

What are we learning about mobility from poverty from Baltimore Communities Assisting and Advancing Neighbors?

Learnings from Mobility LABs

Drafted September 2023



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MOBILITY LABs
Learning and Action Bets

POWERED BY **ROBIN HOOD**

About this Report

This report, prepared by Equal Measure, summarizes the work of the **Baltimore Communities Assisting and Advancing Neighbors (BCAAN) partnership from 2022-2023**, the second year of Mobility LABs project implementation. During spring 2023, Equal Measure conducted interviews with staff from the Center for Urban Families (CFUF), No Boundaries Coalition, and two community residents. CFUF also completed a questionnaire (the “learning tool”) about BCAAN’s second year activities, outputs, and outcomes.

This report intends to serve as a reflection tool for BCAAN partners and provides insights about how one community is working to move residents out of poverty.

This report shows how BCAAN has:



Offered **programming** to increase job readiness, leadership, and advocacy skills among residents



Continued to build a foundation for economic mobility through **partnerships** and **community engagement**



Demonstrated progress against **outcomes** related to mobility from poverty



The Mobility LABs Initiative

Mobility LABs is a four-year initiative designed to spur the development of new solutions to sustainably lift families out of poverty, and to promote dynamic leaders who will aim to change the national conversation around social and economic mobility. Through Mobility LABs, Robin Hood, along with their funding partners – the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, Tipping Point Community, and an anonymous donor – are funding nine initiatives across the country.





Summary: What happened this year?

BCAAN built civic engagement momentum among community residents through leadership and advocacy workshops and trainings. The popular workshops aimed to increase knowledge and skills among residents to have a voice and impact in their community. BCAAN continued to meet as a collaborative of local organizations and moved to a more action-oriented approach with four work groups that focused on different ways to empower residents economically and civically. BCAAN also continued to engage the local community in programming to improve job readiness skills.



The leadership and advocacy trainings are really designed to educate and empower the residents to be able to become change agents all throughout, so personally in their lives with their families, and then as well in the community.

– BCAAN staff



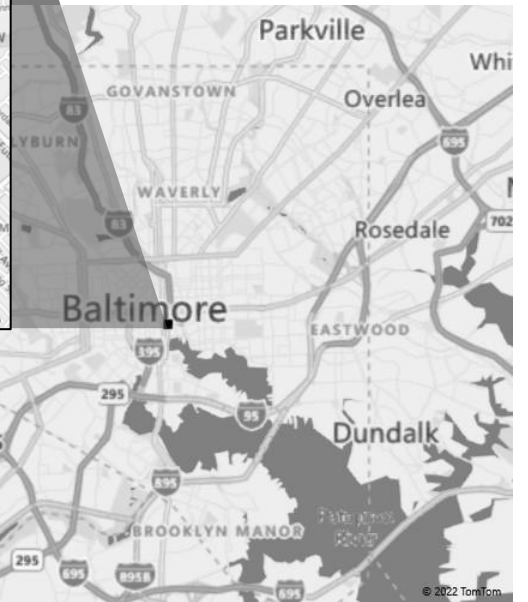
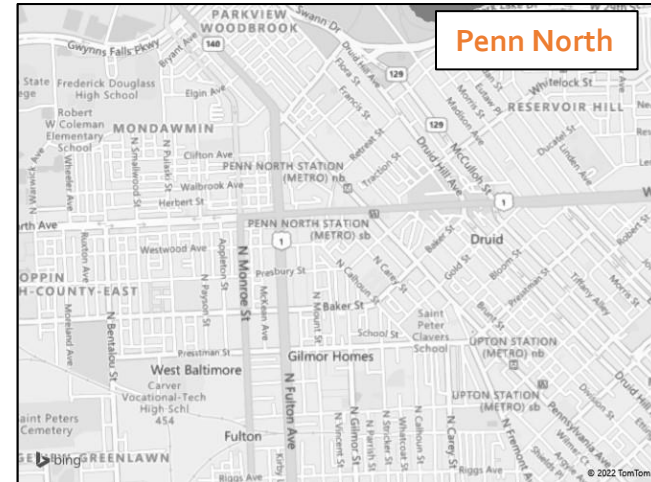


Background on Greater Penn North in Baltimore, MD

- Greater Penn North community comprises the Penn North, Parkview/Woodbrook, and Reservoir Hill neighborhoods in West Baltimore.
- Population: 30,448 (2020 Census). Greater Penn North residents are mostly African American.
- About one-third of residents live below the poverty line (2021 5-year ACS Estimates).



