



RESEARCH REPORT

Forward Cities

Four Cities' Efforts toward More Inclusive Entrepreneurship

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Contents

Acknowledgments	iv
Executive Summary	v
Introduction	1
Forward Cities Overview	2
Project Goals	2
National Staffing	3
Local Innovation Councils	4
Data and Methods	6
Project Activities	7
Cross-Site Convenings	7
Activities in the Focus Areas	9
Forward Cities Outcomes	13
Deepen Focus on Supporting Minority Entrepreneurs and Underserved Neighborhoods	13
Strengthen Relationships among Entrepreneurship Support Organizations within Cities	14
Increase Funding for Supporting Entrepreneurship and Small Businesses	15
Foster Learning across Cities about Inclusive Innovation and Entrepreneurship	17
Going Forward	18
Continuing Local Efforts on Inclusive Entrepreneurship	18
National Efforts on Inclusive Entrepreneurship	19
Recommendations for Future Networks	20
Final Reflections on Forward Cities	23
Notes	25
References	26
About the Authors	27
Statement of Independence	28

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Executive Summary

Forward Cities is a cross-city learning collaborative designed to foster inclusive innovation and entrepreneurial development in traditionally underserved neighborhoods in Cleveland, OH; Detroit, MI; Durham, NC; and New Orleans, LA. During this pilot initiative from June 2014 to June 2016, national staff for Forward Cities managed the project and peer learning, organized four cross-city convenings, and represented the project in national forums to advocate for inclusive entrepreneurship. Locally, innovation councils led activities in each of the four cities. The volunteer members of these councils, who represented key players in the cities' entrepreneurial ecosystems, included entrepreneurs, funders, corporate leaders, education leaders, policymakers, data scientists, community leaders, and representatives from economic development and entrepreneurial support organizations.

The four councils selected neighborhoods or corridors where they would identify new ways to concentrate their efforts. By summer 2016, the councils in Cleveland, Durham, and New Orleans had facilitated concrete plans or activities to support entrepreneurship in the focus areas. In Detroit, a group of partners including some affiliated with the Forward Cities council helped to carry the work of inclusive innovation in the focus area.

Research conducted through October 2016 showed that Forward Cities made progress on four interim outcomes intended to lay the groundwork for the ultimate goal of increasing the number of successful minority entrepreneurs. First, the initiative drew attention to the need to support minority entrepreneurs and traditionally underserved neighborhoods. Through its emphasis on the focus areas, it also created a broader awareness of neighborhood-level interventions in supporting minority entrepreneurs. The Racial Equity Institute training workshop during the Durham convening was an influential vehicle for raising the profile of equity and inclusion issues. The workshop discussed the historical policies and structures that led to the racial inequities that exist in the United States today. Council members reported how this experience prompted them to bring the workshop to their own cities for others to learn this background and, in a few cases, to review their own programming and operations.

Second, Forward Cities activities deepened the relationships among council members within each city. In some cases, regular and highly formalized monthly council meetings brought a diverse group of voices to the table to plan activities in the focus area and discuss issues related to the local entrepreneurial support ecosystem. Experiencing the multiday convenings together in other cities also

strengthened the relationships among each city's council members by offering them time to engage with each other in a way not possible when pulled by the day-to-day obligations at home.

As a third outcome, Forward Cities generated funding or significant funder interest in all four cities after the two years. Examples include a proposal to study the informal economy in New Orleans, a grant to support youth entrepreneurship in one of the Cleveland focus areas, and creation of a microloan program in Durham. This research was insufficient to judge whether this support represented a growth in overall funding for entrepreneurship supports or whether money was simply being shifted from one area to another.

As a final outcome, Forward Cities increased cross-city connections, primarily through the four convenings. Many council members interviewed had not connected with people in other cities outside the convenings, but they considered the Forward Cities network in other cities to be a valuable community to tap if the need arose in the future. When connections occurred, council members reported examples of learning from other cities. Notable collaborations occurred between Detroit and New Orleans, when council members from Detroit traveled and learned about New Orleans Entrepreneurship Week and food incubators and implemented similar initiatives back home. Another example is BizGrid, an inventory of entrepreneurship support organizations developed in Detroit, later brought to Cleveland, and being developed in Durham.

Following the formal end of the pilot, work pertaining to supporting minority entrepreneurs and underserved communities will continue in all four cities. The councils of Cleveland and Durham intended to continue meeting regularly and generating ideas for projects to improve support for minority entrepreneurs. In New Orleans and Detroit, participants were planning other activities aligned with Forward Cities goals without the council structure. National staff is planning an "alumni" gathering in 2017 for teams from each of the four cities.

The experience from Forward Cities during its pilot phase offers lessons for designing similar local and national initiatives trying to knit together local systems around entrepreneurship, including the potential for varying the focus for local council work and the need to cultivate more cross-site connections. We also suggest the need to advance several general areas of measurement and evaluation to better monitor progress in achieving Forward Cities goals. From our research, we believe Forward Cities will continue to have a positive legacy in the four cities, but much more work needs to be done by a broader array of actors to close the gap in entrepreneurship for minority individuals and neighborhoods in our nation's cities.

Introduction

Small businesses are vital to the United States economy. Small businesses of less than 500 employees made up 99.7 percent of employer firms in 2010. Over 27 million small businesses in the United States operate as home-based businesses, sole proprietorships, and other types of corporations. The Small Business Administration reports that they account for 64 percent of new private-sector jobs and almost half of private-sector employment (Advocacy 2012). Entrepreneurs create many of these businesses. However, several factors have led to structural gaps for minority entrepreneurs, who are underrepresented in the business world relative to their share of the population. African Americans make up 13 percent of the population but represent only 7 percent of small-business owners. Hispanics amount to 17 percent of the population but only own 8.5 percent of small businesses.¹

To address the gaps in support for these underrepresented entrepreneurs with a focus on inclusive urban entrepreneurial development, Christopher Gergen, CEO of Forward Impact and an innovation and entrepreneurship fellow at Duke University, and Denise M. Byrne, executive director and founding board member of Friends of New Orleans, created the national learning collaborative Forward Cities. Launched as a pilot in Cleveland, OH; Detroit, MI; Durham, NC; and New Orleans, LA, this initiative brought together key players in each city's entrepreneurial ecosystem to explore how to unlock the potential of minority entrepreneurs and small-business owners. The initial pilot ran from June 2014 to June 2016, though many activities have continued past the pilot's formal completion.

