



Supporting Emerging Leaders for Community Development

A Study & Action Plan

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September 2026

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Executive Summary

- ▶ Can you make a career out of community development?
- ▶ How do you get from one job to another?
- ▶ In a field with so many small organizations, how do you find growth opportunities beyond one organization?
- ▶ How do you prepare yourself for advancement?
- ▶ What are the training programs? Are there enough of them?
- ▶ Why is it so hard to find top managers or new executive directors, yet up-and-coming people complain they can't get promoted?

This paper stems from questions like these raised in discussions of the Community Opportunity Alliance/Urban Institute survey of the community development field, published in 2023.

Researchers documented 271,000 employees in 6,225 organizations. Nonetheless, newcomers and community development professionals in the middle of their careers, especially people from communities of color, cannot detect a clear pathway to a long career in the field that will offer them advancement and growth. Observers and funders of the field ask “Where is the bench of upcoming leadership?”

What’s wrong with the system that these issues persist? Is there simply not enough training available? Or is something else missing?

Newcomers and community development professionals in the middle of their careers, especially people from communities of color, cannot detect a clear pathway to a long career in the field that will offer them advancement and growth.

Research for this paper began with examining the training programs available on the hypothesis that those dilemmas must be due to inadequacies in these programs. A review of the literature on training and capacity building, examination of over 50 training programs, and conversations with more than three dozen experts in training in the field revealed a surprisingly strong and adequate training infrastructure, albeit with some shortcomings and gaps. The array of programs could be improved but it became apparent that the critical weakness is inadequate career development practices and support for employees in the field to plan a career, navigate a pathway, and make the connection between job demands and advancement opportunities on the one hand and training offerings on the other. Indeed, some crucial information on the field was even missing.

Many of those interviewed expressed an interest in becoming involved in an active network for improving the system.

The investigation pinpointed three missing elements:

- 1 Basic information on categories of jobs in the field** on which individuals could base their career planning and organizations could design their career development programs
- 2 Adequate career development programs** in frontline community development organizations and in the local, state, and national organizations that support them
- 3 Certain specific training and professional development offerings** in an otherwise robust and dynamic set of offerings

Significantly, the research also identified an unrecognized asset in the field that could be used to address the missing elements, namely, a cadre of hundreds of skilled trainers and dozens of managers of training and professional development programs in local and national organizations. Unfortunately, they are working in isolation from one another, often duplicating efforts or struggling to address issues that have already been worked out elsewhere. Fortunately, many of those interviewed expressed an interest in becoming an active network for improving the system and potentially being a catalyst for major improvement in the career development framework and programs in the field.

Since the practices of career development are minimal within the community development field at the moment, this paper describes successful practices and programs from other fields and how those might be applied within our field.

The paper presents, in strategic order, eight specific recommendations for immediate action to address the three missing elements and to capture and build on the potential for a training

and career development network among local, state, and national training platforms. For each recommendation, immediate action is identified for one or more of the several levels of the field: individuals, frontline community development organizations, state and local member organizations, national organizations and intermediaries, and funders, with researchers incorporated into the various levels. It also sketches some longer-term actions to which those immediate steps lead.

Recommendations:

- 1 Establish and maintain a national network of training professionals within the field.**
- 2 Profile jobs and employment opportunities in the field nationwide.**
- 3 Design and disseminate an onboarding program to ground newcomers in the field.**
- 4 Create and disseminate a career planning training module for the field.**
- 5 Boost training and career guidance for mid-level professionals.**
- 6 Expand in-person comprehensive leadership programs for executive directors.**
- 7 Sustain and fund the dynamic training and professional development system.**
- 8 Elevate career development practices throughout the field.**

► Preface

The focus of this study and action plan is not what it started out to be. Our journey, which started out examining training but pivoted to zeroing in on career development, is one that more leaders in the field will need to repeat. Our original pursuit is valuable, but it turned out to be “the right answer to the wrong question.”

Discussions following the sixth Survey of the State of Community-Based Development Organizations by the Urban Institute for the Community Opportunity Alliance, which focused on the years 2019–2021 and was published in 2023, prompted several pressing questions for further study about the survey’s findings and the future of the field. This study was to focus on one. The survey noted that the field is growing and becoming more diverse. The number of organizations, most of them small, continues to expand. As they mature, will there be enough well-prepared leaders to fill the positions they would create? Since there seemed to be many people entering the field, the discussion naturally turned to the question “Is there enough training available in the field to meet the professional development needs of the workforce in community development organizations?”

The community development field can be difficult to define because it encompasses so many different organizations and practices across public, private, and nonprofit organizations. This paper focuses on the definition given by the Community Opportunity Alliance in its introduction to the survey results:

Community development organizations are private, nonprofit, community-based organizations that 1) develop housing, commercial, industrial or community facilities, or 2) support business

development. Their work generally involves projects and programs aimed at improving the lives of lower-income people or the communities they live in. Organizations that provide social services and also do development are included in this survey.

Where appropriate, this paper also refers to and includes the public, private, research, nonprofit, and philanthropic organizations that support those community development organizations.

This paper was commissioned to examine the training available in the field and to determine whether it was adequate, and, if not, to profile the gaps or deficiencies. However, initial reconnaissance and interviews with national leaders and training providers indicated that there probably is a fairly robust training system. When pressed to answer what then was driving their concern, several of those who initially framed this study described a conundrum they regularly face: trying to answer people new to the field, in their initial or second job in it, who ask whether there is a career for them in the field, and, if so, what are the next jobs they can expect to find and how should they prepare themselves for advancement along a career pathway. The framers of the study had no easy answer or materials to which to refer those newcomers.

Exploring that conundrum turned our attention to the basics of career development, the term that most of us would use for the process of charting a career pathway and supporting people in their pursuit of their career in our field. How well understood are the need for and the methods of supporting and retaining emerging leaders in their career growth through a series of jobs from their early employment on through midcareer to senior leadership in the field?

We quickly discovered that in other fields, training and professional development programs are just one element in cultivating a pool of talent and a pipeline of leadership. The other necessary elements we saw in those fields were programs, practices, and tools that help talented individuals plan and advance their careers in the field. What is the state of those practices and supports in community development? Are they adequate? Where are the gaps and challenges? Deficits in career development practices turned out to be a bigger problem in the field than the inadequacies of the training and professional development programs, and became a significant focus of this study and action plan.

The community development organization field has grown and matured to the point where we ought to have better systems for career development. What can we learn from other fields and import, both from the professionals who specialize in career development and who have refined the options and tools that an individual should have; and from employers seeking to retain talented individuals for a long time? What practices, programs, and tools should organizations that serve the field provide or ensure are in place? The terminology and the way those professionals in other fields define a career and have perfected practices for career development is so new to those interviewed for this paper—and quite probably most leaders in the community development organization field—that this paper includes a whole section on it, *A Vision for a Better Future: What Is Career Development?*

► Study Process and Research Questions

These were the steps in the study as they unfolded, or were revised and implemented:

1. Review the initial scope of the paper and research questions.
2. Review the findings and data behind them in the sixth Survey of the State of the Field of Community Based Development Organizations and its companion work, *The Financial Health of Community-Based Development Organizations* (subtitled *Using Internal Revenue Service Tax Data to Assess Sector Health*).
3. Do an initial reconnaissance of training available in the field by online search and initial interviews with national leaders and training providers (see appendixes 4 and 5, *Training Providers in Community Development Investigated for This Paper* and *Training Providers Interviewed for This Paper*).
4. Revise the study scope to include career development; expand research questions (see immediately below).
5. Continue online reconnaissance and interviews with those responsible for training in national, state, and local organizations serving the field about the availability of training and its adequacy and the presence or absence of career development practices in the field.
6. Compose an initial “state of the field” in career development and in training and professional development programs in the field; begin drafting recommendations for action.

7. Review the initial recommendations with a cross-section of leaders in the Community Opportunity Alliance and refine further research questions.
8. Complete online research and the field interviews with training managers.
9. Draft a report of study findings and action recommendations for the field.
10. Test and refine those findings and recommendations with key informants in the training and professional development programs in the field.
11. Finalize the report of the study and action recommendations.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

Initial questions:

1. What training and professional development programs are being offered in the field?
2. How adequately do the current offerings cover relevant content?
3. Is there a prototype comprehensive curriculum against which to measure that coverage?
4. How adequate are current offerings to meet the demand of the workforce and emerging leaders?
5. What are the critical gaps, if any, in the training and development system and what could be done to remedy them?

Additional research questions:

6. What are the essential career development practices for a field like community development and how prevalent are they in the field?
7. What are the deficiencies in those community development practices and what can be done to address them?

As described in the process above, the last two questions turned out to be the most important for recommendations. Therefore, often in this paper they are addressed first.

► A Vision for a Better Future: What Is Career Development?

Discussions and initial fieldwork revealed that the absence of good practices of career development, rather than deficits in training, was the most pressing issue in recruiting, promoting, and retaining talented women and men in the field. Since explicit formal career development practices were either nonexistent or invisible, we needed to look outside the field, particularly in the private sector: What constitutes a career? What is career development?¹

A career is composed of a series of employment opportunities that a person assembles in pursuit of earning a living, at work that aligns with their interests and talents, providing rewarding opportunities for growth and personal development. A career pathway is a person's lifelong endeavor to identify that sequence of jobs and to develop and enhance their knowledge, skills, and experience by taking advantage of every opportunity for progress, from entry-level to the highest position to which one aspires.

A career development program refers to a system of supports that help individuals pursue a career in their field. Appendix 1, "What is Career Development?" lists several typical supports that large companies provide to their employees or that might be available more generally in a field of work. It's also helpful to

describe what the system using those elements might look like in action.

What would success look like if we got it right?

What follows may seem obvious to many because the concepts are simple. So simple, they are easy to forget. The problem is not in conceptualizing but in consistently practicing. The deficit in community development often lies in the fact that the tools that should be readily available are not. The practices are informal and inconsistent. Nonetheless, many people have found rewarding careers in the field and have stayed in it for a long time. But we can do better; we can adopt best practices.

A field, like an organization, has a healthy career development system when it can relatively easily find competent and motivated people for positions throughout the system and when both employees and employers are satisfied with the method of providing advancement, growth, and professional development for people within it, from early in their careers to the top leadership positions. The field would be relatively well-known and attractive to target audiences seeking entry-level positions. There would be ample information on positions within the field—including duties, requirements, and compensation ranges—readily available to those interested in planning a career within the field, regardless of their current position.

Career development would be an integral part of personnel management, integrated into performance reviews and supported by employers who provide both financial resources and time for professional development. Career counseling would be available

¹These descriptions represent a synthesis of common elements I noted in a wide variety of depositories of career development information. I looked at the websites, materials, and conference programs from the National Career Development Association and the national organization Association for Talent Development (formerly the American Society of Training & Development). I explored online examples of career development programs in roughly 10 large companies that were referred to in those materials. I visited and reviewed the collection on career development in the Baltimore Enoch Pratt Free Library, scanning an arbitrary selection of a few dozen of the over a thousand volumes there. I searched the Library of Congress catalog and reviewed materials they had available electronically. I looked at the websites of three major publishers of series on careers.

to employees from competent coaches who are not involved in the direct supervision of the employee. In fields like community development, which is composed of many small organizations, a robust and healthy system would expect and facilitate the movement of talented women and men across organizations and geographies in the field. This is particularly important when a person's current employment, for one reason or another, does not provide timely opportunities for growth and advancement.

Large companies in the field, or the field itself, would offer easily accessible professional development programs that provide recognition or certifications congruent with the competencies required for jobs within it. Everyone who qualifies, especially rising stars within the company or field, would have access to networking opportunities, mentors, and field visits outside of their current employer. There would be a mechanism for identifying those rising stars and shepherding their growth to meet the demands of the field. Emergency succession plans and executive transitions would be used as opportunities to identify "bench strength," those with potential to step into the shoes of leaders ahead of them. Job opportunities would be posted in a way that ensures employees throughout the company/field have ready access to them. The promotion and achievement of certifications would be celebrated openly and rewarded. Employers, stakeholders, and educational institutions in the field would collaborate to enrich the supply of information about the field, its career opportunities, and the professional development requirements for advancement and leadership within it.

