we exclusively spotlight initiatives designed to build mixed-income neighborhoods in concert with Community Schools or other efforts to provide students and families with supports that enable upward economic mobility. Massachusetts has been home to many notable place-based efforts. Boston’s Dudley Square Neighborhood Initiative is a particularly impressive example of a backbone organization devoted to organizing residents and helping them develop their neighborhood without displacement, including through deep school improvement. However, efforts in Massachusetts have not explicitly sought to increase economic integration, and public schools in communities served by these place-based initiatives remain intensely segregated.



Leaders tour the new Congdon-DeValles school under construction in New Bedford’s Goulart Square neighborhood.

Summary of the 10 backbone organizations profiled in the landscape scan

STAFF	EDUCATIONAL SERVICES	GEOGRAPHY	BUDGET
<p>Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation A community development corporation working to revitalize the Auburn-Gresham neighborhoods of Chicago and surrounding areas utilizing comprehensive community development strategies. <i>Stand-alone 501(c)(3), established in 2000.</i></p>			
45	Partners with five local Community Schools to build the Auburn Gresham Gold model, providing tutoring, mentoring, sports, culinary arts, healthy lifestyles, and performing arts programs and summer camps	Chicago, IL: Auburn and Gresham neighborhoods; approximately 3.8 square miles with 45,000 residents	\$9M with about \$1M for youth development services
<p>Cherry Hill Strong A Purpose Built Community backbone working to align partners and resources around strategies to strengthen education, community wellness, housing, economic vitality and overall quality of life based on the community's vision. <i>Stand-alone 501(c)(3), established in 2022.</i></p>			
3	Currently developing vision	Baltimore, MD: Cherry Hill neighborhood; approximately 1 square mile with 5,500 residents	\$400K with some funds from CBA; recently received \$3M from ENOUGH Act
<p>Growing Together Tulsa A Purpose Built Community backbone revitalizing Tulsa's Kendall-Whittier neighborhood through education, economic development, entrepreneurship, and mixed-income housing. <i>Stand-alone 501(c)(3), established in 2014.</i></p>			
10	Manages Communities in Schools intervention with 10 local schools and supporting efforts to transition these schools to the Full Service Community Schools model	Tulsa, OK: Kendall-Whittier neighborhood; approximately 1 square mile with 5,000 residents	\$5.1M
<p>Mission Economic Development Agency A CDC that works in partnership to advance economic mobility for Latino communities by fostering community ownership, pathways to opportunity, and lasting systems change in San Francisco's Mission District. Participant in a StriveTogether cross-sector partnership. <i>Stand-alone 501(c)(3), established in 1973.</i></p>			
121	Leads Mission Promise Neighborhood Initiative and employs Family Success Coaches to help children access services and enrichment opportunities	San Francisco, CA: Mission District; approximately 2.3 square miles with 45,000 residents	\$25M; \$3M from Promise Neighborhood grant
<p>Northside Development Group A Purpose Built Community backbone expanding affordable and market-rate housing, economic, educational, recreational, health, and social opportunities for residents of Spartanburg, the Northside neighborhood in Spartanburg, South Carolina. Participant in a StriveTogether cross-sector partnership. <i>Stand-alone 501(c)(3), established in 2011.</i></p>			
12	Supports an early learning center and a neighborhood elementary school, and provides academic coaches and coordinators and case management for children and their families	Spartanburg, SC: Northside neighborhood; approximately 0.65 square miles with 2,000 residents	\$2.1M

STAFF	EDUCATIONAL SERVICES	GEOGRAPHY	BUDGET
<p>Northwest Center A community-based organization working to improve the economic well-being of residents in Chicago's Belmont Cragin neighborhood through housing counseling, financial literacy, community organizing, and leadership development. <i>Stand-alone 501(c)(3), established in 2004; created subsidiary Northwest Side Community Development Corporation in 2018.</i></p>			
38	Provides organizing and leadership development services for the local Sustainable Community School	Chicago, IL: Belmont Cragin neighborhood; approximately 3.7 square miles with 70,000 residents	\$3M; plus an additional \$2M for Northwest Side Community Development Corporation
<p>Omega Community Development Corporation A CDC working to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty by leading a comprehensive community change strategy in Northwest Dayton, Ohio. Participant in a StriveTogether cross-sector partnership. <i>Stand-alone 501(c)(3), established in 1997.</i></p>			
78	Manages federal Promise Neighborhood grant, providing after-school and summer enrichment, student success planning, and family coaching	Dayton, OH: 17 neighborhoods in northwest Dayton; approximately 5 square miles with 15,000 residents	\$9M with roughly \$6M from Promise Neighborhood grant
<p>Park Heights Renaissance A nonprofit backbone established to support implementation of a master plan for revitalization and community development across 12 northwest Baltimore neighborhoods. <i>Stand-alone 501(c)(3), established in 2007.</i></p>			
32	Employs 5 Community School coordinators and home visitors	Baltimore, MD: 12 neighborhoods in northwest Baltimore; approximately 2.5 square miles with 30,000 residents	\$5M
<p>REACH Riverside A Purpose Built Community backbone transforming the Riverside neighborhood of Wilmington, Delaware, through community redevelopment, education, and community health. <i>Stand-alone 501(c)(3), established in 2017, serves as umbrella organization for The Warehouse; and Kingswood Community Center.</i></p>			
14	Supports an early learning academy, a charter school, and a teen recreation center	Wilmington, DE: Riverside neighborhood; approximately 0.5 square miles with 1,000 residents	\$2.1M (Kingswood Community Center and Warehouse an additional \$12M)
<p>Southeast Raleigh Promise A Purpose Built Community backbone strengthening Southeast Raleigh, North Carolina, through mixed-income housing and community real estate, health and community wellbeing, cradle-to-career education, and economic vitality. <i>Stand-alone 501(c)(3), established in 2017.</i></p>			
24	Developed and manages a site that co-locates the Southeast Raleigh YMCA, Southeast Raleigh Elementary School, an affordable apartment complex, and a community garden	Raleigh, NC: Southeast Raleigh; approximately 8 square miles with 22,000 residents	\$1.6M

1

How can communities lay the foundation for a strong backbone during the start-up phase?

Place-based initiatives across the United States offer lessons on how SCND leaders can deliberately build strong backbone organizations during the start-up phase. The approach that communities take planting the seeds for a backbone during this crucial and sensitive stage may differ slightly depending on whether the effort is initiated by the city government or by civic leaders. Community Schools offer an alternative third way. Below, we share examples of organizations that emerged through each of these channels.

When the neighborhood takes the lead. Eight of the 10 backbones in our landscape scan originated from community-led efforts. There are many advantages to neighborhood organizations and leaders embracing this approach and working hard to bring city leaders to the table. Rather than leaving other neighborhoods to claim favoritism, this pathway sets an example of civic initiative-taking that can be replicated. And ensuring residents have a strong sense of ownership is far easier to achieve when the seeds for the initiative trace back to the neighborhood.

Several of the model initiatives had humble beginnings in low-resource communities. For example, REACH Riverside emerged from the entrepreneurial efforts of a local community center director in Wilmington, Delaware. Growing Together Tulsa is the product of resident organizing efforts led by a group of engaged community members who wanted to see their neighborhood revitalize without displacement. Southeast Raleigh Promise originated from a series of listening sessions hosted by the local YMCA. In all three cities, local leaders and residents found and successfully entered the Purpose Built Communities network, launching new nonprofits to serve as backbone organizations for the initiative (or “Community Quarterbacks,” as Purpose Built terms them).

With residents of urban neighborhoods throughout Massachusetts increasingly concerned about displacement threats, there is considerable opportunity for community-based organizations to point to these examples as models. They show how residents can organize to improve their communities and quality of life—while putting guardrails in place to ensure that revitalization efforts do not unintentionally increase the likelihood that they will be pushed out.

When the city takes the lead. Assuming the lead role in the creation of an SCND initiative can be challenging for city leaders. They must manage both city politics (i.e., targeting a specific neighborhood for investment) and neighborhood politics (i.e., selecting a group to serve as the backbone organization). But the city has a degree of neutrality that can be helpful with neighborhood selection, it controls resources and can bring partners to the table, and in some instances, it may have the most credibility when introducing this new approach to residents of an underserved neighborhood.

City leaders are often able to designate a pilot site without encountering resistance from other neighborhoods when there is a unique opportunity in the targeted community, such as new school construction or major redevelopment of public housing. In these instances, the city government is well-placed to bring stakeholders together to fashion a more comprehensive revitalization plan that maximizes the opportunity to generate broader benefits for the community from projects with catalytic potential. The Park Heights Master Plan in Baltimore, Maryland, is an example of a city-led planning effort that birthed a backbone organization charged with driving a long-term revitalization initiative with children and families at the center.