This report is intended to help Forward Cities national staff and local stakeholders, as well as others planning cross-city efforts to mobilize local leadership for community action and economic development. An interim report published in February 2016 assessed the progress of the Forward Cities pilot during the first half of the initiative, finding that the four participating cities made initial steps toward the intended final outcomes (Pettit and Pitingolo 2016). The report looked ahead to the next year of the pilot and described steps that could make the initiative a success.

This report builds upon the earlier research to document the achievements of Forward Cities over the two-year pilot initiative. We first provide an overview of the pilot's goals and staffing. We also describe its main activities, including cross-site convenings and the local work of the innovation councils. We next assess how Forward Cities advanced four key outcomes that support minority entrepreneurship. Finally, we report on the innovation councils' plans to continue efforts beyond the pilot and offer recommendations for designing future multicity networks to spur inclusive entrepreneurship.

Forward Cities Overview

Forward Cities focuses on fostering inclusive innovation and entrepreneurial development, particularly in traditionally underserved neighborhoods. An *entrepreneur* organizes and manages any enterprise that translates an innovative idea or invention into a good or service that creates value for which customers will pay. For the Forward Cities collaborative, this definition applies to people, small businesses, and nonprofit organizations and is not limited to those in high technology or fast-growth business sectors. It can be someone opening a new line of food products, retail store, hair salon, or other service-based venture. *Innovation* is the development of new and improved strategies and can take place in emerging or existing enterprises. For this initiative, *inclusive innovation* means that people of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds have the supports they need to become successful entrepreneurs. The project also focuses on underserved communities, which have historically received limited public or private investment. Residents in these neighborhoods have less access to capital and professional networks and may be unaware of local organizations that foster entrepreneurship.

Project Goals

Forward Cities was designed to:

- identify ways to develop and support more business entrepreneurs and social innovators living or working in low-income communities of color in addition to ensuring a vibrant pipeline for the next generation of local entrepreneurs
- figure out best strategies for harnessing the talent and creativity of local entrepreneurial ecosystems to address critical issues in cities' most distressed communities
- strengthen existing networks and accelerate entrepreneurial activity within participating cities and their surrounding areas
- foster best-practice sharing, relationship building, and entrepreneurial activity among participating cities and their surrounding areas
- serve as a dynamic knowledge resource for others looking to expand their entrepreneurial ecosystems²

Table 1 illustrates how the program founders envisioned stronger local relationships would lead to improved economic and social outcomes.

TABLE 1

Forward Cities Theory of Change

National learning collaborative's intended outcomes

	Short term	➔	Medium term	➔	Long term
Within collaborative cities	Increased networks, cross-sector relationships, and local engagement		Increased individual and organizational social capital		Financial investment
Between collaborative cities	Networks across collaborative cities; shared learning		Increased cross-city social capital		Cross-city investment opportunities
Among "new" cities	Increased knowledge		Increased engagement		Collaborative participation

Source: 2014 Forward Cities national learning collaborative proposal.

Improving connections to entrepreneurial supports for all neighborhoods is an ambitious, long-term process. The Forward Cities project staff and innovation council members recognized that improving economic situations for minority entrepreneurs and underserved communities could not be fully realized in two years. To carve out a realistic scope of work that would lay the groundwork for achieving the long-term goals, Forward Cities asked local participants to choose one or more neighborhoods or corridors in which to identify new and actionable ways to direct and coordinate resources to increase inclusive innovation and entrepreneurship. The neighborhoods selected in all four cities were underinvested, underdeveloped commercial corridors with potential for entrepreneurial growth and small-business development. The hope was to create enduring social and economic impact in the chosen areas and provide a model for other neighborhoods.

National Staffing

National staff for Forward Cities managed the project and peer learning, organized cross-city convenings, and represented the project in national forums to advocate for inclusive entrepreneurship. The initiative involved limited national staff time. Friends of New Orleans, the fiscal organization, led by Executive Director Denise Byrne, was responsible for project management, implementation,

fundraising, and reporting. Christopher Gergen led the cross-site education, website platform and media communications, research, and national advocacy activities. To supplement the lean staffing, the Aspen Institute and its Center for Urban Innovation helped moderate the convenings and provided leadership development opportunities for Forward Cities participants throughout the two years. Forward Cities also partnered with national organizations, including the Urban Institute, for research support.

Issue Media Group developed and managed the web platform and electronic communications, which included a monthly newsletter and a website section for resources on tools and data. The website also featured a blog where entrepreneurs, donors, and leaders from each city shared examples and perspectives on inclusive innovation with a national audience. The monthly electronic newsletter showcased individual entrepreneurs, promising local programs, focus neighborhoods in the initiative, and perspectives from donors and key stakeholders in these innovation ecosystems. From its launching in December 2014 until November 2016, the website received almost 33,000 site visits by about 24,200 unique users. Additionally, Hey Now! Media helped Forward Cities establish a social media presence. @ForwardCities has over 800 Twitter followers, and #ForwardCities was a top-trending hashtag during the Cleveland convening.

Local Innovation Councils

At the start of Forward Cities, the national staff collaborated with local stakeholders to establish innovation councils in each city. The councils averaged about 35 people each and were led by co-chairs. The national staff recruited council members to guide, plan, and implement Forward Cities local activities. The innovation councils' volunteer members, who represented key players in each city's entrepreneurial ecosystem, included entrepreneurs, funders, corporate leaders, education leaders, and representatives from economic development and entrepreneurial support organizations. Each innovation council also selected six members who attended the cross-city convenings at Forward Cities expense. These teams were the coordinating committee for the council's activities. The national staff asked innovation councils to meet once a month.

