

A DECADE OF

Municipal Financial Empowerment Strategies

Findings from a
2024 Field Scan



About the National League of Cities

The National League of Cities (NLC) is an organization comprised of city, town and village leaders that are focused on improving the quality of life for their current and future constituents. With more than 100 years of dedication to the strength and advancement of local governments, NLC has gained the trust and support of more than 2,700 cities across the nation. NLC's mission is to relentlessly advocate for, and protect the interests of, cities, towns and villages by influencing federal policy, strengthening local leadership and driving innovative solutions.

About NLC's Center for Municipal Practice

NLC's Center for Municipal Practice (CMP) provides creative solutions to improve residents' quality of life, inspiration and ideas for local officials to use in tackling tough issues, and opportunities for city leaders to connect with peers, share experiences and learn about innovative approaches in cities. CMP's mission is to equip local government leaders with the knowledge, tools, and inspiration to build and sustain vibrant communities.

Authors

Kristin Szakos, Independent Consultant and former Vice Mayor, Charlottesville, Virginia

Heidi Goldberg, Director, Economic Opportunity and Financial Empowerment – NLC

Patrick Hain, Program Director, Economic Opportunity and Financial Empowerment – NLC

Chanell Hasty, Program Manager, Economic Opportunity and Financial Empowerment – NLC

Diana Goldsmith, Senior Specialist, Economic Opportunity and Financial Empowerment – NLC

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank NLC colleagues who contributed to this brief, including Christine Baker-Smith, Director of Research, and Jacob Migdall, Program Manager for Data Visualization. In addition, the authors would like to thank the staff at the University of Wisconsin-Madison for their research support, in particular, Katie Jajtner and Hallie Lienhardt.

The National League of Cities appreciates the generous financial support of the Wells Fargo Foundation, which made this research scan and the development of this report possible.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

4 **Executive Summary**

6 **Introduction**

10 **Key Findings**

1. Financial Empowerment Continues to Be a High Priority for Municipal Leaders
2. A Core Set of Pillar Programs Anchor Municipal Financial Empowerment Efforts
3. BIPOC Communities Are a Growing Focus of Financial Empowerment Programs
4. Municipalities Are Engaging in Creative Partnerships to Strengthen Financial Empowerment Efforts within Communities
5. Cities Across Regions and of All Sizes Have Successfully Established Financial Empowerment Programs
6. Funding Is a Major Challenge in Maintaining and Expanding Financial Empowerment Initiatives
7. Inconsistent Data Collection Limits Program Evaluation and Support

46 **Going Deeper:
What's Working,
What's Ahead**

Moving from Programming to Systems Change
Looking Inward: How City Policies Can Be Part of the Problem—and the Solution
Creating New Access to Resources
On the Horizon: The Future of Financial Empowerment

64 **Conclusion**

65 **Appendices**

Executive Summary

1 in 3

Americans are economically insecure

More than 100 million Americans — roughly one in every three — are economically insecure, defined as living in households with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level.¹ These are Americans for whom one expensive car repair, one health crisis or one missed paycheck could lead to a spiral of unpaid bills, predatory loans, eviction, and even homelessness.

While anti-poverty programs have long existed to address immediate needs, American cities, towns and villages increasingly are implementing financial empowerment programs and policies to help their residents improve their financial health and decrease their vulnerability to financial crisis.*

In 2024, National League of Cities (NLC) conducted a scan of financial empowerment initiatives across the country, including a national survey, city interviews, a roundtable convening of municipal staff and elected leaders and focus groups with experts to learn more about this important work. The 2024 Municipal Financial Empowerment Scan is a follow-up to a survey conducted by NLC in 2014 to better understand how municipal financial empowerment strategies have changed over time.



* For the sake of brevity, the term “cities” in this report includes cities, towns, and villages.

The 2024 scan produced several interesting findings:

1. Financial empowerment continues to be a high priority for municipal leaders.
2. A core set of pillar programs anchor municipal financial empowerment efforts.
3. BIPOC communities are a growing focus of financial empowerment programs.
4. Municipalities are engaging in creative partnerships to strengthen financial empowerment efforts within communities.
5. Cities across regions and of all sizes have successfully established financial empowerment programs.
6. Funding is a major challenge in maintaining and expanding financial empowerment initiatives.
7. Inconsistent data collection limits program evaluation and support.

In addition to these findings, the scan identified several **key themes about emerging directions** in the municipal financial empowerment field:

1. Cities are moving from individual programs to broader systems change.
2. Changes in city policies are an important part of the solution.
3. New initiatives create expanded access to resources for residents and business owners.
4. Technology and new ideas fuel the future of financial empowerment.

This report highlights the findings and themes from the scan and identifies promising practices and trends that will continue to make American cities places where people can thrive. It is intended to reach municipal leaders and staff, as well as inform researchers, nonprofit and community organizations, and philanthropic organizations across the country. It also seeks to help city leaders understand the value and promise of addressing their residents' financial barriers, whether they are just starting out or have had financial empowerment strategies underway for a long time. NLC hopes local leaders will be motivated by this report and create momentum among cities around the country to improve financial empowerment, equity, and economic well-being in their communities. NLC is committed to providing guidance to effectively support cities' efforts.

Introduction



Refund

Have it directly
deposited! See page
20 and fill in 12th,
and 13th.

What is Financial Empowerment?

City governments play a vital role in making their communities places where residents and businesses can thrive. Financial empowerment has emerged over the past decade as an effective way city leaders can make financial well-being accessible to all their constituents.

Financial empowerment refers to an individual's knowledge and ability to make decisions that advance their financial well-being, maintain adequate finances to meet financial obligations, and acquire wealth to promote long-term financial stability. Financial empowerment strategies can take many forms, from single programs to interconnected systems and initiatives. These strategies can include individual financial counseling about budgeting, credit and debt counseling, and financial planning; financial education; assistance accessing tax credits and benefits such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Child Tax Credit (CTC), or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP); direct cash payments in the form of guaranteed income; and facilitating wealth-building through homeownership or entrepreneurship.

Financial empowerment approaches can be directed towards children in the form of Children's Savings Accounts (CSA's), young adults burdened by educational loans, working-age adults, seniors, and small business owners. Financial empowerment can also involve ensuring that city policies are not adding to the financial distress of their constituents, such as accelerating impact through department collaboration or addressing fines and fees.



Financial empowerment has emerged over the past decade as an effective way city leaders can make financial well-being accessible to all their constituents.

Types of Financial Empowerment Strategies

BUILDING GENERATIONAL WEALTH

- ◆ Homeownership assistance
- ◆ Entrepreneurship support
- ◆ Children's Savings Accounts (CSAs)

CITY POLICY REVIEW AND REFORM

- ◆ Fines and fees reform
- ◆ Permitting rules for small businesses
- ◆ Zoning and housing policy
- ◆ Departmental collaboration and program integration
- ◆ Consumer financial protection

DIRECT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

- ◆ Help accessing tax credits and benefits
- ◆ Direct cash payments in the form of guaranteed income
- ◆ Debt forgiveness (overdue utility bills, court fees)
- ◆ Purchase of medical and student debt

FINANCIAL CAPABILITY

- ◆ Financial education, counseling and coaching (budgeting, credit and debt counseling and financial planning)
- ◆ Access to and utilization of safe and affordable bank accounts

The 2024 Municipal Financial Empowerment Scan

To gain a deeper understanding of the landscape of financial empowerment approaches in cities across the country, NLC conducted a scan of municipal financial empowerment efforts. The scan complements a similar scan conducted by NLC in 2014 that led to the report, *City Financial Inclusion Efforts: A National Overview*.^{*}

The 2024 scan included four components:

1. A **national survey** was sent to NLC member cities and to NLC networks to identify key trends and approaches to financial empowerment.
2. **Individual virtual interviews** were conducted with municipal staff and leaders from 21 municipalities of different sizes and across various regions to dig deeper into their financial empowerment efforts.
3. Five **focus groups** were conducted with thought leaders and funders in the field of financial empowerment to understand their perceptions of key trends and changes in the field.
4. An **in-person roundtable** convening of municipal leaders was convened to review findings from the survey data, delve deeper into city strategies, and gather insights into new strategies that are emerging in the field.^{***}

The information gathered through this scan provides a snapshot of how cities are working to improve their residents' financial stability and well-being, illustrates the growth in programming and municipal commitment to such efforts, and offers examples of promising practices that other communities can replicate. It will also help guide the direction of NLC's future efforts in working with municipalities to build and strengthen financial empowerment efforts.

^{*} The report *City Financial Inclusion Efforts: A National Overview* is available at <http://staging.community-wealth.org/sites/clone.community-wealth.org/files/downloads/report-nlc15.pdf>

^{**} The term "financial empowerment", used in this report and the term "financial inclusion" used in the earlier report refer to the same set of programs and policies.

^{***} A more detailed description of the 2024 scan can be found in Appendix A: Methodology

Key Findings

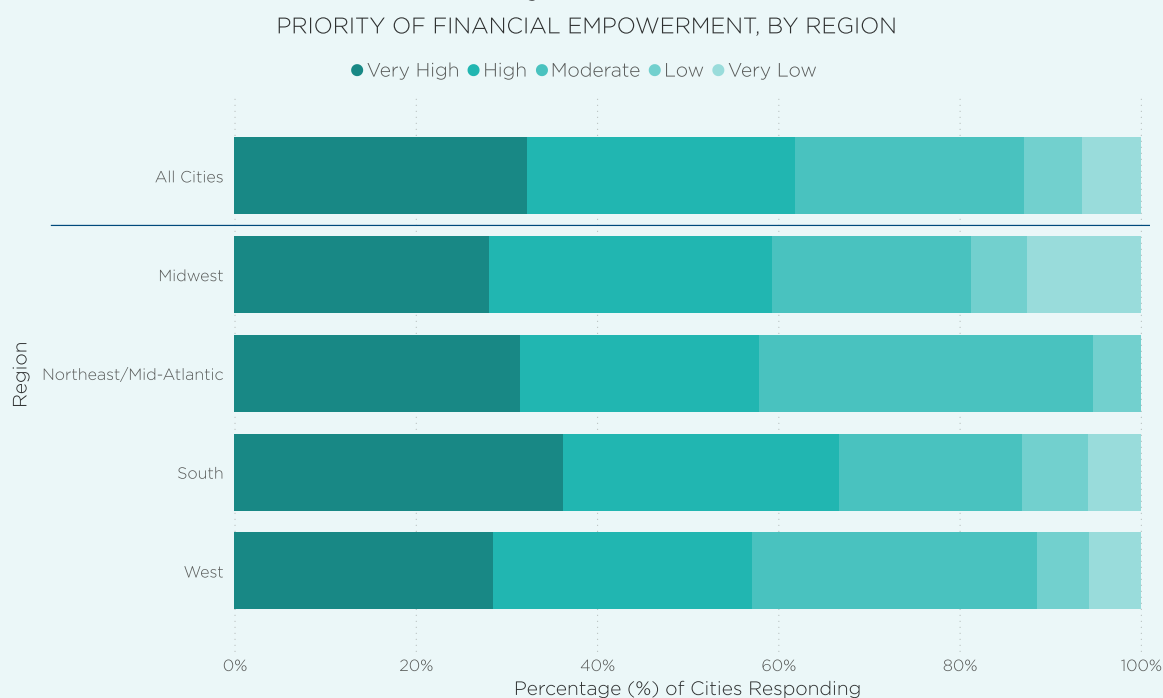


FINDING #1

Financial Empowerment Continues to Be a High Priority for Municipal Leaders

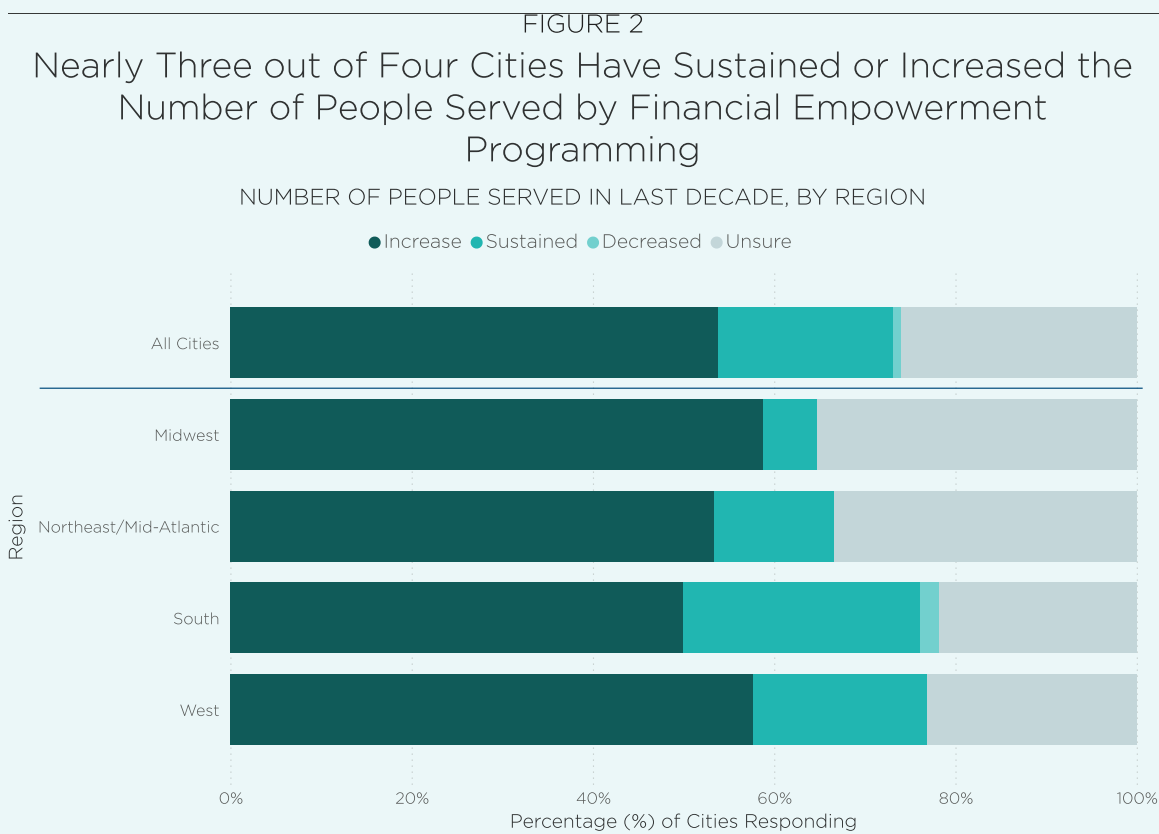
In the 2024 survey, 62 percent of respondents noted that financial empowerment is a very high or high priority for their city leaders, and another 25 percent said it was a moderate priority in their city.* Notably, prioritization of these programs is highest in the South. In 2014, just under half of respondents in the NLC survey reported financial empowerment as a high priority for their mayor and/or council members. Further analysis found that in cities with less disadvantaged populations, financial empowerment is rated as a higher priority. (See Appendix D, Table 13)

FIGURE 1
Across Regions, Financial Empowerment Is a Priority for
City Leaders



* Not shown here, large and mid-size cities tended to put a stronger emphasis on financial empowerment than smaller communities, with 75 percent of large cities and 73 percent of mid-size cities responding listing it as a very high or high priority, compared with 44 percent of small and very small cities. See Appendix D for details.