With the city preparing a revitalization plan—or co-producing a plan with logical partners, such as the local housing authority—the selection of a backbone organization can be part of the development of the strategy.

If a well-managed community planning process identifies an existing organization to take the reins, there should be a healthy consensus that the organization chosen is the most appropriate fit based on the new plan's stated objectives and the capabilities required to achieve these outcomes. Interviews with experienced leaders in place-based initiatives suggest that strong community organizations are often hesitant to serve as backbones because they can produce jealousy among partners or fear that they are “taking over” the neighborhood among residents. A community visioning process that begins from a neutral position on backbone selection can provide some help in assuaging this concern. (As detailed below, governance and the resource strategy must also be part of the solution).

Often, city-led processes lead to a consensus that a new organization should be created to guide the initiative. By defining the need and the roles the backbone will play, the plan will give the leaders charged with founding this new entity enhanced credibility with prospective funders. The Northside Development Group, which emerged from Spartanburg, South Carolina's Northside Transformation Plan, is an example of how this can play out successfully.

When Community Schools take the lead. Either the city or the neighborhood can leverage Community Schools to launch an SCND strategy. This approach works particularly well when the backbone capacity to lead a place-based initiative is already in place. Greater Auburn Gresham Community Development Corporation and the Northwest Center are leveraging the Chicago Public Schools' Community Schools Initiative to further their long-standing neighborhood revitalization efforts.

When capacity in community-based organizations is lacking in a neighborhood, Community Schools

can partner with municipal planning and community development departments to craft comprehensive neighborhood revitalization plans that carefully integrate the needs of children and families and the public school district, alongside those needs of other groups and neighborhood interests. This is the approach the Community Learning Center Institute has successfully taken as the lead agency for several Community Schools in Cincinnati (as described previously in the Playbook).

Working closely with Community Schools, city planners can fashion revitalization plans that emphasize community wealth building. An empowered school community can then help design a backbone organization with the capabilities to implement the plan. This community-driven approach will help allay fears that the city is attempting to spur gentrification in the neighborhood.

Regardless of who initiates the effort, it is vital that the planning process gives voice to all stakeholders so they can discover the challenges and opportunities the neighborhood faces from all points of view. Equally important, the process must be free to unfold without undue time pressure so the community can deliberate carefully. Establishing a collective vision means asking difficult questions and expressing honest disagreement. A successful process requires time to collect data to inform these discussions and to reach a shared agreement on the strategies that will work best for the neighborhood. While grant windows can be helpful in spurring initial discussion, communities must be careful not to let grant deadlines put excessive pressure on sensitive deliberations.

In the Purpose Built Communities context, planning processes have generally led to the formation of a new independent 501(c)(3) backbone organization. Creating a new organization sends a strong signal to investors that the city, key stakeholders, and neighborhood residents have embraced an ambitious change strategy for the place.

2

How will the backbone's governance structure support collective decision-making, balance resource development and community ownership, and create strategic alignment with the public school district?

Experts on place-based initiatives have written extensively about the governance challenges that backbone organizations face as compared to more traditional nonprofits.² These structural tensions come from:

- the collective nature of the work
- the money that must be raised to implement a bold agenda and the power imbalances between stakeholders with and without access to these resources
- the need to continuously align place-based efforts with the evolving strategic priorities of local public schools

A closer look at best practices in place-based governance and how the organizations in our landscape scan implement these approaches in real-world settings can help communities design backbone organizations with governance structures that are up to the task.

Building collaborative governance structures

To start, there are many tools that cover this topic in depth that nascent SCND initiatives should review. They include the Tamarack Institute's [Collective Governance Framework](#) and the Anchor Collaborative's guide for [Activating Place-Based Partnerships for Equitable Economic Development](#). While these resources were not crafted explicitly for SCND initiatives with a focus on building mixed-income communities and schools, they address many of the baseline issues communities will confront when bringing leaders to the table, including helping them find

shared motivation and capacity for action in environments with limited resources, challenging regulatory frameworks, prior failures attempting to work in partnership to address shared concerns, and difficult political dynamics and power relations within and across communities.

Overcoming these hurdles begins with the composition of the governing board. Whether formally in the bylaws, or informally by practice, board members are often selected to represent organizations central to the collective effort. Professional affiliations with partner organizations carry two risks: They may present conflicts of interest that are difficult for the board member to overcome, inhibiting their ability to fully represent the larger initiative; or the board member may see their selection as an honorary appointment, reducing the likelihood that they will be fully engaged in their service.

To help mitigate the conflict-of-interest challenge, backbones can seek prominent members of the community to serve as chairs. In this leadership capacity, they can help encourage members to govern with a broader system view, furthering the culture and norms of collaboration. To succeed in this role, the board chair must take great care to serve impartially, so they are not seen as an advocate for a particular solution or stakeholder group.

Most of the place-based backbones in our scan do not assign board seats to partner organizations, but for initiatives that want a formal governing role for partners, one potential fix to the honorary appointment problem is reserving a set number of rotating seats for partners, rather than granting seats to specific partner

organizations. The nominations committee can then take particular care to ensure that members do not feel obliged to serve, or worse yet, compelled to serve to represent the interests of their employer.³

The Anchor Collaborative’s guide encourages boards to look for “champions” who can serve as committed organizers inside their organizations. By mentoring colleagues and pushing for the adoption of collaborative strategies within their own organizations, board members can help build a wider network of champions for collaborative efforts to further the well-being of the neighborhoods they serve.

One of the backbone organizations that we interviewed administered an anonymous 360-degree survey to all of the partners in the collaborative to test whether they believed leaders in each sector were living up to this culture of collaboration in governing the initiative. They saw this regular data collection as essential to ensuring accountability for collaboration among the key stakeholders.

Balancing resource development with community ownership

Most of the backbones that we examined were explicitly built to draw significant resources into neighborhoods that had long been denied access to capital, and their board makeups clearly reflect this objective. They all have heavy representation from the business, finance, and real estate industries. While this undoubtedly positions them to increase public and private investment in low-resource communities, the grass-tops-heavy approach has the potential to create tension and to lead to missteps because it diminishes resident leadership by design.

Many place-based initiatives address this issue by involving resident leaders on community advisory boards, implementation committees, and working groups. But this approach creates additional layers of governance that can be cumbersome, and it may reinforce power imbalances rather than remedy them.

Our vision for SCND anchored by Community Schools provides a compelling solution. Community Schools are governed by strong site councils that include parent representatives and other grassroots members. Many place-based initiatives train parents to participate in community organizing and engagement in neighborhood revitalization efforts, which means they are well-positioned to help Community Schools build effective site councils. The few efforts we observed that work in combination with a Com-

By mentoring colleagues and pushing for the adoption of collaborative strategies within their own organizations, board members can help build a wider network of champions for collaborative efforts.

munity School are providing this function. The Northwest Center, for example, supports 40 Parent Mentors. Community School site councils provide an empowering venue to nurture and utilize emerging civic leadership skills. As parents gain experience in these settings, backbones can then ask them to serve on their boards.

Another approach to reduce power imbalances is tapping into grass-tops leaders who are from these neighborhoods. In Massachusetts, this is increasingly possible with efforts to support emerging developers and other entrepreneurs of color. These individuals are launching businesses and leading a growing number of real estate projects in low-income neighborhoods across the state. Because they either live in or have very strong ties to the places where they invest, they are especially likely to want to participate in collective efforts to support children and families and build community wealth.



Leaders from the Massachusetts legislature gather at the United Way of Greater New Bedford for a conversation about school-centered neighborhood development.

Aligning with the local school improvement plan

Most of the place-based initiatives included in our scan do not include current school district employees on their boards. In some places, this is by design. They believe an arm's length relationship is necessary, given the unique political and regulatory challenges that school districts face. Furthermore, attendance and academic achievement measures for students in neighborhood schools are key performance metrics for their initiatives. To the degree that the local school improvement plans incorporate these same measures, there is strong institutional alignment and shared accountability.

However, place-based initiatives will have great difficulty overcoming the much broader, longer-term institutional siloing between education and planning,

housing, and community development without active school system participation in the governing board.

Indeed, many of the initiatives interviewed noted that school coordination remained a challenge, despite the many services that they provide to children and families in the neighborhood, often under formal memorandums of understanding with local schools.

Again, this points to the unique value Community Schools can offer in anchoring SCND initiatives. Including an empowered Community School coordinator (see Section 3) or members of a Community School site council on backbone governing boards will help ensure that there is overlapping strategic decision-making and oversight at both the Community School's school improvement plan development level and within a well-integrated place-based initiative.