Note: Currently, the term most commonly used by organizations and experts focused on career development, training, and professional development for the work they do *is talent development*.

► The State of the Field in Career Development

There are five points to note on the state of the field, each of which is elaborated upon below.

1. **There is not overt and systemic attention to career advancement.**
2. **Critical information on jobs in the field is not available.**
3. **Formal career promotion and career guidance material is outdated or unknown.**
4. **Examples of and precedents for field-wide action do exist.**
5. **A few career hurdles in community development deserve more attention.**

Caveat: The following five-part description is more accurate for the smaller organizations that make up the majority of the field, rather than the larger ones. According to *The Financial Health of Community-Based Development Organizations*, published in 2022 by the Urban Institute, well over half of the organizations in the field have fewer than 20 employees.

1. There is not overt and systemic attention to career advancement.

Anyone familiar with the community development field would recognize that current practice does not measure up to the Vision for a Better Future outlined in the previous section, nor does it utilize the career development programs described in Appendix 1: What Is Career Development, like career counseling, mentorships, job shadowing, formal training programs. The practices and supports are informal, somewhat haphazard, and inconsistent. As deficient as that may be, many of the almost 300,000 employees of the organizations in the Urban Institute survey have been in the field for some time. People are finding their way somehow, on some career path. However, we don't even know how many talented people we lose. Many interviewed for this paper indicated both difficulties in organizations in finding people at critical moments of growth and turnover and complaints from individuals in the field that they were not able to advance.

It is not surprising that the community development field has very little infrastructure or information and practices on career development that would address those difficulties. Mission-driven nonprofits, such as community development organizations, focus on achieving outcomes for social change, often rejecting individual ambition and advancement. Furthermore, 75% of organizations have fewer than 50 employees; organizations with less than 50 employees² in any industry are unlikely even to have a full-time human resource professional, much less a department and a human resource program that might have a career development program. Like any small business, whether for-profit or nonprofit, these organizations

must focus on program production, community outcomes and survival, scrambling on a day-to-day basis with no time to attend to organizational systems or future personnel needs. As organizations mature and grow, they focus on the personnel needs of the organization, filling the next set of job vacancies. Long-term thinking and investments in developing new talent come much later.

Paying attention and building the data, tools, and supports for career development, then, is likely to always depend on field-wide efforts undertaken by local associations and national organizations, as is true in many fields composed of small employers.

The last time there was a concerted effort across the community development field to focus on human capital was 30 years ago and it lasted only a dozen years. The first phase was led by the national organizations and intermediaries in the field at the time, cooperating in the Human Resource Consortium. The second phase was funder-led, based in Living Cities, a collaborative of philanthropic and financial institutions. Those efforts led to the first data on the workforce and human resource practices. They fostered many improvements in salaries, benefits, human resource practices, training, executive transition, and minority leadership advancement. Two projects of that concerted effort were a book on careers in community development by Paul C. Brophy and Alice Shabecoff, as well as a workforce analysis in Cleveland noted in the next section of this paper. Since 2005, however, there has been no notable effort across the field to focus on recruitment, advancement, or retention of talent and leadership. It's time for a resurgence.

² Fifty is frequently cited as the number of employees at which a company hires its first full-time HR professional. See, for example, "Does Your Company Need an HR Department?" Concordia University, July 9, 2020. (downloaded Aug. 9, 2025)

2. Critical information on jobs in the field is not available.

The Sixth National Census of Community-Based Development Organizations, conducted by the Urban Institute for the Community Opportunity Alliance, reported 271,000 employees among the organizations surveyed in the field. A companion analysis³ of the IRS 990 forms of 5,720 organizations documented a similar number. However, we do not have a detailed breakdown of the jobs or compensation of those employees. Anyone considering a career in community development would want to know what the particular jobs might be in her future. What are they? How many are there in each category of employment? What are the qualifications these jobs require? What do they pay? Where are they? In what types of organizations?

We do, however, have some past work that could help us build a database of current information in the workforce. As one effort of the Human Resource Consortium, Paul Brophy and Alice Shabecoff did formidable work funded by the National Congress for Community Economic Development in the late 1990s to provide a framework for understanding jobs in the field and an outline for career planning. Their book, *A Guide to Careers in Community Development* (2001),⁴ included not only jobs in community-based development organizations and intermediaries but also related positions in banks and financial institutions, research, technical assistance providers, foundations, and the public sector. They offered generic job descriptions for 62 jobs in the field across those sectors. They provided

some rough information on compensation and qualifications for each position, but no projection of the number or locations of those employment opportunities.

It is also possible to move beyond generic descriptions to more specific, up-to-date information about a cross-section of the entire industry. The earlier Human Resource Consortium in the field pooled resources from its members to commission a study of compensation across job categories by a national benefits consultant. Also, in the early 1990s, the Development Training Institute worked with Neighborhood Progress, the local intermediary in Cleveland, Ohio, to get every CDC there to report on every job in its workforce. Similar activity today could create a data-based profile of all the typical jobs available in frontline organizations.

3. Formal career promotion and career guidance material is outdated and unknown.

Every field utilizes job information as the fundamental basis for promoting careers in the field, counseling individuals in developing a career plan, and formalizing professional development programs to help individuals acquire the competencies required for those jobs. Every college, many high schools, and every public library has a career section replete with books on “careers in...”—fill in the blank with the name of a specific field: aerospace, construction, early childhood education, biomedical work, law, health care, adult basic education, transportation, engineering, architecture, and so on.

³ *The Financial Health of Community-Based Development Organizations*, 2022

⁴ Paul C. Brophy and Alice Shabecoff, *A Guide to Careers in Community Development* (Washington: Island Press, 2001)

⁵ Searching under “careers in” <https://search.catalog.loc.gov/search?option=keyword&pageNumber=1&query=careers%20in%20&recordsPerPage=25>

The Library of Congress, with the simplest search, notes over 60,000 books on careers⁵, of which there is only one on community development careers⁶, the *Guide to Careers in Community Development*, noted above. Most employment databases have nothing. The Department of Labor's listing of occupations⁷ does not include community development. Three well-known publishers of career series (Ferguson, Rosen, and VGM) boast hundreds of books, none of which list community development.

In *A Guide to Careers in Community Development*, the authors sketch some typical pathways, both within each sector of the field and by crossing sectors, as well as "going out on your own." They also provide intimate profiles of 28 workers at different levels in different sectors that exemplify the diversity of jobs and career paths in community development. For newcomers, they offer a brief background on the definition and history of the field, and outline the variety of community-based, public, and private organizations in each sector along with their funding and training organizations. They include profiles of 10 typical organizations/employers. Several sections provide some career guidance and tools.

The book may be dated, but it is the only career guidance publication we have in the field, and it could be used as a template for further elaboration, especially if it were available in a digital, internet-searchable format. Unfortunately, of the many dozens of people interviewed for this study, only a handful were aware of the book's existence. None had a copy of it.

4. Examples of and precedents for field-wide action do exist.

Fortunately, there are well-established practices of career development within individual companies and across various industries in other fields that we can adapt for community development. NeighborWorks demonstrated during the Human Resource Consortium era how to import best practices in executive transition from the private sector into the community development field. Today, those practices are common in our field, and that initial effort spawned several providers of executive transition planning and greater numbers of interim executive directors serving not just community development but the entire nonprofit sector.

Here are some exemplary programs in allied industries that could serve as a guide.

The Housing Partnership Network (HPN) discovered a remarkably successful program in the commercial real estate industry that was attracting Black senior undergraduates to that field, where they had been underrepresented. The program operates primarily online and through social media with a short internship for each participant at a commercial real estate company. HPN recruited the same operator, Project Destined⁸, to create an exciting internship program to attract the same audience to affordable housing. They are on the third repetition of their prototype.

Tech hubs in hundreds of cities across the country incubate technology startups, all of which are, by definition, small companies, as are most community development organizations. The Chicago tech hub

⁶ An advanced search seeking both careers and the exact phrase community development yields 8 titles total: <https://search.catalog.loc.gov/search?option=advanced&pageNumber=1&query=keyword%20containsAll%20%22careers%22%20AND%20keyword%20exactPhrase%20%22community%20development%22&recordsPerPage=25>

⁷ https://www.bls.gov/oes/2023/may/oes_stru.htm

⁸ <https://projectdestined.com/housing-partnership-network-next-gen-talent-academy>

recruited a successful tech information entrepreneur to create a platform, Built In⁹, for pairing their small businesses with the pool of professional talent looking for jobs in the technology industry. Today, Built In is nationwide, with over 100,000 tech company members, and at any given time lists over 15,000 jobs. Built In has become the go-to place for tech businesses to network and for technology professionals to find employment. Even the big tech companies are now members.

Recognizing that commercial real estate was a “man’s world,” women professionals in the industry in the 1980s began informal support groups in several cities across the United States. The CREW¹⁰ network was founded in 1989 to bring those groups together and to expand the recruitment and support of women for commercial real estate. Today, there are 15,000 CREW members in 85 markets committed to accelerating success for all women in the global commercial real estate industry. CREW promotes careers in commercial real estate to women in high school and higher education, as well as broadly in the workforce. Among its activities is a yearlong leadership certificate program, which includes leadership development, industry training, and mentoring.

Some valuable programs in the community development field could be scaled up or otherwise applied throughout the field. Here are just a few examples: Local Initiatives Support Corporation, known as LISC, is now replicating the Milwaukee ACRE¹¹ (Associates in Commercial Real Estate)

program to recruit and prepare women and men from communities of color for careers in commercial real estate, particularly in commercial real estate that transforms marginal communities. Begun by local universities, ACRE combines a 26-week in-person multidisciplinary academic program with real-world experience. In its first two decades, it graduated over 300 people.

Enterprise Communities in the mid-Atlantic has a program focused on building the skills of private, small, Black-owned development companies, as well as a peer learning program for emerging and experienced professionals in affordable housing organizations. The Minnesota Consortium of Community Developers has an Emerging Leaders Development Program¹² that combines training, peer learning, and mentorships. The National Association for Latino Community Asset Builders (NALCAB) sponsors the Pete Garcia Fellowship¹³, an annual national program for emerging Latino leaders. The Community in the Capital¹⁴ program of National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development (National CAPACD) develops public policy advocacy skills for emerging leaders in their network.

⁹ <https://builtin.com>

¹⁰ <https://crewnetwork.org>

¹¹ <https://www.lisc.org/milwaukee/our-work/acre>

¹² <https://mccdmn.org/elcd/>

¹³ <https://nalcab.org/2025/04/02/capacity>

¹⁴ <https://www.nationalcapacd.org/community-in-the-capital/>

5. A few career hurdles in community development deserve more attention.

While there has been no extensive analysis of career paths in the community development field, anecdotal evidence and comments from those interviewed for this study suggest that there are currently three particular “pinch points” in the career development pipeline: getting the second or third job, moving at mid-career to higher management positions, and finding new executive directors. At the moment, there are more questions than answers about each of these.

There seem to be extensive mechanisms now for recruiting newcomers to the field, including higher education programs, internships, AmeriCorps, and volunteering. Some entry-level jobs have low qualification thresholds, relying more on the personality, commitment, and interest of each applicant. Philadelphia, for example, has an extensive publicly supported program of neighborhood “commercial corridor managers” who often are “first-timers” to the field, with little experience, who stay for a short time and move on to another job, often within the community development field. Recognizing that such churning has negative effects on program outcomes, the Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations, with city support, has created an onboarding program for new hires¹⁵.

The three pinch points are

The second/third job dilemma: Even though frontline community organizations are small, they often have enough job openings to allow a move from an initial job to a second one within the field.