The previous report on the early progress of Forward Cities documented the initial experiences with council chairs and other member participation (Pettit and Pitingolo 2016). As the local work evolved, the leadership and composition of the innovation councils shifted. Some of the people who attended initial meetings chose not to continue with Forward Cities; others joined their innovation

council later as they learned about the initiative's work. Some met less frequently than monthly. Cleveland created subcommittees that met approximately once a quarter in addition to the full monthly council meetings.

During the first year, Forward Cities contracted with a research partner in each city to provide data and research that supported the innovation councils' efforts. These partners included the Center for Economic Development at Cleveland State University, Data Driven Detroit, the City of Durham's Neighborhood Compass Program, and a local professor from Tulane University in New Orleans. Local research partners produced data and maps providing important context about the focus neighborhoods and the people living there. Each research partner developed an inventory of organizations that support entrepreneurs. Some research partners took on additional responsibilities related to Forward Cities, such as creating a comprehensive database of women- and minority-owned businesses in Cleveland. These materials are available on the Data/Tools section of the Forward Cities website.

Data and Methods

To assess the influence and accomplishments of Forward Cities in the four participating cities, Urban Institute researchers relied on Forward Cities documents, local meeting minutes, informal conversations with Forward Cities staff, convening evaluations from the four events, and researcher observations at the convenings. Data and evidence from Pettit and Pitingolo (2016) were incorporated as well.

In addition, researchers conducted 20 in-depth interviews in July and August 2016 with five members of each innovation council, including the council chairs. In consultation with Forward Cities national staff, the researchers selected interviewees who were key local contributors and knowledgeable about the initiative. Fourteen interviewees from the interim study were selected again for this study. All the interviewees attended at least one convening; most had attended three or all four. Researchers followed up through December 2016 to clarify final details.

All interviews were conducted by telephone, lasted between 30 and 45 minutes, and gathered information on several key questions from the interviewees, including the following:

- What were their motivations for getting involved and staying involved with Forward Cities?
- What were the innovation council's activities and accomplishments?
- Did the convenings and other Forward Cities experiences help the local entrepreneurship support system, and how?
- How has Forward Cities affected their organization and themselves personally?
- Has Forward Cities created new relationships with people in their cities and other cities?
- What work to support minority entrepreneurs will continue after the final convening?

The researchers synthesized information from these interviews to describe the state of Forward Cities activities and accomplishments through October 2016 and develop recommendations for Forward Cities and similar endeavors.

Project Activities

Forward Cities set out to accomplish its goals through two major mechanisms. First, the national staff and local councils hosted four cross-site convenings to bring local participants together and share promising examples of fostering entrepreneurship. Second, the Forward Cities staff charged the local councils with choosing one or more focus areas in which to develop activities that would improve support for minority entrepreneurs.

Cross-Site Convenings

Forward Cities held four convenings from 2014 to 2016. These events comprised three days of topical panels, tours of local demonstration projects and well-regarded programs, visits with local entrepreneurs and city leaders, and networking. Forward Cities convenings fostered relationships among the participants and allowed them to share strategies, lessons, and best practices that they brought back to their respective cities. One Detroit donor wrote, “In each city we visited, [the convening] provided opportunities to reflect upon working with minority communities and seeing how it was being addressed in the other cities. . . . It was something that was very important and powerful in terms of reenergizing and reasserting the importance of those issues and making sure we looked at them in a frontal way.”

The innovation councils helped organize and execute the convening in each city. In the months before hosting a convening, host-city council members planned the programming with the national Forward Cities staff. The planning team identified speakers for panels and selected neighborhoods and demonstration projects to highlight local efforts to support entrepreneurship and inclusive innovation. Some innovation council members described their convening as a great chance to showcase the local programs for a national audience.

All council members were invited to attend all of the convenings. Six-member teams from each city that attended at Forward Cities expense were charged with bringing back lessons to the rest of the council in their respective cities. These six members also were eligible to participate in private Aspen Institute leadership seminars led and moderated by Peter A. Reiling, executive vice president for leadership and seminar programs. These closed-door sessions were described positively by several council members. One business leader said the sessions “allow for space to examine our own leadership style. That was huge for me. I rarely get time to do that.”

All four convenings had a broad focus on inclusive entrepreneurship, but innovation councils were allowed to focus on other general issues related to entrepreneurship, such as sector development or access to capital. The format evolved as the Forward Cities initiative matured. One council member noted, “Forward Cities convenings were a cumulative process, and each convening built off of the one that came before it.” Each convening is briefly summarized below. Additional details, including the agendas for each gathering, can be found on the Convenings section of the Forward Cities website.

- The New Orleans convening in December 2014 was the first opportunity for local council members to meet their counterparts in other cities. Forward Cities national staff presented the initiative’s goals and discussed their expectations for local councils. Panel topics included public education reform, urban farming, the biotech sector, and strategies for developing low-income and minority entrepreneurs. Tour guides led participants through innovative charter schools and showed them urban farms and green building development as tools of blight removal.
- In Detroit, council members from the four cities met in June 2015 and strengthened cross-city relationships. Networking opportunities were provided in the evenings, including one hosted by Bamboo Detroit (a minority-owned downtown coworking space). The convening included a Detroit incubator field trip through downtown and midtown Detroit, as well as a stop at the historic Eastern Market to hear from local entrepreneurs. The topical panels covered food entrepreneurship, working with women entrepreneurs, and teaching entrepreneurship in public schools. Detroit’s director of urban planning and development and the president and chief executive officer of Rock Ventures gave the keynote speeches.
- By Durham, the Forward Cities council members cemented relationships built during the first year of the initiative. The three-day convening in December 2015 started with field trips, including Durham’s Black Wall Street and the Angiers-Driver Corridor, a historic African American community and the focus of Durham’s Forward Cities innovation council. The Racial Equity Institute, LLC, offered a workshop at Durham Technical Community College’s Phail Wynn Center to council members so that many could better understand the systemic racism—the deliberate policies and structures detrimental to people of color—that led to the racial inequities apparent in today’s society. The convening featured panel discussions at the North Carolina Central University Law School, a historically black university with one of the most diverse law schools in the country, covering such topics as gentrification and inclusive competitiveness.