3

What key staff positions does the backbone need to fulfill its core function?

The staffing of each backbone organization must follow the community's vision for the initiative. However, our review of backbones with similar mandates provides some insight for nascent efforts with regard to executive leadership, education, resident engagement, real estate, fundraising, communications, and data and evaluation.

Executive leadership. Invariably, the single most important function of all backbones is bringing people together, creating connection and common purpose. The ability to perform this function rests heavily on the executive leading the effort. They need skills in relationship management and facilitation, as well as entrepreneurial energy to sell both individual projects and the overall vision to potential investors and other external partners.

It does not take much time with leaders like Logan Herring, the CEO of REACH Riverside, to recognize the exceptional talent that this type of work can draw. The bolder the charge, the more likely it is that backbones pursuing SCND will be able to attract top-tier talent. Northside Development Group's plan was ambitious enough to entice a former mayor to serve as the organization's first CEO.

Our review of backbone organizations found that annual CEO salaries ranged from \$100,000 to \$160,000 (two larger organizations in the scan with multifaceted capabilities paid their CEOs significantly more). Backbones may be able to lower compensation costs if they couple entrepreneurial leaders earlier in their careers with seasoned leaders serving as active board chairs or coaches. For instance, one of the backbones interviewed relied heavily on a well-respected retired school principal to build and manage relationships with schools and other powerful anchor institutions in the community.

Education. Each of the backbones profiled had staff dedicated to advancing their education strategies. At a minimum, they have a program manager or similar role to work with partners and oversee the educational components of their plan. Most of the backbones also employ a significant number of staff who provide direct educational services.

There are definite pros and cons to having the backbone provide direct programming. Backbones may be able to contract for services more efficiently than school districts or other public agencies. They may also have more success with funders, particularly those who exclusively donate to nonprofits. And earned revenue from programs may help support strategic efforts that are often harder to sustainably fund. On the other hand, providing direct services can distract from the backbone's core mission of providing a neutral table to develop and steward strategy. And it can put the backbone into direct competition with other local nonprofits. Whether this concern is real or perceived, it has the potential to detract from the culture of collaboration in the community that it is seeking to promote.

Backbones that work with Community Schools typically employ a Community School Coordinator, who builds and manages partnerships. In theory, this creates stronger alignment between the place-based effort and the local public schools. It also has some advantages because Community School Coordinators nurture parent leaders and help them organize to advocate on behalf of the school and its students. This overlaps with the work of the backbone resident engagement staff (see below) and helps insulate the school from the political challenges that may arise from this work.

However, there are definite trade-offs to employing Community School coordinators. To be effective, Community School Coordinators must be empowered by their principals and district leaders to serve as high-level administrators. The backbone organizations and other Community School leaders noted that this is less likely to occur when they are on the payroll of a community partner. Too often, the Community School Coordinator is seen as a program rather than a central component of the school's operating model, and they are pulled into activities such as subbing and monitoring lunchrooms that make it more difficult for them to drive systems change.

SCND efforts anchored by Community Schools may be more effective in advocating for and supporting efforts to ensure that Community School Coordinators are playing true executive roles, including through fundraising to ensure that there is adequate and sustainable compensation for these positions. To the degree that this happens, these leaders could then provide valuable service on the backbone governing board.

Resident and community engagement. Consistent with their mission to facilitate resident-led community transformation, backbones typically have one or more staff devoted to community organizing and leadership

WHAT KINDS OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES DO THESE INITIATIVES DELIVER?

Our landscape scan provided insight into the kinds of educational services that backbone initiatives are delivering. While this data is less pertinent given that communities should focus first on their unique needs, assets, and opportunities, observing how others have chosen to approach this work can help inform local planning efforts.

Park Heights Renaissance employs Community School Coordinators for each of the five elementary schools in its neighborhood. It also has Home Visitors on staff to help ensure that families with young children can access services to meet developmental needs. Growing Together Tulsa operates the Communities in Schools program, a school-based, multitiered student support model; a little more than half of its \$2.1 million budget covers staff who provide these services. Northwest Center's Community education team has eight members. They provide both adult programs (English as a Second Language, fitness, nutrition, and wellness classes and workshops) and enrichment activities, and organize and provide leadership development services for the local sustainably designed Community School.⁴

Omega Community Development Corporation directs 85 percent of its \$9.2 million budget to educational services, including summer and after-school programming at local elementary and middle schools, as well as Family Resource Coordinators who help caregivers with children at these schools overcome barriers to academic success. They also employ Student Success Navigators who work with youth, parents, and caregivers on individualized student success plans. Mission Economic Development Agency has a three-person management team to lead the Mission Promise Neighborhood Initiative, which includes efforts to establish partnerships similar to the Community Schools model. They also employ seven Family Success Coaches, who help ensure that each child in the neighborhood receives services and enrichment opportunities that match their individual needs and interests.

Notably, these place-based efforts are investing heavily in coaching and navigation services. Emerging evidence suggests this approach can provide a significant return on investment by improving long-term educational outcomes and increasing economic mobility.⁵

development. For instance, Southeast Raleigh Promise has a Community Relations Ambassador and a Resident Services Coordinator.

As organizers, they spend a lot of time showing up at schools, tenant meetings, faith spaces, and block parties. They take advantage of these gatherings to get to know residents one-on-one. They also provide capacity by helping to facilitate resident advisory councils, town halls, and working groups. As the effort unfolds, these staff members provide important connective tissue to help ensure that the strategy is effectively meeting the needs of residents.

In contrast to the family navigators found on many education teams, the work of community engagement staff is less about connecting residents to services and more about building power, trust, and feedback loops, so the initiative is genuinely shaped by the people who live in the community.

Resident and community engagement teams play a crucial role in encouraging volunteerism and in supporting part-time positions that provide residents with hands-on opportunities to contribute to the improvement of their neighborhoods. The Northside Development Group, for example, organizes the Northside Voyagers, a group of 20 volunteers who assist with improving the appearance of the community, supporting both families with children and the elderly, and documenting the community's history and narrative.

Real estate development expertise. To draw investment into communities, place-based backbones also require staff with considerable real estate development expertise. However, they do not need a full complement of project, property, and asset managers. Mission Economic Development Agency (MEDA) is the only backbone in our scan with a large real estate team. Most have one or two professionals with real estate skills, who broker efforts with partners to execute this component of their plan. For example, Northside Development Corporation works with the local housing authority and Columbia Residential, a private firm

with expertise in developing and managing mixed-income properties across the South.

Larger intermediaries can also lend valuable real estate expertise to place-based initiatives. REACH Riverside is helping to bring more than \$700 million in real estate activity to its community, but it leans heavily on PBC's real estate development staff to advance these projects. In Massachusetts, backbone organizations with the sophistication to access real estate assistance would have numerous outlets to find these services, including MassDevelopment and other quasi-state agencies, large CDCs, and regional nonprofit and private affordable housing developers with considerable expertise leading complex commercial and mixed-income housing projects.

Resident and community engagement teams play a crucial role in encouraging volunteerism and in supporting part-time positions that provide residents with hands-on opportunities to contribute to the improvement of their neighborhoods.

Fundraising and communications. Fundraising and communications are central roles for the backbone organization. While most of the established backbones have at least one fundraising professional on staff, only the largest organizations have team members dedicated to marketing and communications.

In contrast to traditional nonprofits, fundraising staff in backbone organizations play a strategic, field-building role. Their focus is not simply identifying and applying for grants, but rather aligning money with the advancement of the shared strategy and communicating to all stakeholders throughout the process when the strategy is not aligning with what is fund-

able. This is relational work. Like the CEO, fundraising staff must be skilled at managing the inevitable tensions that will surface around scarcity, power, and credit for shared accomplishments. If they have the skills to braid public and private funds—particularly pooled funds that can be dispersed to partners in the initiative following a transparent and collaborative decision-making process—they can play an outsized role in helping under-resourced communities tap into funding streams that would not otherwise be accessible (see box below).

Many of the backbones also rely on fundraising staff to support communications. This task requires similar knowledge and skills to build and maintain trust among a diverse set of stakeholders, crafting a common narrative for the initiative, and aligning major announcements so partners do not unintentionally undermine one another.

Working with the executive director and community engagement teams, fundraising and communications staff coach leaders in the community to talk about the collective work publicly, and provide templates, talking points, and shared language to maintain

narrative discipline. At the same time, they organize communications campaigns to reach residents directly through schools, WhatsApp, flyers, and local radio, giving them an understanding of what's happening in their community and how they can positively contribute to the effort.

Intermediaries supporting SCND initiatives in multiple neighborhoods and cities can help backbone organizations hone their communications strategies, but each member of the team and the partners must work together to carry out these activities.

