

From Inquiry to Impact

Fund for Our Economic Future Impact Report for 2022

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Welcome

Since 2004, the Fund for Our Economic Future has been bringing funders, leaders and Northeast Ohioans together to explore big questions, take on complicated problems and champion novel solutions to make our region a more equitable, prosperous place to live and work.

This report highlights the provocative conversations, sparks of a new idea and plans set in motion during 2022 to advance our vision of a growing Northeast Ohio economy that creates good jobs and rising incomes for everyone, regardless of their race or place.

See how the creative space in which we operate drives our focus on what matters, what works, and what's next as we aim to change the course of Northeast Ohio's economic trajectory toward a more racially equitable, collectively prosperous tomorrow—with good jobs and rising incomes for all.



Bethia Burke, President
Fund for Our Economic Future

Everything we do begins by asking the right questions.

How can we connect people to jobs, jobs to people, and grow a more inclusive economy for all, regardless of race or place?

We invite you to join us in exploring how this kind of intentional inquiry leads to innovative solutions and, ultimately, the lasting impact we're making across Northeast Ohio.

And if our efforts spark your own curiosity, ask away—we welcome new perspectives, partnerships and support as we hold the creative space for civic collaboration to transform Northeast Ohio's economic future.



William H. Gary, Sr., Chair
Senior Advisor for National Workforce Solutions,
Cuyahoga Community College

Who we are

The Fund for Our Economic Future is

- ▶ A network of civic leaders who learn, lead and develop bold, new ideas to advance an inclusive economy.
- ▶ Advancing an ever-deepening understanding of what matters for our region's economy to thrive.
- ▶ A funding collaborative, with pooled resources bringing vital flexibility to the efforts we support.
- ▶ A nonprofit, civic collaborative of members, compassionate staff and partners who share a passion and path to creating lasting change.
- ▶ A champion of big issues, changing attitudes and behaviors that enables the region to achieve its full economic potential.
- ▶ Rooted in the priorities found in *The Two Tomorrows*—our guiding light.

Our Priorities

Job Creation

Job Preparation

Job Access

Racial Equity and Inclusion

The 2022 Landscape

Across the United States

- ▶ Sustained talent shortages elevated interest in how workers make decisions.
- ▶ Divisive wedge issues dominated midterm election campaigns and blunted the nuances of complex societal problems.
- ▶ Inflationary pressures and fluctuating gas prices intensified the perceived risk of a looming economic recession.
- ▶ Federal legislation directed billions of dollars in funding for economic recovery, climate change mitigation, supply chain reshoring, and more.
- ▶ Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson became the first Black woman to serve on the United States Supreme Court, sworn in days after *Roe v. Wade* was overturned.

In Northeast Ohio

- ▶ The Akron community called for accountability and grieved the loss of Jayland Walker— an unarmed 25-year-old Black man who died at the hands of police.
- ▶ Conversations elevated issues of maternal and infant mortality for Black families.
- ▶ Leadership transitions occurred among many institutions, including those of some of our member organizations.
- ▶ Infusions of federal funding to stimulate economic recovery in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic have prompted a greater focus on collaboration to coordinate and optimize investments.
- ▶ Civic leadership transitions included the January inauguration of Justin Bibb, Cleveland's first new mayor since 2006, and the election of Chris Ronayne as incoming Cuyahoga County executive.
- ▶ Community activists raised concerns over plans to develop jail facilities in a predominantly Black neighborhood in Cleveland.

At the Fund

We entered our seventh three-year strategic phase in 2022, recommitting to our vision and adapting our strategic approach to align with the current economy and build on past progress. Our members voted to restructure our executive committee and elected a new slate of officers, including Chair William H. Gary of Cuyahoga Community College. We also welcomed several staff members and consulting partners to lend new talent and expertise to our strategy and operations.

Our 2022-2024 Strategic Direction

During this strategic phase, our Fund's portfolio aims to advance these five objectives:

JOB CREATION

We aim to grow inclusive clusters by supporting the development of new industries with the potential for growth and with good jobs accessible to all.

JOB PREPARATION

We aim to make workforce systems work better for people, ultimately connecting more people to career pathways with high-wage potential.

RACIAL EQUITY AND COMMUNITY WEALTH-BUILDING

We aim to build new wealth creation models and break the notion that growth is bad for neighborhoods by testing the feasibility of community investment funds.

JOB ACCESS

We aim 1) to bring jobs to people by changing the factors informing company site decisions, moving from a region marked by no- growth sprawl to one growing in strategic job hubs; and 2) to connect people to jobs by promoting greater and more innovative transportation options, ultimately becoming a region where mobility options abound.