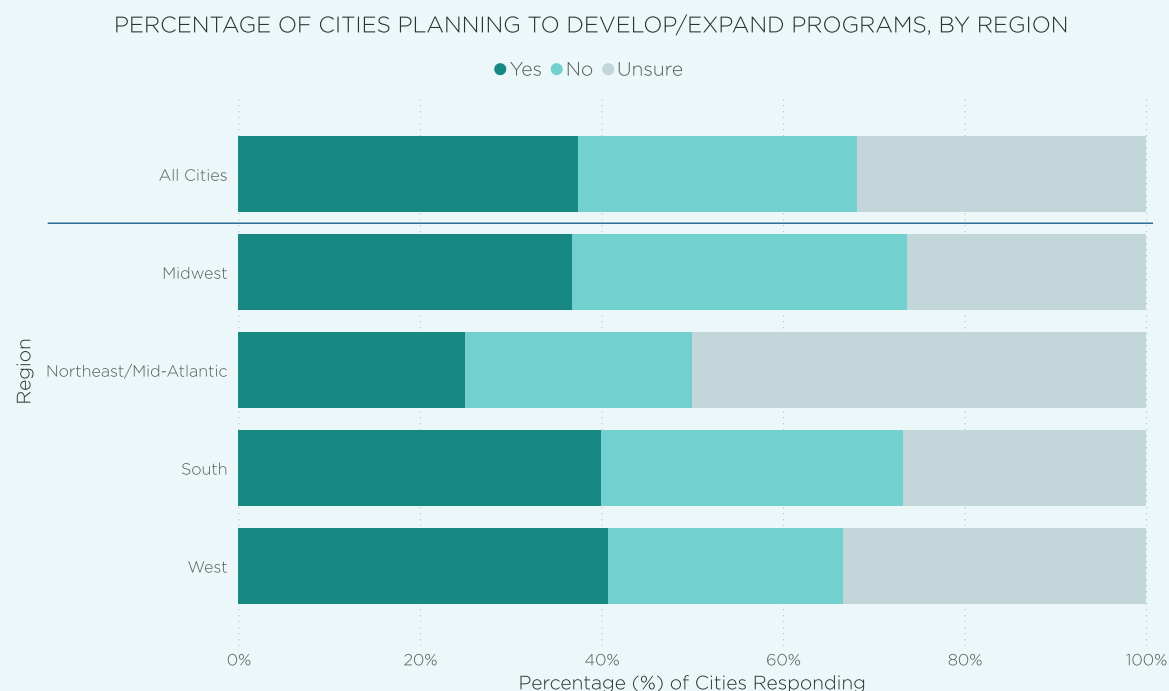
Figure 2 shows that not only is it a priority, but the scale of municipal financial empowerment efforts is growing. Three-fourths of cities reported that they had sustained or increased the number of people served by financial empowerment programs over the past decade, with 57 percent reporting increased impact in the number of people served.



Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024 (n=104).
Note: NLC uses data from the U.S. Census bureau (2020) to calculate population size and Census region. See Appendix D for details.

As shown below, in **Figure 3**, almost 40 percent of respondents said their city plans to develop or expand financial empowerment programming in the near future. For example, guaranteed income (GI), consumer protection, and fines and fees reform are new financial empowerment program frontiers for the **City of Lansing, MI**. Lansing leaders emphasized that their new financial empowerment program frontier is grounded in partnerships. Lansing now partners with its district courts and its specialty courts (sobriety, domestic violence, and eviction), along with the Department of Corrections to help carry out its financial empowerment programming.

FIGURE 3
Almost 40 Percent of Cities Plan to Develop or Expand Financial Empowerment Programs in the Future



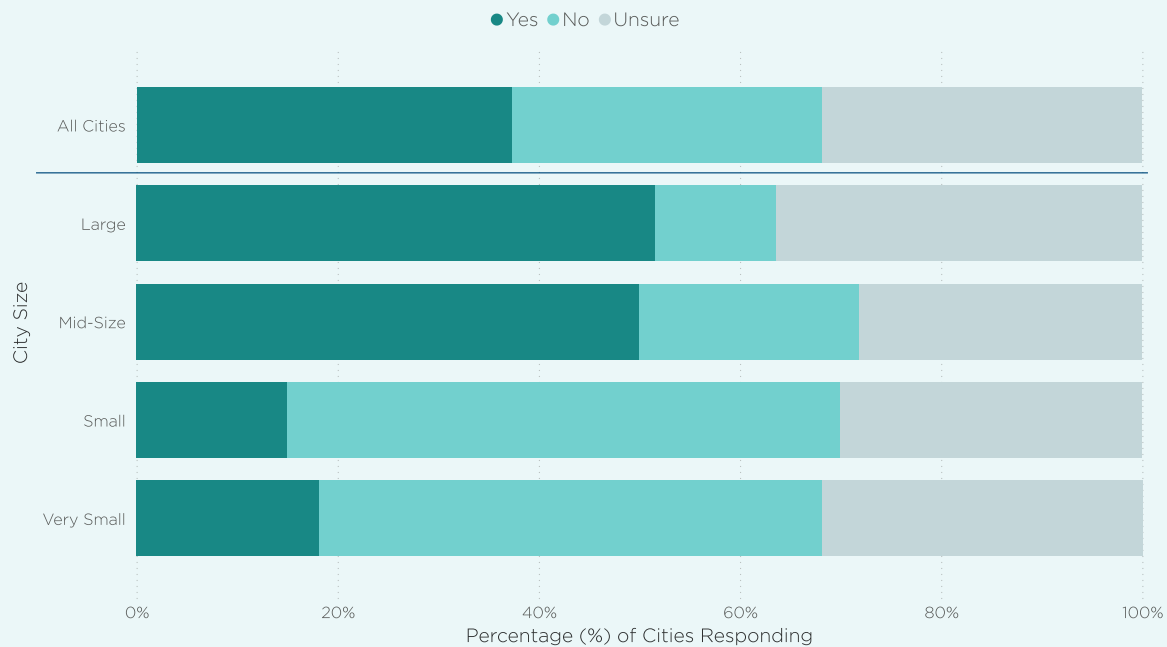
Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024 (n=107).

Note: NLC uses data from the U.S. Census bureau (2020) to calculate population size and Census region. See Appendix D for details.

Large and mid-size cities, like **St. Louis, MO**, and **East Orange, NJ**, were most likely to report plans to expand their financial empowerment programming, but even among the smallest cities, almost 20 percent indicated plans to expand.

FIGURE 4
Large and Mid-Size Cities Are More Likely to Develop or Expand
Financial Empowerment Programs in the Future

PERCENTAGE OF CITIES PLANNING TO DEVELOP/EXPAND PROGRAMS, BY CITY SIZE



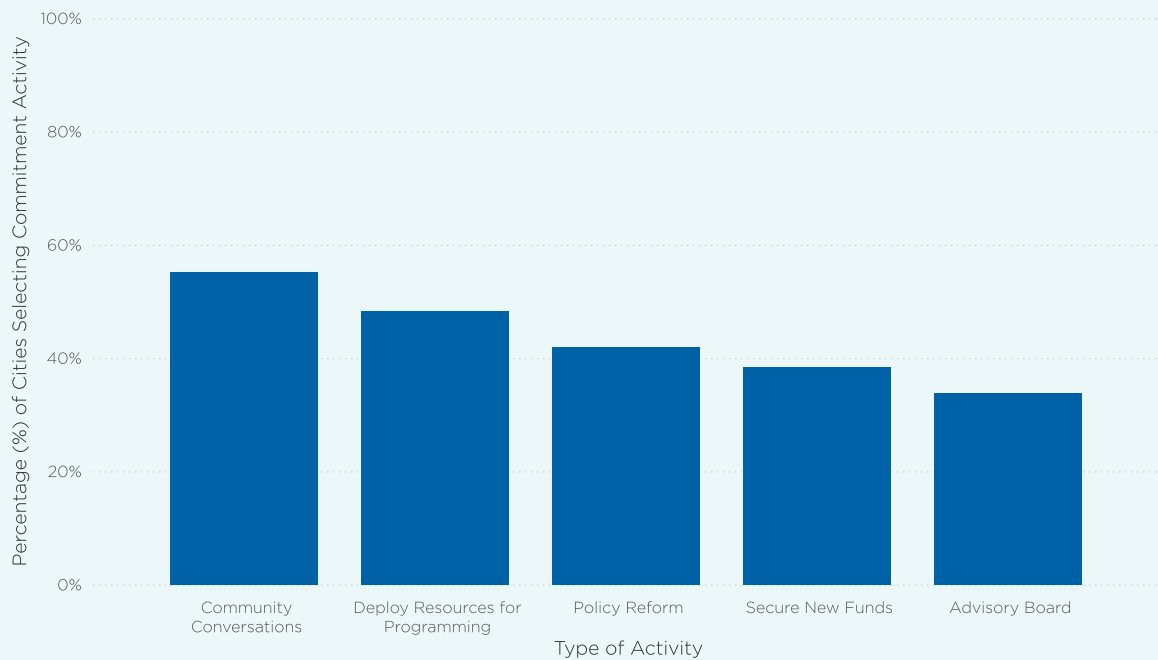
Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024 (n=107).

Note: NLC uses data from the U.S. Census bureau (2020) to calculate population size and Census region. See Appendix D for details.

Cities demonstrate commitment to financial empowerment of residents in various ways. **Figure 5** shows that many city leaders indicated that they conduct community conversations or create advisory boards to solicit public input on programming. Other ways cities support financial empowerment include investing financial resources into programming and changing city policies.

FIGURE 5
More Than 50 Percent of Cities Show Commitment to Financial Empowerment Programming through Community Conversations

ACTIVITIES BY WHICH CITIES SHOW COMMITMENT TO FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMING



Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024 (n=119).

Note: Respondents could identify multiple options so total is greater than 100%.



MIAMI, FL

Long Term Partnerships

Miami has been offering financial empowerment programming for more than 20 years, working closely with partners in the community. The city employs a Community Partnerships Manager of Policy and Strategic Development to ensure that constituents can connect with existing programming and to help support financial empowerment efforts. In communities where distrust of government is high, such partners are able to deliver services and information in collaboration with the city. The result is ACCESS Miami, which stands for Assets, Capital, Community, Education, Savings and Success. The initiative focuses on access to existing benefits, access to capital, building and accumulating wealth, and improving financial literacy for city residents and small business entrepreneurs.*



POPULATION

455,924

* More information on ACCESS Miami can be found at [Miami.gov/access](https://miami.gov/access).