Data and evaluation. SCND initiatives must be able to demonstrate that their programs and services are working in concert to further the larger, long-term vision for neighborhood transformation. Demonstrating the success of efforts that seek to strengthen neighborhoods on multiple levels is notoriously difficult. Accurately measuring progress on one dimension in small geographies is always challenging given the limitations of Census data and other readily available information. Collecting reliable data from local service providers who lack technology and staff capacity is even more difficult. Harder still is dealing with the

THE POWER OF POOLED FUNDS FOR PLACE-BASED PARTNERSHIPS

Pooled funds are an important tool for place-based initiatives because they can help backbones bring community partners to the table. By providing pass-through funds, backbones can ensure that all partners receive appropriate compensation for the time and resources that they contribute to shared strategy, communications, and data collection.

Place-based initiatives that blend capital for common uses (or braid it for coordinated uses, with some restrictions by source) can help funders align resources and reduce fragmentation. When multiple public agencies, philanthropies, and anchor institutions contribute to these funding vehicles, they also create predictable, multi-year capital that allows local partners to plan beyond short-term grant cycles. This stability and scale create confidence among stakeholders more broadly that the backbone will be able to pursue the initiative's long-term strategy without interruption.

While pooled funds ensure that long-term funding is committed, they also encourage shared accountability to ensure that milestones are met to the greatest extent possible: Contributors agree on common metrics and outcomes, and funding is released incrementally as these benchmarks are met.⁷

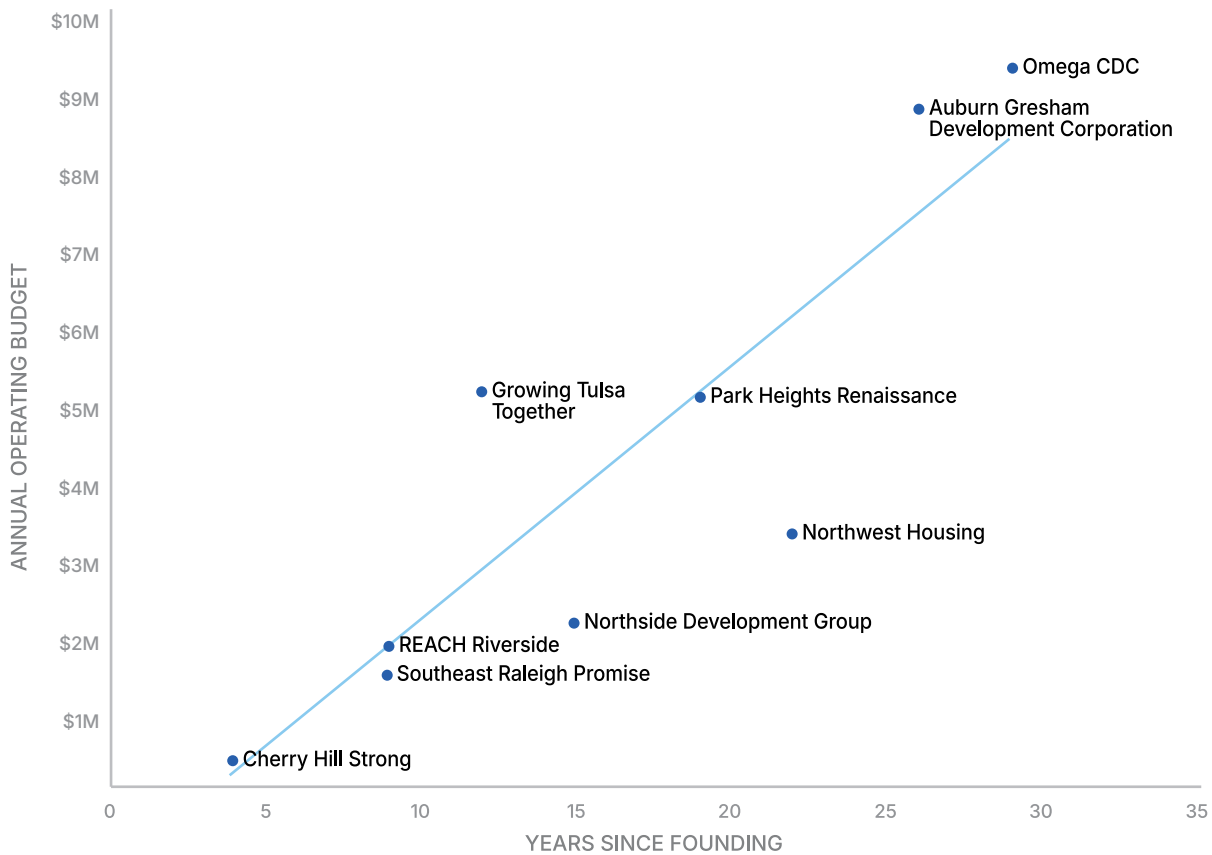
reality that sometimes the data reveal that things are not going well, and organizations must change their approaches.

While backbones can play a central role in coordinating with partners to overcome these obstacles to evaluation, only the largest organizations in our sample have the resources to staff their data and evaluation functions internally. Smaller backbones may be able to borrow from the evaluation models that these larger backbones are establishing. For instance, MEDA's Vice President of Data, Analysis, and Planning has prepared a [case study](#) to describe how they crafted data-sharing agreements with partners and provided training to help them develop standards to collect accurate information. Similarly, the Northwest Center's Senior Data Research Fellow has shown

how backbones can utilize a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to gauge whether homeownership efforts are helping local residents build wealth.⁶

Backbones can also turn to national field-building organizations for data and evaluation models. StriveTogether, Purpose Built Communities, the EdRedesign Lab, and the William Julius Wilson Institute are working together to develop and refine evaluation protocols that will work effectively in these complex settings. Taking full advantage of these resources will still require some on-the-ground staff. Backbones could draw on regional intermediaries and/or contract with consultants for this assistance. With support from the United Way, several Gateway Cities have employed this approach in their Community School efforts.

Over time, backbone organizations funnel more resources into their neighborhoods



4

Which revenue sources will produce sufficient and sustainable funding for the backbone?

National intermediaries also provide resources to help place-based backbones with budgeting and fundraising. The [Place-Based Partnership Toolkit](#) developed by the Nonprofit Finance Fund includes workbooks that may be especially useful to communities in Massachusetts that need more detailed cost estimates to get their efforts off the ground.

Before efforts progress to detailed budgeting, community leaders will want a basic sense of how much this work costs. The median backbone organization in our scan raises approximately \$5 million annually. The figure in the previous chapter shows that budgets tend to rise linearly with the length of operation. Backbones start with less than \$500,000 annually and add to their resource levels at a rate of roughly \$325,000 annually. Over time, they build larger and more diversified funding streams to sustain this level of spending within relatively small geographic areas.

This is a testament to a signature strength of the model. Neighborhoods with a coordinated vision and an organization dedicated to advancing the strategy can draw significant funding into their community from new sources. Below, we provide more detail on each backbone's financial model. We then explore funding sources that communities in Massachusetts can pursue to sustainably resource their initiatives at these levels.

Probing the Financial Models from Leading Place-Based Initiatives

The backbones in our sample tend to draw from many sources to generate strong and sustainable revenues. Several have received substantial investment from rare opportunities that will be difficult for others to access. In some cases, this is capital for real estate projects (which is not reflected in our operating budget

figures), but more often it tends to be large multi-year grants to provide enhanced support for children and families. Below is a more detailed breakdown of revenue by source.

Federal grants: While the Trump Administration recently paused funding, the US Department of Education's Promise Neighborhoods program has been the most common source of federal support for backbones in our scan. Established by the Obama administration in 2010, the program seeks to help communities replicate the Harlem Children Zone's success in providing enhanced education, health, and social services within a defined neighborhood. Two of the backbone organizations in our landscape scan received these five-year \$30 million grants: MEDA in 2012 and Omega Community Development Corporation in 2023. Research on the Promise Neighborhoods program shows former recipients face a steep funding cliff when the federal grant expires. However, the federal grant requires a one-to-one local match, so some neighborhoods are able to sustain higher levels of *services* by retaining these matching funds. Others engage in advocacy to replace lost federal funds with other public and private resources.⁸

State grants: Several states operate grant programs that provide support to place-based efforts to develop cradle-to-career pipelines, mirroring the Federal Promise Neighborhood program. California provided \$12 million to extend support to four communities with federal Promise Neighborhood grants in 2022 and 2023. MEDA has received \$3 million from this state appropriation.

Maryland's ENOUGH (Engaging Neighborhoods, Organizations, Unions, Governments, and Households) Act is the largest state effort to replicate the Harlem Children's Zone success. Introduced by



Worcester leaders gather at the Lincoln Street School for a community tour.