- The Cleveland convening conducted in June 2016 was the final cross-site meeting of the Forward Cities councils during the pilot. The event celebrated accomplishments during the initiative and was a learning opportunity for council members as they decided how to proceed after the initiative's official end. Council members took field trips around the city, including a lunch program with Latino leaders at a Puerto Rican community center and bus tours through the other focus areas identified by the Cleveland council. At the Cleveland Botanical Gardens and the Global Center for Health Innovation, panelists discussed the role of anchor institutions in inclusive innovation and barriers to entrepreneurship. Walter Isaacson, president of the Aspen Institute and author of *The Innovators: How a Group of Hackers, Geniuses, and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution*, spoke at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame on the importance of diversity in creativity and innovation and interviewed Cleveland mayor Frank Jackson.

Activities in the Focus Areas

Forward Cities asked councils to concentrate their activities in a specific geographic area, but otherwise gave the council members local autonomy. All cities had chosen focus neighborhoods or corridors by June 2015. Cleveland, Detroit, and Durham chose focus neighborhoods to align with existing local initiatives. Several council members in Cleveland mentioned they chose their focus areas based on the strength of established neighborhood organizations. In New Orleans, the council relied on the research and expertise of its local research partner and chose a neighborhood that lacked activities to support entrepreneurs.

All four innovation councils identified opportunities in their focus areas to better support minority entrepreneurs, but the pace of progress differed in each city. By summer 2016, the councils in Cleveland, New Orleans, and Durham facilitated concrete plans or activities to support entrepreneurship in the focus areas. In Detroit, a group of partners, including some affiliated with the Forward Cities council, helped to carry the work of inclusive innovation in the focus area.

The summaries below describe the focus areas and activities initiated by the Forward Cities councils, and the Forward Cities Outcomes section describes the initiative's indirect positive effects. This report does not offer a comprehensive picture of the entrepreneurship support systems of the four cities, as individual organizations or other collective efforts operate other valuable programs to serve minority entrepreneurs.

CLEVELAND

Several established organizations support entrepreneurship across Northeast Ohio, including youth programs, technology-focused incubators, and local donors such as the Burton D. Morgan Foundation. The Cleveland council chose four focus areas. Work in each progressed at a different speed. Cleveland's implementation of the focus area work through subcommittees allowed each project to operate independently from each other while keeping the stakeholders connected through the broader innovation council.

The focus areas and activities are summarized below.

- Opportunity Corridor on the city's east side is one of Cleveland's largest publicly funded infrastructure projects in one of its most disadvantaged neighborhoods. Forward Cities shifted the emphasis in Opportunity Corridor from solely large corporations to include small businesses. Borrowing from Detroit, the project team developed an inventory of service providers based on BizGrid; held a trolley tour to bring community members, commercial developers, and small businesses together; and undertook special outreach to African American realtors to alert them to opportunities in the corridor.
- West 25th Street Corridor is a largely Hispanic community on the west side of Cleveland. Forward Cities concentrated on the "bricks and mortar" businesses along the corridor, specifically those with minority business owners. Leaders in the corridor hired a national association of community action builders to engage in strategic planning. The organizers started planning in early 2016 and interviewed community stakeholders, held community forums, and created a steering committee to flesh out work to be done. They are creating a plan that can be taken to funders for support.
- East 55th Food Corridor is a neighborhood-based corridor where the council hopes to encourage residents of the St. Clair and Hough neighborhoods to pursue food entrepreneurship. Through Forward Cities, St. Clair Superior Community Development Corporation developed a relationship with the Burton D. Morgan Foundation that resulted in a \$100,000 grant to support youth entrepreneurship programming in the neighborhood. The goal is to continue developing food-based businesses in the corridor and bring young entrepreneurs into the mix.
- East 105th and East 93rd Street Corridor links several of Cleveland's most disadvantaged neighborhoods with University Circle, a major job center. Forward Cities highlighted ways to link businesses in these neighborhoods to markets created by the Cleveland Clinic, university

hospitals, and Case Western Reserve University. A larger focus of the corridor aimed to boost residential and commercial property development along the corridor so that community members feel like they have opportunities to move up without having to leave their homes.

DETROIT

Detroit's entrepreneurial system was already somewhat connected before Forward Cities. The region benefits from the New Economy Initiative (NEI), a collaborative project funded by 12 local and national funders building a support network for entrepreneurs and small businesses. The council chose the Northend and New Center District based on established businesses and NEI investment in the area combined with the potential for significant entrepreneurial engagement and community growth. This area will be the terminus of QLine, a streetcar scheduled to open in 2017.

NEI guided the agenda for Detroit's focus area. Council members dedicated their time to NEI work and decided against taking on additional work under the Forward Cities banner. Stakeholders are supporting minority entrepreneurs through the Neighborhood Business Initiative, which includes worktables focused on capital readiness, business advocacy, place-based entrepreneurship, and creating a connected ecosystem.

DURHAM

Durham programs support entrepreneurs through the public, nonprofit, and academic sectors, but they were not formally coordinated or collectively focused on minority entrepreneurial development before Forward Cities. The Angier-Driver Corridor was the council's focus area, chosen to align with a city investment program and to take advantage of expected development spillover from downtown.

Since selecting the focus area, Durham's council members prioritized engaging with neighborhood stakeholders. By summer 2016, the council was working with community members to formulate plans for the area. Ideas for interventions included using support organizations to provide technical assistance to entrepreneurs and working with anchor institutions in the area to establish a small business hub for minorities in east Durham, including a core group of partners working collaboratively to launch business services for minority enterprises.