FINDING #2

A Core Set of Pillar Programs Anchor Municipal Financial Empowerment Efforts

A set of pillar programs identified in the 2014 scan — the programs that were most cited by survey respondents and that signify a strong city infrastructure for financial empowerment efforts — are still very much the core of financial empowerment efforts in cities today:

- ◆ Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)*
- ◆ Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) outreach
- ◆ Benefits outreach and access
- ◆ Financial education, counseling, or coaching
- ◆ Homeownership assistance

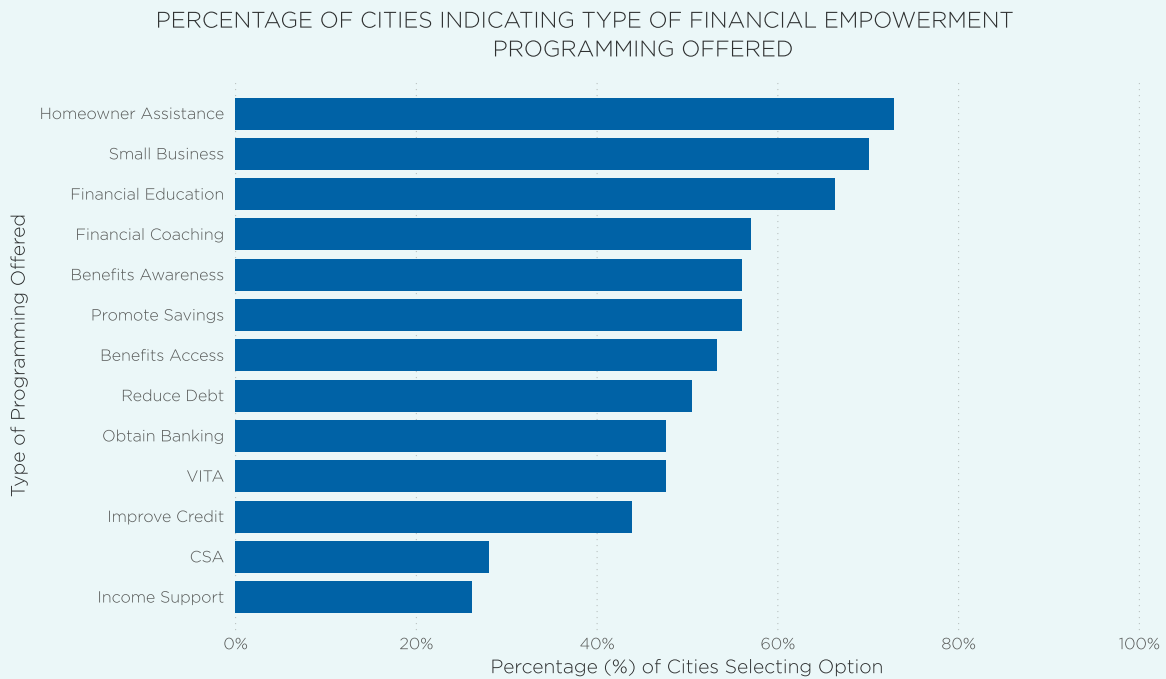
However, some different programs appear in the top five in 2024, as shown in **Figure 6** below. It is important to note that in some regions, financial empowerment programs are offered by other levels of government, such as county or state government. This could explain why some very common programs, such as VITA, are lower on the list in Figure 6. Moreover, the prevalence of CSA programs may seem inflated because most municipalities that operate a CSA are within NLC's network and more likely to have completed the survey.



In some regions, financial empowerment programs are offered by other levels of government, such as county or state government

* Definitions of some key terms are included in Appendix C of this report.

FIGURE 6
Homeowner Assistance, Small Business, and Financial Education
Are the Most Common Programs Offered



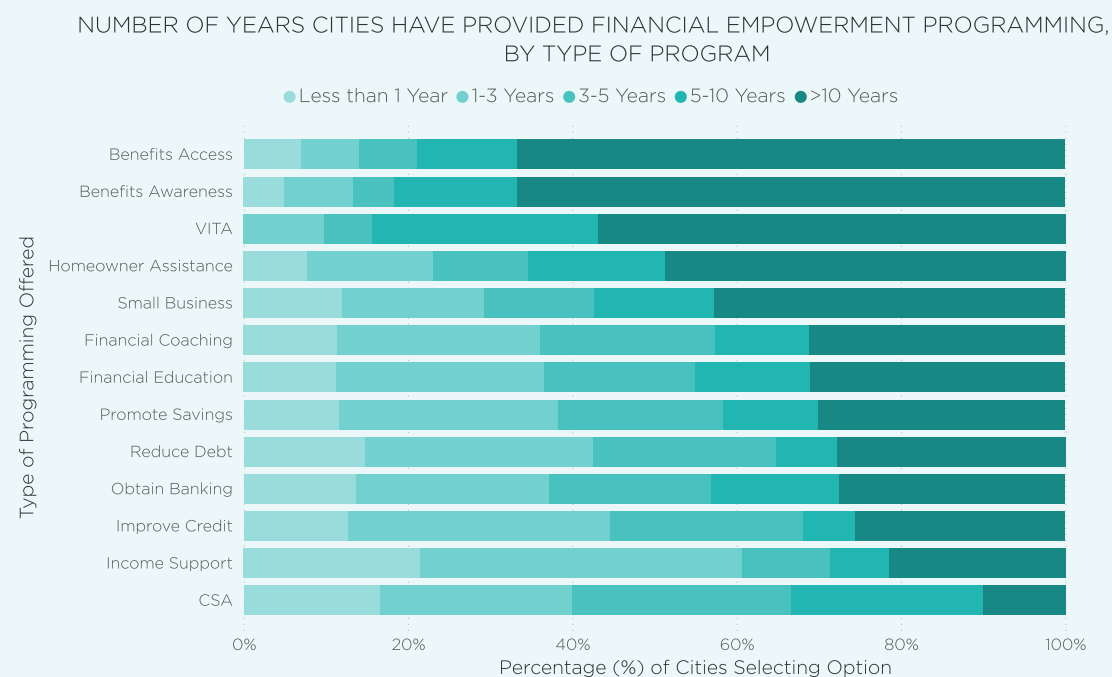
Survey participants identified how long their cities had been providing those pillar programs, as well as how long they have had additional programs that have gained momentum in the past decade. Benefits awareness, benefits access, VITA and homeowner assistance make up some of the longest-running financial empowerment programming in responding cities. In cities with average rates of SNAP participation, people below the poverty line and median income (2nd and 3rd quartile) programs are likely to have been in place five to 10 years. Cities with the lowest or highest rates of income and percentage of disadvantaged residents have programs that have been in existence for the least number of years (See Appendix D, Table 13).

Most municipalities in the survey that had initiated pillar financial empowerment programs in 2014 continue to operate them in 2024. Of cities that completed the survey in both 2014 and 2024, only one had dropped any of its financial empowerment pillar programs by 2024.

Although not classified as a “pillar” program in 2014, small business and entrepreneurship support appeared as a foundation of financial empowerment in cities both in 2014 and 2024 and includes some of the longest-running programming in cities.

The emergence of newer financial empowerment programs in communities across the country has broadened the reach of city efforts in the past decade. Some of the models that have gained traction include CSA’s, guaranteed income programs, rental housing assistance and eviction prevention, and review and reform of city policies.

FIGURE 7
Benefits Access and Awareness Programs Make Up Some of the Longest Running Financial Empowerment Programming in Cities





LANSING, MI

Long-term Pillar Programs

Lansing a respondent in both the 2014 and 2024 surveys, has long-standing and comprehensive financial empowerment programs in place. Since 2014, with strong mayoral support, Lansing has established a Children's Savings Account called Lansing SAVE with Michigan State University Federal Credit Union as part of a continuum of financial and education supports known as BOLD Lansing. Mayor Andy Schor granted ARPA funds to United Way for a fully equipped mobile VITA unit to provide free tax preparation services at residents' homes, workplaces, or local community centers.

Along with expanded VITA programming, Lansing's Financial Empowerment Center continues to deliver free, professional, one-on-one financial counseling, and is now housed within the city and staffed by city employees. Since 2017, Lansing has served as the regional administrative agency for the state's reentry program. The city provides 28 beds of housing in 13 apartments for returning citizens and coordinates behavioral health services, employment services, bus passes, clothing vouchers, and identification. Lansing's other initiatives include a consumer protection campaign and a driver's license restoration initiative.



LANSING POPULATION

112,115



DENVER, CO

Denver was one of a handful of cities after San Francisco and Seattle to launch Bank On, a strategy to give residents access to non-predatory financial institutions. The city was one of 10 cities participating in NLC's 2010 Bank On technical assistance project, and by 2014, Bank On was a centerpiece of Denver's broad range of financial empowerment pillar programs. Today, Denver's approach has expanded while still including financial education, credit repair services, homeowner assistance, benefits awareness and access, tax preparation assistance, and small business capital and support. During the COVID-19 pandemic, with support from the Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund (CFE Fund), Denver created its Office of Financial Empowerment and Protection, adding consumer protection and financial navigation to its stable of programming, and was the first locality in the nation to pass legislation against predatory lending.



DENVER POPULATION

716,577

FINDING
#3

BIPOC Communities Are a Growing Focus of Municipal Financial Empowerment Programs

Many municipal financial empowerment efforts prioritize certain populations or target certain groups to maximize impact and make best use of limited resources. As shown in **Figure 8**, Black, indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) were named as a priority for financial empowerment programming by the most respondents (82%) in 2024, followed by people who are housing burdened (69%), women (67%), children and seniors (both 57%), immigrants (53%), people with disabilities, and individuals earning low wages (51% each).*

Target populations for cities have changed somewhat over the last decade. In 2014, low-income residents generally were most often designated as a priority population for cities' financial empowerment efforts (85%). Cities have increased their focus on programming for BIPOC residents over the last 10 years. In 2014 only 63 percent indicated "racial/ethnic minorities" [sic] as a priority population.**

While some participants noted that poverty is experienced disproportionately by many of the groups noted in the survey, the 2024 scan showed that cities are interested in addressing longstanding racial disparities in their communities. The racial wealth gap in the United States has grown 47 percent over the last 30 years, according to the Federal Reserve Board of Governors, due to historic and systematic barriers faced by BIPOC individuals in accumulating wealth.²

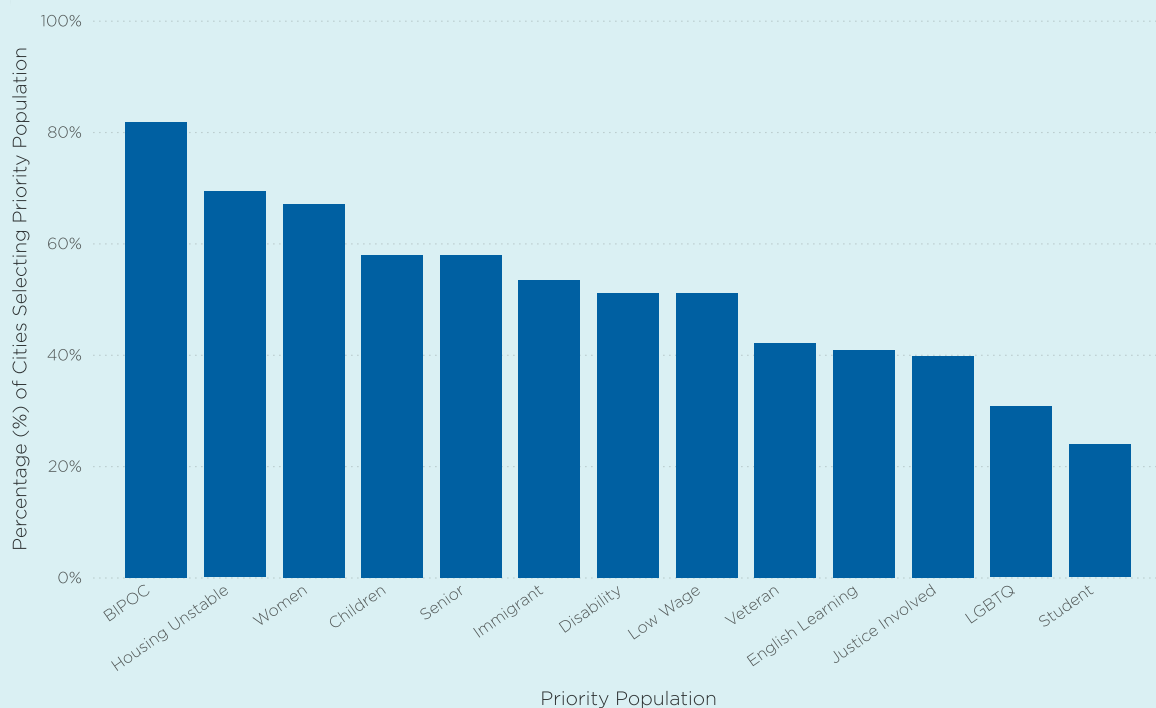
* Housing burdened is generally defined as spending more than a third of household income on housing, including rent or mortgage, utilities, and other fees.

** Scan respondents indicated a focus on BIPOC communities at the time the survey was conducted and prior to the issuance of federal executive orders.

FIGURE 8

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Are the Highest Priority Population for Financial Empowerment Programming

PERCENTAGE OF CITIES IDENTIFYING FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMING PRIORITY POPULATION



Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024 (n=88).

Note: Respondents could identify multiple options so total is greater than 100%. BIPOC is defined for this survey to mean "Black, Indigenous, and People of Color" and LGBTQ is defined for this survey to mean "Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer."



PHILADELPHIA, PA

Focus on Returning Citizens

Several years ago, **Philadelphia** began focusing on recidivism and cycles of imprisonment and launched a program to give unrestricted cash grants to residents re-entering the community after incarceration. Administered through the nonprofit organization Clarifi, the program links microgrants with financial counseling to help justice-involved people open a bank account, make financial plans, and meet their immediate needs. In addition, the city has reduced the fees inmates in its jail must pay for telephone calls and commissary items — costs that incurred debt for them and their families. It is also working with Drexel University to study the impact of eliminating diversion fees charged to people in alternatives to incarceration. City leaders hope that helping to improve the economic health of justice-involved residents will allow them to avoid future incarceration, saving them — and the city — millions of dollars over time.



POPULATION

1.55 MILLION

The need for such efforts was made even more clear by the COVID-19 pandemic, which exacerbated long-standing economic and racial divides.³ Some low-wage workers, disproportionately people of color, were unable to stay home because their jobs — as nursing home aides, food producers, clerks, drivers — could not be done remotely.⁴ Elevated COVID death rates among BIPOC Americans showed the impact with devastating clarity.* Others, such as housekeepers, cooks, and restaurant workers were unable to work at all during lengthy shutdowns, with an economic impact that was felt long after the initial period of the pandemic.

Several city leaders at the roundtable noted that community conversations and collaboration with neighborhood leaders are critical to building trust in BIPOC communities and encouraging participation in financial empowerment programming.

* In the first year of the pandemic, the death rate per 100,000 population for African Americans was 178, and for Latinos, 154, compared to 124 for whites. (The Covid Tracking Project <https://covidtracking.com/race>)



FINDING
#4

Municipalities Are Engaging in Creative Partnerships to Strengthen Financial Empowerment Efforts within Communities

Partnerships are a key component of financial empowerment efforts in cities. In fact, almost half rely on nonprofit organizations to administer programming to people in their community — about the same proportion as in 2014. Whether through a contract for services, a memorandum of understanding, or partnership agreement, nonprofit organizations are important partners in the work. Large private employers in some cities host city financial counseling programs, while Community Development Financial Institutions and banks may support financial access programs like Bank On.