Learn more about our 2022-2024 strategic priorities and initiatives [here](#).



From Inquiry to Impact

Read on to see how the questions we explore in pursuit of our vision shape our priorities—and how they lead to innovative ideas, action, and positive impact across Northeast Ohio.



Who benefits from growth in job hubs?

How can we match regional assets to business needs to attract good jobs for nearby residents?

What do entrepreneurs need to support and accelerate job growth in an emerging industry?



INNOVATION

Opportunity Corridor Food Tech Hub

Since 2015, the Fund has championed equitable, strategic job creation strategies in the Opportunity Corridor, working closely with Burten, Bell, Carr Development Inc., the city of Cleveland, the George Gund Foundation, and others to enable the acquisition, aggregation, and marketing of sites for development. Additionally, we supported the feasibility assessment of a plant-based accelerator in the Corridor, seeking to capitalize on food-based businesses already growing in the area.



IMPACT

Assets to attract job growth in inclusive clusters

We funded the development of a strategy for an accelerator to support neighborhood-based entrepreneurship. Central Kitchen is seeking architectural drawings to realize the plant-based accelerator explored through the feasibility assessment. We defined the boundaries of a food tech hub and established criteria for targeting business attraction aimed to grow inclusive clusters and attract family-sustaining jobs and enabled public ownership of a significant amount of land around the Opportunity Corridor. A working group led by the City of Cleveland with community development corporations, Team NEO, Greater Cleveland Partnership, and large funders is now leading implementation to attract good, accessible jobs to those sites.



What matters to workers after a global pandemic disrupts the status quo?

Who left the workforce during the pandemic, and what do they need to return?

Where are the biggest disconnects between employers and workers when it comes to what matters about work?

How can employers and systems adapt to today's workforce?



INNOVATION

Where Are the Workers

Beginning in late 2021 and throughout 2022, the Fund and several partners across Greater Cleveland and Akron sought to understand the prevailing question in the region and across the country: Where Are the Workers? Together with ConxusNEO, Policy Bridge, Team NEO and the Summit/Medina Workforce Area Council of Governments, the Fund embarked on a [broad analysis](#) to explore the causes and outcomes of pandemic-related workforce shifts in Northeast Ohio. The initiative reached more than 600 employers and 5,000 residents across 11 counties. Data focused on employee responses highlighted trends affecting about 2.9 million Northeast Ohio workers.



IMPACT

More competitive, inclusive workplaces

In July 2022, we published a preliminary report showing the pandemic had a broad and sustained effect on life and work priorities and in January 2023 launched Strengthening Workplaces as a "front door" to the body of research for employers, workforce practitioners and other potential change influencers seeking answers about talent strategies. Our employer surveys and roundtable discussions exposed the gaps in awareness of—and capacity to address—barriers to work, work culture and job quality issues excluding or discouraging workers from some environments. These insights are now informing collaborative strategies to catalyze systemic changes to strengthen workplaces across the region and elevate job quality as a competitive advantage through our networks.

From Inquiry to Impact



When pandemic shutdowns exacerbated systemic inequities in the economy, which workers suffered the most—and what do they need to recover?

How does the quality and stability of hospitality work impact the broader economic success of a region?



INNOVATION

Hospitality Sector Recovery Initiative

The pandemic impacted hospitality businesses and workers like no other sector: Workers disproportionately felt financial, mental, emotional, and social hardships while employers and independent business owners struggled to survive. Restaurants, venues and other arts & entertainment businesses employ a higher proportion of workers of color, young workers, single parents, and women, meaning impacts to the hospitality sector have worsened systemic exclusion. In January 2022, the Fund launched the Hospitality Sector Recovery Initiative to quantify the real impact of the pandemic on Cuyahoga County's leisure, hospitality and events businesses and people—and to develop strategies for improving jobs and business stability.



IMPACT

Groundwork for a more resilient arts, culture and entertainment economy

Through worker and employer data from Where Are the Workers, focus groups and industry discussions, this initiative has catalogued the unique assets, challenges and opportunities represented by Cuyahoga County's hospitality sector and exposed a need for deliberate strategies and resources to strengthen the sector, improve conditions and financial stability for its workforce, and ensure greater resilience and equity going forward. A set of recommendations will soon emerge from this work, along with further economic impact analysis and convening of partners to test solutions.



How can workforce development work with community-based organizations to reduce racial disparities in talent pipelines?

What's keeping Black and Hispanic jobseekers from entering the training programs that could help close the racial income gap?

Whom do people trust when they're making career decisions?



