

STATE ASSET BUILDING COALITIONS

# Perspectives from the Field

IASP



What happens  
when people in states  
collaborate to  
advance new policies,  
innovations, and  
investments to create  
economic opportunity  
and build a more  
stable financial future  
for all?

The Institute on Assets and Social Policy conducts strategically framed research, evaluations, and analysis to inform policy and institutional change, enabling vulnerable populations to build resources and access opportunities to live securely, and participate fully in all aspects of social and economic life.

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#### Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the many people who contributed to this peer learning process over the years through their participation in the Mott Learning Initiative, more than we can note here. We want to especially thank the following whose work and commitment is reflected here through their many contributions over the years, and who aided the development of this report:

**Don Baylor**, Center for Public Policy Priorities  
**Stephanie Bowman**, Washington Asset Building Coalition  
**Tamika Edwards**, Southern Bancorp Community Partners  
**Lucy Gorham**, North Carolina Assets Alliance  
**Sharon Henderson**, Prosperity Works  
**Lara Henneman**, Maryland CASH  
**Paul Knox**, Washington Asset Building Coalition  
**Ben Mangan**, EARN  
**Robin McKinney**, Maryland CASH  
**Margaret Miley**, Midas Collaborative  
**Lucy Mullany**, Illinois Asset Building Group  
**Ona Porter**, Prosperity Works  
**Woody Widrow**, RAISE Texas  
**Ross Yednock**, Michigan Economic Impact Coalition

**Rick Williams**, **Tom Shapiro**, **Carolyn Hayden**, **Karen Edwards**, **Benita Melton**, and **Janet Boguslaw** planned and facilitated the convenings and helped identify key initiative insights.

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The Mott State Asset Coalition Learning Initiative and this report were funded through the generous support of the *Charles Stewart Mott Foundation*. Program Officer **Benita Melton** brings enthusiasm, expertise, and long-term commitment to building capacity and peer learning to advance savings and asset development in states across the country.

# Impact: Learning Together to Make Change

In 2009, the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation selected ten state asset-building coalitions across the nation to participate in a coalition development and peer-learning process to advance asset building in their states. These coalitions, reflecting stakeholders from the private, nonprofit, education, government, community development, and advocacy sectors, met nine times over three years to identify benchmarks for strategic development, talk about progress moving forward, and share ideas and innovations.

The primary goal of these meetings was to help coalitions strengthen their capacities to build enduring state asset building infrastructures that would advance policies and practices with impacts of scale. Capacity building was framed as strengthening both the in-state infrastructures as well as the cross-state peer support and learning network. A secondary goal was to share what they learned with others, thus this report. This document steps through different aspects of these asset coalitions' strategic development. It provides examples of their work, process, and insights.

Remarkably, this learning initiative took place from 2009–2012, when the impacts of the Great Recession were reverberating across the nation. States experienced high unemployment, reduced public funding, reduced tax contributions, and an overall environment of austerity. In particular, the foreclosure crisis brought renewed attention to the need for asset protection policies. There was and remains pressure to address immediate needs, without trading off development for the future. Despite these challenges, the featured asset building coalitions were able to make progress. Indeed, the economic crisis brought into high relief the problems that occur when families are financially