Partnerships are also central to funding in many communities. While government funding — federal, state, county, and municipal — is the largest source of support for financial empowerment, many cities seek additional funding from private philanthropies, nonprofit and business partners, and financial institutions. Almost a third of cities reported that they are actively fundraising to support their financial empowerment activities.

Financial empowerment programming can be provided by a variety of city departments or agencies, most commonly through the offices of economic (52%) or community (51%) development, the mayor's office (43%), the housing department (41%) or the city manager's office (32%). However, survey participants also reported financial empowerment programming being administered in almost every city department, from the treasurer's office to housing, human services to human resources, even water utility, transit, and animal control. Some reported programs through municipal courts, libraries, and public health agencies, as shown in **Figure 9**. A growing number of cities also now have a dedicated Office of Financial Empowerment through which programming is coordinated.

Almost

1/3

of cities reported that they are actively fundraising to support their financial empowerment activities.

FIGURE 9
A Broad Range of Other City Departments Implement Financial Empowerment Programs
CITY OFFICES RESPONSIBLE FOR FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMING, BY FREQUENCY



Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024 (n=119).
Note: Figure represents offices responsible for financial empowerment programming excluding the top 5 listed in the text above. Text size is related to the proportion of responses for each phrase/word.

Municipal leaders noted in interviews and at the roundtable that collaborations among city departments are also being used to expand the reach and effectiveness of financial empowerment programming. In San Francisco, for instance, several departments within city government provide funding for financial counseling to their constituents and staff through contracts with the Office of Financial Empowerment.



LOS ANGELES, CA

Financial Empowerment Integration Across City Departments

The **City of Los Angeles** is working to infuse financial empowerment in all aspects of city operations. The Community Investment for Families Department (CIFD) works to break the cycle of generational poverty by building community wealth. The department also recently established an Office of Community Wealth, which offers technical assistance and support to other city departments to include financial empowerment in their work, as well as training nonprofit agencies to do the same. CIFD piloted the nation's largest guaranteed income program, providing 3,200 individuals with



POPULATION

3.8 MILLION



\$1,000 a month for a year. The department also supports neighborhood-based financial counseling and tax preparation, children's savings accounts for all first graders, help accessing federal student debt relief, and is expanding financial counseling to its services for individuals experiencing domestic violence. These efforts increased household income in the city by \$21.8 million last year through Earned Income Tax Credits, Child Tax Credits, employment, public benefits, reduced debt, and improved wages, according to the department's data.



CIFD piloted the nation's largest guaranteed income program, providing 3,200 individuals with \$1,000 a month for a year.

FINDING #5

Cities Across Regions and of All Sizes Successfully Established Financial Empowerment Programs



Even very small communities have increasingly implemented financial empowerment programs

The 2024 scan found that successful financial empowerment programming is taking place in large and medium cities as well as small towns and can be adapted to work in a wide variety of municipal structures.

Even very small communities have increasingly implemented financial counseling, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) programs and benefits access guidance for their residents, along with support for entrepreneurship and micro-businesses.*

While financial empowerment is utilized by municipalities across the country, of cities that responded, cities in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic are statistically more likely to have programming than the average city, as shown in **Figure 10.****

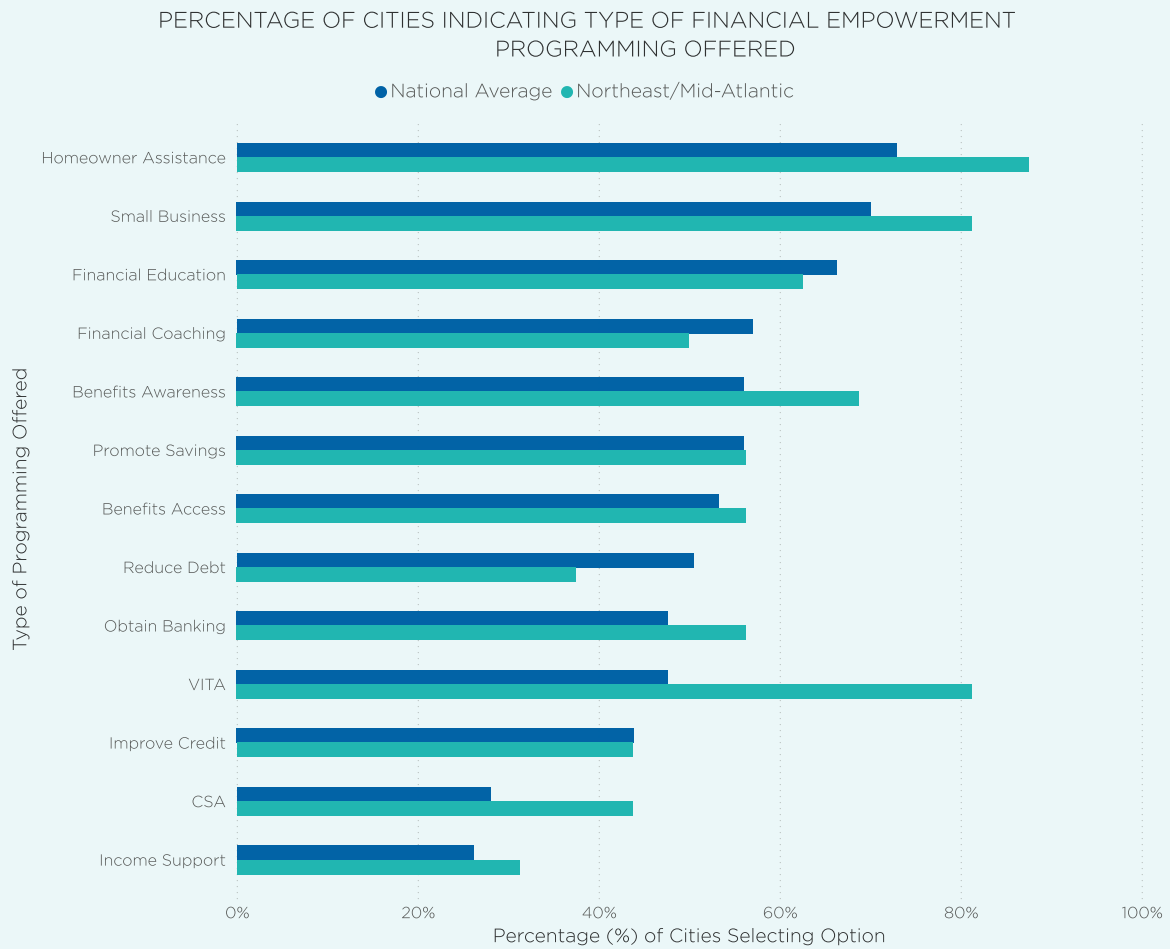
Municipalities in the Midwest are more likely to have developed programming more recently, as shown in **Figure 11** (page 32).



* Micro-businesses are generally defined as those with fewer than 10 employees and include sole proprietorships.

** Analysis not shown here, see Appendix D for more detail.

FIGURE 10
 Cities in the Northeast/Mid-Atlantic Region Offer More
 Programming than the National Average

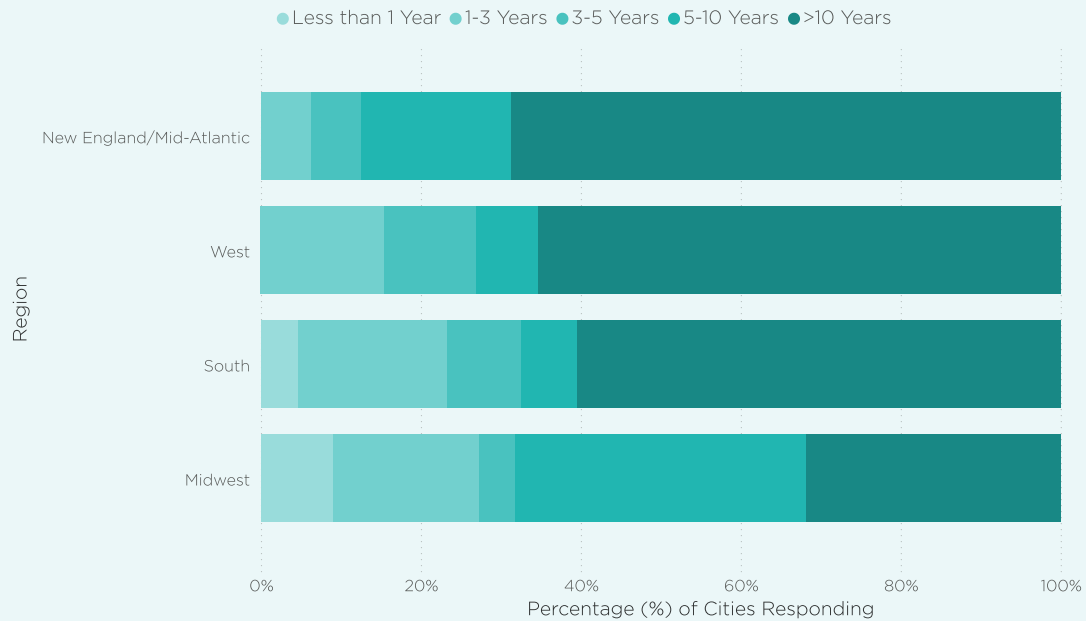


Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024 (n=119).

Note: NLC uses data from the U.S. Census bureau (2020) to calculate population size and Census region. See Table D5 for details. VITA is defined for this survey to mean "Volunteer Income Tax Assistance." CSA is defined for this survey to mean "Children's Saving Accounts."

FIGURE 11 Midwest Cities Have Been Providing Financial Empowerment Programming for Fewer Years than Cities in Other Regions

NUMBER OF YEARS CITIES HAVE PROVIDED FINANCIAL EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMING,
BY REGION



Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024 (n=119).

Note: NLC uses data from the U.S. Census bureau (2020) to calculate population size and Census region. See Appendix D for details.

These regional differences may be the result of regional support and the effect of neighboring localities inspiring others in the region to implement programming to boost residents' financial well-being. For example, **Denver** launched an office of financial empowerment, and then partnered with the **City of Aurora** to aid them in creating an office of financial empowerment. This further led the State of Colorado to start a statewide financial empowerment office that supports other localities' efforts.

A variety of approaches to financial empowerment was notable among the cities surveyed, and reflected the wide range of governmental structures, political environments, and demographics that American cities represent. Whether they had a strong mayor or a council-city manager form of government, cities in the scan with financial empowerment initiatives credited support from elected leaders as critical to their success.

Cities that are independent of county government like **Charlottesville, VA.**, and those with a joint city-county governing structure like **Louisville, KY.**, and **San Francisco** have been able to provide financial empowerment programming to serve their communities, and some have collaborated with nearby localities as well.

Some cities are in states that share their commitment to financial empowerment, while others find themselves acting alone within their municipal borders. The Dillon's Rule in 31 states prevents localities from instituting certain policy initiatives and ordinances without a state mandate, but city leaders in those states have found ways to help residents improve financial well-being within those constraints.* Municipal micro-loan programs in cities like Philadelphia provide an alternative to predatory lenders, for instance, although they are not permitted to regulate payday loans directly.

Some cities allocate general funds to financial empowerment programming, while others rely on federal or philanthropic funds. Creative programming, along with support from organizations like National League of Cities and the Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund (CFE Fund), enables even less affluent communities to provide such services.



* "Dillon's Rule takes a narrow approach to local authority, essentially stating that local governments only have the powers expressly granted to them by the state." <https://fiscalnote.com/blog/dillons-rule-vs-home-rule>. An NLC report on Home Rule and Dillon's Rule can be found at <https://www.nlc.org/resource/new-principles-of-home-rule/>.

Small Cities on the Move

Charlottesville has taken an explicit racial equity lens with its financial empowerment efforts, delivering a wide variety of programs and initiatives to begin to undo the harm caused by generations of systemic racism. From job training to entrepreneurial support, rental assistance to tax relief, Charlottesville's efforts gained new momentum in the wake of the deadly 2017 Unite the Right "rally" that brought hundreds of white supremacists and fascist groups to the city to protest its planned removal of Confederate monuments.



CHARLOTTESVILLE POPULATION

45,983

CHARLOTTESVILLE, VA



JACKSON POPULATION

68,380

In October 2021, **Jackson** was one of five local governments selected to receive a planning grant and technical assistance from the CFE Fund's CityStart initiative. The initiative seeks to identify local financial empowerment priorities through a structured approach to identifying financial empowerment goals, convening stakeholders, developing concrete strategies, and ultimately crafting an actionable blueprint rooted in local priorities and opportunities. The center's services reach beyond its 68,380 residents to serve the surrounding rural communities as well.

JACKSON, TN



Regardless of a city's structure, leadership and support from elected leaders was cited by many in interviews and roundtable discussions as key to the success and growth of financial empowerment programming. Strong mayors take the lead in some cities, while in others, city managers and staff integrate financial empowerment into the work of their departments. The 2014 scan found that leadership from a mayor, city manager, city treasurer, or councilmember "can help break down silos and strengthen partnerships in financial empowerment efforts. In almost all instances, a strong municipal commitment to financial inclusion translates into more comprehensive and effective programs and services that are more stable and more likely to meet residents' needs." This observation was confirmed by the 2024 findings.



