

Transformative Use of Data for Mobility from Poverty

Julia Lane, David C. Kendrick, and David T. Ellwood

The data revolution is transforming how executives manage operations and businesses deliver goods and services. Yet when it comes to helping people escape poverty, the revolution has barely begun.

The Problem

Good raw data sources exist, but they are not being fully used to measure impact, refine services, and inform the choices of families seeking mobility from poverty for some key reasons:

1. The startup costs are high for creating an integrated data infrastructure that stretches across agencies and programs.
2. As a result, data are typically fragmented, and attempts at integration are often one-off and piecemeal.
3. Interoperability happens at the speed of trust, but there are strong disincentives to share data across programs or with external parties.
3. **Design for security, privacy, and confidentiality.** The technical and policy aspects of privacy and confidentiality must be a foremost concern, not developed ad hoc or as an afterthought.
4. **Standardize frameworks, technological capacities, and data structures.** Scalable systems require common templates for legal language, data models, syntax, and terminologies, and should include an architecture that enables local, regional, and potentially national data aggregation with appropriate safeguards.
5. **Strengthen human capacity, especially in state and local workforces.** Agency workforces need to build technical expertise and fluency in data science and strengthen their capacity to develop governance and policy structures. Staff members should have the technical skills necessary to assemble, organize, and analyze large, multidomain datasets.

The Solution

Six core principles are essential to an effective and sustainable strategy to take advantage of untapped data:

1. **Establish clear benefits to data owners.** Data producers and owners must see significant value in sharing access to datasets.
2. **Engage low-income families.** Benefits must also be obvious for the people who use programs and services, not just researchers.
6. **Focus early on sustainability, scalability, and a community of practice.** Financial, political, and organizational sustainability of each community's data efforts are critical to consider very early in the process. In addition, data and structures should be built with expansion in mind; one-off technology and architecture strategies can

become traps. The system must also be part of a community of practice with trusted partners of program leaders, researchers, and stakeholders.

We suggest two phases of implementation: a short-term demonstration and learning phase followed by a longer-term sustainability, scaling, and community-building phase.

WHAT PHILANTHROPY CAN DO

Local and national philanthropies can serve as neutral third-party conveners, bringing together political and community leaders, key agency heads, providers, and advocates to build mutual trust in the design of more powerful data systems. And philanthropy can and should be proactive in encouraging long-term, generalized and sustainable lower-cost data solutions that will encourage more agencies and jurisdictions to make transformative use of data.

WHAT GOVERNMENT CAN DO

Governments can commit to developing a long-term, comprehensive, and sustainable structure for properly collecting and taking full advantage of their program and other data. They can begin by convening enthusiastic and committed agency and outside leaders to begin learning and training, building trust, and generating quick wins while crafting larger data strategies.

WHAT DOES “MOBILITY” FROM POVERTY MEAN?

The US Partnership on Mobility from Poverty’s definition of mobility has three core principles: economic success, power and autonomy, and being valued in community. These principles drive five mutually reinforcing strategies:

- Change the narrative
- Create access to good jobs
- Ensure zip code is not destiny
- Provide support that empowers
- Transform data use

HOW TRANSFORMING DATA USE CAN IMPROVE MOBILITY

- **Economic success:** Better data systems can improve program impact on education, job and career advancement, and income growth.
- **Power and autonomy:** Families will ideally have access to their own program data and information on the quality of different service options.
- **Being valued in community:** Giving families access to their own program data is a measure of respect and value. As data systems link services, families will become part of more integrated and effective networks of people and resources.

This brief summarizes the paper *A Locally Based Initiative to Support People and Communities by Transformative Use of Data*. The paper lists sources for the research summarized here.