But what happens to aspiring careerists next, when the small organization doesn’t offer many more opportunities? Suppose one learns about other lines of business/programs within the community development field other than those within one’s current organization. How does one find openings in different organizations in a timely manner? Without information on the range of jobs and the qualifications required for them, how does one plan a professional development program to continue to more challenging and rewarding employment and stay in the field?

Moving midcareer to higher management: At mid-career, professionals tend to seek opportunities to move up significantly in positions of influence and responsibility within a program specialization or to move into the administration and leadership of organizations. Apparently, there are precious few guideposts and program supports for those who want to move from mid-level administration to higher management responsibility. Larger organizations may offer a clear progression of jobs that lead to that growth, but most people will have to move across organizations, to a new geography, or across sectors.

Many mid-career professionals are drawn to better salaries and the prospects of long-term employment in allied organizations in the private and public sectors. For example, interviewees for this study noted a particular talent drain of experienced housing counselors moving to private financial institutions, and successful real estate project developers moving to banks, private developers, entrepreneurial opportunities, and the public sector. Given the large number of people in the field—300,000 employees in the organizations surveyed by the Urban Institute—there must be a significant population at mid-career

¹⁵ <https://pacdc.org/commercial-corridors>

looking for career development support to plan and reach their future. Some affiliates of the Community Opportunity Alliance have launched peer support groups or small programs of training, networking, and mentoring for people in the middle, but these are few and far between.

Filling executive director positions: Finally, there is the regularly reported difficulty of finding new executive directors, particularly those who will be succeeding a founding, highly entrepreneurial, or long-term executive. There seems to be less anxiety in discussions of this issue than there was 20 years ago, before the advent of more professional succession planning and some of the current leadership programs; and when all industries were facing a purportedly massive impending baby boomer retirement crisis. That retirement surge was ameliorated as many baby boomers continued to work into their later years and turnover was stretched out. Nonetheless, recruitment for these positions remains challenging. At the same time, talented women and men from communities of color report difficulty in identifying leadership enhancement mechanisms that will prepare them to move up in the field into those positions.

All the evidence in the study of these pinch points is anecdotal and secondhand, reported by knowledgeable observers in local and national organizations who are familiar with frontline organizations and training programs for individuals affected by all three pinch points. Leaders of the field who would address the deficits in career development must uncover more data to refine the description of these issues, both qualitatively and quantitatively.

► The State of the Field for Professional Development Support

What follows are four main aspects of the field, each of which is expanded on below.

1. The training infrastructure is robust and dynamic—and disconnected.
 - a. There is a surprisingly large number of permanent, experienced training managers working in the field, mostly in isolation from other trainers.
 - b. The number of training platforms and experienced trainers is adequate to build on.
 - c. Funding is sustainable but never enough.
2. The existing collection of training curriculum is ample and growing, although gaps exist.
 - a. The body of training curriculum is vast.
 - b. NeighborWorks is the respected training giant.
 - c. Gaps exist for skill training, grounding in the field, career planning, and leadership development.
 - d. Programs lag for middle managers and senior leaders.
 - e. The drivers of training are narrowly focused.
3. Training though widely available is still limited, but delivery is highly professional.
 - a. Accessibility and coverage are still limited.
 - b. Trainings and evaluations employ best practices and outcome data is solid.

- c. There's a major trend toward courses rather than programs and virtual delivery rather than in-person.
 - d. There has been some increase in certifications.
4. Some training efforts are broadening the types of organizations in the field.

1. The training infrastructure is robust and dynamic—and disconnected.

- a. There are a surprisingly large number of permanent, experienced training managers working in the field, mostly in isolation from other trainers.

There is now a significant cadre of professionals devoted to training and capacity building employed by national organizations and intermediaries and among local and state associations. At least 20 members of the Community Opportunity Alliance and most of the national organizations have regular training programs and dedicated staff. This group represents a dynamic and innovative resource within the field. Unfortunately, most of these professionals are unaware of their counterparts in other organizations or even of the existence of other training programs. They tend not to be the staff who attend national meetings that are more likely populated by CEOs, policy directors, and fundraisers. Most of these training professionals have years of experience, and many were recruited by their employers for their training experience outside of the field. They are applying to community development the training and career development resources that have been successful in other fields.

- b. The number of training platforms and experienced trainers is adequate to build on.

The number of training programs, the diversity of sponsors, the variety of modes of delivery, and the geographic spread of delivery sites, supplemented by electronic availability, is impressive. It is also virtually invisible since there is no central or national organization tracking or cataloging all of the training available in the field. This study, however, was able to identify training programs located in or targeted to all but a handful of states. Many programs are available specifically for affordable housing, the most common program area among community development organizations. Is there enough training for all of the organizations and employees in all of the states? Decidedly, there needs to be more training, but the network of providers and training platforms does exist, it is expanding, and it could be built up to more completely serve the growth of community development.

In addition, seasoned trainers seem to be readily available for existing and potentially expanding programs. Most of the programs offered by Community Opportunity Alliance members and by national organizations and intermediaries are delivered by outside trainers on contract to the organization. NeighborWorks alone has 150 trainers under contract. When asked about barriers to the expansion of training, no one indicated the lack of skilled trainers as one of the constraints.

Sometimes programs offered by an organization in the field are a joint venture with a local university or a training institute. This study did not extend to academic programs but surveys in the early 2000s identified over 100 academic programs related to community development.

c. Funding is sustainable but never enough.

Most of the training programs identified in the research for this paper are funded from core operating budgets of the sponsoring organization, whether those are national organizations or state and local associations of community development organizations. While this imposes some limitations as the training departments must compete with other elements of the sponsor organization for annual budget allocation, core operating budgets create a more sustainable long-term funding base than special training grants of limited duration and focus.

Occasionally, particularly among the national organizations and intermediaries, there is targeted funding from a particular source. That funding is usually program-specific, e.g., focused on HUD programs, or limited to a particular audience, like faith-based organizations or emerging leaders from communities of color. The largest amount of funding for training and broader programs of capacity building¹⁶ comes from national and local government sources. The most common nongovernmental program funding is from financial institutions for real estate development and financial packaging.

Almost all of the funding provided by members of the Community Opportunity Alliance comes from their own core budgets, as does funding for the NeighborWorks training program. Core support allows the sponsor of a program to be more focused on training objectives and outcomes for individual participants, free of the limits that usually come with dedicated funding; for example, limiting residential real estate training only to HUD financing or Low-Income Housing Tax Credits. Potentially, that

freedom could be an asset in developing more career development awareness and programs on grounding within the field.

Can one determine whether the range of training offerings available in the field is adequate to meet the career development and workforce needs of the field? Since there is so little information about the workforce in the field, the answer is, at best, a guess. But given that the field may have 300,000 or more employees, the programs identified by this study could not be serving more than a small percentage of them. It is also impossible to quantify whether the training available meets the needs of the number of employees in each workforce category within the field because there is no position-specific data for employees in the field, only the gross numbers of employees. Moreover, for specific skill sets, there are many training programs offered by organizations outside of the field that are applicable. Our survey, therefore, was limited to qualitative information in terms of coverage of topics, geographic dispersal, and accessibility.

Nonetheless, everyone interviewed for this paper would like to see more resources to provide broader and more frequent training to better meet constituent needs. They expressed, also, the concern that those who fund their organization do not sufficiently appreciate the value of training. Many people think that the proficiency one gains on the job is sufficient; they overlook that formal training programs can accelerate the learning curve, reduce the cost to the organization of inexperienced people learning on the job, and prepare people not yet in a particular job to assume the responsibilities of that job when they get there.

¹⁶ As indicated in Appendix 3, A Capacity-Building Framework, organizational capacity building includes all those activities to improve an organization's ability to achieve its mission and sustain the organization. Training is one tool in that context.

2. The collection of training curriculum is ample and growing, although gaps exist.

a. The body of training curriculum is vast.

There are literally over 1,000 courses available among the training providers in the field. There are multiple courses available in every important curriculum category (see Appendix 2, A Prototype Comprehensive Curriculum for Community Development). Gaps identified in the past in programmatic skills (in financial packaging and housing counseling, for example) have now been addressed through a curriculum that includes a series of courses and leads to certifications in those fields. New gaps (in asset management and community engagement, for example) are being met with the development of new training, not just courses but on-site consulting and other organizational supports. Special issues like racial equity and the recruitment and advancement of people from communities of color are being tackled by programs introduced in the last few years.

Does the collection of existing courses cover all of the topics needed to advance career development for everyone? That assessment requires some comprehensive curriculum against which to measure current collection. As has been well documented by the surveys of the Community Opportunity Alliance and others, the field has become more diverse, both in the multiple programs/lines of business being conducted by any single organization and in the variety of types of organizations. This complexity makes it more difficult to compose a comprehensive curriculum for the field. When the field's definition was limited to community economic development,

there were comprehensive curricula in several yearlong leadership programs, and even textbooks reflecting that content. A fairly inclusive curriculum is still reflected in those yearlong programs that exist in the field, like the Pete Garcia Fellowship of NALCAB.¹⁷ The Prototype Comprehensive Curriculum in Appendix 2 draws on those. Measured against that prototype, the collection of courses in the field has some offerings in almost every category. Some notable gaps are described below.

There is, at this time, no field-wide compilation of training programs offered by all the organizations. Except for NeighborWorks, most of those currently offering training do not keep a publicly available list of training that is embedded in other programs or capacity building, or of training offerings in the past that could be resurrected or employed again or used by other organizations now interested in those topics.

As noted above in Section D, The State of the Field in Career Development, even if there were such a compilation, there is no navigation tool that would help an employee to identify a set of trainings across the compilation that would enable them to identify the programs aligned with their career advancement plan.

b. NeighborWorks is the respected training giant.

Of all the organizations in the community development field, NeighborWorks¹⁸ is by far the largest provider of training with the biggest library of topics (over 400 courses in 10 categories) and the most considerable cadre of vetted trainers for those topics (150 under contract). Its training is well known and almost everyone interviewed for this paper refers individual practitioners to its offerings. Moreover,

¹⁷ NALCAB Training & Leadership Development Team at fellowship@nalcab.org

¹⁸ www.neighborworks.org/Training-Services

it has a disciplined method of identifying topics based on scans of the needs of the field; regular organizational assessments of its 250 frontline member organizations; emerging topics from NeighborWorks and other national organizations' program work and conferences, culled by members of a curriculum team; and evaluation and feedback from current offerings in a constant self-improvement loop. Twenty-five to 30 courses are in development every year.

In addition to individual courses, NeighborWorks offers a number of structured series of courses leading to certifications. These certifications are based on competency analyses for specific positions within the field. NeighborWorks employs a strict curriculum planning process, with primary objectives for each course tied to three to five core competencies in knowledge, skills, and proficiency. NeighborWorks also offers its 16-month Achieving Excellence¹⁹ program for senior leadership, which is a joint program with the Harvard Kennedy School.

For many years, NeighborWorks delivered training primarily through weeklong in-person institutes. Currently, it annually sponsors two in-person institutes and one online institute, each with 70 to 100 courses. It also offers multiple virtual training courses in various formats: self-guided learning, classes simultaneous with a trainer and other participants (synchronous); hybrids of in-person and online, etc. A significant portion of its online training is now free. Unlike many other organizations in the field, NeighborWorks has a consistent schedule of training offerings. Its full course catalog is available on its website, along with detailed schedules for upcoming training sessions.

NeighborWorks' training model is distinguished by its ability to track outcomes and collect informal longitudinal data on participants, particularly those within its 250 member organizations. This approach ensures that its training programs are both relevant and impactful.

c. Gaps exist for skill training, grounding in the field, career planning, and leadership development.

All of the training providers interviewed for this project noted topics and new needs that are not currently being addressed. All of them have mechanisms for surveying their target audiences, identifying new topics, designing new training, and refining prototypes for new courses. Nonetheless, this dynamic process seems to consistently overlook four important areas: skill training, grounding in the field, career planning, and leadership development.