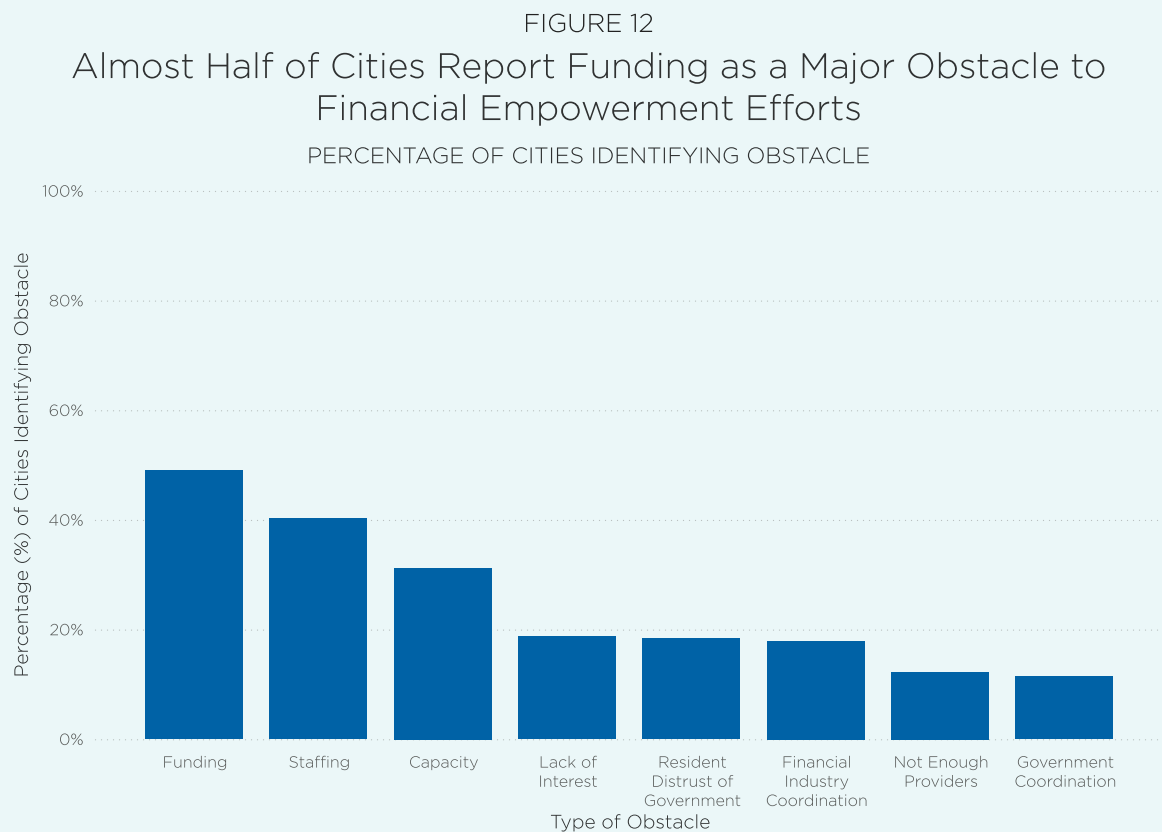
Strong mayors take the lead in some cities, while in others, city managers and staff integrate financial empowerment into the work of their departments.



FINDING
#6

*Funding is a Major Challenge
in Maintaining and Expanding
Financial Empowerment Initiatives*

When asked to identify obstacles they face in their financial empowerment efforts, almost half of respondents identified insufficient funding as a challenge to maintaining and expanding financial empowerment efforts (see **Figure 12**).



Many financial empowerment programs do not have direct funding opportunities or robust funding sources that municipalities can access directly. The federal Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Matching Grant program estimates a funding level of \$40 million in 2025, awarded to up to 325 grants, far fewer than the number of communities that offer such help. In addition, since many financial empowerment programs align with financial institutions' goals, financial institutions have supported programs through Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) investments. However, CRA investments are not required in all communities and are made at the financial institution's discretion. Moreover, CRA funds are often sent directly to nonprofit providers.

Two additional common challenges cited by cities in the scan were staffing and organizational capacity, which can be caused by lack of funding or lack of political will. Other obstacles cited were less tangible, such as community distrust of government and lack of community interest in the programs offered. Still others involved difficulties in coordination with other agencies and organizations and with other government entities, such as counties and neighboring communities.

Almost
50%
OF RESPONDENTS
identified insufficient
funding as a challenge
to maintaining and
expanding financial
empowerment efforts





THE AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN ACT

ARPA and Financial Empowerment Programs

The American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) provided a lifeline for local governments during the COVID-19 pandemic through its State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (SLFRF) program, offering an unprecedented influx of funds to municipalities nationwide. Many cities participating in the scan noted that they utilized ARPA funds to launch or expand financial empowerment initiatives, including piloting guaranteed income and other cash assistance programs, establishing entrepreneurship support programs, paying down debt related to fines and fees, and offering financial counseling. A handful of cities responded in the survey that the utilization of ARPA funds toward these kinds of enterprises was evidence of their



Many cities participating in the scan noted that they utilized ARPA funds to launch or expand financial empowerment initiatives



city's commitment to financial empowerment. However, ARPA's obligation deadline, whereby any funds that had not been obligated by December 31, 2024, had to be returned to the U.S. Treasury, meant that many cities would no longer have federal funds to rely on to support these programs. The so-called "ARPA cliff" served as a turning point for many municipalities that had to face decisions on how to maintain these initiatives. NLC's ARPA resources provided cities with useful information to navigate these deadlines.^{*} Some cities plan to use general funds while others are exploring other funding partners to help share the cost.

^{*} NLC blog, "FAQs: Navigating the ARPA SLFRF Obligation Deadline," December 6, 2024 and NLC blog, "Countdown to ARPA's SLFRF Obligation Deadline: Top 5 Insights for Local Governments," December 9, 2024

FINDING

#7

Inconsistent Data Collection Limits Program Evaluation and Support

Cities reported a wide variety of data collection efforts and uses of data in their financial empowerment work, but the scan revealed that few cities have a comprehensive approach to data collection or setting goals (See Appendix D, Table 12). This presents an opportunity for growth in municipal efforts, as quality data can help target programming, measure effectiveness, and build financial and community support.

The survey also asked respondents to note how they have used various forms of data to assess the need for and target financial empowerment programming in their communities, including conducting a financial services needs assessment of key constituencies (24%); a general assessment of community needs, program availability and service gaps (69%); and mapping of other community indicators like crime, poverty or health (66%) (see Appendix D, Table 11). The survey showed that cities are also using federal and state data, local data, data from other organizations, such as health departments and local and national nonprofit organizations, and success data from their programs. In 2014, just 20 percent of respondents indicated a high reliance on data to guide and evaluate their financial inclusion efforts.



Community engagement is an important data source for many of the cities surveyed in the 2024 scan, particularly in conducting assessments of community need. From community meetings to anonymous neighborhood surveys, public input is considered by many cities to be essential in developing and targeting financial empowerment programs. Participants in the 2024 roundtable also noted that community conversations during the planning process can improve participation by community members in resulting programming and build trust in city providers.

The **City of Jackson, TN.**, conducted an analysis of needs, program availability, and service gaps, and utilized data from a United Way of West Tennessee report which found that 27 percent of the county's households are "ALICE" (asset-limited, income-constrained, employed) earning more than the federal poverty level, but not enough to afford basic needs where they live. With targeted outreach to this population resulting in increased services provided, Jackson's Office of Financial Empowerment reports impressive financial growth for the target group: \$250,757 in debt reduced overall, 49 credit score increases, 78 credit delinquencies reduced, and \$208,812 in increased savings.⁵



Community engagement is an important data source for many of the cities surveyed in the 2024 scan, particularly in conducting assessments of community need.



BOSTON, MA

Quantitative and Qualitative Data to Tell the Story

The Center for Working Families (formerly known as the Mayor's Office of Financial Empowerment) in **Boston** provides residents with financial coaching, credit building, tax filing, benefits access and employment. The office works with independent evaluators and data partners to assess community needs and to develop, evaluate, and improve its programming, as well as to help tell the story of the value of financial empowerment in the city. However, Director of Operations Constance Martin says that data is only one part of the story. "We should rely on data as only one factor," she says. "I want a success story from staff every month. Narrative and stories are important, too, in measuring impact. When I give updates to our Cabinet Chief and Mayor Michelle Wu, I want to be able to augment data with real human beings' achievements."



POPULATION

653,833

Cities in the scan have collected data to record participation and track a variety of financial outcomes, such as employment, family income, credit reports, savings and debt levels, and general financial well-being. **The City of Miami**, for instance, has linked funding of its financial empowerment programming to measurable outcomes and impact data, based on specific goals and targets. However, only a small number of cities in the scan reported conducting formal evaluations to measure quality and impact, and only 21 percent of cities reported that they have specific measurable goals for their financial empowerment initiatives, compared to almost a third in the 2014 scan.

Program stability is a necessary component to creating a seamless continuum of service, several participants noted. As financial empowerment initiatives gain traction and pass from one administration to the next, many participants stressed the need to use both quantitative data and storytelling to build support for financial empowerment work both in the community and within city government.

Only
21%
of cities reported that
they have specific
measurable goals
for their financial
empowerment initiatives



Key Findings from the 2014 Scan

- ◆ **Financial empowerment programs were emerging as an important priority** for city leaders

- ◆ **More than 20 percent of responding cities had assembled at least six out of seven key “building blocks”** of successful financial empowerment programs: a strong champion, coordination between departments or agencies, leadership, program implementation, community commitment, defined goals, and vision.

- ◆ **Most cities responding had at least four initiatives in “pillar program” areas:**
 - Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) and federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) outreach;
 - Multi-benefit outreach/access;
 - Financial education, counseling and/or coaching;
 - Homeownership assistance.

◆ **An even wider array of financial empowerment programs were operating**

in a quarter of the survey respondents' cities, including programs aimed at promoting savings, expanding access to the financial mainstream and reducing debt.

◆ **Less than a third of responding cities reported that their financial empowerment programs had a dedicated home—a**

dedicated department or agency—in city government or a partner organization.

◆ **Partnerships between municipal governments and external stakeholders**

had been formed to deliver financial empowerment programming in more than a quarter of surveyed cities.

◆ **Just 20 percent of survey respondents indicated a high reliance on data to guide and evaluate their financial inclusion efforts.**

These cities also had a more robust set of programs (six or more) in place.

Going Deeper



Going Deeper: What's Working, What's Ahead

The survey data, along with municipal interviews and roundtable discussions, revealed important insights about city financial empowerment efforts beyond the key findings revealed in this report. City representatives shared lessons learned from the programming they provide and brainstormed about other initiatives on the horizon. The conversations revealed a broad array of approaches within the financial empowerment field. From small villages to large metro areas, participants described the ways they address specific needs, overcome obstacles and leverage partners to better support the populations they are targeting.

While some communities described a focus on one specific strategy and aim to increase its reach in the community, others have elected to increase the number of programs offered to reach more residents. Many cities have opened dedicated offices or financial empowerment centers, while others house their programming in multiple departments, or within a collaborating partner organization.





LOUISVILLE, KY

A Systems Approach

Louisville is a merged city-county government with an Office of Financial Empowerment (OFE) that includes six full-time staff, including a data manager. In 2022, the OFE launched a Financial Empowerment Center to increase access to financial empowerment services for low-income families in the city. The city has integrated financial empowerment into almost every facet of local government, even animal control. If a family is unable to care for a pet because of financial need, they are linked to a financial counselor to get them started on the path to financial health.

Although the city has traditionally offered financial empowerment services to low- and very low-income residents, the office is increasingly reaching out to families whose income is above the poverty level, but who still face economic hardship. Defined by some as ALICE (asset limited, income constrained, employed) and others as the “muddy middle,” families between poverty and true financial stability can benefit from financial counseling, particularly in the areas of credit management and housing. City representatives note that such services help middle-income families at risk of losing assets from slipping into poverty.



POPULATION
256,231

Moving from Programming to Systems Change

A common theme in interviews and from the roundtable discussion was the desire to move from a focus on specific programming to a more comprehensive financial empowerment strategy that leads to systems change. In some communities, like **Louisville, KY**, that takes the form of a “no wrong doors” strategy, in which anyone who seeks help from the city, whether in social services or the tax office or even animal control, has the chance to access financial empowerment programming. In **San Francisco**, eight different city departments fund and staff financial empowerment initiatives for the people they serve. The Department of Community Investment for Families in **Los Angeles** provides technical assistance and support to other city departments to incorporate financial empowerment into their work.



In some cities, financial empowerment is beginning to be integrated into business policies and contracts.

In some cities, financial empowerment is beginning to be integrated into business policies and contracts. This can take form of requiring banks holding city funds to offer low-barrier accounts to low-income residents (San Francisco); or it can be built into the funding structure for supporting nonprofit organizations, requiring and training funded organizations to provide financial empowerment services in the programs they operate in the community (**Louisville, KY**).