Photo Credit: Black Arts District



- **Recent school closings** have caused disruptions in students' learning and negatively impacted the greater community. Recently, the community was able to successfully advocate for recreation center at the site of a closed elementary school.
- There are many **community members returning from incarceration** whom BCAAN is hoping to engage with and register to vote in the upcoming elections.



Leadership and advocacy trainings:

Conducted **28 one-day workshops covering 17 different topics** related to becoming an advocate. Facilitators taught residents about topics, including interacting with local government, communicating across different generations, advocating for their families, and preserving Black mental health.

The **3-part leadership program** consisted of 10-12 weeks of classes, a community-supported project, and a year of service.

Job readiness program:

The **components of STRIVE** include Adult Basic Education (ABE) testing, financial literacy, and resume writing and interviewing to improve job skills with the overall aim to increase one's ability to secure and sustain a job with a living wage.

BCAAN collaborative work groups:

Developed **four work groups** to advance work across these areas:

- economic empowerment
- narrative change
- neighborhood empowerment
- health and nutrition



*I am most proud of the leadership and advocacy workshops. They were a new addition and has been well-received by the community. **It has shown that people are interested in receiving the knowledge if you are proactive about how you get to them.***

- BCAAN staff





How is BCAAN engaging with the community?

This year, BCAAN worked with:

286 community members

who participated in **leadership and advocacy trainings** or received **case management services**, including referrals and emergency assistance resources.

7 community members

served on the **advisory board**; additional residents attended the **monthly partner convenings**.

BCAAN designed programming to meet the needs of community members.

- The dedicated outreach coordinator continued to build relationships with the community and connect residents to resources and programming. All BCAAN-supported workshops and trainings were open to any interested residents.
- As a result of community feedback, BCAAN designed nine additional leadership and advocacy workshops on topics of interest to residents (such as advocating within your school). All workshops offered stipends and meals (“earn while you learn”).
- BCAAN continued to meet with their advisory council to get feedback on their activities and develop a community-grant making process.



How is BCAAN partnering to advance mobility from poverty?

BCAAN is a large partnership comprising community-based organizations, higher education, businesses, and K-12 schools all working towards coordinating resources and opportunities for residents.

Together, BCAAN partners :



Continued **monthly convenings** of CBOs in Penn North



Formed **4 work groups** to be more solution-oriented and accountable to community



Provided **funding** for programming offered to BCAAN residents



Organized **community events for families**, such as a summer camp resource fair and Thanksgiving/holiday gift baskets

Partners provided resources and trainings to BCAAN participants:



One-day leadership and advocacy workshops



3-part leadership and advocacy training



Occupational skills training



Entrepreneurship program with education and mentorship



Outreach event about quick access childcare vouchers for people with employment/education opportunities



What have BCAAN programs helped to accomplish?



Improved skills and confidence in civic engagement and job readiness

- Participants in the leadership and advocacy workshops indicated that they were **more likely to participate in advocacy opportunities**.
- Community members participated in “Jobs & Economic Justice Day” in Annapolis where they advocated **for better jobs, higher wages, and economic stability for all** by lobbying, attending legislative briefings, and phone banking.
- STRIVE participants were **placed in jobs** after the program, often resulting in **wage increases**.