Skill training: It is useful in training to distinguish between those programs whose objectives and design are to build knowledge and those designed to enhance skills. Knowledge includes imparting information, deepening understanding of concepts, encouraging new applications of concepts, or modifying and improving them. Skill refers to the level of proficiency in doing a particular thing. For example, a knowledge program could introduce participants to the concept of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, help them understand the types of financing behind it, and imagine improvements in its efficacy. A skill program would use case study exercises, simulations, and role-playing in which participants design an affordable housing project, negotiate the financing, and manage the implementation of property acquisition, building

¹⁹ <https://www.neighborworks.org/Training-Services/Nonprofit-Leadership/Executive-Leadership>

design, construction, rent up, and management of such a project.

Since many people in community development only had on-the-job training (or more literally an on-the-job job), it might be difficult to imagine the gains from a skill-oriented program beyond just basic knowledge transfer. A person can learn skills that are not presently part of their job, train to prepare themselves for a subsequent job which requires as a threshold qualification “demonstrated skill.” Skills that one is currently using on the job can also be improved in a training setting in ways that are not possible on the job site.

One can accelerate skill proficiency over what could be learned just doing it on the job. One can also learn the skills for a subsequent job to which one aspires. For example, someone who is currently involved in helping market affordable houses created by a community development corporation might aspire to become a project developer for the CDC. To do that they must not only understand the development process but also need to learn the skills of financial packaging, which could be acquired through case studies, simulations, exercises, team problem-solving, shadowing a financial packager, etc. They would need to learn not just the theory of multilayer affordable housing financing (knowledge), but to practice applying the theory (skill), which could be done through simulations in which they had to create alternate financing scenarios for a new affordable housing project or practice negotiating financing with different kinds of partners or people role-playing those partners.

While the list of course offerings in the field is impressive, the curriculum tends to be skewed toward knowledge goals rather than skill development. Moreover, the knowledge development programs, particularly among Community Opportunity Alliance

members, are usually geared to information transfer/presentations rather than higher levels of knowledge proficiency development, like demonstrating the understanding of concepts or applying concepts. Predominant among the virtual libraries offered by many Community Opportunity Alliance members and national organizations are presentations of information and panels recorded at conferences, or information sessions on new government programs.

Grounding in the basic elements of the community development field: Research for this paper noted only a few offerings covering the history, values, and breadth of the field beyond occasional introductions to community economic development or “Community Development 101.” These offerings tend to be presented only episodically, at member conferences. Interestingly, not even the members of the Community Opportunity Alliance present the Alliance’s national survey or its implications for careers to their members.

Successful leadership programs for executive directors in the past (e.g., NeighborWorks, Development Training Institute) and NALCAB’s current Pete Garcia Fellowship program had segments grounding participants in the field, most often including the history and evolution of the community development field; the values and social change movements driving the evolution of the field; testimony from successful community developers, mostly CEOs of well known, accomplished organizations; and some exposure to the diversity of organizations and the size of the field. Such content is virtually absent among the current offerings by member organizations of the Community Opportunity Alliance and by national organizations, although when asked about it, those interviewed for this paper often recognized the need for such a regular offering for newcomers to the field. As the

organizations and the programs being conducted in the field have become more diverse, it becomes even more important to develop a series of programs that ground newcomers and the staff at every level in the commonalities of the field.

Planning your career in community development:

Almost none of the managers of those programs interviewed for this paper said they include any career orientation, presentation of the possible jobs at different levels, or description of the types of organizations in the field in their offerings. NeighborWorks has nothing along those lines in its catalog of 400-plus courses.

Surprisingly, this survey of training programs available in the field uncovered only one provider offering an orientation to careers. Ann Silverman, who designed that program for the Boston LISC AmeriCorps²⁰ and co-teaches it regularly through the Mel King Institute, described the content as “really quite basic: What are the jobs? What are your interests and skills? What skills and experience do you need to build? How do you market yourself? Where do you look for jobs? We just spoke about how to build more networking about jobs in CD and next steps.” That model could serve as a prototype for a course in other training platforms.

Leadership development: Within programs whose objectives are skill development, most focus on techniques in program implementation or organization management and administration. Only a few focus on the leadership skills required of CEOs as distinct from organization management and administration skills.

All fields distinguish between and emphasize both

management and leadership for top executives²¹. Management and administration primarily involve executing plans, maintaining order, and optimizing resources to achieve organizational goals. Managers focus on the “how”—delegating tasks, overseeing operations, ensuring compliance, and refining processes for efficiency. Leadership, however, emphasizes the “why” and “what”—setting a clear vision, inspiring teams, fostering innovation, and navigating change to propel the organization forward. Leadership is about vision, strategy and direction; management is about implementation.

Management training focuses on equipping individuals with the skills and knowledge to effectively procure funding and coordinate resources, design and oversee production or program processes, and direct people within an existing organizational framework. It centers on developing expertise in planning, organizing, directing, and controlling activities to achieve organizational goals. It includes technical and procedural aspects like data analysis, risk management, human resource management and workplace technology. Leadership development, on the other hand, aims to cultivate broader skills and a mindset focused on inspiring and motivating individuals toward a shared vision and on driving transformational change within an organization. This involves fostering skills like strategic thinking, communication, emotional intelligence, adaptability, and the ability to influence and engage teams to achieve long-term success, potentially evolving organizational culture over time. Leaders are more concerned with creating new visions, empowering employees, and navigating dynamic environments. This is precisely where, for example, leadership

²⁰ <https://www.melkinginstitute.org/programs/professional-education>

²¹ See, for example, how the Harvard Business School makes this distinction: <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/leadership-vs-management>

training for community development would delve into the history and values of the field, and apply the key lessons drawn from them to the current challenges in community development.

Executives in community development organizations are also called to provide leadership that transcends the organization, mobilizing community engagement and sometimes being a voice for the community; identifying and marshaling the power to affect public policy and changes in government programs that reflect the direction of the community; cultivating partnerships with mainstream private businesses outside of the community that may have long abandoned the community as a place to invest in or do business in. There are also unique leadership challenges in community development, like being a change agent to address the barriers of racial discrimination and institutional disinvestment within mainstream institutions that are the necessary partners of community development organizations, without losing touch with or commitment to the community of those who are the victims of mainstream racism and inequity.

Fortunately, there are some leadership training elements in the NeighborWorks catalog, and some of the offerings of a few of the Community Opportunity Alliance affiliates, like the Mel King Institute in Boston, and NALCAB's Pete Garcia Fellowship program. Somewhat prevalent also are programs that fall in the curriculum category of strategy for neighborhoods and techniques of community engagement, client empowerment, board development. But these are the exceptions.

d. Programs lag for middle managers and senior leaders.

With respect to the levels of employees in an organization, there seems to be a plethora of programs directed to **entry-level** professionals, most especially in specific program techniques. For example, very common are programs in housing counseling and affordable housing development. An increasing number of programs are directed to attracting young people from communities of color to the field, such as two programs described earlier in this paper: the Milwaukee ACRE Program; and the Housing Partnership Network's work with Project Destined.

However, **mid-level professionals** in community development seeking to advance to higher level management within the field are left to cobble together some collection of courses they judge will help them build a career. Ann Silverman, in her survey²² of 50 programs, observed that while there are fellowship programs for senior-level community developers, the absence of mid-level training and advancement programs remains a significant deficit. Only a few training providers explicitly announce they are addressing this issue. NeighborWorks certifications could be seen as one program directed to this level. The Pete Garcia Fellowship program is a more comprehensive and integrated curriculum for rising talent in the mid-level space. The Minnesota Consortium of Community Developers annually sponsors an Emerging Leaders in Community Development program²³ combining professional development, networking, and mentorship. Several affiliates of the Community Opportunity Alliance also offer programs of peer learning, networking, and mentorship to emerging leaders. But these are few

²² <https://www.neighborworks.org/research/recruiting-developing-leadership-in-community-development-key-ingredients-for-success>

²³ <https://mccdmn.org/elcd/>

and far between. Just estimate how many aspiring leaders there are at mid-career in the almost 6,000 organizations represented in the Community Opportunity Alliance/Urban Institute survey.

While there have been several long-term programs for **executive directors** in the past, there appear to be none currently operating. Many of those programs, such as the NeighborWorks program for new executive directors of Neighborhood Housing Services organizations or the Development Training Institute's national program for executive directors of community development corporations, ended some time ago. Some programs noted by earlier studies, like that of Ann Silverman, did not return after COVID. Even if all were still operating, they would only have addressed a small percentage of even just the new executive directors every year. It is likely, as indicated by past community development studies and general surveys of the nonprofit field, that 10 to 20% of executive directors are replaced every year²⁴. That could be 500 to 1,000 new executive directors just in the cohort study by the Urban Institute for the Community Opportunity Alliance among organizations that have any staff.

Aside from those at mid career moving into higher management and new executive directors, there is also a leadership development issue for other long-term professionals in community development who do not choose administration but become more expert in the particular program specialty they have within the community development field. While those dedicated to their program specialization have the opportunity for advanced degrees within their specialty, there are still particular challenges in

community development that could be addressed through special training. For example, multiple specializations need to be interwoven in service of a community-driven neighborhood revitalization/antipoverty strategy. Professionals in programs focused on people need to understand the strategy of place; those focused on revitalizing of place need a deeper understanding and relationship to programs of education, workforce, youth development, and family resilience. Moreover, rising experts in community development specialties are also called on to play leadership roles in the community similar to those challenges faced by the organization's executive outlined above in the curriculum gaps section on leadership.

e. The drivers of training are narrowly focused.

From where does the impetus come for the development of new training or the expansion or repetition of previous training programs? Except for NeighborWorks, which has a curriculum committee and mechanisms for drawing input from the field of frontline organizations, most training is driven by membership needs, new program deployment, and special priorities within the private funding community. National intermediaries also prioritize capacity building based on assessments of organizational or program weaknesses in their grantee or client population. There's a trend to embed training within a larger strategy of organizational development, one organization at a time. Few are operating from a comprehensive curriculum of the knowledge, skills, and values needed for careers in the field.

²⁴ Surveys of executive director tenure vary widely from an estimate of 3.5–4 by CompassPoint <https://www.compasspoint.org/board-cafe/hiring-new-executive-director>; to 13 years by the nonprofit Times https://thenonprofittimes.com/npt_articles/average-ceo-tenure-just-sort-of-13-years/. More experts cite the lower numbers, around 5 years, than the higher ones. It may be that a small number of organizations with fairly long-serving executive directors, especially those that are founders, skew the numbers.

Community Opportunity Alliance members usually include topics at conferences in response to formal or informal membership surveys or the deployment of new program funding, often the result of successful policy efforts by the association itself. These sessions may be recorded so as to be available virtually, but they are often not repeated. Managers have less opportunity to design programs to help participants acquire a specialized body of knowledge and skill based on job analysis or a comprehensive curriculum.

3. Training though widely available is still limited, but delivery is highly professional.

a. Accessibility and coverage are still limited.

Despite the breadth of the curriculum and the availability of some training nationally, and in virtually every state, access can be restricted and the number of those served is still small. Members of the Community Opportunity Alliance, for example, make their programs available only to their members or other stakeholders in the geography they serve. LISC, Enterprise, and NeighborWorks offer multiple programs through their local offices available only to those in the geography of those offices and, in some cases, only available to the organizations they directly serve. For example, the California Development Training Institute (HDTI)²⁵ of the Los Angeles office of LISC and Enterprise's peer learning are targeted to organizations affiliated with those intermediaries in a specific geography. The Pete Garcia Fellowship, while national, is targeted to emerging Latino leaders. As noted in an earlier section, other training programs are tied to specific

funding or programmatic activity and are limited to organizations funded or invited by the sponsor who are using that funding or program activity.

There does not seem to be experience testing whether a community development practitioner from an organization outside of a targeted geography would be accepted if they learned of the program and asked to be included. Nor do those sponsoring electronic material track where their users are located geographically. Accessing any programs outside of one's locale or current network also would require more widespread knowledge of the programs available nationally and would probably be constrained by the availability of funding for travel and lodging if that were necessary. However, there are many places where funders and intermediaries provide scholarships to defray such costs (in most cases, the scholarships are currently being used to attend programs of NeighborWorks or Grow America²⁶).