INNOVATION

Collaborative Outreach for Job Training

The collaborative outreach pilot project aimed to test ideas to address a persistent problem in workforce development: underrepresentation in enrollment of training programs for in-demand jobs for Black and Latinx residents. Flexible, pooled funds bolstered by additional directed support from the National Fund for Workforce Solutions and Westfield Insurance Foundation enabled support for four pilot projects in Cleveland, Akron, Canton and Lorain designed to bridge the divide for workers of color to high-demand talent pipelines. While the project launched pre-pandemic, the pilots were executed over an expanded timeline that concluded in 2022 and were adapted to fit the realities of pandemic shutdowns, social distancing and the emerging “new normal” around talent attraction.



IMPACT

Greater equity and inclusion in training pipelines to good jobs

Each of the four pilots was led by a community-based organization with strong community ties among Black and Latinx residents. They tested a range of strategies (a telephone hotline, peer mentorship, coordinated resource navigators, and coaches) to place at least 80 Black and Latinx residents into technical training for in-demand careers and produced valuable insights for improving equity and inclusion in talent pipelines: 1) There is no one-size fits all solution for neighborhoods or individual jobseekers, 2) Testing and adapting to find what works take time, and 3) Success depends on building trust and awareness within historically excluded communities. We have shared these lessons with talent intermediaries across Cuyahoga County to further improve racial equity in talent development and contributed to the national research on this issue through the National Fund for Workforce Solutions.



Who owns a neighborhood?

How can collective investment build generational wealth for Black and Brown communities?

Can shared real estate investment help longtime residents reap the financial benefits of rising property values?



INNOVATION

Community Investment Funds (CIFs)

In most urban neighborhoods, corporate ownership of single-family properties is 10% or less. But in Cleveland's Clark-Fulton neighborhood, which has a large community of Hispanic/LatinX residents, this rate is 18%—and growing. In 2021, the Fund explored a potential solution to reduce racial exclusion in generational wealth-building and reverse the trend of long-term residents losing out when neighborhoods become attractive for real estate investment. Working closely with a team of local and national experts, we invested in a research and design phase to understand how a Community Investment Fund (CIF) model might expand generational wealth through shared investment in Clark-Fulton.



IMPACT

Framework for ownership

The feasibility study produced key insights on resident demographics and perspectives, real estate market trends and other factors to inform a strategic path forward for improving racial equity in generational wealth-building through shared investment. The study also helped partners understand existing capacity gaps relating to community development. Following leadership transitions across project partner organizations, the Fund is developing the next phase of this initiative for 2023.



When businesses decide where to locate, what matters beyond time, risk and money?

How does the location of a business influence its equity, sustainability and governance goals?

How can Northeast Ohio support job creation in ways that reverse no-growth sprawl?

Why might exurban employers have a harder time attracting talent?



INNOVATION

Job Hubs and Where Matters

Job hubs are places in the region defined by concentrations of economic activity and traded-sector jobs across multiple employers and alignment with local development patterns and civic priorities. Over nearly a decade, we have worked with Team NEO on various efforts to advance growth in job hubs across the region. In 2022, this included funding a strategic site inventory in Summit and Cuyahoga Counties, and launching an interactive site selection tool (ESGP) that allows businesses seeking to locate in Northeast Ohio to go beyond the standard questions of time, risk, and cost to compare potential development sites across factors such as access to racially diverse talent, carbon emissions for the average commute, transportation access, and walk and bike scores.



IMPACT

Smarter, stronger business attraction strategies

The ESGP tool is now embedded into Team NEO's way of doing business and serves as a strong sales tool for the organization to improve the economic competitiveness of the region. Efforts to expand the tool to compare Northeast Ohio sites against other regions, and to add additional data resources, are underway.

In addition, we supported three priority job hubs and funded a site inventory to improve coordinated development efforts in Cuyahoga and Summit Counties. This effort has uncovered meaningful potential for development of sites in job hubs for industrial use, and has informed how the Fund and Team NEO will coordinate elsewhere in the region to expand site inventory and priority job hubs efforts.

From Inquiry to Impact



How can we solve the “No car, no job. No job, no car.” paradox?

What do businesses need to know about how their employees get to work?

When the bus route doesn't reach a business and a worker can't afford a car, what can we do to connect them?

How can we connect more workers to good-paying jobs across the region?



INNOVATION

Paradox Prize

Launched in 2019, the Paradox Prize aimed to elevate and solutions-test the problem of worker mobility stranding thousands of workers—disproportionately workers of color—from good-paying jobs as a result of decades of no-growth sprawl across the region. Our objectives for this phase are to advance policy and practice changes emerging from the lessons of Paradox Prize pilots to increase business' access to talent, worker access to economic opportunity, and bring people to jobs they need.