NEW ORLEANS

New Orleans experienced a resurgence of entrepreneurship after Hurricane Katrina that helped rebuild the city. Several programs support innovation across sectors, from food to biotech, but these programs operate without a formal network. The New Orleans council chose the Seventh and Eighth

Wards as a focus area after consulting with their local research partner. The area is a mostly working-class collection of neighborhoods with pockets of poverty and gentrification. The New Orleans council reviewed interventions proposed by their local data partner and settled on a project that will gather information from and support entrepreneurs in the informal economy. At the end of the engagement, the organizers will hold a neighborhood festival to celebrate these entrepreneurs.

At the time of the interviews, Forward Cities had reached the end of its official two-year course, but local councils and national staff intended to continue various activities to build upon their experiences in the initiative. These intentions are captured in the final section of the report.

Forward Cities Outcomes

The national staff envisioned that Forward Cities activities would strengthen relationships and increase knowledge among council members during the initiative (table 1). In our earlier report, we identified four specific short-term outcomes that Forward Cities believes will lead to increased entrepreneurship among minority entrepreneurs and underserved communities in the long term (Pettit and Pitingolo 2016). These outcomes mostly represent indirect or potential benefits rather than direct support or additional capital for entrepreneurs. The 2016 report documented early progress made during the initiative. Innovation councils further advanced all four outcomes during the second year of Forward Cities.

Deepen Focus on Supporting Minority Entrepreneurs and Underserved Neighborhoods

Many council members stated that the focus on minority entrepreneurs and underserved neighborhoods motivated them to join the initiative. Forward Cities created an awareness of neighborhood-level interventions in supporting local minority entrepreneurs and drew attention to traditionally underserved neighborhoods.

Some councils spotlighted underserved neighborhoods by selecting them as focus areas for the initiative. La Villa Hispania in Cleveland generated new interest from local influencers and gained attention from broader audiences during the Cleveland convening. A council member familiar with the neighborhood said, “Bringing national attention to our little community was important.” Similarly, the Seventh and Eighth Wards in New Orleans had few preexisting entrepreneurship support activities, which drove the council’s decision to concentrate their Forward Cities plans there.

Forward Cities also influenced the strategy for the Opportunity Corridor, one of the selected areas in Cleveland. A council member stated, “[The] Opportunity Corridor had no focus on small business, but Forward Cities allowed us to start conversations and make inroads. For us, it was really good people around the table who were committed to [making] things work. The group would not have gotten together without Forward Cities.”

In addition to working in specific corridors, Forward Cities helped reinforce local organizations’ interest in supporting minority and immigrant entrepreneurs and helped foster a common

understanding of the importance of this focus. As one important example, the Racial Equity Institute training workshop during the Durham convening allowed council members to explore the cultural and historical roots of racism and helped consider strategies to becoming more racially equitable.

The Durham staff decided to hold the racial equity workshop after attending the Detroit convening. Some council members felt that the businesses featured on the tours seemed disconnected from the focus on inclusive entrepreneurship. One Durham council member said, “We spent time going to Mexican Town and downtown. Maybe except for [the opening reception], every place else was segregated, and no one talked about it. This is what drove the deep dive into race in Durham.”

During our interviews, the racial equity workshop was mentioned 70 percent of the time, frequently without prompting. Since visiting Durham, the New Orleans and Cleveland councils have sponsored the workshop in their cities. The Burton D. Morgan Foundation and others also facilitated a workshop in Akron, OH, in September 2016. A council member in Cleveland said of the lasting impact of the training, “I think in the whole context of everything, the [Racial Equity Institute] work and the way we embraced that given the civil unrest in our community, that’s going to be the most lasting impact of Forward Cities.”

Strengthen Relationships among Entrepreneurship Support Organizations within Cities

Forward Cities asked each innovation council to build and deepen relationships among the members in each city. These relationships developed in each city to varying degrees. The Cleveland council was highly formalized and had monthly meetings that allowed stakeholders from each of Cleveland’s four corridors to regularly discuss shared connections in the local entrepreneurial support ecosystem. One council member said that without Forward Cities, “the relationships would not have happened,” and he praised the council’s composition because “had they not been so wide ranging in terms of different sectors and levels of community, we probably would not have appreciated or experienced the richness of having the eclectic mix.”

In Detroit, relationships were strengthened outside of formal meetings. One council member in Detroit noted that before Forward Cities, “everyone was aware of each other but had their niche and was busy doing their own thing.” Two council members whose organizations support entrepreneurs developed a mutually beneficial professional relationship because of Forward Cities. One organization specialized in serving all immigrant entrepreneurs, and another concentrated on the retail sector. After

working together on Forward Cities, they started collaborating on a regular basis, referring entrepreneurs to each other if they knew the other would be a better match.

The Durham council used formal council meetings to bring a diverse group of community stakeholders together regularly. The group included people in traditional small-business support services, such as those contracted by the US Small Business Administration and others working in incubators to support entrepreneurs in high-tech fields. The council also included representatives from local government and community leaders and members who would be part of the selected project for the focus area. Our interviews revealed that in many cases, the people around the table knew each other or were aware of each other, but Forward Cities helped develop relationships that probably would not have developed otherwise.

Forward Cities council activities in New Orleans also enabled new connections and strengthened relationships among key stakeholders. The council met regularly at the beginning of the initiative and outlined potential interventions, but it did not initially have someone who could execute a project on the ground. Forward Cities attracted a new council member to the table about halfway through the initiative who led the effort in the Seventh and Eight Wards focus area. When asked whether the council could have pulled off the work without the added council member, someone who had been involved since the beginning said the full project would not have been possible.

Convenings were envisioned primarily as opportunities for cross-city collaboration, but council members often described traveling and being together in a different city as the best opportunity to get to know people from their own city. One person said, “New [relationships] have been cemented at the convenings. People don’t come to the local events.” This positive outcome was true for all four councils, with many council members noting their appreciation for getting to know their colleagues on trips to each city. Council members were described as “high power with limited time,” and the ability to step away from their own city for a few days to work together without distractions was an important contribution of the initiative.