The total capacity of all in-person programs identified in this study would at best be in the low thousands, serving a workforce in the hundreds of thousands. It is possible that the larger organizations in the field are big enough to offer internal professional development programs, but there is no data available on that. If they do, that would dramatically increase the estimate of training capacity for the system at large. (The Urban Institute in its 2022 report, *The Financial Health of Community-Based Development Organizations*, noted that the largest quartile, measured by total expenses, had 1,430 organizations, with an average of 131 employees each).

Coverage alone is not a measure. Most of the organizations list conference sessions, including

²⁵ <https://www.lisc.org/los-angeles/what-we-do/affordable-housing/california-housing-development-training-institute-hdti/>

²⁶ <https://growamerica.org/training-and-professional-education/>

presentations and panels, as training. Considered as training, these are at best narrow presentations of information and insight with limited discipline about training objectives and slim data on the impact on audience members. A great deal of the electronic library available online is simply recordings of these events.

b. Trainings and evaluations employ best practices and outcome data is solid.

The same is not true for formal programs that are not simply conference presentations. All of the organizations with professional staff dedicated to the design and management of ongoing training programs or sets of courses—and many of those conducted under contract by training consultants—employ best practices of training, including detailed training plans with objectives and methods of evaluation. Those with repeated programs usually have some mechanism of peer review by other training professionals.

All of the training providers investigated for this paper collect participant feedback on the quality of the training experience. Many also have participants identify, at the conclusion of the training and sometimes subsequently, successful application (and the impact of that application) of the knowledge, skills, and values cultivated through the courses. Those that offer multi-session programs, especially those with in-person, multi-month programs, have formal evaluations. Many training providers offer collections of courses in the form of an “institute” or program. These often conduct formal evaluations of the performance and the impact of their institute.

Funders who are clear about their goals and the context for funding training obtain ample

demonstration of outcomes and impact. They recognize, as many do not, that training can be funded for many different purposes, each with its own outcomes and data. Sometimes training is for individual growth, learning, and advancement of participants: the outcomes are the educational achievement level. Sometimes it’s part of a capacity-building effort in the grantee organization: the outcomes are at the organizational level. Sometimes it’s part of building the field locally or nationally: the outcomes are above the organizational level, including impact on the credibility of the field with external stakeholders or a more sustainable institutionalization. That external stakeholder might even be the governing structure of the funding organization itself. Organizations with external funding specifically for training and capacity-building programs report to their external funders not only on the accomplishment of internal training objectives but also on the accomplishment and impact of contextual goals of the program that are spelled out in the funding agreements. Funders who have been clear have been getting the feedback they need to justify their investment.

c. There’s a major trend toward courses rather than programs, and virtual delivery rather than in-person.

There has been a notable shift, especially post-COVID, away from in-person programs. Just as COVID has disrupted in-person interaction across all industries, it has had a particularly severe impact on training programs. All organizations interviewed for this paper reported a decline in in-person training programs and resistance to their revival among people who might be served by them. Half of the “key ingredients for participant success” identified by Silverman (below), and echoed by many managers of such programs interviewed for this paper, depend on

in-person connection among a cohort of trainees.

An extensive study of 50 programs in the field by Ann Silverman (2021)²⁷ identified “key ingredients for participant success”:

- ▶ engagement with experienced coaches and mentors
- ▶ learning with a cohort of peers
- ▶ ongoing networking with colleagues and program alumni
- ▶ a focus on individual growth and development
- ▶ implementation of strategic action and organizational change
- ▶ access to sufficient resources, including time and money, to participate in the more extensive programs

Those interviewed cited two factors for the preference of electronic delivery versus in-person: the increase in work pressures on community development organizations after COVID, including the increase in lines of business, and a general preference for the convenience of virtual interaction.

A further shift in virtual programming toward asynchronous virtual courses (i.e., those that are delivered to the individual user at their own timing without anyone else being simultaneously engaged) may make training more widely available for individuals but undermine the networking and leadership development that comes from participating in a learning cohort. Some organizations in community development are creating electronic cohorts for peer learning and networking. Some cohort networks are supplemental to in-person

meetings, but others are freestanding professional development experiences.

Simultaneously with the trend toward electronic delivery, and as a partial result of that, there seem to be fewer programs with multi-topic or comprehensive curriculum and multiple meetings. Unfortunately, this trend, not limited to the community development field, is ignoring the often-repeated data that one-time learning opportunities have always been shown to have less permanent gains than learning that extends over multiple sessions. It also leads to a fragmentation of the curriculum into separate topics or skills that in practice need to be integrated.

d. There has been some increase in certifications.

In response to the trend toward fragmentation into short-term, narrow topic courses just noted, however, there has been growth in certifications that require completion of a series of individual courses. The most common of these have been in housing counseling certification and real estate financing certification. Certifications give those who complete them something to present to current or future employers for advancement. Trainers aware of or even collaborating in a series can help participants integrate content. Certifications are increasingly popular with employees. One provider even noted that the use of social media among young people, particularly on platforms like LinkedIn, amplifies the desire for certifications that can be posted in one’s profile or shared with one’s social network. That provider relies on such postings as the major method of recruitment for his programs, noting that young people are less likely to go to job-listing boards or training sites and more likely to look for experiences

²⁵ <https://www.neighborworks.org/research/recruiting-developing-leadership-in-community-development-key-ingredients-for-success>

that have a buzz in their particular social network. The director of curriculum for NeighborWorks has been considering fragmenting some of their certifications into mini-certifications to respond to the pressure from participants for something that can be immediately posted to their profile. Nonetheless, the growth in certification-style multi-course programs leads to a higher level of proficiency in knowledge and skill development among professionals in the community development field—a positive development.

4. Some training efforts are broadening the types of organizations in the field.

Some of the national organizations and intermediaries are offering training programs that reach beyond even the diversity of organizations included by the Community Opportunity Alliance in its definition of the field. They are offering training and capacity building for groups like small minority housing contractors; faith-based organizations not now in affordable housing but who have real estate that could be so deployed; or young people from communities of color interested in commercial real estate more broadly defined than affordable housing or community economic development.

► Recommendations for the Field

- 1 Establish and maintain a national network of training professionals within the field.**
- 2 Profile jobs and employment opportunities in the field nationwide.**
- 3 Design and disseminate an orientation program to ground newcomers in the field.**
- 4 Create and disseminate a career planning training module for the field.**
- 5 Boost training and career guidance for mid-level professionals.**
- 6 Expand in-person comprehensive leadership programs for executive directors.**
- 7 Sustain and fund the dynamic training and professional development system.**
- 8 Elevate career development practices throughout the field.**

Preface

The eight recommendations are presented strategically. After each recommendation, the particular actions appropriate, if any, for different audiences is spelled out under a heading for each: individuals in the field, frontline community development organizations, state and local associations of community development organizations, national organizations and intermediaries, and funders, with researchers incorporated into the various levels.

Although many levels of the field are implicated by these recommendations, each step is best initiated at the level most capable of catalyzing action—some solutions require field-wide leadership, while others are more effective when originating from the organizational

or individual level. The order that specific actions are suggested under each example reflects the level from which they are most feasibly initiated.

Mobilizing the catalyst: WHO will be responsible to act?

Facilitating a formal, functional network is the first and most strategic step, creating an entity that will be committed to and capable of carrying out the rest of the recommendations.

Filling the fundamental data gap

The second addresses the most critical gap in information for career development in the field: data about the jobs in the field and advice on moving among them, without which individuals cannot envision and plan a career path, and organizations cannot initiate career development programs.

Plugging training and leadership development gaps

Recommendations 3 through 6 are narrow, specific actions that plug the most glaring gaps in our professional development/training programs: an orientation to the whole community development field for new hires; basic career planning training; midcareer professional development; and leadership development for future executives. Those four recommendations highlight some of the most salient missing or underdeveloped elements in the robust constellation of offerings already thriving in the field.

Sustaining present strengths; building best practices

The seventh recommendation reminds us that we need to strengthen the dynamic, ever-improving system of training and professional development that is already in place. That requires organizational commitment, attention, and funding.

The eighth recommendation is fairly global, calling for changes in career development practices and programs at every level of the field over an extended period. However, there are specific, more narrow, and immediate actions identified for actors at each level of the field. The eighth recommendation is only last because full implementation will be better and easier if it utilizes and flows from implementation of the previous seven recommendations.

Although the study was not intended to address the current crises facing the field as a result of major federal government change, a field-wide network that develops talent and leadership strengthens the resilience of the field in the face of threats or other impetus for major change.

1 Establish and maintain a national network of training professionals within the field.

As noted above in Section E, The State of the Field, there is a dynamic but disconnected cadre of training professionals at work in the field. Collectively, they have tremendous potential to become a formal network to carry forward a national agenda of more robust training and career development within the field. All of those interviewed for this paper were excited to know they had peers in other organizations and expressed a high level of interest in having more mechanisms of exchange. At its simplest level, networking could facilitate sharing. For example, it was clear in the study that individual training managers were designing new programs that, unbeknownst to them, already existed in peer organizations across the country. While they might still want to modify and give geographic or cultural embodiment to the content, they could certainly use the programs of others as prototypes.

These are the women and men who day in and day out are implementing programs of training, capacity building, and career development. The whole could well be more than the sum of the parts, although it wouldn't be bad just to be bringing the parts together. Collaborating, they will be uniquely positioned to identify gaps in curriculum as well as best practices in training. Moreover, since almost all are supported by the core budget of their organizations rather than short-term, restricted grants, a formal network would be more sustainable than some earlier collaboratives on a similar human capital agenda among the national organizations in the field that were dependent on dedicated grants or the personal interest of few national staff.

The network might retrieve and utilize the earlier collaborative work on human capital development by organizations and funders in the field (1992–2005, described earlier in this report). Members of the network could also assist other actors in the field, including frontline community development organizations, state and local alliances, national organizations, and funders, in expanding the emphasis on and adopting other facets of a career development program, as identified in Recommendation 8, below.

Forming a training and career development network is a high impact, low cost, immediate action. It ought to be an easy decision for funders, lead sponsors, and participating organizations. For a relatively small new investment, this project capitalizes on existing leadership, resources, and latent interest to address a major, critical issue quickly. It takes existing assets to a whole new level of functionality and payoff. It meets all the criteria of “low hanging fruit.”

Note: For purposes of this paper, the recommended network will be referred to as the training and career development network. Those who form the new network can subsequently choose their own title.

Implementation actions for leaders in the field:

National organizations: One or two should take the lead on this project. The Community Opportunity Alliance, perhaps with NeighborWorks, is the most likely. All should be ready to support the involvement of their dedicated training/professional development staff in the network. Each should look at their national convenings for opportunities to bring training and professional development staff together. All should provide adequate resources for electronic and in-person gatherings for their people as the network is mobilized.

State and local organizations: Those with dedicated training and professional development staff should share this paper and apprise them of the networking opportunity. Executives should ask staff if they are in touch with other training organizations in the field to prevent duplication and adopt best practices. All should be ready to sponsor activities and training designed by the training and career development network. Give priority to maintaining the core funding support for training and professional development staff, or creating such a position if one does not exist (proportional to the size of the organization).

Funders: A lead funder or two should provide a three-year network facilitation grant to the sponsor organization(s) to mobilize and formalize the network. Funders should be prepared to respond to proposals for specific initiatives that improve career development, training, and leadership development, stemming from the network's work. Funders of state and local organizations should include in their support any necessary resources for training and professional development of staff to participate in the network. Funders should make clear the outcomes they expect from funding in this area and the data they require to be accountable to their funding organization's governance.