Governor Wes Moore in January 2024, the initiative has raised \$100 million from state, philanthropic, and private sector partners to support collaborative place-based efforts to help ensure that residents of neighborhoods with concentrated poverty have access to quality health care, good jobs, safe communities, and high-performing schools. In the first round, the state distributed \$13 million to 27 communities. Cherry Hill Strong and Park Heights Renaissance (PHR) each received \$3 million from this initial funding round.

Efforts to support place-based initiatives also get a boost from Maryland's substantial investment in Community Schools. In 2021, the state passed the landmark Blueprint for Maryland's Future. The law fully embeds Community Schools into the state's education funding system. All schools with more than 55 percent low-income enrollment receive entitlement grants to cover the salary of a Community School Coordinator. PHR utilizes these resources to employ five Coordinators serving schools in its catchment area.

The state of Illinois has also made substantial investments in Community Schools. In 2021, it created the Community Partnership Grant with an \$86 million allotment of federal recovery funds. Greater Auburn

Gresham Development Corporation received \$635,000 over three years from this appropriation. Illinois successfully worked to sustain these investments with a \$94 million state application for the federal Full-Service Community Schools grant. While it was successful, the Trump administration recently canceled the award.

Private philanthropy: The Ballmer Group and Blue Meridian Partners have worked in close partnership to back many of the leading place-based efforts. The Ballmer Group is an effort to make investments that improve economic mobility for children and families, led by the retired Microsoft executive Steve Ballmer. Blue Meridian Partners is a consortium of foundations that makes large investments in communities to address intergenerational poverty and boost social and economic mobility for children and families. Together with the Ballmer Group and others, Blue Meridian Partners has invested \$600 million in nearly 20 place-based partnerships and in the national organizations that support them through the joint Place Matters initiative. Recipients of these funds include the Northside Achievement Zone, the Northside Development Group, MEDA, and REACH Riverside.

Some place-based efforts have drawn sizeable contributions from philanthropy to finance real estate investments. For example, the Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation received a \$10 million grant from the Pritzker Traubert Foundation to develop a \$50 million “healthy lifestyle hub” campus that includes a health center, a digital community center, space for social service providers, and a minority-owned pharmacy and restaurant.

Community benefit agreements: Several place-based initiatives take advantage of opportunities to secure funds when there are developments in the area that have clear negative effects on the neighborhood, requiring mitigation. This is common for energy and other large-scale facility projects, including data centers, as well as major redevelopments that could have displacement effects on low-income neighborhoods in the vicinity. For instance, Cherry Hill Strong receives funding from a community benefit agreement negotiated with the developers of Port Covington, a massive mixed-use redevelopment of industrial land along a 2.5-mile stretch of coastline in South Baltimore.

PHR receives approximately \$2.5 million annually from video lottery revenue generated at the Pimlico Race Course.

Nonprofit hospitals also have regulatory requirements to provide community benefits based on a Community Health Needs Assessment conducted every three years. While many hospitals have contributed to neighborhood revitalization through the anchor collaborative initiative, we did not come across contributions in our scan of place-based initiatives with a heavy focus on education and economic mobility. However, REACH Riverside did secure a \$13 million bridge loan from a local health care provider to build a new community center that will include space to provide high-quality pediatric care.

Community development finance/community real estate: Backbones in the Purpose Built Communities (PBC) network are experimenting with community development finance models to increase

community-wealth. They focus on financing models that ensure that appreciation in real estate assets is captured collectively, especially when the risk capital is provided by public and philanthropic sources, and when residents invest significant sweat equity in developing and executing the neighborhood improvement strategy that adds to the underlying value of these assets.

Growing Together Tulsa launched one of the first Mixed-Income Neighborhood Trusts (MINT) in the country. By creating a portfolio of both market-rate and affordable housing under community control, the MINT ensures that rising rents on market-rate units help keep affordable units affordable in perpetuity.⁹

For commercial districts, PBC network members have been exploring the Community Investment Trust model pioneered in Portland, OR. The approach allows low- and moderate-income residents to crowd-fund investment in neighborhood commercial districts. They earn returns through dividends and build wealth as the shares increase in value. With local governance, this trust model also helps residents retain control over neighborhood real estate to protect against commercial gentrification.¹⁰

Pathways to Financial Sustainability in Massachusetts

Massachusetts has a rich history of supporting place-based initiatives through its community development infrastructure—going back to the 1970s. Many of these systems, programs, tools, and funding streams could easily be employed to support SCND more explicitly. Particularly well-suited opportunities include:

Community Investment Tax Credits (CITC): The CITC is a unique state program to provide community development corporations (CDCs) with resources to engage in activities beyond housing development outlined in a state-approved Community Investment Plan. All CDCs that have held state certification for at least three years are eligible to receive

STARTUP COSTS AND THE PATHWAYS TO GROWTH

Leaders contemplating an SCND initiative should understand how costs will vary at different stages of the initiative. As the figures illustrate, this will depend at least partially on the pathway to formation.

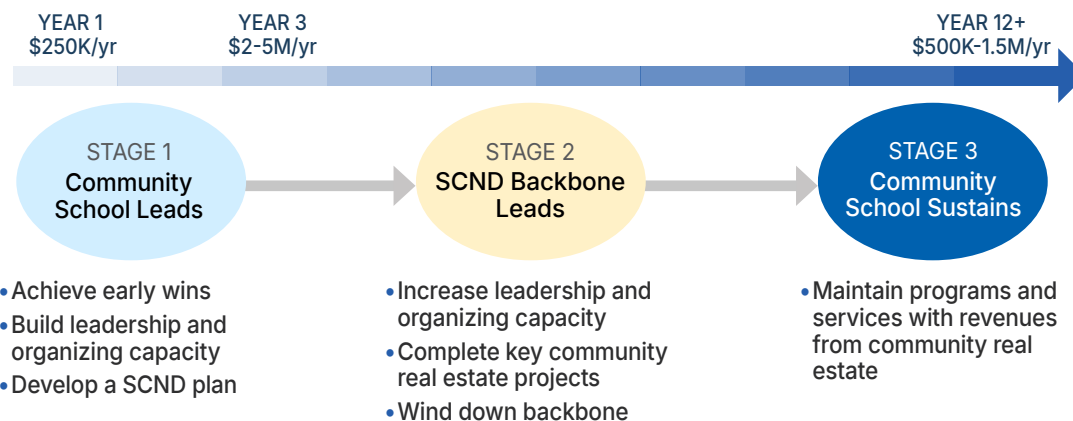
An initiative that starts by launching a backbone (Pathway 1) will likely have a modest budget of no more than \$500,000 during its first few years, when planning is the main activity. As the initiative advances and provides leadership development, organizing, and other necessary services, the more mature initiatives in our sample suggest operating costs will increase between \$2 million and \$5 million annually. Once major milestones have been met with respect to community real estate projects, the backbone could then wind down, and revenue from community real estate projects could support a Community School with the capacity to maintain healthy levels of resident organizing and leadership development, as well as essential services such as after-school programming.

If initiatives begin with a Community School (Pathway 2), the costs may be more modest initially. Many Community Schools in Massachusetts make considerable progress with less than \$300,000 annually over their first several years of operation.

Pathway 1: SCND Backbone to Sustainable Community School



Pathway 2: Community School to SCND Backbone to Sustainable Community Schools



these funds. CDCs produce Community Investment Plans every three years. Donors invest in a CDC's Community Investment Plan and receive a tax credit equal to 50% of the gift. If the donor does not have sufficient tax liability, the credit is refundable. They can receive a maximum award of \$375,000 annually to implement the plan. With the state match capped at \$15 million annually, the CITC effectively generates \$30 million in investment. The United Way of Boston and the Merrimack Valley has been designated by the state as the leader of the Community Investment Partnership Fund, which enables it to raise money from donors claiming credits and subsequently pass those funds on to the CDCs.

The CITC program has many features that overlap with SCND. It requires a clear geographic focus, deep resident engagement, strategies to integrate housing and community economic development, a strong financial plan and financial controls, and measurable outcomes.

District Improvement Financing (DIF): Through DIF, cities can establish a funding stream to pay for community economic development activities that spawn new growth and investment. Cities capture tax revenues that result from new private investment in a specific area, such as a new multifamily housing project. Districts may operate for up to 30 years; they cannot cover more than 25 percent of the land area of the city, and they must be approved by both the city council and the state.

Typically, these funds support public infrastructure improvements that enable redevelopment on private land, but the Massachusetts statute gives communities leeway to cover both professional service costs, such as backbone organization staffing, and a range of activities, including planning, communications and marketing, and workforce development.