Increase Funding for Supporting Entrepreneurship and Small Businesses

Forward Cities generated funding or significant funder interest in all four cities for several organizations that participated in the initiative. Some council members questioned whether the grants that resulted from Forward Cities were funds already designated for entrepreneurship programs that

were shifted from one project to another. A council member in Detroit said, “There [is] a small group of funders, banks, [and] corporations and many competing for the exact same dollars.” Our research cannot demonstrate whether these perspectives are correct, or if the grants represented net growth in funding.

In New Orleans, council members submitted proposals to the Kellogg Foundation and a local corporate donor to fund the informal economy intervention described above on local activities. As of January 2017, a \$27,000 grant from the Kellogg Foundation was approved to fund the assessment of the informal economy in the Seventh and Eighth Wards focus area. An additional \$10,000 grant from a local corporate donor, which is still pending, would pay for a festival that would celebrate neighborhood entrepreneurs later in the year. Additionally, a relationship developed between a council member and Blue Cross Blue Shield of Louisiana resulted in another fundraising success. Blue Cross had previously funded this organization, but because of a deepened relationship through Forward Cities, they were invited to submit a second proposal for additional funding. Blue Cross also provided in-kind assistance through their specialized expertise.

In Cleveland, council members working in the corridors learned about the areas of interest to the Burton D. Morgan Foundation and designed projects to fit their priorities. For example, staff from the foundation and the St. Clair Superior Community Development Corporation developed a relationship that resulted in a two-year, \$100,000 grant for youth entrepreneurship programs in the East 55th Food Corridor. After the Cleveland convening, the foundation also awarded the Hispanic Business Center a \$25,000 grant to develop and implement bilingual curricula in retail and construction for Hispanic entrepreneurs. A Cleveland funder said these grants were “definitely” the result of Forward Cities.

Because of their involvement in Forward Cities, four council members from three cities received invitations and funding to attend the invitation-only 2016 Aspen Ideas Festival, and two council members were invited to the Resnick Aspen Action Forum 2016. These events helped council members raise their visibility nationally with high-level investors and funders. One council member from Detroit made the finals in a pitch competition at the Aspen Ideas Festival. Although he did not win the \$25,000 award, he highlighted his business to the funders and other influential participants. At the 2015 Aspen Ideas Festival, a Forward Cities council member from New Orleans developed a relationship with a funder from the Walton Family Foundation and received a \$230,000 grant for her organization.

Foster Learning across Cities about Inclusive Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Council members cited learning from other cities as a major reason for joining Forward Cities. By the end of the initiative, many noted the close friendships that had developed with participants from other cities over the two years. The convenings were the primary vehicles for these connections. One council member said, “It’s always energizing to meet new people who are doing similar work but differently and infuse new ideas and energy.” Many people met and started getting to know each other at the New Orleans and Detroit convenings, but by the final two gatherings in Durham and Cleveland, council members felt comfortable sharing aspirations and challenges.

Outside the convenings, notable collaborations happened between council members in Detroit and New Orleans. Both cities hosted an Entrepreneur Week to showcase local companies and businesspeople. Forward Cities provided a travel scholarship to a council member from Detroit who traveled to New Orleans to learn from their event and take some of the best ideas home. She described the success, saying, “I was able to have 1,200 attendees, and based on my experience with New Orleans’ Entrepreneur Week, we raised \$40,000, which was a big deal because typically what we would do is just bring in coffee and donuts.” The funding came as small gifts from several sources, including local government and philanthropy. The additional funding helped the organizer pay for a website and social media outreach during the event.

Forward Cities participants benefitted both personally and professionally. One council member in Detroit traveled to New Orleans to meet with council members and entrepreneurs participating in a food incubator, hoping to bring that concept back to Detroit. Another council member reflected on her involvement, saying, “It was a phenomenal experience professionally and personally and for [my organization]. I feel like I had a family across cities and believe everyone who was engaged I can call on for whatever, and they can call on me.”

The Cleveland Opportunity Corridor’s adaptation of Detroit’s BizGrid, which helps entrepreneurs find service providers to help with various stages of business development, presents an additional illustration of cross-site learning. The Durham council is also exploring adapting the tool. In another example of cross-city collaboration, council members in Durham and Cleveland discussed their community farming work and how they might work together. Additional opportunities still exist for collaboration. As one funder described, “Relationships are started, and it will depend upon the initiative of each of us on following up on those. The convenings created great opportunities, and now it’s going to be incumbent on each of us to continue to follow up and deepen those relationships.”

Going Forward

During the two years of Forward Cities, local participants formed innovation councils and selected neighborhood focus areas and a course of action. Council members knew that two years was not enough time to address all of the issues facing minority entrepreneurs and underserved communities. One council member pointed out, “This is hard work. Given the issues of economic disparity and exclusion, I never went into this with the expectation that there would be a quick turnaround or early wins.” This section describes the work the local organizations in the four cities and national staff anticipate to support minority entrepreneurs and underserved communities. It then provides lessons for future initiatives structured to use a national initiative and peer learning to catalyze local action and offers some final reflections.

Continuing Local Efforts on Inclusive Entrepreneurship

Council members in each city reported that the strong relationships built during the Forward Cities pilot would persist beyond its official end and that they expected the benefits from the initiative would continue to enhance local efforts to support minority entrepreneurs. When asked about activities that would continue, council members reported different approaches in each city to build upon the activities during the Forward Cities initiative.

In Cleveland, the chairs intend to continue to convene council members and additional stakeholders periodically to exchange ideas and share updates. The council met in August 2016 to celebrate the success of the Cleveland convening and brainstorm ideas to keep the momentum from Forward Cities going. A few ideas discussed at the council meeting in August 2016 included working with local public radio and television to create a Forward Cities beat that highlights the importance of entrepreneurship and goes deep into issues affecting minority entrepreneurs. They also considered engaging with city and local banks and credit unions to design new financing vehicles to provide capital to entrepreneurs.

The Cleveland council also identified over two dozen potential new partners, individuals and organizations not closely involved with Forward Cities that could be brought to the table in the future. Council leadership in Cleveland has always been strong, and the two council cochairs expressed commitment to moving the group forward.