2 Profile jobs and employment opportunities in the field nationwide.

As noted in Section D, The State of the Field in Career Development, the lack of information on the types of jobs within the 271,000 employees identified in the census survey is a significant detriment to career counseling and career advancement planning for community developers in the field. One or two national organizations in the field, with the participation and support of a few key funders, should immediately commission research and/or a pilot program to profile typical jobs within the field, complete with information on the competencies required for each of those jobs and the range of compensation being paid for them.

Several people interviewed in the course of this study described sophisticated digital techniques for promoting the field and job listings within it. Currently the common methods being used in the community development field are not up to best practices. Therefore special effort should be made so that the end product of this recommendation is produced following best practices of digital formatting, so they can be easily shared on currently popular social media and other platforms currently used in career development. Other industries offer useful templates, but even those formats quickly become obsolete if they don't evolve with new digital practices.

A profile of the typical employment opportunities is foundational. It also requires career guidance material to help the career seeker put it to use. The components of Brophy and Shabecoff's *Careers in Community Development* are very typical of career literature, giving some background on typical employers, the breadth and history of the field, profiles of successful professionals in different jobs, some guidance for charting a pathway among

opportunities, and some pointers on professional development opportunities at each step in the pathway. A more contemporary version would not only be updated but would be widely available online, easily searchable, and embedded with helpful internet links.

Recognizing that current methods of job posting by individual community development organizations and collectively in local and state associations use outdated methods and probably do not reach the target market, the new training and career development network might undertake both a review of best practices within the current network and a consultation with the most successful associations and consultants in other fields who are succeeding with avant-garde methods of job advertising and recruitment not currently being used in the community development field. The result could be a series of recommendations and potentially the creation of some collective methodologies for frontline community development organizations to recruit for their job openings more effectively.

Implementation actions for leaders in the field:

National organizations: A national organization or a collaboration of them should sponsor this workforce data project, raise the funds, and commission a research organization with experience in human capital and career development. Alternatively, a workforce consultant could be retained to advise the emerging training and career development network on conducting a pilot program to gather the same information through their members. Other national organizations should determine whether they have data that includes jobs in the field and make it available to the researchers. National organizations should provide job descriptions of

typical jobs in their own organizations for inclusion in the database.

State and local organizations: All organizations should determine whether they have data that includes jobs in the field and make it available to the researchers. Organizations should provide job descriptions of typical jobs in their own organizations for inclusion in the database. Organizations, especially the larger ones, should encourage their members to provide job information to the researchers when requested

Funders: A lead funder or two should provide financing for this project. Funders should determine whether they have data that includes jobs in the field, even in grant files, and make it available to the researchers. Funders should provide job descriptions of typical jobs in their own organization for inclusion in the database.

3 Design and disseminate an orientation program to ground newcomers in the field.

The field has a long and rich history that reflects its values and accomplishments in social change, community empowerment, and economic and racial equity. It is also a broad, diverse, and growing field that defies easy definition. Too many come to their first job in the field without understanding that it is a field or knowing its background. Their orientation is usually to the job at hand and, at best, the larger organization in which they are employed. Without understanding the rest of the field, the lines of business, and the variety of jobs, they are unlikely to develop an appetite for a career in it. Leaders with long-term careers in the field often report that it was exposure to the breadth and history of the field that strengthened their commitment to long-term work

in the field, reinforcing the feeling that they were part of something bigger than themselves and their immediate employer, a movement of like spirits who shared the values that motivated them.

A leading training organization or a collaborative of trainers should create an easily replicable program for orienting newcomers to the broad community development field, including the career potential within it. That program should provide a more extensive grounding in the history and evolution of the field, its shared values, and its future direction. That grounding becomes even more critical in light of the survey results showing that, in the last decade or two, the field has grown and become more diverse, with almost every organization having multiple lines of business.

Previous programs provide a treasure trove of material for creating prototypes. Many local and state affiliates of the Alliance report having included at their conferences, on past occasions, one or two programs that ground participants in the values, history, accomplishments, and breadth of the national community development field. National leadership programs provided a fairly extensive grounding in the history and values of the field. Prototype programs could be refined and disseminated through the network of training managers.

Many of those interviewed for this research who had experiences with grounding and orientation programs—some of which used electronic presentation as part of their program—noted the power of in-person encounters with experienced leaders who had successful careers in the field, especially people from the same locale and/or with the same cultural background as the participants. Nonetheless, various hybrids of national and local content, in-person and electronic format, could

probably be generated to be available to every organization in the field to use regularly as part of their orientation for new hires.

Implementation actions for leaders in the field:

The new national training and career development network outlined in Recommendation 1 is the most logical actor and efficient way to undertake the refinement of prototypes, field testing, revision, and dissemination of onboarding programs, including program designs for in-person, electronic, and hybrid presentation. They would form a work group of members who have experience with prototypes for this collective effort, facilitated by the central staff person.

In the absence of such a network, the implementation then is similar to that for the workforce profile activity in Recommendation 2; namely, a lead training organization undertaking to raise the money for and **sponsor the project; one or two funders providing resources; national, state, and local training providers** offering examples of curriculum they have used and volunteering to field-test and/or present the final product.

4 Create and disseminate a career planning training module for the field.

Career planning is not automatic with employment; it is a skill to be learned. Since most employers in community development are too small to provide enough different jobs to constitute a lifetime career or career counseling within the organization, local associations and national organizations serving many organizations could address the needs of emerging professionals through their training platforms. They could all sponsor a similar offering to

expose participants to methods of career planning, both generic and particular to the community development field. The Boston program of the Mel King Institute described earlier in Section E, The State of the Field in Professional Development Support, could well serve as a prototype. It would probably be wise to release such a module when the job information research (Recommendation 2, above) is complete.

If the program is targeted to newcomers in their first experience in the field, as the Boston program was, it can include a significant amount of generic career planning. If it's oriented to professionals with some experience in the field, it should include not only how training can be used to build competencies for jobs the participant targets for the future, but also how to fashion and use other professional development opportunities including mentoring, shadowing a person already in a targeted job, field visits to organizations with those desirable jobs that are not in the participant's current organization, and review of national data sources. Hopefully, the training and career development network (in Recommendation 1, above) will create a database of training programs across the field, across the country, which is easily searchable in ways that align the competencies each program develops with the competencies different jobs require (a product of Recommendation 2).

An important byproduct of this project should be to capture and carefully curate career guidance materials for broader access and, in some form, deploy them across social media. The materials derived from the prototype career planning training program could supplement, update, and elaborate on components of the book *Careers in Community Development* in whatever new form that is rendered as recommended in number 2 above.

Implementation actions for leaders in the field:

Like the implementation actions for Recommendation 3, the new national network for talent development in community development is the most logical actor and efficient way to undertake the refinement of prototypes, field testing, revision, and dissemination of a career planning training module. The network would form a work group of members who have experience with prototypes for this collective effort, facilitated by the central staff person.

In the absence of such a network, the implementation then is similar to that for the workforce profiling activity in Recommendation 2. Namely, a lead training organization undertakes raising the money for and **sponsoring the project; one or two funders provide resources; national, state, and local training providers** offer examples of curriculum they have used and volunteering to fieldtest and/or present the final product.

As noted in the final recommendation below, training programs and conferences of local, state, and national organizations should consider regularly offering a career planning program over the next few years. This would foster a better orientation to careers in the field and help retain talented professionals. There are also recommendations there to all actors in the field to support and use career development tools like mentoring, shadowing, field visits, and career coaching.

5 Boost training and career guidance for mid-level professionals.

Training providers should collaborate to create pilot programs for experienced program staff who aspire to become mid-level and upper level managers of community development organizations, like program or division directors. The last major review of training programs for the field, echoed in research for this paper, noted that there are many programs now to bring new people into the field, but virtually **nothing** for people in the middle. For variety of reasons, it is not likely that this need should be addressed through a comprehensive national or regional program. The answer may well be a combination of a) better career counseling and financial support to pursue, and then supplement, generic nonprofit management courses; and b) more leadership development training and experiences for them as well as those who choose, at midcareer, to become more proficient in their programmatic specialization rather than administration.

Those who choose the path of organizational management and leadership in the community development field may draw on professional programs in public administration and nonprofit management for some of the requirements of future jobs. There are also many sources of skill training in individual administration topics like fundraising or personnel management. At NeighborWorks, roughly 20% of the courses in its catalog and institutes are managerial. It also offers a certification in Nonprofit Management and Leadership, which requires completion of a set of courses in its catalog. There are many credit and noncredit courses in higher education in nonprofit management. Outside of academic institutions, the 50 state associations of nonprofit organizations and their trade association, the National Council of Nonprofits, offer training and educational material for aspiring middle managers.

Importantly, the field needs more leadership development programs that transcend administration and managerial topics, or programmatic specialization, particularly those leadership skills for community development that integrate the values of social change, racial equity, and economic justice. There are also unique leadership challenges to address the peculiar multidisciplinary and entrepreneurial character of community development organizations. (See the section on middle and senior leaders in Section E, The State of the Field for Professional Development Support.)

Preparing future leaders also requires exposing them to some opportunities across organizations, which equips them with a higher level of skills and leadership that cuts across the variety of organizations and multiple lines of business (specializations) in the field.

The community development field will need to create better mechanisms and practices of mid-career counseling. Local and state associations can be particularly helpful. They may also be logical sponsors of programs to expand the current crop of midcareer supports like mentorship, peer learning circles, and networking.

Implementation actions for leaders in the field:

Individuals

- ▶ Pursue mid-career reassessment and new career planning guides, tools, workshops
- ▶ Recruit a mentor and widen your networking
- ▶ Research more widely for jobs or roles in the field
- ▶ Attend more conferences for networking; travel to study other organizations

- ▶ Pursue relevant certifications and leadership programs

Frontline community development organizations and other employers

- ▶ Through regular performance reviews, encourage the activities listed above for individuals
- ▶ Provide training
- ▶ Provide funding to travel and study other programs and organizations
- ▶ Organize job shadowing for employees with jobs in the company
- ▶ Use succession planning to identify and acknowledge emerging talent
- ▶ Expand diversity and inclusion initiatives

State and local associations and national organizations and intermediaries

- ▶ Provide more extensive programs for midcareer professionals to ground themselves in the history, background, values and current challenges of the field
- ▶ Fund midcareer professionals attending conferences and networking experiences
- ▶ Sponsor mechanisms of peer coaching among midcareer professionals, emerging leaders
- ▶ Develop more certification methods that enable employees in the field to communicate their capabilities and credentials more easily
- ▶ Examine compensation in the field for midcareer professionals to ensure it is competitive to retain talent. Some previous surveys indicated that community development salaries and

benefits were competitive at the entry and executive levels but not in the middle

- ▶ Convene a task force—with a cross-section of national organizations and intermediaries, funders, and the new training and career development network—to examine the particular challenges of midcareer job change in community development, the apparent talent drain to the public and private sector, and to create more midcareer programs

Funders

- ▶ Consider sponsoring more fellowships and travel and study for midcareer emerging leaders
- ▶ Encourage community development grantees to bring emerging midcareer talent to your regular meetings to discuss funding and program progress
- ▶ Identify emerging leaders among your grantees in community development organizations and help them become exposed to mainstream organizations in philanthropy, government and private business to which your organization has access
- ▶ Provide financial support for emerging leaders to attend leadership programs

6 Expand in-person comprehensive leadership programs for executive directors.

Preparation of new or recently appointed executive directors of community development organizations could be better addressed by a multi-course in-person program than by a plethora of individual, subject-specific offerings, even with certifications requiring a series of particular courses. The Prototype Comprehensive Curriculum (see Appendix 2) could be an organizing framework. Programs with a series of sessions over months enable trainers to create a more integrated, comprehensive curriculum, exploit synergy across topics, and emphasize multidisciplinary skills like leadership.

Moreover, networking, so crucial to cohesion in the field, is enhanced when a cohort of participants moves through a program together over a period of months, particularly if the providers deliberately structure exercises to create a trusting learning community. Programs could well be targeted to known talent gaps in the field, like preparing an adequate pipeline of emerging leaders from communities of color particularly Black professionals in majority Black communities (the Community Opportunity Alliance noted that of all the diversity desired among the executive directors to reflect the diversity of communities their organizations serve, the most persistent deficit over multiple surveys of field for decades has been Black executive directors in Black communities.)