Tax increment financing vehicles have been heavily critiqued because they capture public revenue to subsidize private developments. Across the country, many cities created hundreds of these special

BACKBONE BUDGETS AND COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Leaders contemplating an SCND initiative should understand how the total cost to mount the effort will stack up against the potential benefits. The backbones in our scan generally operated on \$2 million to \$5 million per year. Sustaining these efforts over a 10-to-20-year period would require a total investment ranging from \$20 million to \$100 million.

Neighborhood revitalization efforts often measure success based on the level of private investment drawn into the community. Leveraging public and philanthropic dollars by three- or four-to-one ratio is generally viewed as a worthy accomplishment. However, private investment is just the means to an end for an SCND initiative. These efforts must produce mixed-income neighborhoods and schools that give generations of youth greater opportunity and upward economic mobility.

Raj Chetty's recent estimates on the lifetime earnings gains of growing up in a formerly high-poverty neighborhood that became mixed-income following the redevelopment of public housing suggest successful SCND efforts can generate benefits that far exceed their costs. On average, children who lived in mixed-income neighborhoods that had been high-poverty areas prior to revitalization had 50 percent higher earnings at age 30, with an estimated total lifetime earnings gain of more than \$500,000.¹¹ A backbone that required \$5 million per year over 20 years to produce these changes in the neighborhood would need to impact fewer than 200 children to generate benefits in excess of costs. And this breakeven estimate is without consideration of other monetary gains that will likely come with improvements in health, reductions in incarceration, and second-order benefits to offspring and other family members.

districts with little scrutiny, and this significantly reduced revenue for education and other vital services.¹² Directing increased property tax revenue to neighborhood initiatives is an approach centered on equity because residents will get direct benefits from new development and returns on the sweat equity that they invest in improving their neighborhoods and schools. By directing a portion of the revenue from neighborhood improvement efforts back into the neighborhood, the city can both empower and incentivize residents to work together to develop their community. This approach could be particularly helpful in generating neighborhood support for infill projects in areas where the economics make it difficult for developers to provide mitigation through community benefit agreements.

Community development finance/community real estate: In addition to the CITC, Massachusetts

invests in neighborhood real estate through a variety of programs. Place-based initiatives can help ensure that these limited resources are deployed strategically to build community wealth. The current toolset includes mixed-income housing subsidies, such as the Housing Development Incentive Program and the Momentum Fund; affordable homeownership programs, such as Commonwealth Builder and the Neighborhood Stabilization Program; and supports for underserved entrepreneurs, such as the Equitable Developers Fund and the State Small Business Credit Initiative. While none of these capital sources will support backbone operations in the near term, they can help finance real estate development projects with the backbone (or another community-controlled entity) as an equity partner. Over time, this could provide modest cash flow to support the initiative or a durable spinoff, such as a sustainable Community School.

HOW MUCH TERRITORY DO PLACE-BASED INITIATIVES TYPICALLY COVER?

Most of the backbones in our scan are working in neighborhoods that cover between 0.5 square miles and 1 square miles (320 acres to 640 acres). In major cities, the population within an area of this size is very large. Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation in Chicago and Mission Economic Development Agency in San Francisco both reach about 45,000 residents. In less dense cities, the population served is far lower. Cherry Hill Strong in Baltimore and Growing Together Tulsa in Oklahoma reach roughly 5,000 residents. REACH Riverside in Wilmington, Delaware, and the Northside Development Group's in Spartanburg, South Carolina, work in areas with fewer than 2,000 residents.

Several backbones do serve significantly larger territories. For instance, Park Heights Renaissance works across 12 distinct neighborhoods in northwest Baltimore with a combined population of approximately 30,000 residents spread over 2.3 square miles. Omega Community Development Corporation's Promise Zone spans 17 neighborhoods in northwest Dayton, Ohio, with a similar population total living in a 5-square-mile area.

5

How many neighborhoods can one backbone organization support, and what role can intermediaries play?

The answer to this question hinges on the goals of the initiative. Efforts focused on driving revitalization in areas that have suffered from decades of disinvestment may benefit from a tighter geographic focus that demonstrates a strong commitment to strategically targeted investment. On the other hand, if the main goal is to ensure that students and families have access to a web of opportunities, services, and supports, selecting a larger geography is beneficial, as long as students and families have reasonable access to all locations within this space.

Some place-based efforts take a dual approach, targeting their real estate activities strategically while partnering with other local initiatives to knit together a cradle-to-career pipeline for children and families living in their target neighborhood and surrounding communities. The revitalization strategy for the Northside Development Group, for example, focuses on a very small area, and they partner directly with just one school. However, they are also a key partner to the Spartanburg Academic Movement, another collective impact backbone working exclusively on cradle-to-career education strategy countywide.

A hybrid approach, where an organization serves as a backbone to multiple neighborhood-level initiatives, also seems plausible. However, the Community Learning Center Institute in Cincinnati is the only organization that we have found operating in this manner to date.

As Massachusetts cities consider how much geographic area their initiatives should encompass, it is important to gauge how much support they could draw from

intermediaries. By intermediary, we mean organizations that do not work directly in neighborhoods, but rather, support backbones with coaching, training, policy development, and by providing a discrete set of shared services.

The more assistance that national, state, and/or regional intermediaries can provide to neighborhood-based backbones, the more efficient it becomes to sustain SCND initiatives with a tighter geographic focus. The considerable support that members of the Purpose Built Communities network receive certainly helps them achieve greater impact with limited staff capacity. Moreover, several of the Purpose Built backbones profiled operate in cities where the StriveTogether network provides considerable assistance to local cross-sector cradle-to-career partnerships. Massachusetts is starting to grow its own intermediary ecosystem. The Boston Opportunity Agenda is a StriveTogether network member. And for the past several years, the United Way of Massachusetts Bay has served as an intermediary for cities launching and growing community schools in the eastern part of the state.

Another important consideration is how many of these initiatives the city may seek to launch and support simultaneously in the future. Ideally, SCND initiatives will wind down as the projects outlined in the plan come to fruition and the Community Schools model is fully established. At this point, it may be possible for the backbone to bring its experience, capabilities, and track record of success to another location within the city or region.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

Do's, don'ts, and maybes for SNCD backbone organizations

1. How can communities lay the foundation for a strong backbone during the start-up phase?



DO

- Describe the role of the backbone over the lifespan of the initiative in the initial SCND plan



DON'T

- Allow arbitrary deadlines to put excessive time pressure on the planning process



MAYBE

- Consider whether forming a Community Schools provides an ideal starting point

2. How will the backbone's governance structure support collective decision-making, balance resource development and community-ownership, and create strategic alignment with the public school district?



DO

- Appoint board chairs with the influence to hold partners accountable for collaboration
- Include members of local school site councils to ensure strategic alignment and increase community voice



DON'T

- Appoint members solely to have particular institutions represented
- Rely too heavily on advisory boards to represent community voice



MAYBE

- Consider regularly surveying partners in each sector to create accountability for collaboration

3. What key staff positions does the backbone need to fulfill its core functions?



DO

- Build a team with real estate, education, and community organizing expertise
- Prioritize hiring an executive director with collaborative leadership skills and a core group of community organizers
- Leverage intermediaries for additional real estate, communications, and data and evaluation expertise



DON'T

- Hire a full complement of real estate project and property managers



MAYBE

- Consider how to empower Community School Coordinators to play executive roles.
- Consider creating part-time positions to compensate resident leaders and help them increase their civic governance and organizing skills

4. How will the organization be sustainably resourced?



- Sustainably resource the initiative with a portion of the incremental real estate value it creates for property owners and the municipality



- Allow fees from program services to distort the backbone's mission to provide neutral strategic management of the initiative



- Consider creating a blended fund that aligns investment and allows the backbone to flexibly and efficiently provide resources to partners

5. How many neighborhoods can one backbone organization support?



- Target real estate activities; contribute to service delivery improvements within a larger area
- Use national and regional intermediaries to create the efficiencies necessary to support multiple efforts simultaneously



- Spread the overall effort over too large a geographic area



- Consider how a capable organization could migrate to another neighborhood when the strategic objectives have been accomplished in its initial service area

BUILDING A NEIGHBORHOOD OF OPPORTUNITY IN MATTAPAN

We focused the landscape scan on efforts outside of Massachusetts to gain experience from others. However, Massachusetts also has history with backbone-led cross-sector collaboration, and this work is steadily evolving toward the place-based initiative + Community Schools model.