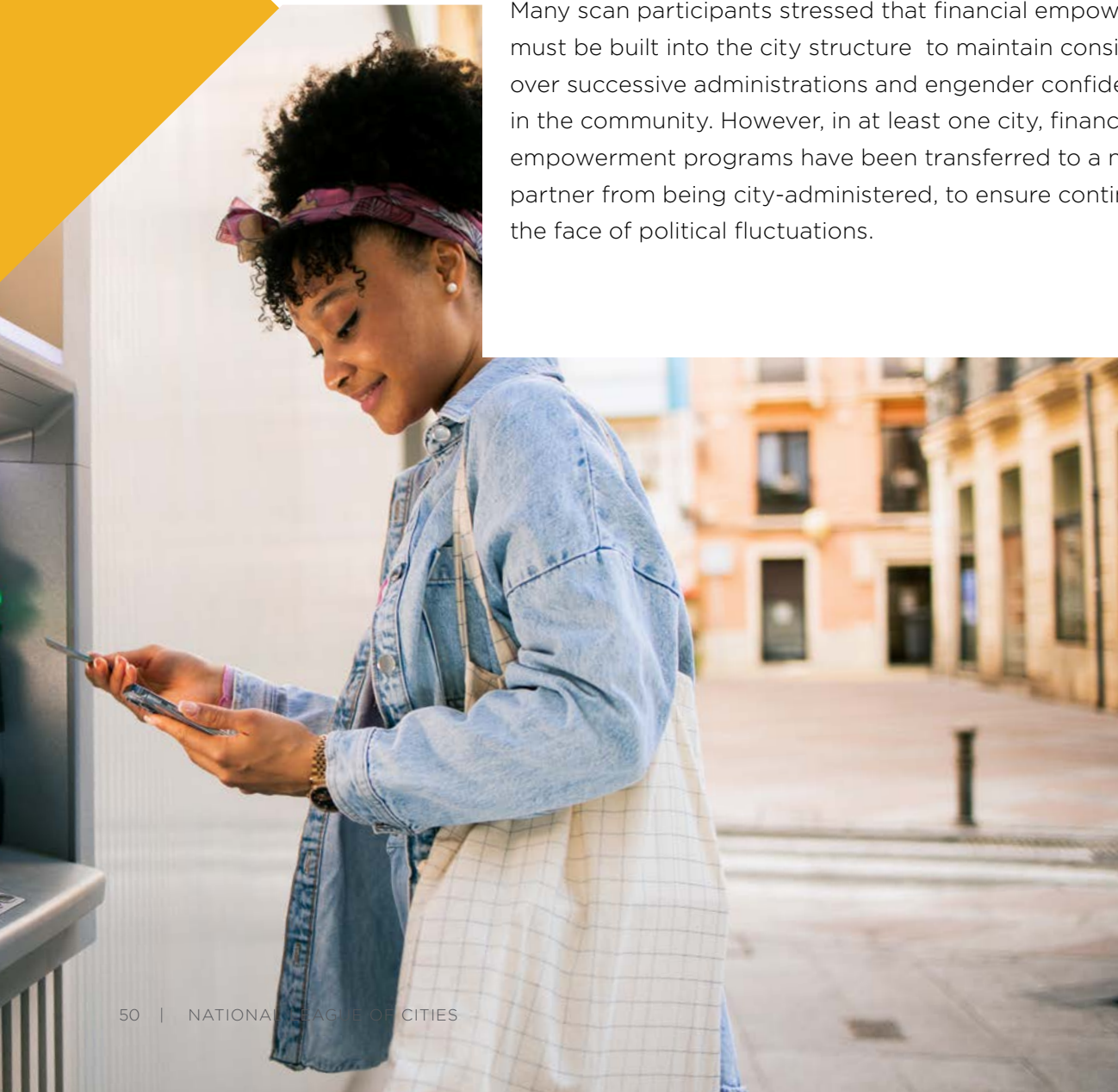
Other cities are looking at how financial empowerment efforts fit into the broader goal of helping residents find financial stability across the spectrum of need. For example, while residents at risk of homelessness may benefit from direct cash payments or debt relief, a microbusiness owner may be better served by a change in municipal policy that allows them to compete for lucrative city contracts. Targeting the appropriate service to the specific need was cited in the scan as key to program success and impact.



In some communities, such as **Louisville, KY.**, public benefits recipients are automatically offered financial empowerment programming.

Several roundtable participants noted that such strategic approaches benefit from a wide range of “on-ramps” or first doorways to access programming, as well as “off-ramps” to exit when residents no longer need it. Some on-ramps include public benefits assistance, tax preparation guidance, job readiness programs, and financial counseling, among others. As residents become financially secure, off-ramps support sustained economic security and promote wealth building, such as homeownership and maintenance programs, Children’s Savings Accounts, and more advanced financial services. In some communities, such as **Louisville, KY.**, public benefits recipients are automatically offered financial empowerment programming. Others, like **New York City**, offer applications that allow residents to apply for a variety of services and benefits at once, including financial empowerment services.

Many scan participants stressed that financial empowerment must be built into the city structure to maintain consistency over successive administrations and engender confidence in the community. However, in at least one city, financial empowerment programs have been transferred to a nonprofit partner from being city-administered, to ensure continuity in the face of political fluctuations.





SUPERIOR, AZ

One-Stop Financial Empowerment Services in a Small Town

The small town of **Superior** fought back against economic downturn and a mine closure by equipping its residents to become financially healthy and ready for the next opportunity. After working with the University of Arizona extension program to offer financial education classes at the local library, Superior created Rebuild Superior, a nonprofit organization, and used an abandoned school building to create the Superior Enterprise Center. In addition to financial empowerment programs like benefits access, financial counseling and small business capital support, the center houses a food bank, home repair program, maker spaces and job training. Funding for the center was made possible by a federal grant matched by a mining company that plans to open a new copper operation there. Superior has negotiated a good neighbor agreement with the mine that will guarantee support for the community's financial empowerment programming for the life of the mine.



POPULATION
2,500

Looking Inward: How City Policies Can Be Part of the Problem and the Solution

In conversations that took place as part of this scan, city staff and leaders cited the pandemic and an increasing public awareness of racial disparities as spurring new and expanded financial empowerment programming.* For others, the conversations also prompted a look inward to assess how municipalities' own policies could be changed to reduce inequities and boost economic security at the local level.

* See Finding #3, above.



The police killing of Philando Castille in Ferguson, MO., brought to light the practice by many cities of using fines and fees to fund city government in a way that can lead to over-policing and over-enforcement. Some cities have responded by changing the way they impose and collect fines and fees. NLC's Economic Opportunity and Financial Empowerment program worked with cities as part of the *Cities Addressing Fines and Fees Equitably Initiative* (CAFFE) to address the negative impacts of municipal fines and fees on residents.^{*} The **City of St. Louis, MO.**, a participant in the CAFFE initiative, discovered evidence of auto insurance redlining disproportionately impacting Black residents in certain neighborhoods of the city. As a result, the city targeted residents with fines from driving without car insurance by providing them with financial empowerment services and helping them reduce overall debt from fines and fees, instead of imposing increasing fines on residents unable to pay. The city further addressed these challenges by partnering with a nonprofit organization to help them cover essential costs like vehicle licensing and insurance premiums to continue to fight against auto insurance redlining.^{**}

A few cities have adopted a policy of debt forgiveness for very low-income residents, recognizing that families may never be able to pay thousands of dollars in past-due utility bills, for instance, and are unable to establish credit and get out of poverty with this debt on their records.^{***} The cities of **Detroit** and **Baltimore** have both worked with their local financial empowerment centers on this practice for their very low-income residents.

Cities are also looking to zoning regulations and housing policies to begin to lower the cost of living and repair past inequities that favored certain populations at the expense of others.⁶

* More information on this initiative can be found at <https://www.nlc.org/economic-opportunity-and-financial-empowerment/>

** Another effort known as *Cities and Counties for Fine and Fee Justice* also offers promising practices to reform fees and fines.

*** More information about these initiatives is available in the NLC report "LIFT-UP: Innovative City Strategy Reduces Utility Debt and Financial Insecurity for Residents". https://www.nlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/YEF_LIFTUPBrief-FINAL.pdf



SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Financial Justice through Fines and Fees Reform

San Francisco has pioneered the use of fines and fees reform to lift burdens of debt from low-income residents and communities of color. Led by the Financial Justice Project (FJP) within the Office of the Treasurer and Tax Collector, and in partnership with community organizations, various city departments and agencies, and the courts, the city has reduced or eliminated fees for towing and storage fees, overdue library materials, traffic and parking citations, and jail phone calls and commissary items. FJP implemented fine and fee discounts for people with low incomes, including parking tickets, transit fare evasion citations, child support, and water and sewer bills. Since its inception, FJP has reduced tows and booting costs by more than 50 percent for low-income San Franciscans, waived or eliminated \$33 million in criminal justice debt and administration fees, waived \$1.5 million in library fines, and cleared 88,000 driver's license holds for missing traffic court, enabling residents



POPULATION

808,988



to begin meeting current expenses without the need to service debt. While the initiatives have come at some expense to the city, Treasurer José Cisneros, who oversees the initiative, noted that in some cases, the city actually benefits financially when fines are right-sized to an amount that people can afford. For example, research on California's MyCitations program, which provides ability-to-pay discounts on traffic tickets, found people were more likely to pay on time and in full when the amount was right-sized to their income. The rate of repayment for amounts under \$100 was 70 percent compared to a repayment rate of less than 20 percent for amounts over \$500. The MyCitations program was initially piloted in San Francisco and has expanded to all California counties.⁷

The city continues to innovate and spread the word about its suite of financial empowerment programs, like Bank On San Francisco, free financial counseling, and the Kindergarten to College children's savings program (K2C), alongside fine and fee discounts to help low-income San Franciscans thrive.

Creating New Access to Financial Resources for Individuals and Businesses

City participants in the scan reported that they are increasingly looking for ways to help residents access additional resources directly, through direct payments, loans and entrepreneurship supports.

Guaranteed Income programs piloted in several cities, some with federal COVID relief funding, have been expanded in cities like **Los Angeles**, **San Francisco**, and **St. Louis, MO**. Most of these programs are targeted at specific populations or neighborhoods.

Roundtable participants said that while small business support has long been provided by municipal offices of economic development, increasingly a financial empowerment lens has encouraged the development of supports for micro-businesses

and entrepreneurs as well, as a way to help low- and moderate-income residents build wealth and create a steady stream of income. These supports cover a range of services such as financial counseling, navigation of city procurement, and direct loan programs. Some cities that have long had VITA and other tax-preparation assistance for individuals now also offer tax assistance to small business owners. Others have created revolving loan funds, some in partnership with Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), for small business owners or entrepreneurs from under-resourced neighborhoods.* Still others work with small businesses to help them meet licensing requirements and compete for city contracts.



Some cities that have long had VITA and other tax-preparation assistance for individuals now also offer tax assistance to small business owners.

* A revolving loan fund (RLF) is a gap financing measure primarily used for development and expansion of small businesses. It is a self-replenishing pool of money, utilizing interest and principal payments on old loans to issue new ones.





KANSAS CITY, MO

An Entrepreneurial City

Kansas City's goal is to be “the most entrepreneurial city in America,” and it is approaching this challenge with a range of financial empowerment initiatives, including access to capital and changes in the city’s own regulatory and zoning practices.

KC BizCare is a free business regulatory resource and information center for new and existing businesses operating in Kansas City, MO. The office oversees the Mayor’s Small Business Task Force for regulatory reform and small business data. The KC BizCare Office works in partnership with its Economic Development Corporation for the implementation of small business capital programs to help businesses grow and expand that includes microbusiness grants, a new crowdfunded micro-loan program, a matched savings program and financial



POPULATION

510,704



technical assistance to help entrepreneurs develop the skills and knowledge they need to succeed. The office also administers special grant initiatives to help prepare business for World Cup 2026 that include the Mayor’s Outdoor Dining Enhancement Grants and Back to Business small business vandalism grants.

Aspiring entrepreneurs can search for resources by industry, business type and stage, keyword, or targeted population through its viral one-stop-shop. The site offers guidance in navigating city zoning and licensing processes and includes an online chatbot for entrepreneurs that communicates in 70-plus languages. The city also advocates for its smallest businesses, helping sole proprietors navigate the federal COVID-response Paycheck Protection Program in 2021 and piloting a small business vendor initiative with the community’s new airport in 2023.

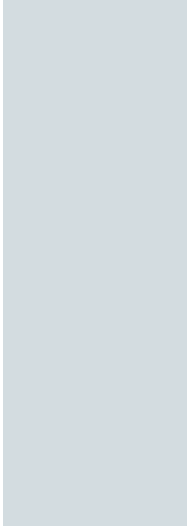


Several cities in the scan have established their own loan programs for targeted residents

Participants in the roundtable discussion shared strategies for supporting entrepreneurs but acknowledged that entrepreneurship is not always the best approach for individuals to achieve financial stability, depending on the local economy and the capacity of the community to absorb more new businesses. Starting a business in a community without that capacity could potentially deplete a family's savings, rather than creating a source of wealth, several participants cautioned.

For individuals, cities are increasingly looking at ways to help residents weather financial crises and reduce their reliance on predatory loans and credit card debt. Several cities in the scan have established their own loan programs for targeted residents or have worked with large employers in their communities to encourage them to institute supportive financial products for their employees.





On the Horizon: The Future of Financial Empowerment

City leaders and staff participating in the scan offered many insights about the future of the field, both in the city interviews and in the roundtable. As financial empowerment initiatives gain traction in cities, staff and city leaders continue to look for ways to expand their impact and effectiveness.

Roundtable participants engaged in a lively discussion of the potential of **artificial intelligence** (AI) to enable cities to better target programming to appropriate residents and give all residents the ability to determine their eligibility for programs and benefits.

Using municipal or external funding to **purchase student or medical debt** is emerging as an economical way for cities to relieve financial burdens on residents and enable them to build financial stability. **Washington, D.C.**, Mayor Muriel Bowser, for instance, set aside \$900,000 in budget surplus funds in 2023 to purchase and forgive up to \$90 million in medical debt for Washingtonians.⁸

Youth employment programs in several cities have led to an awareness of the need for teens to have access to bank accounts independent of their parents/guardians. San Francisco's Office of Financial Empowerment worked with the **San Francisco** Federal Credit Union to develop safe and affordable **non-custodial youth bank accounts** to give young people a way to save money they earned themselves.



Financial empowerment programming can help city residents prepare for the financial impacts of climate-related losses.