Detroit will benefit from the preexisting programs of the entrepreneurship support organizations. NEI provides leadership in developing capacity and programs across silos. NEI awarded nearly \$600,000 in grants to nonprofit organizations across Detroit for their Neighborhood Business Initiative. One of these organizations, Michigan Community Resources, supports and empowers nonprofit community organizations through pro bono legal and technical services. Michigan Community Resources convenes stakeholders around issues related to entrepreneurial support. The Neighborhood Business Initiative will look to use vacant commercial property in Detroit to assist entrepreneurs. Although these activities are not a direct output of the local Forward Cities council, the work is closely aligned with Forward Cities goals, and council members believe they are enhanced by the closer relationships and cross-site fertilization that Forward Cities provided.

The Durham innovation council is aware of the need to engage with the community before imposing any neighborhood interventions. As of September 2016, the council was finalizing target outcomes, such as increasing the number of locally owned minority businesses in the focus area, bringing livable-wage jobs for residents, and increasing the amount of commercial ownership by minority business owners. To further these goals, the council created a microloan fund to increase the capital available to entrepreneurs. Other specific interventions and strategies are still being developed, but ideas discussed at recent council meetings included using four support organizations for technical assistance and leveraging anchor institutions in the focus area. They also are considering adapting successful ideas from other cities (e.g., BizGrid in Detroit) and a one-stop support shop (e.g., PNC Fairfax Connection in Cleveland).

In New Orleans, distinct groups will work on two important projects. The first group will work on engagement around the informal economy in the Seventh and Eight Wards focus area. The other group comprises four council members who helped bring the Racial Equity Institute workshop to New Orleans and hosted a highly successful training workshop with business leaders there. This group hopes to host two to four of these workshops each year and is planning and organizing “naked lunches” around the city that bring people together to discuss local issues through a racial equity lens.

National Efforts on Inclusive Entrepreneurship

The Forward Cities national staff members are also building upon their experiences during the initiative. They are planning an “alumni” gathering of teams from each of the four cities, likely to be held in New Orleans in 2017. They also intend to continue supporting the four cities throughout 2017 and

documenting the tools to foster inclusive innovation within the cities and developing comprehensive case studies in each city.

The Forward Cities model is being adapted for other cities. Christopher Gergen worked with local partners to launch InnovateNC, a five-city learning collaborative focused on inclusive innovation in North Carolina. Forward Cities staff, with support from national donors, is also planning to develop a national learning coalition of cities committed to advancing inclusive innovation.

The lessons from Forward Cities have been disseminated in other national forums. Denise Byrne and a member of the Cleveland Forward Cities council were invited to present on Forward Cities at a White House event, Reimagining Small Business Technical Assistance. Several Forward Cities council members attended the event. In addition, council members from Detroit, Cleveland, and New Orleans presented on Forward Cities at the 2016 Meeting of the Minds conference in California on urban sustainability. The leaders expect these types of communications efforts will continue into 2017.

Recommendations for Future Networks

The experience from the Forward Cities pilot demonstrates that a program that offers the opportunity for cross-site learning and a national platform for showcasing work can inspire local stakeholders to come together in new ways. The local innovation councils were volunteer groups, and the fact that members stayed involved over two years speaks to Forward Cities value. One council member stated, “I’m a quitter, so if something wasn’t what I wanted, I would have just quit.” Although participants responded well to the program’s structure, the initiative offers lessons to improve the design of future cohorts or similar national initiatives aiming to knit together local systems to increase inclusive entrepreneurship.

Membership on the councils was fluid. Forward Cities staff developed an initial list at the beginning of the initiative with their local contacts. Some of the recruited members became involved in council activities, but others never connected. Some councils invited different people to the table as the local agenda emerged to include stakeholders missing from the conversation. Durham invited community members to its council to ensure their voices were heard as plans for the neighborhood developed. Other councils did not invite more people to the table, and members interviewed noted some gaps in council composition. A periodic review of membership size and composition will help any future collaboration ensure the council includes the skills and interests to suit the council activities and goals.

Any future iteration should also underscore expectations about roles for council members throughout the initiative. Council members received written and verbal guidance from the national staff at the start of the initiative, but we noted in the first report that many council members did not know their responsibilities or what goal their council was trying to accomplish. A few of those interviewed for this report still echoed this confusion. One innovation council benefited from strong cochairs which lessened confusion, but another council with different leadership rarely came together outside of planning the convening for their city and traveling to the others. As one suggestion, having councils publish their roles and planned milestones after the first six months of the initiative would provide clearer messaging to the members, particularly to those members who join midstream. It would also be a way for council members to hold themselves accountable to their objectives.

The assignment to develop a collective action agenda for the two years gave the councils an impetus to meet between convenings and contributed to stronger relationships. Although the council members controlled the agenda for each site, Forward Cities charged each council with choosing focus areas and developing a plan of action for each focus area. National staff identified this strategy after the four cities were selected to concentrate the energies of the volunteer councils during the short two years of the pilot. In most cities, this approach worked well because there was no preexisting cross-organizational agenda for place-based work. But in Detroit, NEI had a long-standing plan for strengthening entrepreneurial supports before Forward Cities. The timing of Forward Cities request to select particular neighborhoods did not align well with these activities. One council member described this tension, saying that “Forward Cities wanting to identify a specific project in one neighborhood was not compatible with what our group was doing.”

This kind of mismatch could happen in other cities, or other local stakeholders may decide tackling a city- or regionwide issue or intervention would be more productive. Organizers of future initiatives could accommodate this diversity by offering a menu of approaches, such as focusing on a neighborhood, policy, or sector. This approach would enable the council to decide which activities make the most sense in their entrepreneurial ecosystem. If a place-based focus is central to the initiative, local funders and council leadership should agree to this model as a condition of being selected.

Future organizers should also consider the other responsibilities that local councils are asked to assume during the initiative, including their role in planning the convenings. One drawback of asking volunteer council members to play a major role in this component is that they have limited time to dedicate to Forward Cities. A substantial in-kind donation of time for convening planning risks trade-offs with the on-the-ground work in the focus area.