IMPACT

Sustained transportation innovations and better job access

In mid-June, the Fund hosted a capstone event to showcase the impact of the Paradox Prize. We supported eight pilots across urban, suburban and rural communities in seven NEO counties. These programs reached 1,300+ residents and 400+ employers. Four of the eight pilots produced sustained support for transportation solutions, indefinitely improving worker mobility for residents across four counties in Northeast Ohio. These pilots collectively increased support for flexible and affordable worker mobility options, established new cross-sector collaborations, and provided a roadmap for employers, communities and service providers to adopt proven practices for better, more equitable worker mobility. Insights from this initiative, summarized in our June 2022 Paradox Prize report at paradoxprize.com, continue to inform job preparation, job access and job creation initiatives within and beyond the Fund.

From Inquiry to Impact

What's on the horizon?

The long-term nature of our work means our initiatives continue to effect change long after they launch—either within the Fund through emerging initiatives that build on past progress—or across the region and beyond as our networks adopt new ways to think and promote change in their region.

A key example of this catalyzing momentum: Ohio Manufacturing Association won a \$25 million in the Good Jobs Challenge in 2022, a portion of which will be used to expand the WorkAdvance model across 10 manufacturing sector partnerships across the state. This represents a significant scaling of practices proven to strengthen and improve equity for on-ramps to career paths. WorkAdvance was a program deployed by Towards Employment in Cleveland and the Mahoning Valley, substantially supported by the Fund nearly a decade ago.



Throughout 2022, we continued to...

- ▶ Make structural investments for systemic change through sector partnerships in Summit and Cuyahoga Counties.
- ▶ Participate in guiding the execution of the strategies defined by the Cleveland Innovation Project.
- ▶ Explore how Racial Equity and Inclusion training influences nonprofit organizations, businesses and social discourse at large about systemic racism and its intersection with economic prosperity.
- ▶ Enable funding through grant writing, convening stakeholders and sourcing match funding, and track emerging issues that matter to equitable growth in Northeast Ohio.

There will always be more questions.

Each new question prompted by our ever-changing social, economic and structural landscape is just as important as the answers we find. At the Fund, our work is a data-informed process with no small amount of creativity—testing hypotheses, challenging what’s possible and asking people to see things differently.

With every progression, we strengthen our civic network, apply lessons learned and iterate new questions that bring us closer to the future we envision—a **growing Northeast Ohio with good jobs and rising incomes for everyone, regardless of race or place**. As we continue to advance the priorities defined in our strategic direction for 2022-2024, we hope you'll stay connected, curious, and reach out with your own great ideas and determination to make change happen for the place we all call home.



How can our region coordinate resources to attract more national grant funding to support equitable economic growth and innovation?

What does it cost our region when people can't afford to work?

How does Northeast Ohio compare with other metros across the country on equity, sustainability and governance assets for expanding businesses?

How can we catalyze change at scale to strengthen Northeast Ohio's workplaces and connect more residents with family-sustaining work?

Where are our best chances for attracting traded-sector growth, and how can we ready sites for it?

About Our Fund

The people who drive our work

We continue to be the only organization in the region (and one of the first in the country) where leaders of foundations, higher education, private companies, economic development organizations, and local government come together with equal decision-making authority to learn, lead and develop ideas together to advance an inclusive economy. We are governed by a board of authorized voting representatives of our funding members as well as civic members elected to represent the diverse professional expertise and perspectives of leaders of color who have historically been underrepresented within the leadership of funding member organizations. With the support of this civic alliance, our team of staff and consulting partners represents a vital leadership resource for advancing our Fund's shared vision for the region.

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** Executive Committee members*

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Funders

Our work is supported by funding members who contribute a minimum of \$100,000 over three years, supporting funders who direct funding to specific aspects of our agenda, and contributors and donors who provide unrestricted funding at lower levels to advance our mission. This pooled funding enables our members and supporters to advance work collectively that drives greater impact for our shared goals.

2022-2024 Funding Members

As of December 31, 2022

Abington Foundation

Akron Community Foundation

Briggs Family Funds

Bruening Foundation

Burton D. Morgan Foundation

Case Western Reserve University

Community Foundation of Lorain County

Community Foundation of Mahoning Valley

Community West Foundation

Cuyahoga Community College

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From Inquiry to Impact



Ask Us Anything.

If you're interested in exploring tough questions, advancing equitable solutions and contributing to our collective impact for Northeast Ohio, please contact us at info@thefundneo.org.

You can also learn more about our history, portfolio, people and strategy on our website at thefundneo.org.