Implementation actions for leaders in the field:

National organizations in intermediaries and funders

There are many models among the successful executive leadership programs in the past and

present, including the former NeighborWorks Institute for new directors of NeighborWorks member organizations and its current Achieving Excellence program; the Development Training Institute's national program and its New York program at the Pratt Institute; the Center for Urban Redevelopment Excellence at the University of Pennsylvania; NALCAB'S Pete Garcia Fellowship program; the Enterprise New York Leadership Institute created in 2018 in collaboration with JPMorgan Chase; and several fellowship programs sponsored by foundations. A task force made up of a cross-section of national organizations and intermediaries, funders, and the new training and career development network should be tasked to design and advocate for implementation of appropriate and sustainable program models for the contemporary environment.

7 Sustain and fund the dynamic training and professional development system.

Perhaps it goes without saying that the existing training platforms, the catalog of training topics, and the cadre of training sponsors already available in the field should be sustained; and that the regular expansion and ongoing improvement of those offerings should continue to be supported at every level. If that system stays in place, all of the recommendations just made and those that follow have a place to be implemented, advocates to advance them, and a long-term apparatus to modify and improve them based on implementation feedback.

Funding remains critical. Training staff from NeighborWorks to local providers consistently reported that an increase in funding would allow the development of more courses, an increase in in-person training, and better tracking of the outcomes produced.

Community development is not the only field that has difficulty in articulating the outcome and impact

of training and career development investments for funders of the field. Capacity seems an elusive element because it does not have public moments of concrete demonstration like ribbon-cuttings. Yet capacity is an indispensable component of the success of organizations producing change in community real estate, financial institutions, wealth building, employment, and family resilience. But it is not the change itself; it is the background, a necessary prerequisite. Sometimes the training of the talented people who produce those changes is too far removed from that ultimate change for funders to support, too basic to warrant attention.

Increasing funding will require bringing more funding sources into play. We need to shine a spotlight on the funders who have supported successful training and career development programs in the field. All leaders in the field and their supporters in private funding and financial institutions must advocate for local and national governments to include training funding within their programs in community development.

Implementation actions for leaders in the field:

State and local associations

- ▶ Those associations with training managers should ensure that those positions and their programs are maintained within the core budget
- ▶ Those associations without formal training programs or training managers should reassess training needs among their members and find alternatives for meeting those needs directly, in partnership with a training or educational organization, or by referring members to training outlets

- ▶ Training managers or other senior executives of associations should become more familiar with training and professional development activities among their peer associations

National organizations and intermediaries

- ▶ The same actions above for local and state associations pertain, with obvious adjustment, to the national level
- ▶ National organizations and intermediaries are in a unique position to promote the value of training and professional development to the funding community. Praising the programs of others and encouraging funders to recognize the value of state and local providers of training would demonstrate a wonderful commitment to the field, extending beyond the immediate self-interest of one's own organization.
- ▶ Training managers from many organizations could collaborate to establish clearer best practices for evaluating the outcome and impact of training and professional development, and promote those systems to the funding community.
- ▶ To the extent the organization provides funding to community development organizations, ensure that training and professional development resources are incorporated in all funding.
- ▶ Within your own system or collaborative, look for opportunities to identify and nurture for higher leadership emerging talent in frontline organizations in the field, particularly those from communities of color.

- ▶ Collaborate with leading funders on the first recommendation under Funders, immediately below.

Funders

- ▶ Give recognition to and expand the number of funders supporting training and career development. We need to better publicize in concrete and visual form the results of the programs funders now support to help draw the attention of other potential funders.
- ▶ We need to better advertise success. Help managers of programs and their funders be more successful in "tooting their own horn" with clear and compelling portrayals of program success. Obviously, the closer a funder is to the frontline organization whose employee is participating, the more likely that funder is to know firsthand the impact of the program. Financial institutions that fund training in financial packaging for organizations that become their customers are repeat funders of such training because they see that it works. Training managers and funders already working together in the field could collaborate to better communicate to funders more distant from the front line the power of successful training for organizational impact. We should encourage training managers and participants, as well as funders, to post to social media their successful experiences in and program impact from training.
- ▶ Funders could significantly **improve satisfaction with funding training** by being explicit, at the beginning of the

grantmaking process, the purpose of funding training, the outcomes expected, and acceptable data for demonstrating those outcomes. As noted in Section E, The State of the Field for Professional Development Support, training can be funded for many different purposes, each with its own outcomes and data: individual growth of participants; capacity building of the participant's organization; building the field locally or nationally; or positive impact on the credibility of the field. Funders who have been clear have been getting the feedback they need to justify their investment.

8 Elevate career development practices throughout the field.

Boosting the culture of career development will require a sustained field-wide effort. What follows describes immediate, realizable steps that individuals and organizations at every level of the field can undertake to build momentum for that change. The comprehensive list can be daunting; readers can easily skip to the sections pertinent to them.

Individuals

Every person ought to create a career plan based on their own goals and assess their own potential for advancement. They should explore jobs or roles available within their own organization, and, especially if they are in a small organization, among other employers in the field, even those outside their locale. Besides their long-term goals, they need to identify the next few steps of employment advancement and the competencies required for these growth positions. Then, they can look among training and professional development

offerings to grow those competencies. All of these steps may seem obvious, but individuals need to be encouraged in these practices and supported by organizations in the field. The work described here for individuals will be greatly facilitated by the availability of employment opportunity information recommended above (Recommendation 2) and enhanced by the creation and deployment of an onboarding module and one on career development (recommendations 3 and 4).

Frontline community development organizations

- ▶ Immediately incorporate a career development element in all **performance reviews** in the organization. Encourage a discussion among employees on advancement. Organizations can encourage their employees to learn about other jobs in their own organization as well as in different organizations in the field. Everyone should recognize that employees often transition among organizations in the course of their careers. Celebrate advancement even when an employee moves to another organization. Career development for any field requires an orientation and commitment to nurturing a pool of talent for the whole field, recognizing that a shared commitment benefits all stakeholders by strengthening the overall pipeline of capable professionals.
- ▶ Provide **support for training** and professional development by ensuring that every employee has several experiences every year. Incorporate tuition support and travel for individual training in the annual budget.
- ▶ Ensure that all new employees get an

orientation to the field at large and some initial career counseling. Be alert for and **use new supports** that flow from implementation of recommendations 1 through 6 above.

- ▶ Encourage and provide time for employees to **shadow** at least one other employee within the organization in a different job each year, even if only for a part of the day.
- ▶ **Improve job posting** methods to follow the most cutting-edge practices, utilizing electronic posting and social media. Guidance might come from the activity on job postings and recruiting, as described in the recommendation for the new training and career development network in Recommendation 2, above.

State and local associations

- ▶ Provide formal sessions on **orientation to the field for newcomers** and career planning at annual conferences and/or training programs.
- ▶ Make career development a major topic for their agenda of meetings and training every year for the next few years to create momentum.
- ▶ Look for other opportunities in **association conferences and convenings** to elevate career development.
- ▶ Continue to provide **budget support for a training manager** at a level appropriate to the size of the organization and the availability of other training in the geography served. If your association does not provide training, consider doing so, partnering with some organization

that can deliver training, or offering financial support and guidance to employees of your member organizations to get training and professional development support.

- ▶ Provide time and travel support for your training manager or consultant to **participate in the new training and career development network**. If you do not have a training manager or consultant, assign someone in the organization to follow the work of the emerging network and incorporate its products and services into the activities of your association.
- ▶ Encourage **collaborative efforts** among your member organizations to recruit, train and retain talented people; or be a sponsor of programs that do so. Currently, there is precedent in the work of several associations that sponsor AmeriCorps programs and internships, which recruit, place, and train entry-level practitioners for many frontline employers.

National organizations and intermediaries

- ▶ Take a leadership role in prioritizing a deliberate, field-wide effort to **boost career development practice**. They should advocate career development practices within every organization they serve.
- ▶ Designate and support a staff person charged with training and professional development to **participate in the new training and career development network**.
- ▶ Respond to the recommendations of that emerging network for additional

training that might be provided by your organization, **sharing prototypes** freely of training and professional development supports currently being used within your organization.

- ▶ **Identify any collection of job descriptions** among organizations in the field, both in your own organization and among organizations you serve, that might be used for the workforce research in Recommendation 2.
- ▶ Look for opportunities to provide funding (or raise new financial support for) and help implement **career development supports** in addition to formal training: career counselors or mentors; job shadowing outside the home organization of the beneficiary; travel to conferences or for study of other organizations; facilitating connections with mentors, leaders in the field, and funders; peer sharing on career and professional development; succession planning; career counseling, etc.
- ▶ Formalize within your staff a method of **talent spotting** to identify, track, and support upcoming leaders in the field, especially people of color.
- ▶ **Sponsor** one of the recommendations in this report

Funders

- ▶ Funders (along with other leaders in the field among local, state, and national organizations) need to especially **increase recognition for those funders** who have committed to training and professional development within the

field. This is often a difficult funding decision; they deserve applause. Funders could also broaden the base of support for career development by more widely publicizing their investment, outcomes from, and satisfaction with that funding.

- ▶ Existing funders of this work should **expand support** incrementally for one or more items in the recommendations of this report, and help the leaders of associations in the field to recruit new funders for those activities by helping identify them and suggesting how the initiative could be presented appropriately to them.
- ▶ Funders of organizations at every level ought to **ask their grantees** as part of the funding dialogue how they are or could be supporting talent development, career development, and professional development in the field.
- ▶ Funders who support training and professional development are an essential source of intelligence about best practices, gaps, and outcomes. They ought to be willing to **participate** and leaders of other organizations ought to recruit them to workgroups, networking structures, and consultations on career development in the field.

► APPENDIX 1:

What is Career Development?

Note: Currently, the term most commonly used by organizations and experts focused on career development, training, and professional development for the work they do is *talent development*. For example, the 82-year-old National Association for Training and Development changed its name in 2014 to the Association for Talent Development. This paper, however, consistently uses *career development*, the older term, because that seems to be more generally understood in our network.

What is a career? A career may be seen as a person's lifetime venture to progress through a series of jobs or roles, from entry-level through many job changes to more senior positions in their chosen field. **Career development** encompasses all the activities undertaken to enhance one's knowledge, experience, and skills, thereby exploiting and maximizing every opportunity to progress in their career path.

What is a **career development program**? A career development program, as defined by national organizations and journals for career development, is a system of supports to help individuals plan and pursue a career pathway in their company or field.

To be used by and assist individual women and men:

- career assessment and career planning guides and tools
- research of jobs or roles available in the field with qualifications and salary schedules
- professional development to build competencies for advancement
- mentorships and networking

To be deployed at a company or organizational level:

- incorporating the elements for individuals in regular performance reviews and feedback
- employee resources like career counseling and industry-specific information
- job exposure and internships for employees with jobs in the company
- succession planning
- diversity and inclusion initiatives

For a field in general:

These supports can be developed and deployed by organizations serving the whole field, including both trade organizations and professional associations, and organizations who collaborate to provide assistance.

