



URBAN AGENDA

THE FRAMEWORK

Goals, Focus Areas, and Theory of Change

DOCUMENT 1

June 2026

Cleveland & Cuyahoga County | PolicyBridge



ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

This is the first of three Urban Agenda documents.

- 1. The Framework. What the Urban Agenda is and how it works.**
2. The Progress and Alignment Update (this document). Where the work stands now and what comes next.
3. The Initiative Alignment Tool. The working document partners use to map and align their initiatives.

SECTION 1 | Urban Agenda Goals, Benchmarks & Timeframe

Long-Term Economic Mobility Goals

The Urban Agenda is focused on advancing economic mobility across Cleveland and Cuyahoga County through three interconnected long-term goals. These goals are intentionally ambitious and require coordinated systems change across sectors.

- Increase overall Black and Brown families' median household incomes
- Eliminate the Black/Hispanic/White wealth gap
- Reduce poverty in Cleveland and Cuyahoga County

Benchmark Progression (2028 to 2050)

Progress is measured through phased benchmarks that advance from parity with Ohio, to parity with the Nation, to exceeding national averages, and ultimately to elimination of the gap or poverty.

	Goal	2028	2033	2043	2050	Status
	Increase Black & Brown Families' Median Household Income	Equal Ohio's racial income gap	Equal the Nation's	10% better than the Nation's	Gap Eliminated	Active
	Eliminate Black/Hispanic/White Wealth Gap	Equal Ohio's wealth gap	Equal the Nation's	10% better than the Nation's	Gap Eliminated	Active
	Reduce Poverty in Cleveland & Cuyahoga County	Poverty rate equals Ohio's	Equal the Nation's	10% better than the Nation's	Gap Eliminated	Active

How These Benchmarks Are Achieved

These benchmarks are advanced through a coordinated systems change approach that aligns partners, strategies, and resources to address root causes and drive measurable outcomes over time.

SECTION 2 | Urban Agenda Goals, Benchmarks & Timeframe

To achieve these goals, the Urban Agenda concentrates on three interconnected economic systems. Each represents a primary pathway through which economic mobility outcomes will be achieved.

 Homeownership	 Workforce Preparedness	 Business Ownership
Supporting asset building and wealth creation through increased access to homeownership opportunities.	Increasing income and economic stability through education, workforce training, credentials, and career pathways.	Expanding wealth-building opportunities by growing Black and Brown-owned business creation and sustainability.

SECTION 3 | Urban Agenda Goals, Benchmarks & Timeframe

PolicyBridge believes that systems such as governments, philanthropic organizations, financial institutions, businesses, and educational organizations perpetuate principles, policies, and practices that impede social and economic opportunity and progress for Black and Brown people. The Urban Agenda focuses its strategies and activities on improving and changing systems by removing the structural, policy, and practice barriers that prevent Black and Brown families from being economically and socially successful.

A theory of change for improving systems explains how interventions can achieve long-term, fundamental shifts in a complex system, rather than only changing surface-level outcomes. It views the system's underlying structure, its policies, practices, relationships, power dynamics, resource flows, and mental models, as the levers for change. By strategically shifting these interconnected elements, a new and more positive pattern of behavior and results can emerge within the system.

Step	Milestone	Description
1	Map System Conditions & Key Actors	Understand how the system operates and who holds influence within it
2	Identify System Drivers	Uncover the root causes driving racial and economic inequities
3	Align Partners Around Shared Priorities	Build cross-sector commitment to shared goals and accountability
4	Influence System Levers	Shift policies, practices, resource flows, relationships, power dynamics, and mental models
5	Design & Advance Coordinated Strategies	Move from alignment to action through structured, evidence-based plans
6	Implement & Track System Change	Execute strategies and monitor progress toward measurable outcomes

System Levers Targeted for Change

These are fundamental conditions within a system that can be shifted to drive deep and lasting change. The Urban Agenda applies each lever across all three focus areas. Homeownership is the first applied model. Workforce Preparedness and Business Ownership will follow the same disciplined structure.

Policies	Practices	Resource Flows	Relationships & Connections	Power Dynamics	Mental Models
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System Lever Definitions & Urban Agenda Application

The table below defines each lever and shows how the Urban Agenda is currently applying it within the Homeownership workstream. Workforce Preparedness and Business Ownership will follow the same structure in the next phase.

Lever	Definition	Urban Agenda Application: Homeownership
Policies	The rules, regulations, and formal agreements that govern a system.	The Homeownership workstream examines zoning regulations, development incentives, property tax systems, lending oversight, and appraisal standards that limit affordable inventory and reinforce patterns of disinvestment. Strategies will identify specific policy shifts that remove structural barriers to equitable ownership. Workforce Preparedness and Business Ownership lever analysis will follow in the next phase.
Practices	The actual day-to-day behaviors and methods used within the system.	SME discussions surfaced fragmented housing programs, compliance-heavy processes, and institutional practices that create access barriers. The Urban Agenda will work to align practices across organizations and reduce duplication, ensuring coordinated pathways rather than siloed initiatives. Workforce Preparedness and Business Ownership lever analysis will follow in the next phase.
Resource Flows	The movement and control of money, information, and materials within the system.	The team identified disparities in capital access, investor cash purchasing patterns, appraisal valuation inequities, and limited access to low-dollar mortgages. Strategy development will focus on aligning public, private, and philanthropic resources to increase affordable inventory and expand equitable access to financing. Workforce Preparedness and Business Ownership lever analysis will follow in the next phase.
Connections & Relationships	The networks and interactions between actors within the system.	The Urban Agenda convenes lenders, developers, nonprofit housing providers, policymakers, employers, philanthropic leaders, and community representatives to identify gaps and build shared accountability. Ecosystem mapping strengthens coordination across sectors rather than isolated action. Workforce Preparedness and Business Ownership lever analysis will follow in the next phase.
Power Dynamics	The distribution of authority, influence, and voice within the system.	Participants acknowledged that institutions with decision-making authority, including financial institutions and large-scale investors, shape opportunity through their investment patterns and lending standards. The Urban Agenda will strategically engage these actors to influence system-level change. Workforce Preparedness and Business Ownership lever analysis will follow in the next phase.
Mental Models	The underlying beliefs, paradigms, and assumptions that shape how people perceive and interact with the system.	Dominant assumptions, such as the belief that homeownership readiness is solely an individual responsibility and that programs alone solve inequity, were surfaced and challenged. Shifting narratives toward structural accountability and equitable wealth creation is central to the Urban Agenda's long-term impact. Workforce Preparedness and Business Ownership lever analysis will follow in the next phase.

Roles & Responsibilities

As the backbone organization for the Urban Agenda, PolicyBridge plays a coordinating and convening role throughout this work. PolicyBridge organizes partners, facilitates structured discussions, shares data through the dashboard, and maintains alignment with broader Urban Agenda priorities. The systems change work itself is carried out by the partners. Participating organizations bring their expertise, capacity, and resources, and they share responsibility for designing and implementing projects. This collaborative approach ensures that solutions are owned by the partners doing the work and that progress is driven collectively across the ecosystem.

PolicyBridge — Backbone Role	Community Partners — Action Role
Identifying system drivers	Lead initiatives and programs
Convening cross-sector partners	Implement strategies
Aligning strategies and priorities	Control resources and service delivery
Supporting coordinated action	Contribute to system-level outcomes
Tracking progress toward shared benchmarks	