Several city leaders spoke of the need to address growing climate change concerns in their communities as part of an overall financial empowerment strategy. Risks from climate change often have a disproportionate impact on low-income neighborhoods, which may be in low-lying areas prone to flooding. Climate events often result in a loss of property or savings when residents lack bank accounts or insurance. Financial empowerment programming can help city residents prepare for the financial impacts of climate-related losses. The **City of Flint, MI.**, used federal funds from the Environmental Protection Agency to **improve residents' climate resiliency** through home improvement aimed at reducing energy cost burdens.

Through these and other creative actions, cities are leading the way into the future in supporting the financial health of their communities.





TOLEDO, OH

Reducing Medical Debt

City leaders in **Toledo** partnered with the nonprofit organization Undue Medical Debt in 2022 to erase more than \$72 million in medical debt for its residents. The city used \$800,000 in funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) to purchase the debt from Bon Secours Mercy Health and ProMedica Health, two leading health care providers in the city. Their investment erased \$72,289,080.53 worth of overdue medical bills for more than 35,000 city residents.

Toledo was the first city in the nation to invest in the purchase of medical debt. The Commission of surrounding Lucas County also invested \$800,000 in purchasing medical debt for its residents.⁹



POPULATION

265,000

Medical debt can put a severe strain on a family's finances and is a leading cause of individual bankruptcy in the U.S., according to the National Institutes of Health.¹⁰ Some of the other cities that have also partnered with Undue Medical Debt to purchase debt for their residents include **New Orleans, St. Paul, MN.,** and **Washington, D.C.**

CONCLUSION

NLC's 2024 Municipal Financial Empowerment Scan has provided important information about how cities are approaching efforts to improve the financial well-being of residents. While the scan was not intended to capture a comprehensive view of all city efforts across the nation, it does provide a glimpse into a sample of cities' efforts, priorities and plans for the future. Moreover, it allows NLC and those in the financial empowerment field to better understand changes and constants over the last decade.

As in the similar 2014 scan, several key points were confirmed:

- ◆ Programs are **expanding**.
- ◆ There is wide diversity in **content and implementation**.
- ◆ **Cities of all sizes** are offering financial empowerment programs.
- ◆ **Partnerships** are critical.
- ◆ **Funding** is often a major constraint.
- ◆ **Data collection and evaluation** are areas of opportunity.

While much has remained consistent, it is clear that municipalities are pioneering new ways to deliver programs and support to their residents. The 2024 scan found that cities are increasingly taking a broader approach to financial empowerment, targeting programming to specific populations, and assessing community needs and partnership opportunities to create seamless access to financial empowerment initiatives. Whether a city offers financial counseling through all its departments or connects coaching to other practices, such as loan funds and fines and fees reform, municipal governments offer innovative models for their peer cities and for other levels of government. A decade ago, and now, cities are stepping up to help ensure the financial well-being of their residents and build thriving communities.

APPENDIX A

Methodology

The National League of Cities (NLC) partnered with the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW) to conduct a field scan of communities across the U.S. to explore how financial empowerment efforts in cities, villages, and towns have expanded and changed over the past decade. This 2024 scan builds off a previous in-depth scan that NLC conducted in 2014 and provides points of comparison and progress in how communities are using financial empowerment tools to improve the lives of their residents.

The 2024 Scan included an in-depth, online survey distributed to all NLC member cities, towns, and villages (>2,700 municipalities), 21 virtual city interviews, a day-long, NLC-sponsored Municipal Roundtable on Financial Empowerment that brought together city officials and community partners from 11 cities across the country, and five focus groups with thought leaders and funders in the field of financial empowerment.

The survey was in the field from April 8 through May 10, 2024. It was disseminated to city leaders and their partners through multiple communication venues, including NLC's online newsletter, NLC's state leagues, various peer networks like LinkedIn, and through direct communication with city contacts.

Almost 400 responses were received, though not all respondents completed all questions. NLC thus analyzed each question based on its responses as opposed to using only completed surveys.* Notably, only 157 respondents indicated their region and/or size and thus all subgroup analyses using these characteristics reflect responses only from those cities. This report is an analysis of the self-reported information in those surveys, city interviews, and roundtable discussions, as well as focus groups with thought leaders in the field of financial empowerment.

* For cities with multiple respondents a decision rule was used to select a single respondent per city that gave preference to (1) fully completed survey responses, (2) municipal government respondents, and if multiple respondents remained, (3) a randomly selected response.

Cities in 42 states and the District of Columbia are represented in the completed survey responses.* Responses were relatively evenly distributed by city size (see Table A1, below), with the majority received from large and mid-size cities.** Southern cities were represented the most among respondents, while cities in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic were least represented. Six states were represented by 10 or more cities, all of them in the South and West: Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, Texas, Arizona, and California.

About a quarter of those responding were elected municipal leaders. The support of elected leaders is key to the development and continued funding of financial empowerment. The rest were city staff, including employees of city financial empowerment centers or programs.

City Interviews and Focus Groups

To flesh out the themes lifted up by survey responses, NLC staff conducted interviews via Zoom with leaders from 21 cities, representing municipalities of various sizes, from 2,400 (Superior, AZ) to 8 million (New York) in all regions of the country.*** NLC also conducted five focus groups with thought leaders and funders in the field of financial empowerment.****

Municipal Financial Empowerment Roundtable

Representatives of 11 cities gathered on July 16, 2024, at the NLC offices in Washington, D.C., to review the initial findings of the scan and further discuss how cities are helping residents gain financial stability and build wealth.***** They were joined by members of NLC's Economic Opportunity and Financial Empowerment team, consultants from UW, and representatives from the Wells Fargo Foundation. Participants shared notes on their cities' work and offered ideas for how the work may be expanded in the coming years.

* States not represented among the completed responses were Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Delaware, Maine, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Montana, and Nevada.

** Definitions of city size used in this report by population: Large (>150,000), Mid-size (50,000-150,000), Small (5,001-50,000)

*** Interviews were held with representatives of Aurora, IL, Boston, Charlottesville, VA, Dallas, Denver, East Orange, NJ, Fayetteville, AR, Flint, MI, Jackson, TN, Kansas City, MO, Los Angeles, Louisville, KY, Miami, New York, Philadelphia, Providence, RI, San Francisco, St. Louis, MO, St. Petersburg, FL, Superior, AZ, and Washington, DC.

**** Focus group participants included individuals from Accelerator for America, The Annie Casey Foundation, Asset Funders Network, Carolina Small Business Development Fund, Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund, Lafayette Square, LIFT Fund, LiftFund, Prosperity Now and government agencies.

***** Cities represented at the Roundtable: Aurora, IL, Boston, Charlottesville, VA, Chicago, Jackson, TN, Louisville, KY, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Superior, AZ, and Washington, DC.

TABLE A1:
Number of Survey Responses by Region and Population Size

		NUMBER OF RESPONSES
Region		
	Midwest	32
	Northeast	20
	South	69
	West	36
Population Size		
	Large	49
	Mid-Size	42
	Small	30
	Very Small	36
Position Title		
	Elected municipal leader	36
	Municipal staff	107
	Nonprofit organization staff	7
	Other / Missing	7
Total		157

Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024

Note: NLC uses data from the U.S. Census bureau (2020) to calculate population size and region. See Appendix text for details. Position title is self-identified.

APPENDIX B

Key Definitions

Bank On

Bank On connects consumers to safe and affordable bank accounts. The Bank On national platform, led by the nonprofit Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund (CFE Fund), helps individuals navigate the marketplace and easily identify accounts that meet their needs. When an account is Bank On certified, consumers know it has features they are looking for— including low or no fees, no overdraft charges, online bill pay and other basic attributes—giving them more confidence to begin or restart their banking relationship with the right tools to manage their money. Across the country, Bank On coalitions help match consumers with financial institutions in their community that offer “certified” accounts.

<https://joinbankon.org/about/>

Children’s Savings Accounts (CSA)

CSAs are long-term savings or investment accounts designed to help children from birth to 18 years old to save for postsecondary education. These accounts are usually opened at birth or when the child enters kindergarten and allow government entities, nonprofit organizations, or private agencies to deposit funds into the accounts the youth can use for post-high school education purposes.

<https://www.nlc.org/resource/advancing-hope-at-the-local-level-childrens-savings-accounts/>

Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI)

CDFIs are mission-driven financial institutions that create economic opportunity for individuals and small businesses, quality affordable housing, and essential community services in the United States. CDFIs can be banks, credit unions, loan funds, microloan funds, or venture capital providers. Unlike traditional banks, they specialize in lending to individuals, organizations, and businesses in under-resourced communities, offering clients

financial education, business coaching, and low-interest rate loans that increase economic potential and help build wealth.

https://www.cdfifund.gov/sites/cdfi/files/documents/cdfi_infographic_v08a.pdf

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)

The EITC is a federal tax credit for working people with low and moderate incomes that boosts the incomes of workers paid low wages by offsetting federal payroll and income taxes. The amount of credit an individual is eligible for may change if they have children, dependents, are disabled, or meet other criteria. Thirty states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have their own local EITCs to supplement the federal credit.

<https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/earned-income-tax-credit-eitc>

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is the process by which an individual or a group of individuals (entrepreneurs) exploit a commercial opportunity, either by bringing a new product or process to the market, or by substantially improving an existing good, service, or method of production. This process is generally organized through a new organization (a start-up company) but may also occur in an established small business that undergoes a significant change in product or strategy.

<https://online.stanford.edu/what-is-entrepreneurship>

Equity

Equity is the consistent and systemic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities.

<https://www.eda.gov/about/economic-development-glossary>

Financial Empowerment

Financial empowerment is an individual's knowledge and ability to make decisions that advance their financial well-being, maintain adequate finances to meet financial obligations, and acquire wealth to promote long-term financial stability.

Fines and Fees

States, cities, and counties across the U.S. rely on fines and fees to balance their budgets. Fees attach a price to a public service, raising revenue by allocating part of the cost of the service to the person who receives the service, while fines are designed to punish transgressors and deter potential transgressors. Fines and fees can be levied either by the court system or government agencies.

<https://www.nlc.org/initiative/cities-addressing-fines-and-fees-equitably-caffe/>

Guaranteed Income (GI)

Guaranteed income is an unconditional cash payment provided on a regular basis to individuals or households, to supplement, rather than replace, existing social safety nets. Guaranteed income provides a steady, predictable income which recipients decide how to spend based on their personal needs.

<https://guaranteedincome.us/about>

Revolving Loan Fund (RLF)

RLFs are pools of capital available for lending. As loans are repaid, the capital is returned to the fund and then reloaned to another project. RLFs are evergreen sources of funding that can be continuously recycled to support different projects in perpetuity. They are often managed by governments and nonprofit organizations to ensure that small businesses and enterprises in sectors not typically eligible for commercial lending can obtain access to working capital for expansion and growth.

<https://www.eda.gov/about/economic-development-glossary>

Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)

The VITA program is run by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and provides free basic tax return preparation to qualified individuals. VITA sites are operated by IRS partners and staffed by volunteers and offer free tax help to people who need assistance preparing their own tax returns, such as people who make \$67,000 or less, people with disabilities, or limited-English speaking individuals.

<https://www.irs.gov/individuals/free-tax-return-preparation-for-qualifying-taxpayers>

APPENDIX C

Additional Resources for Cities

NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES RESOURCES

City Financial Inclusion Efforts: A National Overview:

<https://acrobat.adobe.com/id/urn:aaid:sc:VA6C2:29b9bac4-389f-46e6-8d76-8eb44390dd56>

Economic Opportunity and Financial Empowerment:

<https://www.nlc.org/economic-opportunity-and-financial-empowerment/>

Taking the First Step: Six Ways to Start Building Financial Security and Opportunity at the Local Level (Collaboration between NLC and Prosperity Now):

<https://bit.ly/4i18qml>

EITC Opportunity Map:

<https://www.nlc.org/resource/earned-income-tax-credit-eitc-opportunity-map/>

Earned Income Tax Credit in Cities:

<https://www.nlc.org/resource/earned-tax-credit/>

OTHER RESOURCES

Asset Funders Network Financial Coaching Materials:

<https://assetfunders.org/resource/financial-coaching-asset-building-strategy/>

Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund:

<https://cfefund.org/>

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau Financial Well-Being

Scale Tool: <https://www.consumerfinance.gov/consumer-tools/educator-tools/financial-well-being-resources/measure-and-score/>

Economic Policy Institute Family Budget Calculator:

<https://www.epi.org/resources/budget/>

Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation National Survey of Unbanked and Underbanked Households:

<https://www.fdic.gov/household-survey>

Federal Reserve Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking (SHED):

<https://www.federalreserve.gov/consumerscommunities/shed.htm>

Internal Revenue Service EITC Assistant Tool:

<https://www.irs.gov/credits-deductions/individuals/earned-income-tax-credit/use-the-eitc-assistant>

Internal Revenue Service Free Tax Preparation Locator Tool:

<https://www.irs.gov/individuals/free-tax-return-preparation-for-qualifying-taxpayers>

Prosperity Now Scorecard:

<https://scorecard.prosperitynow.org/>

University of Wisconsin Financial Capability Scale Tool:

https://fyi.extension.wisc.edu/financialcoaching/files/2013/07/FCS_scoring.pdf

APPENDIX D

Tables

TABLE D1:
Priority of Financial Empowerment, by Region and Population Size (Figure 1)

PERCENT OF RESPONSES						
Region		Very High	High	Moderate	Low	Very Low
	Midwest	28%	31%	22%	6%	13%
	Northeast	32%	26%	37%	5%	0%
	South	36%	30%	20%	7%	6%
	West	29%	29%	31%	6%	6%
Population Size						
	Large	45%	31%	18%	4%	2%
	Mid-Size	40%	33%	17%	2%	7%
	Small	21%	14%	45%	10%	10%
	Very Small	14%	37%	29%	11%	9%
Average		32%	30%	25%	6%	6%

Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024

Note: Analysis based on all responses to this question (n=155). NLC uses data from the U.S. Census bureau (2020) to calculate population size and region.