Some council members mentioned the desire for the cross-site education to be more curated. The convenings were the primary vehicle for cross-city learning and showcased a wide array of issues, such as food-related businesses, programs for immigrants, access to capital, and anchor institutions. In response to this, some council members pointed out that the programs for the convenings were generally disconnected from the councils' focus area work. One suggestion is to devote more time during the gatherings to have a direct tie-in to the council activities. Instead of a short "report out" session, council members could spend more time engaging with each other about their work. Participants would also benefit from more synthesis of the material presented before and after convenings. Forward Cities energized council members at the convenings and gave them ideas to bring home, but limited national staffing meant local convening attendees were responsible for distilling the knowledge to share with their full councils.

Future initiatives should facilitate more opportunities for cross-city learning between formal convenings. This learning could rely on low-cost methods, such as an online directory, periodic informal sharing of council activities, or a published list of related events at which council members might interact. Our first report also suggested video conferences with affinity groups centered on different sectors (such as food), populations (such as youth or immigrants), or services (such as minority-focused incubators and accelerators). With individuals pressed by day-to-day tasks, these video conferences would require additional national staff time to prepare and publicize such activities.

Lastly, Forward Cities and any similar efforts should undertake formal and explicit closeout activities. During our interviews, several people mentioned uncertainty regarding how to officially close the book on Forward Cities and move council activities under a different umbrella so they could continue. Some council members expressed interest in seeing what happens over the next few months in the other cities. The proposed plans for the alumni gathering would provide the opportunity to share activities within the four cities during 2017, but documentation through blog posts and more formal case studies on the Forward Cities website would benefit a broader audience. In any case, the website information should be updated to indicate the end of the initiative, and plans should be made to archive the initiative's materials with an institution so the materials are not lost. Other suggestions for closeout include a formal notice from the national Forward Cities staff and funders with clarity about use of the brand and a final exchange of council contact information.

Any future cohorts of Forward Cities or similar initiatives can learn from what was accomplished over the past two years. They could ramp up faster and allow innovation councils to more quickly select and make progress on a place- or topic-based intervention that meets the needs of entrepreneurs in

their communities. They could also foster more cross-site learning through fine-tuning the structure of the convenings and introducing virtual activities to complement in-person meetings.

Final Reflections on Forward Cities

Our research documents Forward Cities cross-site programming, innovation council activities, and participants' perceptions about the resulting effects on ecosystems that support entrepreneurship. But many questions remain about how to most effectively accomplish the Forward Cities goal of having more racially and ethnically diverse entrepreneurs succeed and in turn help boost their local economies.

Forward Cities received overwhelmingly positive response from the active participants whom we interviewed. However, a few of the council members interviewed questioned who was not at the table. Some interviewees believed entrepreneurs should have been better represented on the council to get the perspective of the end beneficiaries. Residents and small-business owners from the focus areas could have played a larger role in the council decisionmaking. In addition, our research did not seek out external actors in the city or those individuals who were invited but chose not to participate. Their viewpoints could provide a more complete view of the initiative and suggest areas for improvement.

The group discussions over these two years featured many interesting programs, but without a focus on how to help organizations evaluate their effectiveness. Given the imperative to reduce economic disparities, local stakeholders should invest in the strategies that have the most payoff. The Racial Equity Institute also raised questions for some interviewees about how programs serving entrepreneurs should be adapted for minority individuals and communities in the face of structural inequalities, such as more limited access to capital and professional networks. The council members in Forward Cities offer a community that could contribute to the evidence base of which programs best attract and serve minority entrepreneurs.

We also need more sophisticated measurement of entrepreneurship and the systems that foster innovation. Many exciting new data resources have improved our ability to measure Forward Cities desired outcomes at the regional or national level, including the Kauffman Startup Index, the Innovation Index, and the Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs.³ But local research partners in Forward Cities had difficulty assembling current neighborhood-level data on local businesses and minority ownership. Local and state governments have a role to play in collecting business data and providing neighborhood-level indicators directly or indirectly through research partners. In addition, more research needs to be done on measuring the components of the regional systems that support entrepreneurship. Our

qualitative research provides some information, but it needs to be supplemented with quantitative measures.

The actions of city, county, and state government can foster or hinder opportunities for entrepreneurs. Representatives from government agencies were generally not deeply involved in the initiative, but they could have been a point of contact for existing public programs and investments related to entrepreneurship and small business. Similar initiatives in the future should share more examples of public policies that foster a supportive ecosystem and remove barriers for minority entrepreneurs and business corridors. Armed with this information, local councils could provide a platform for advocacy for effective government action that would provide a solid foundation for other philanthropic and nonprofit efforts.

Progress in these expanded areas would help Forward Cities council members critically examine how their programs serve minority entrepreneurs and track progress over time. Locally, the Forward Cities initiative helped raise the visibility of the need to support minority entrepreneurship and cultivated new relationships between stakeholders in the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Nationally, the initiative built a community that participants can tap for assistance in the future and provided an outlet to publicize its goals and stories from four diverse cities. The evidence indicates that Forward Cities will continue to have a positive legacy in the four cities, but much more work needs to be done by a broader array of actors to begin to close the gap in entrepreneurship for minority individuals and neighborhoods.

Notes

1. US Census Bureau, 2010–14 American Community Survey five-year estimates.
2. This report does not assess the broader goal of Forward Cities to be a knowledge resource for the field outside the four participating cities.
3. For more information on the Innovation Index, see “Innovation in America’s Regions,” StatsAmerica, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://www.statsamerica.org/innovation/index.html>. To view the Kauffman Index of Startup Activity, see “Kauffman Index of Startup Activity,” Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://www.kauffman.org/microsites/kauffman-index/reports/startup-activity>. To view the Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs, see “Annual Survey of Entrepreneurs (ASE),” US Census Bureau, accessed November 30, 2016, <http://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/ase.html>

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