- a consistent and readily available introduction to the field
- career planning information, including information on typical jobs (description, qualifications, and salary) and sample career paths in the field
- development, dissemination, and promotion of those other elements described above for individuals and organizations
- promotion of careers in the field across all media platforms, to students, teachers, and counselors in

educational organizations, at career events and trade fairs and to target groups underrepresented but necessary to the field, especially women and people from communities of color

- ▶ ready access to robust collections of job listings and hiring notices, including creating centralized depositories of all listings
- ▶ development of certification methods that enable employees in the field to more easily communicate their capabilities and credentials

Comprehensive, integrated career development programs can be seen clearly within very large companies. These programs include career coaching, mentoring, career mapping, skill development, job shadowing, leadership development programs, and professional development through training, seminars, conferences, online education, and certifications. By incorporating these components, a career development program can provide a structured approach that empowers individuals to take charge of their career paths while aligning with organizational goals. Aflac, for example, has a Career Success Center²⁸ available to all employees to ensure all are prepared to take their next step in employment at Aflac. It includes a career counseling consultant and exercises in resume review, interviewing, and other one-to-one sessions to explore career opportunities. Bank of America offers a comprehensive internal Academy²⁹ for onboarding, training, and comprehensive professional development and personalized support, as well as access to over 400,000 industry resources and more than 6,000 expertly curated materials. Many very large companies have efforts specifically geared toward retaining, developing, and promoting women and “marginalized populations” to more rewarding and powerful jobs within their particular companies, for example, Ericsson and Alco.

Here are some of the standard tools in talent development, with a definition of each:

1. Career assessments: Tools and tests that help individuals understand their skills, interests, values, and personality traits. Examples include skills inventories, interests assessments, and personality assessments.
2. Career planning: Offering guidance on setting career goals, identifying potential career paths, and creating actionable plans to achieve those goals. This may involve workshops or one-on-one coaching.
3. Skill development: Programs that focus on building essential skills required for career advancement, such as technical skills, soft skills (communication, teamwork, etc.), and leadership training.
4. Professional development: Opportunities for continuous learning and growth, including workshops, seminars, certifications, conferences, and online courses that align with career aspirations.
5. Mentorship and networking: Facilitating connections with mentors, industry professionals, and peers to provide guidance, share experiences, and expand professional networks.
6. Employee resources: Access to resources such as career counseling, job search tools, resume building, interview preparation, and industry-specific information.
7. Performance reviews and feedback: Regular evaluations that provide constructive feedback on

²⁸ <https://careers.aflac.com/#>

²⁹ <https://careers.bankofamerica.com/en-us/career-development/the-academy>

performance and progress toward career goals, helping individuals understand their development areas.

8. **Job shadowing and internships:** Opportunities for individuals to gain practical experience, understand job roles better, and assess different career paths through hands-on learning experiences. Shadowing involves following an employee in another job for all or part of the day, or an extended period of time, to see and understand what they do. Dialogue with that person helps people understand the job responsibilities, qualifications, and attractions of particular jobs.
 9. **Succession planning:** Plans for replacing key individuals in jobs. Succession planning offers an opportunity to identify and prepare other employees to assume key roles within the organization, ensuring a pipeline of talent for future leadership positions. These may be emergency plans or plans for permanent replacement as a key individual is promoted, otherwise leaves their current position, or retires. This kind of planning is usually more common at senior levels within organizations.
 10. **Diversity and inclusion initiatives:** Programs aimed at supporting underrepresented groups and promoting an inclusive workplace culture, ensuring equitable access to career development resources.
 11. **Work-life balance support:** Providing resources or programs that help employees manage their work responsibilities alongside personal commitments, which can affect career development.
 12. **Evaluation and improvement metrics:** Regularly assessing the career development program's effectiveness and making adjustments based on participant feedback and outcomes.
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► **APPENDIX 2:**

A Prototype Comprehensive Curriculum for Community Development

- **Grounding in the field**
 - definition and profile of the field
 - history of the field
 - core values in the field
 - careers in the field
 - training for the field
 - challenges facing the field
 - current opportunities for field development
- **Community strategy**
 - place-based strategy for community
 - techniques for a place-based strategic planning, including market positioning (strong market/weak market; revitalization without displacement)

- strategies for building resilience in disadvantaged populations
- asset-based community development
- anchor institutions and cross-sector collaborations
- comprehensive approaches to community development and poverty, integrating people and place (community building)
- ▶ Community engagement and empowerment techniques
 - community organizing
 - techniques of community building
 - social capital
 - engaging participants in program governance
 - community leadership development
 - mobilizing and developing youth leadership
 - cultivating and engaging stakeholders
- ▶ Programs, techniques, and implementation tools (lines of business)
 - housing market interventions to reverse disinvestment
 - homeownership development
 - housing counseling
 - affordable housing development
 - services for the homeless
 - health care and preventive health
 - arts and culture
 - workforce development
 - youth development
 - educational programs
 - school improvement programs
 - family resilience
 - food and nutrition
 - community crime prevention
 - building wealth
 - neighborhood commercial revitalization
 - small-business development
 - community-based financial institutions, credit unions, CDFIs
 - immigrant services
- ▶ Public policy
 - techniques for influencing public policy
 - building and maintaining collaborations for public policy intervention
 - reversing structural discrimination
 - preserving, improving, expanding, and funding public programs

- community reinvestment
- minimum wage, living wage
- immigration
- affordable housing
- Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security and family support
- educational equity
- ▶ Management and administration
 - financial management
 - fundraising
 - human resource management
 - technology
 - strategic planning for the organization
 - organizational assessment
 - organization development
- ▶ Leadership
 - skills beyond organization management
 - leadership styles and strengths, group dynamics
 - pursuing a strategic project
 - creating and managing collaborations
 - handling conflict to maximize innovation from diversity and minimize destructive effects
 - cultural sensitivity
 - cultivating social capital that reaches into the mainstream
 - coping with structural racism and personal discrimination
 - special issues facing people of color in leadership positions
- ▶ Special issues
 - comprehensive community building
 - sustainable economic development
 - coping with climate change
 - rural development
 - racial equity
 - regionalism
 - AI

This curriculum draws heavily upon three textbooks for the field:

Steven D. Soifer, Joseph B. McNeely, et al., *Community Economic Development in Social Work* (Columbia University Press, 2014)

Robert O. Zdenek and Dee Walsh, *Navigating Community Development: Harnessing Competitive*

Advantages to Create Strategic Partnerships (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)

Roland V. Anglin, *Promoting Sustainable Local and Community Economic Development* (CRC Press, American Society for Public Administration, 2011)

Also note:

Edward J. Blakely and Ted K. Bradshaw, *Planning Local Economic Development: Theory and Practice* (Sage, 2002)

G. Thomas Kingsley, Joseph B. McNeely, and James O. Gibson, *Community Building: Coming of Age* (Urban Institute, 1997)

John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (Northwestern University, 1993)

Alexander von Hoffman, *House by House, Block by Block: The Rebirth of America's Urban Neighborhoods* (Oxford University Press, 2003)

► APPENDIX 3: A Capacity-Building Framework

Often the terms *training* and *capacity building* are used interchangeably. It is useful when working to support community development organizations to note that capacity building includes a much broader range of tools than training AND to position training—and now career development—within that important context.

Organizational capacity building includes all those activities that improve an organization's ability to achieve its mission and sustain the organization.

Techniques for capacity building:

- access to information
- access to technical expertise
- access to partners in all sectors
- general operating support; or particular support for organizational infrastructure and management, especially financial, data, and technology systems
- access to project financing
- funding for cash flow issues like lines of credit, factoring of receivables
- categorical grants, program funding
- organization development
 - organization development consulting
 - strategic planning
 - organizational assessment

- human capital improvements
 - training and education
 - recruitment and retention
 - compensation, including benefits
 - career development counseling
 - improved personnel policies and practices
 - support for enhanced community engagement
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► **APPENDIX 4:**

Training Providers in Community Development Investigated for This Paper

National organizations:

- Community Action Partnership (community action agencies)
- Opportunity Finance Network (community development financial institutions)
- Community Opportunity Alliance
- Local Initiative Support Corporation national programs
- National Association of Latino Community Asset Builders
- National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development
- Enterprise Communities
- Grow America (formerly the National Development Council)
- NeighborWorks, national and Northeast Regional offices
- Housing Partnership Network, with Project Destined
- Associates in Commercial Real Estate

Community Opportunity Alliance members:

- BLDG Memphis
- California Community Economic Development Association
- Community Economic Development Association of Michigan
- Community Builders Network of St. Louis
- Chicago Rehab Network
- Cleveland Neighborhood Progress
- Housing Oregon
- Housing California
- Housing Action Illinois
- Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey

- ▶ Massachusetts Association of Community Economic Development Corporations, with the Mel King Institute
- ▶ Nonprofit Housing Association of Northern California
- ▶ Ohio CDC Association
- ▶ Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations
- ▶ Prosperity Indiana
- ▶ South Carolina Association for Community Economic Development
- ▶ Texas Association of Community Development Corporations

Other local associations and programs:

- ▶ Rural Housing Coalition of New York
- ▶ California Coalition for Rural Housing
- ▶ Minnesota Consortium of Community Developers
- ▶ North Carolina Association of Community Development Corporations
- ▶ Arizona Housing Coalition: NextGenAZ initiative
- ▶ Local Initiative Support Corporation (LISC) separate training programs in many local offices, including New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Philadelphia, Charlotte, Virginia, Louisville, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, Chicago, Central Illinois, Twin Cities, Duluth, Los Angeles, Bay Area, Hawai'i

▶ APPENDIX 5: Training Providers Interviewed for This Paper

National organizations

- ▶ Community Opportunity Alliance
 - Frank Woodruff
 - Chanse Sonsalla
 - Shayna Orensztein
 - Suzanne Gunther
- ▶ Local Initiative Support Corporation
 - Bill Taft
 - Andy Frischkoff
 - Madeline Fraser Cook
- ▶ National Association of Latino Community Asset Builders
 - Natalia Chaves Larkin
- ▶ National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development
 - Anju Chopra
 - Kelley Lou

- ▶ Enterprise Community Partners
David Bowers
Jessica Sorrell
- ▶ NeighborWorks America
Paul Singh
Cormac Malloy
Joan Straussman Brandon
- ▶ Housing Partnership Network, with Project Destined, Cedric Bobo

Community Opportunity Alliance members:

- ▶ BLDG Memphis, Tim Green
- ▶ California Community Economic Development Association, Roberto Barragan, Elias Garcia
- ▶ Community Economic Development Association of Michigan, Sarah Teater
- ▶ Chicago Rehab Network, Rachel Johnston
- ▶ Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey, Woodrow Prevard, Terri Benson
- ▶ Housing Oregon, Cristina Palacios
- ▶ Housing Action Illinois, David Young
- ▶ Mel King Institute of the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations, Shirronda Almeida
- ▶ Nonprofit Housing Association of Northern California (NPH), Monica Joe
- ▶ Ohio CDC Association, Julia Robinson, Andrew Dotson
- ▶ Philadelphia Association of Community Development Corporations, Joanna Winchester, Rick Sauer
- ▶ Prosperity Indiana, Marie Beason
- ▶ South Carolina Association for Community Economic Development, Kate Pratt
- ▶ Texas Association of Community Development Corporations, Matt Hull

Other local associations:

- ▶ Rural Housing Coalition of New York, Sharon Reynolds
- ▶ California Coalition for Rural Housing, Austyn Perry

Other experts:

- ▶ Tom Adams, formerly of NeighborWorks and of TransitionGuides consulting
- ▶ Paul Brophy, co-author, *A Guide to Careers in Community Development*
- ▶ Jack Traywick, retired, Center for Neighborhoods (formerly Louisville Community Design Center, Louisville)
- ▶ Paige Carlson-Heim, TD Bank Charitable Foundation
- ▶ Ann L. Silverman, leadership training consultant to NeighborWorks America Northeast Region

► About the Author

JOSEPH B. MCNEELY, MA, JD



Joseph McNeely is a nationally-known author, expert and consultant on community development and a veteran community organizer and community development corporation (CDC) director. He led a HUD office for community-based development in the Carter Administration, and then was, for 25 years the President of the nationwide Development Training Institute (DTI), which national columnist Neal Peirce called “the country’s premier trainer of CDC leaders.” He has written extensively on community development including, *Community Economic Development for Social Workers* (Columbia University Press); a chapter in *On the Edge: America’s Middle Neighborhoods*; *Community Building: Coming of Age* and, recently, *Supporting Emerging Leaders for Community Development: a Study & Action Plan*, for the Community Opportunity Alliance.