TABLE D2:
Number of People Served in Last Decade, by Region
and Population Size
(Figure 2)

PERCENT OF RESPONSES				
Region	Increased	Stayed the same	Decreased	Unsure
Midwest	59%	6%	0%	35%
Northeast	53%	13%	0%	33%
South	50%	26%	2%	22%
West	58%	19%	0%	23%
Population Size				
Large	72%	10%	0%	18%
Mid-Size	60%	20%	3%	17%
Small	40%	13%	0%	47%
Very Small	20%	40%	0%	40%
Average	54%	19%	1%	26%

Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024

Note: Analysis based on all responses to this question (n=104). NLC uses data from the U.S. Census bureau (2020) to calculate population size and region.

TABLE D3:

**Percentage of Cities Planning to Develop/Expand Programs,
by Region and Population Size
(Figure 3 & 4)**

PERCENT OF RESPONSES			
Region	Yes	No	Unsure
Midwest	37%	37%	26%
Northeast	25%	25%	50%
South	40%	33%	27%
West	41%	26%	33%
Population Size			
Large	52%	12%	36%
Mid-Size	50%	22%	28%
Small	15%	55%	30%
Very Small	18%	50%	32%
Average	37%	31%	32%

Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024

Note: Analysis based on all responses to this question (n=107). NLC uses data from the U.S. Census bureau (2020) to calculate population size and region.

TABLE D4:

**Percentage of Cities Showing Commitment to Financial
Empowerment Programming, by Activity
(Figure 5)**

PERCENT OF RESPONSES	
Community Conversations	55%
Deploy Resources for Programming	48%
Policy Reform	42%
Secure New Funds	38%
Advisory Board	34%

Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024

Note: Analysis based on all responses to this question (n=119)

TABLE D5:

**Percentage of Cities Indicating Type of Financial Empowerment
Programming Offered
(Figure 6 & 10)**

PERCENT OF RESPONSES									
		REGION				POPULATION SIZE			
Program type	Average	Midwest	Northeast	South	West	Large	Mid Size	Small	Very Small
Financial Education	66%	59%	63%	67%	73%	77%	61%	63%	50%
Financial Coaching	57%	50%	50%	60%	62%	72%	61%	32%	33%
Reduce Debt	50%	50%	38%	51%	58%	60%	52%	26%	50%
Promote Savings	56%	59%	56%	56%	54%	72%	52%	32%	50%
Obtain Banking	48%	41%	56%	49%	46%	63%	45%	32%	25%
Improve Credit	44%	45%	44%	44%	42%	53%	48%	21%	33%
CSA	28%	23%	44%	21%	35%	42%	24%	5%	25%
Homeowner Assistance	73%	77%	88%	70%	65%	79%	85%	58%	42%
Benefits Awareness	56%	36%	69%	51%	73%	65%	61%	21%	67%
Benefits Access	53%	36%	56%	53%	65%	63%	58%	26%	50%
VITA	48%	23%	81%	44%	54%	67%	52%	16%	17%
Income Support	26%	27%	31%	21%	31%	44%	18%	5%	17%
Small Business	70%	82%	81%	58%	73%	81%	76%	47%	50%
Other	9%	5%	6%	16%	4%	12%	6%	11%	8%

Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024

Note: Analysis based on all responses to this question (n=119). NLC uses data from the U.S. Census bureau (2020) to calculate population size and region.

TABLE D6:

Number of Years Cities Have Provided Financial Empowerment Programming, by Type of Program (Figure 7)

		PERCENT OF RESPONSES				
Program type		<1 year	1-3 years	3-5 years	5-10 years	>10 years
	Financial Education	11%	25%	18%	14%	31%
	Financial Coaching	11%	25%	21%	11%	31%
	Reduce Debt	15%	28%	22%	7%	28%
	Promote Savings	12%	27%	20%	12%	30%
	Obtain Banking	14%	24%	20%	16%	27%
	Improve Credit	13%	32%	23%	6%	26%
	CSA	17%	23%	27%	23%	10%
	Homeowner Assistance	8%	15%	12%	17%	49%
	Benefits Awareness	5%	8%	5%	15%	67%
	Benefits Access	7%	7%	7%	12%	67%
	VITA	0%	10%	6%	27%	57%
	Income Support	21%	39%	11%	7%	21%
	Small Business	12%	17%	13%	15%	43%
	Other	20%	10%	20%	30%	20%

Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024

Note: Analysis based on all responses to each option; total response = 119.

TABLE D7:

**Percentage of Cities Identifying Financial Empowerment Programming
by Priority Population
(Figure 8)**

PERCENT OF RESPONSES									
AVERAGE		REGION				POPULATION SIZE			
Program type		Midwest	Northeast	South	West	Large	Mid Size	Small	Very Small
BIPOC	82%	87%	93%	82%	71%	83%	93%	81%	60%
Women	67%	47%	79%	74%	62%	73%	78%	63%	40%
Immigrants	53%	53%	79%	37%	67%	70%	59%	38%	27%
English Learning	41%	20%	71%	29%	57%	53%	44%	25%	27%
Disability	51%	40%	64%	50%	52%	53%	59%	44%	40%
Children	58%	60%	64%	61%	48%	57%	70%	44%	53%
Seniors	58%	40%	64%	68%	48%	50%	70%	44%	67%
Housing Unstable	69%	67%	86%	63%	71%	80%	78%	56%	47%
Justice Involved	40%	27%	57%	39%	38%	50%	52%	19%	20%
Student	24%	27%	36%	21%	19%	23%	26%	19%	27%
Low Wage	51%	47%	57%	50%	52%	57%	63%	38%	33%
Veteran	42%	27%	50%	45%	43%	40%	44%	44%	40%
LGBTQ	70%	27%	43%	21%	43%	37%	30%	31%	20%

Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024

Note: Analysis based on all responses to each option; total responses=88. NLC uses data from the U.S. Census bureau (2020) to calculate population size and region.

TABLE D8:
City Agencies Responsible for Financial Empowerment Programming

	FREQUENCY OF SELECTION
Economic Development	52%
Community Development	51%
Mayor’s Office	43%
Housing Department	41%
City Manager’s Office	32%

Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024 (n=130)

Note: Percentages calculated based on number of positive responses divided by the total responses to each department option.

TABLE D9:
Number of Cities by Major Obstacle Identified (Figure 12)

	PERCENT OF RESPONSES
Funding	49%
Staffing	40%
Distrust	18%
Capacity	31%
Interest	19%
Financial Industry Coordination	18%
Providers	12%
Government Coordination	11%

Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024

Note: Analysis based on all responses to this question (n=119)

TABLE D10:

Number of Cities With Measurable Goals for Financial Empowerment Initiatives, by Size

PERCENT OF RESPONSES			
Population Size	Yes	No	Unsure
Large	46%	31%	23%
Mid-Size	18%	58%	24%
Small	13%	74%	13%
Very Small	4%	79%	18%

Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024

Note: Analysis based on all responses to this question (n=119). NLC uses data from the U.S. Census bureau (2020) to calculate population size and region.

TABLE D11:

How Cities Inform their Financial Empowerment Programming

PERCENT OF RESPONSES	
Financial Services Needs Assessment	24%
Analysis of Service Gaps	69%
Community Indicator Mapping	67%

Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024

Note: Analysis based on all responses to this question (n=54)

TABLE D12:
Distribution of Municipal Demographics by Quartile

MUNICIPAL QUARTILE BY CATEGORY (1=LOW, 4=HIGH)			
		Mean	Std Dev
% BIPOC			
	1	6.5	0.7
	2	12.8	1.6
	3	24.2	5.1
	4	62.0	16.7
% SNAP			
	1	1.3	0.8
	2	3.4	0.5
	3	5.9	0.8
	4	11.0	3.5
% 200% or more below poverty line			
	1	14.7	4.6
	2	27.3	3.2
	3	38.1	3.5
	4	53.4	10.2
Average Median Income (\$)			
	1	28,762	5,169
	2	36,303	1,609
	3	42,350	1,964
	4	56,725	9,900

Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024 and American Community Survey 2017-2023

Table Note: Quartiles determined with national population using ACS 2017-2023 data, not limited to analytic sample. AMI calculated as the average median income within each quartile. Sample excludes cities with no data (n=150)

TABLE D13:
Outcomes by Municipal Demographics

		Municipal Quartile by Category (1=low, 4=high)			
		Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Priority of Municipality (1=low, 5=high)	Mean (sd)	% BIPOC			
		3.5	2.7	2.8	2.0
		(2.1)	(1.3)	(1.1)	(1.1)
		% SNAP			
		2.9	2.4	2.0	1.9
		(1.4)	(0.9)	(1.1)	(1.1)
		% 200% or more below poverty line			
		3.0	2.3	1.8	2.3
		(1.3)	(1.1)	(0.9)	(1.3)
		Average Median Income (\$)			
Duration of Programing in Municipality (avg years)	yrs	% BIPOC			
		--	5 to 10	3 to 5	5 to 10
		% SNAP			
		3 to 5	5 to 10	5 to 10	3 to 5
		% 200% or more below poverty line			
		3 to 5	5 to 10	5 to 10	1 to 3
		Average Median Income (\$)			
		1 to 3	5 to 10	5 to 10	5 to 10
Top 3 priority populations*		% BIPOC			
		1	--	Seniors	BIPOC
		2	--	Housing Insecure	Women
		3	--	BIPOC	Immigrant
		% SNAP			
		1	BIPOC	BIPOC	BIPOC
		2	Seniors	Immigrants	Women
		3	Women	Housing Insecure	Low Wage
		% 200% or more below poverty line			
		1	BIPOC	BIPOC	BIPOC
		2	Immigrant	Housing Insecure	Women
		3	Women	Immigrants	Children
		Average Median Income (\$)			
		1	BIPOC	BIPOC	Housing Insecure
		2	Women	Women	BIPOC
		3	Children	Housing Insecure	Children
Top 3 obstacles*		% BIPOC			
		1	Distrust	Funding	Financial Industry Coordination
		2	Providers	Financial Industry Coordination	Funding
		3	Coordination	Coordinating Government	Interest
		% SNAP			
		1	Funding	Financial Industry Coordination	Funding
		2	Staffing	Funding	Distrust
		3	Interest	Capacity	Financial Industry Coordination
		% 200% or more below poverty line			
		1	Funding	Funding	Funding
		2	Interest	Interest	Distrust
		3	Financial Industry Coordination	Distrust	Capacity
		Average Median Income (\$)			
		1	Funding	Funding	Funding
		2	Interest	Financial Industry Coordination	Capacity
		3	Distrust	Staffing	Financial Industry Coordination

Source: NLC Member Survey Spring 2024 and American Community Survey 2017-2023

Table Note: Quartiles determined with national population using ACS 2017-2023 data, not limited to analytic sample. Sample excludes cities with no data (n=150). *Where there are multiple at the same rank I take the first option in order of the variables

ENDNOTES

- 1 PolicyLink & PERE. (2018). *100 Million and Counting: A Portrait of Economic Insecurity in the United States* (2018).
- 2 Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. (2024). *Distribution of Household Wealth in the U.S Since 1989* [Data Set]. Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. Retrieved February 4, 2025, from <https://www.federalreserve.gov/releases/z1/dataviz/dfa/distribute/chart/#quarter:136;series:Net%20worth;demographic:race;population:1,3,5,7;units:levels>
- 3 Duke News. (2024). U.S Racial Wealth Gap is Persistent and Growing, New Research Finds. *Duke News*. <https://news.duke.edu/stories/2024/06/10/u-s-racial-wealth-gap-is-persistent-and-growing-new-research-finds/>
- 4 Gould, E & Wilson, V. (2020). Black Workers Face Two of the Most Lethal Preexisting Conditions for Coronavirus- Racism and Economic Inequality. *Economic Policy Institute*. <https://www.epi.org/publication/black-workers-covid/>
- 5 City of Jackson. (2021). *CityStart BluePrint*. City of Jackson Connect Here. [https://cdnsm5-hosted.civiclive.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_16361603/File/Departments/Mayor's%20Office/Projects%20and%20Initiatives/COJ_FinancialEmpowerment_Piece%20\(2\).pdf](https://cdnsm5-hosted.civiclive.com/UserFiles/Servers/Server_16361603/File/Departments/Mayor's%20Office/Projects%20and%20Initiatives/COJ_FinancialEmpowerment_Piece%20(2).pdf)
- 6 González- Hermoso, J., Treskon, M., & McDaniel, N. (2024). How to Embed Racial Equity into Zoning Code Reform. *Urban Institute*. <https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/how-embed-racial-equity-zoning-code-reform#:~:text=In%20December%202023%2C%20Charlottesville%2C%20Virginia,fastest%20to%20get%20redeveloped%2C%20upzoning>
- 7 Judicial Council of California. (2024). *Report to the Legislature: Online Infraction Adjudication and Ability-to-Pay Determinations*. Judicial Council of California. <https://jcc.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=12698352&GUID=7E8733F7-CAAD-4D8C-AC24-6691B4DB7E3D>
- 8 Government of the District of Columbia., & Muriel Bowser. (2023). *Mayor Bowser Canceling \$90 Million in Medical Debt for up to 90,000 DC Residents*. Government of the District of Columbia. <https://mayor.dc.gov/release/mayor-bowser-canceling-90-million-medical-debt-90000-dc-residents>
- 9 Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy. (2024). Eliminating Medical Debt, No Strings Attached. *Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy*. <https://budgetequity.racepowerpolicy.org/case-studies-policy-briefs/toledo-medical-debt>
- 10 Himmelstein, D., Lawless, R., Thorne, D., Foohey, P., Woolhandler, S. (2019). *Medical Bankruptcy: Still Common Despite the Affordable Care Act*. National Library of Medicine. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6366487/>