Opportunity Boston (formerly Boston Opportunity Agenda) formed in 2012 to align early education, K-12, higher education, workforce development, philanthropy and other nonprofit partners around a cradle-to-career strategy to improve outcomes for all children and youth in Boston. With leadership from the Boston Mayor's Office, Boston Public Schools (BPS), The Boston Foundation, and others, Opportunity Boston was one of the first staffed cross-sector collective impact backbone organizations in the US. Opportunity Boston represents Boston in the StriveTogether network, and this has given the organization exposure to many of the place-based initiatives in our landscape scan.

In her first term, Mayor Wu took steps to build on Opportunity Boston's successful systems change efforts by creating the Office of Early Childhood, addressing early education and care quality and access that has been highlighted through Opportunity Boston's Birth to 8 Collaborative. In 2025 the Boston Children's Council was launched, tasked with increasing coordination across city agencies serving children and youth. One of the three strategic pillars of the Council is place-based cradle-to-career initiatives. Opportunity Boston is the lead backbone implementing the strategy in Mattapan in partnership with Health Resources in Action.

The community co-design process ran from March through October 2025, engaging over 180 Mattapan residents, and leaders from community-based organizations, CDCs, city department, and BPS to determine the key priorities to make Mattapan a neighborhood of opportunity for children birth to 24. This launched the "Mattapan Neighborhood of Opportunity" initiative. The leadership committee of 15 community, BPS, and city agency leaders meets monthly to plan implementation around the first two priorities, building a love of learning through play for children birth to 5, and preparing for life after high-school and college readiness for youth ages 15 to 18.

The Mattapan Neighborhood of Opportunity is early in its implementation, with the city and its partners ensuring that the community has ample time build consensus around how a place-based approach can build on Mattapan's many assets to help more children and families thrive. In combination with the considerable work that the BPS has undertaken to create strong Community Schools, these efforts position Boston to powerfully integrate the place-based initiative and Community Schools models.



Growing Together (Tulsa, OK)

Purpose Built Community Quarterback organization revitalizing the Kendall-Whittier neighborhood through education, economic development, entrepreneurship, and mixed-income housing

Growing Together began in 2010 as an effort to address the high concentration of poverty in Tulsa's Kendall-Whittier neighborhood—a little less than one square mile, housing about 5,000 residents whose median income is a little more than half that of Tulsa as a whole.

Initially, the founders imagined what it would look like to create generational wealth in the community and created a revitalization plan with a group of agencies interested in this work. In 2014, Growing Together became a nonprofit and adopted the **Purpose Built Community** model. Growing Together is the "**Community Quarterback**" organization for the Kendall-Whittier neighborhood revitalization.

At first, Growing Together focused on offering technical assistance and other support to partner organizations. Once partners could stand alone and offer community support, Growing Together analyzed remaining service gaps among the partners and intentionally offered complementary programming.

Today, they have 22 staff focused on coalition building, education, and housing. Education and housing each have a director, with more staffing dedicated to education, including two types of coordinators working in neighborhood schools. In addition, Growing Together serves as the fiscal sponsor and organizational home for **Avanzado Juntos**, a partner whose work focuses on entrepreneurship.

A Community Schools approach, including an agreement with the national organization **Communities In Schools**, enables Growing Together to serve four schools in the neighborhood (and additional schools in other areas of Tulsa). Each school site has a Communities In Schools site coordinator, offering individualized support to students, and also a Community Schools site staff member, whose role is to organize school-wide support both within and beyond the school day.

In the wider Kendall-Whittier community, Growing Together is dedicated to developing mixed-income housing that supports inclusive growth. In collaboration with partners, Growing Together's goal is to introduce 300 additional housing units into the neighborhood. This initiative includes a diverse mix of multi-family and single-family homes, blending market-rate and affordable options, and incorporating both new construction and rehabilitated properties. The housing director coordinates with the education director to help families in the neighborhood improve and stabilize their housing situation as new properties become available.

Growing Together has multiple streams of funding—federal, state, traditional philanthropy, and private-sector dollars—and no one funder represents more than 30% of their \$2 million annual operating budget. From its inception, the organization's revenue has included unrestricted funding from a local philanthropist. See a [case study about their community role and approach to funding](#).



REACH Riverside (Wilmington, DE)

A Purpose Built Community Quarterback transforming the Riverside neighborhood through housing redevelopment, education, and community health

In the Riverside neighborhood of Wilmington, Delaware, a collective of three aligned organizations has come together as **The WRK Group** with one mission: “To empower the community to reach its full potential by eliminating the barriers of structural racism and revolutionizing teen engagement.” The collective employs more than 200 people, 50 of them full time.

Each of the members of the collective—REACH Riverside, Kingswood Community Center, and The Warehouse—plays a specific role. REACH serves as Community Quarterback and managing partner for the collective. The 75-year-old community center offers an early learning academy, a senior center, and a wide range of social services for children and families. The Warehouse is a new youth center that is operated by and for teens.

REACH Riverside, as the Community Quarterback for this Purpose Built Community, is overseeing a \$600 million revitalization. With initial funding from a single philanthropist, the overall effort is primarily funded by bond measures and by state and federal dollars from sources like the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

Their three pillars of work are:

- **Redevelopment Without Displacement**, including 700 units of high-quality, mixed-income rental housing; up to 130 affordable homes for ownership; existing and new business development; and placemaking that includes green spaces and public art
- **Education**, including kindergarten readiness through Kingswood Community Center’s Early Learning Academy, a K-8 public charter school located adjacent to a public housing development, and programming for teens through The Warehouse
- **Community Health**, including primary care and other health-related services offered through a partnership at Kingswood Community Center

These efforts are staffed both directly by WRK Group and through robust partnerships with other organizations. The complementary strengths of the three entities in the collective serve as an anchor for providing services and offering opportunities for partnership.



Southeast Raleigh Promise (Raleigh, NC)

A Purpose Built Community Quarterback revitalizing six census tracts near downtown Raleigh, where many Black residents own homes but are underserved by community infrastructure that supports well-being.

In 2011, the YMCA of the Triangle facilitated a series of community listening sessions with Southeast Raleigh residents interested in expanding YMCA services in their area. These listening sessions, in which residents envisioned a service model that reached beyond traditional YMCA programs, led to the creation of Southeast Raleigh Promise. Initially incubated under the aegis of the YMCA of the Triangle, in 2017 Southeast Raleigh Promise became an independent nonprofit.

Southeast Raleigh Promise serves as the Community Quarterback for a Purpose Built Community effort that will:

- Develop a 32-acre campus—the State Employees Credit Union Beacon Site—that co-locates the Southeast Raleigh YMCA, Southeast Raleigh Elementary School, an affordable apartment complex, a community garden, and a two-story commercial retail space with a credit union branch
- Bring 25 affordable homes to nine city-owned parcels near downtown through a coordinated effort with public, private, and community partners
- Create and preserve generational wealth through property tax reform, home repairs, estate planning, and other anti-displacement strategies

The organization's staffing includes seven full-time and five part-time staff who work hand-in-hand with the partners in education, housing, and community development efforts. These include Program Theme Coordinators who coordinate among schools, community partners, and potential volunteers; youth ambassadors; and liaisons with the home repair program. Staff maintains close relationships with school principals and with residents of the Beacon Site's apartment complex, enabling them to support initiatives like boosting school attendance and offering after-school programming.

With an annual budget of approximately \$1.6 million, Southeast Raleigh Promise is funded by a wide range of partners and supporters, including community foundations, family foundations, national and regional intermediaries like Purpose Built Communities and United Way, health care organizations, public utilities, banks, credit unions, and individual donors.



Cherry Hill Strong (Baltimore, MD)

A Purpose Built Community Quarterback focused on revitalizing one of Baltimore’s historically segregated neighborhoods through mixed-income housing, cradle-to-career education, community wellness, and locally-driven economic development

Cherry Hill’s current revitalization efforts began with a cross-sector collaborative Steering Committee in 2019. In 2021, Cherry Hill Strong was established to carry out a vision for “a vibrant and sustainable Cherry Hill community in which all residents can thrive, uplifting current residents and inviting new community members through a focus on equitable opportunity ... [and serving as] as a model neighborhood for anti-racist development and a self-determined renaissance.” In 2024, the new organization was designated as the Community Quarterback for this Purpose Built Community in one of Baltimore’s southernmost neighborhoods. Today, the backbone has five staff (executive director, deputy director, development director, senior program manager, and community organizer) and a total budget of just under \$400,000. It is governed by a board of about a dozen leaders, including representation from partner organizations and funders.

Located about three miles from Baltimore’s city center, the Cherry Hill neighborhood in South Baltimore was designated by city planners to house Black veterans returning from both World War II and the Korean War. The organization’s website notes, “As a planned residential community for African Americans, Cherry Hill is the first and most conspicuous example of designed residential racial segregation in the United States.” While the neighborhood suffers from this legacy, it also has numerous assets and a proud history. Read more at cherryhillstrong.org/about-us.