New governance structure —work groups— facilitated progress on BCAAN’s work

- Encouraged **resident involvement in neighborhood associations** and are ensuring that all homes in Penn North have **access to the Internet**.
- **Promoted the organizations** that distribute food in the community and are developing ways to educate community members on **how to prepare healthy foods**.
- Four BCAAN partners — Black Arts District, the Black Data group, Arch Social Community Network, and Reimagining West Baltimore, Heritage, Culture and Economics — are **documenting the history of Central West Baltimore** and teaching community members **how to interpret and use data to tell their stories**.



What progress has BCAAN made this year?

Through their job readiness, leadership & advocacy programming and renewed ways of working with other organizations, BCAAN has seen progress across multiple areas:

Education & Employment

| | |
|--|---|
| Educational improvements/ credential attainment* | ● |
| Improved job skills* | ● |
| Job attainment or advancement* | ● |
| Increased financial literacy* | ● |
| Wage increases/ improvements in financial well-being* | ● |

Partnership & Network

| | |
|--|---|
| Network development or expansion* | ● |
| Increased community engagement | ● |
| Increased collaboration and partnerships | ● |
| Increased community trust | ◐ |

Leadership & Advocacy

| | |
|--|---|
| Improved leadership skills* | ● |
| Improved advocacy skills* | ● |
| Improved entrepreneurial skills* | ◐ |
| Increased confidence and self-efficacy* | ◐ |
| Increased civic engagement* | ◐ |

Systems & Community

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| New narratives* | ◐ |
| Local policy changes* | ○ |

Bolded* indicates increased progress reported when compared to year 1.



Haven't started work yet



Started work, no changes



Some signs of progress



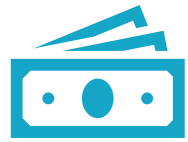
Significant progress



What challenges did BCAAN face during the second year?



Partnership requiring sustained collaboration and coordination is challenging for a variety of reasons (e.g., different ways of working, bureaucratic challenges, leadership turnover, etc.).



Challenges with engaging more residents on the advisory board due to residents juggling many responsibilities (multiple low-wage jobs, families, etc.)



Building community member trust continues to take time and effort due to past false promises and disappointments.



Spotlight on: residents becoming community advocates

Opportunities for leadership and advocacy can build momentum and lead residents to get more and more involved in their community.

Anika had just moved to the neighborhood when she saw a flyer about the leadership and advocacy workshops offered by BCAAN. She attended multiple workshops and inquired about additional opportunities to learn and grow. A BCAAN staff member suggested that she join the more intensive three-part leadership program (Leadership Academy, Block Captain, and bootcamp) offered through the No Boundaries Coalition.

Through the program, Anika had the opportunity to write and apply for a grant for an event that offered mental health services, mentorship, and employment opportunities for individuals in the community to succeed, which also led her to envision her own nonprofit. She volunteered with one of BCAAN's partner organizations, and after a month of service was hired at the same organization. The trainings and programs offered through BCAAN gave Anika a sense of purpose and belonging in her community, confidence to interact with her neighbors, and even employment.

Now, Anika helps host community events and encourages families and community members to get involved in BCAAN workshops. In addition, she teaches neighbors how to advocate for their needs by contacting their local representatives. She has aspirations to run for local office one day and to make a difference in that way as well.



*The class taught me I can **dream a little bit bigger**. And so now I'm thinking about running for a low-level office position just to have a little bit more leverage in bringing change to the community than what I'm doing [direct service] right now.*

- Anika (BCAAN alumni)

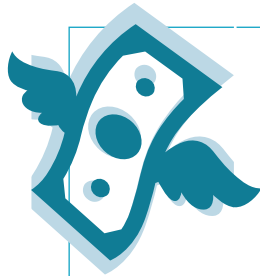




What are next steps for BCAAN?



Sustain the leadership and advocacy workshops with the “learn & earn” approach. Create an “advocacy manager” position to develop community members to affect change.



Provide sub-grants to partner organizations through a community grantmaking process.



Continue BCAAN’s monthly partner convenings and community outreach activities through dedicated staff.



*Because at the end of the day and at the end of this project called BCAAN, **how was the community better off than it was before we started?***

- BCAAN partner