Organized around the four Purpose Built Community pillars of education, affordable housing, community wellness, and economic vitality, Cherry Hill Strong is spearheading:

- A new housing development, Reedbird Park Community Center, is expanding homeownership options in the neighborhood
- Cradle-to-career education initiatives, including a “baby fund” for new and expecting families, a 21st Century Schools Initiative with two brand new school buildings, and a partnership with Elev8 Baltimore related to both Community Schools and out-of-school time
- Community wellness efforts with partners like the area hospital and the local community health center
- Economic vitality boosters like incubating neighborhood-owned businesses, establishing a food co-op, and expanding multigenerational workforce development.

The Housing Authority of Baltimore County is collaborating with Cherry Hill Strong on a [Housing Master Plan](#). Cherry Hill Development Corporation and Weller Development are partners in creating a mixed-income housing strategy for the neighborhood, maintaining affordability for lower-income residents while expanding options for people of all economic abilities.

Park Heights Renaissance (Baltimore, MD)

A 20-year-old nonprofit established to support the implementation of a Master Plan for land use and human services across 12 northwest Baltimore neighborhoods

Park Heights Renaissance (PHR) is dedicated to implementing the [Park Heights Master Plan](#) on behalf of the 20,000+ residents of Park Heights—a community 10 miles northwest of downtown Baltimore encompassing 1,500 acres of land across 12 neighborhoods. The Master Plan, adopted in 2006 and amended in 2008, represents a collaborative effort that engaged more than 1,000 residents and other constituents over a period of more than two years from 2003 to 2005. PHR was established in 2007. Today, it has grown to a \$5M organization with 60+ staff that is governed by a 17-member board of directors.

In pursuit of its mission, PHR dedicates resources to create a community characterized by:

- A diverse and comprehensive housing strategy that meets the needs of all who live and wish to live in Park Heights
- Strong stakeholder engagement and thoughtful and innovative leadership
- An opportunity profile that attracts both public and private investment, that generates economic opportunities and advancement for all residents and businesses
- A healthy and safe environment for all children, youth, families, and visitors

PHR coordinates resources for initiatives in three areas: education, workforce development, and housing development. In addition, it manages a [fellowship grant](#) that supports creative community service projects. As part of its [education](#) initiative, PHR employs a full-time Community Schools Coordinator at each of its five Community Schools.

With respect to [Housing Development](#), PHR is developing both affordable and mixed-use housing for residents, including a National Housing Partnership project that will transform 17 acres of vacant land in the Park Heights Major Redevelopment Area into 288 units of mixed-income, multi-family rental units and single-family homeownership units. Given the geographic footprint of the Park Heights community, PHR supports the largest redevelopment plan in Maryland's history.



Omega Community Development Corporation (Dayton, OH)

A 30-year old Community Development Corporation, associated with the Harvard Ed Redesign Lab, serving 17 neighborhoods in Northwest Dayton through personalized cradle-to-career education, economic stability, health and wellness, and community outreach efforts

Omega Community Development Corporation (Omega CDC) launched in 1997 as an initiative of the Omega Baptist Church in Northwest Dayton. The CDC coordinates efforts related to education, economic stability, health and wellness, and community outreach across 17 neighborhoods in the "Hope Zone." In 2023, the CDC received a \$28M multi-year Promise Neighborhood federal grant from the U.S. Department of Education with the goal of serving 6,700 children and 3,400 families by the end of 2027. Also in 2023, they joined a Harvard Ed Redesign Lab Community of Practice hosted by the Lab's [Institute for Success Planning](#).

Omega CDC's programs include:

- The Hope Center for Families, which brings together services from Dayton Children's Hospital, Miami Valley Child Development Centers, Mini University, Sinclair Community College, and Omega CDC to build residents' capacity to achieve and sustain economic self-sufficiency
- Holistic education support through family resource coordinators, family coaching, out-of-school-time programs, and student success planning for individual students
- Omega Senior Lofts, an affordable housing community for residents 55+ that is supported by an on-site Senior Resource Coordinator
- Coaching and mentoring for expectant parents to boost positive health outcomes and support economic well-being

The organization's staffing is aligned with serving individuals and families across the domains of education, economic stability, health and wellness, and community. The team includes a Managing Director of Educational Programs and a Managing Director of Family Programs.

Omega CDC's most recent Form 990 shows a \$9M annual budget, approximately 78 employees, and a 16-member board. In early 2026, informed by residents' voices, the organization [launched a nonprofit subsidiary](#), RISE Northwest Development Corporation. The new subsidiary will support more focused, place-based investment in five specific neighborhoods. As a result, the CDC reorganized its leadership structure to enable the Hope Zone-wide and neighborhood-focused entities to work closely together while each pursues its own priorities.



Mission Economic Development Agency (San Francisco, CA)

A 50-year old backbone institution leveraging place-based work alongside residents in San Francisco's Mission District, in partnership with others, to transform the systems that shape economic mobility

Launched in 1973, Mission Economic Development Agency (MEDA) is a locally-rooted economic mobility effort that has expanded its vision to systemically advance economic opportunity for Latino communities across San Francisco and across the United States.

This backbone organization supports a [Promise Neighborhood](#) in San Francisco's Mission District and collaborates with multiple statewide and nationwide place-based collective impact networks, including [StriveTogether](#). They view participation in these networks as part of their field-building efforts, leveraging their own place-based experience to help build replicable models for driving local change.

MEDA organizes its work around six results, with three focused on children and families and three on creating the ecosystems in which they can thrive:

1. Families are financially thriving
2. Families have affordable and stable housing
3. Children and youth succeed in school
4. The Mission is a strong and supportive community for residents, businesses, and institutions
5. San Francisco's residents are decision-makers in the institutions and political systems that affect their lives
6. Nationwide, organizations rooted in historically underserved communities are equipped to ensure that families, workers, and small businesses thrive

To achieve these results, MEDA:

- Develops and manages direct service [programs](#) like free tax preparation, tenant legal services, workforce development, and a cradle-to-career, two-generation [Promise Neighborhood](#) initiative
- Leads a [community real estate initiative](#) that fights resident displacement, creates affordable housing, stabilizes neighborhood assets, and integrates wraparound services to support resident success
- Catalyzes [systems change](#), particularly focused on economic mobility for Latino communities, through collective impact, policy and advocacy, and field building

MEDA is a large organization, with more than 100 staff and a budget of about \$25M—half of which is for real estate. In addition to executive and administrative leadership, staffing includes specialists in real estate development, community real estate, housing programs, asset building, school-based services, collective impact, data analysis, planning, and policy and advocacy. They are governed by a 15-member cross-sector board whose members have expertise in community development, nonprofit leadership, advocacy, and housing affordability.

Northside Development Group (Spartanburg, SC)

A Purpose Built Community Quarterback revitalizing a 400-acre community northwest of downtown Spartanburg in partnership with resident-led Northside Voyagers

The Northside Development Group (NDG), which serves a 400-acre area northwest of downtown Spartanburg, was founded in 2011 following a collective effort that included the Spartanburg Housing Authority, the [Mary Black Foundation](#) (a health conversation foundation), the city's community services office, the police department, and other civic leaders. Northside is the former home of South Carolina's largest textile mill, which closed in 2001 following a century of operations. The mill closure led to years of disinvestment, rising crime, and worsening health outcomes for residents. See a case study that highlights some of the early history [here](#).

Grounded in the philosophy that "everyone who wants to live in the Northside Community should be able to live in the Northside Community," NDG focuses on the Purpose Built Community pillars of cradle-to-career education, community wellness, economic vitality, and mixed-income housing. NDG's website offers an interactive "[logic model](#)" tool that shows how partnerships and strategies work together to produce outcomes in each of these areas.

NDG's [cradle-to-career education](#) efforts are anchored in an early learning center for children aged six weeks to five years old; an elementary school that has added 15 days to the instructional year to focus on literacy and math; and a family academy that offers Family Navigators to parents of elementary, middle, and high school students to help with financial literacy, education reentry, homeowner readiness, and resources their family may need so students can succeed in school and beyond. Their [mixed-income housing](#) strategies include affordable and market-rate rental units, homeownership opportunities, and an [owner-occupied rehab project](#) that helps existing homeowners maintain their property.

NDG is relatively small, with 12 employees and a \$2M budget. The organization is governed by a 19-member cross-sector board of directors.

Through [Thrive Spartanburg](#), NDG is offering support to groups from surrounding neighborhoods who want to replicate the models they have developed for Northside.

ENDNOTES

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