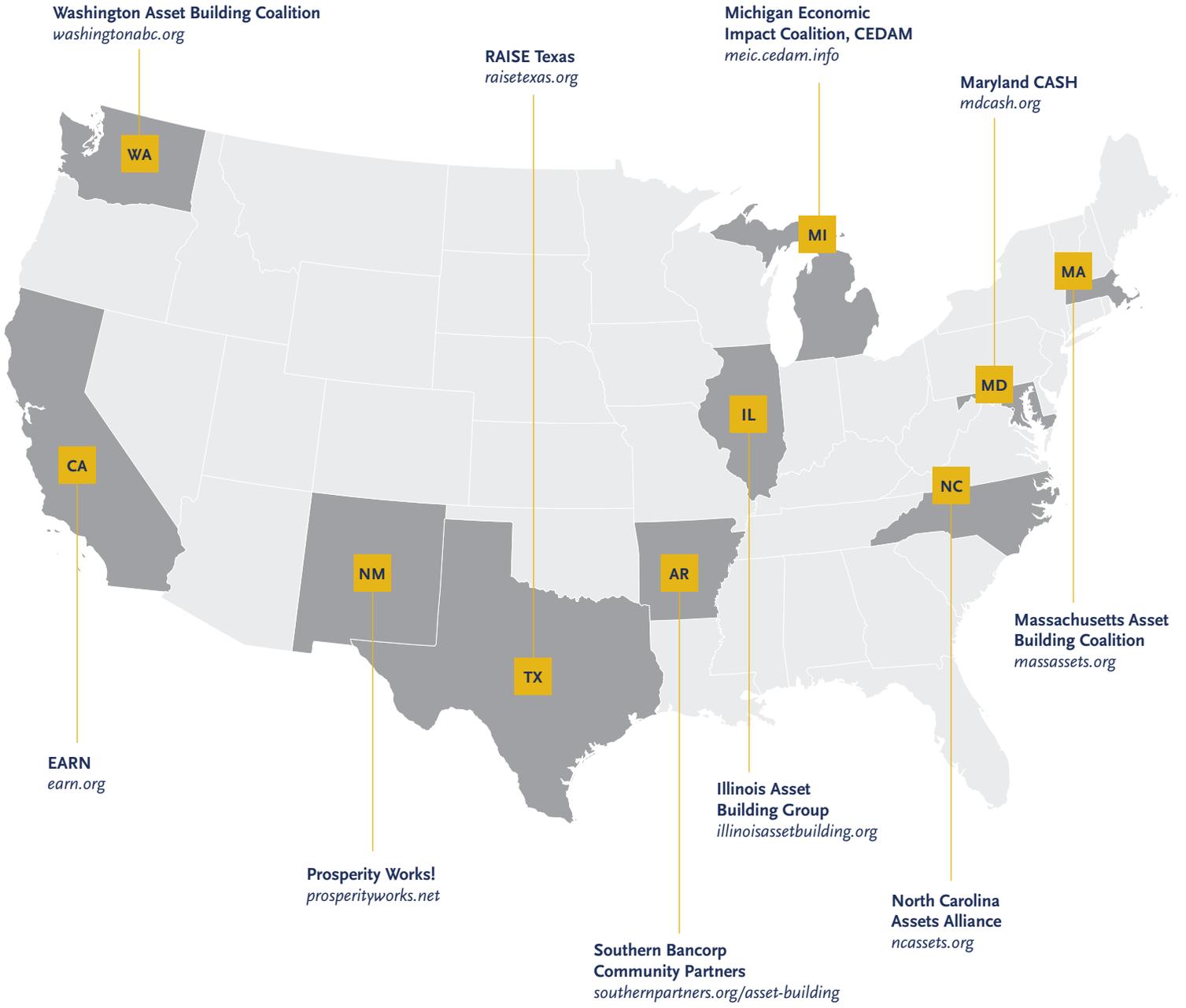
insecure and policies do not provide the building blocks to advance economic security and opportunity. The coalitions were able to lay the “plumbing” needed for a time when new investments could be made. They made progress in ways that did not require significant new investments by establishing the partnerships, research, policies, communications, administrative, and regulatory initiatives necessary to create sustainable, durable impacts over the long-term.

## Why Read This Report?

The broad agenda of asset building, coordinated at the state level, is to help align state policies for comprehensive impact, enhancing the effectiveness of the movement for economic and social mobility throughout the life course, along all income levels, and across ethnic, gender, and race-based concerns. State asset building coalitions strive to advance this broad agenda by actively engaging stakeholders to build the frameworks, policies, and practices that will strengthen our collective future.

If you are a funder, a business, a nonprofit, a government agency, an elected official, an educational institution, a community organizer, a state resident or someone who has a stake in the strength and well-being of your state, read this document. *You will find compelling evidence about how people like you across the nation are investing and collaborating in building assets, savings, and financial security to reduce poverty, improve family self-sufficiency, and strengthen the economic and social fabric of their states.* Read this report and consider how you can contribute to shifting the trajectory from vulnerability to opportunity for those who live in your state.

**Participating Coalitions**



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Asset building  
provides individuals,  
families, communities,  
states, and the  
nation with greater  
economic security  
and opportunities for  
growth.

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## I. IMAGINE THE FUTURE:

# Why Asset Building is Important

The United States is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, yet many of its residents have few assets and face increasingly complex challenges that keep them from living well and securely throughout their lives: jobs with low wages and few or no benefits, rising costs of health care and housing, resource-poor communities and schools, and limited access to opportunities for economic advancement. Assets—in the form of financial wealth, health, education, social and community resources, and networks—play a critical role in how families navigate these challenges to build and sustain a better future.

### A Theory of Change

State asset building coalitions operate with a clear theory of change; well-being, stability and security require a thriving economy, one in which everyone can participate and prosper. Assets are necessary for participation; assets provide a foundation of resources to draw upon in times of need, to live securely, and to leverage for economic opportunity and upward mobility. Without assets, individuals and families find themselves unable to invest in their future. The U.S. asset picture is bleak:

- › 54 percent of all U.S. households lack sufficient financial assets to make investments in opportunities that increase financial mobility and security such as buying a home, creating a business, investing in their own or their children's education, and living stably as they age.<sup>i</sup>

- › 36 percent of all U.S. senior citizens are at risk of outliving their resources and a significant percentage live on the precipice of economic insecurity.<sup>ii,iii</sup>
- › 56.4 percent of all U.S. households have subprime credit. Credit scores are increasingly used to set home and auto insurance premiums and are checked as part of applications for jobs and rental housing.<sup>iv</sup>
- › 26 percent of all U.S. households are asset poor, meaning they do not have sufficient net worth to subsist at the poverty level for three months in the absence of income.<sup>v</sup>
- › The U.S. personal savings rate peaked in 1975 at 14.5 percent and is currently at 4.6 percent.<sup>vi</sup>

The challenge facing states and their residents is that opportunities for building and securing assets are not readily available and that harms the whole—and that harms the whole. Under these conditions, communities and states remain or become increasingly vulnerable. Without a strong base from which tax revenues can grow and state economic development can thrive, states have few assets for investments to strengthen schools, attract industry, build infrastructures, or generate innovations. The combination of assets and community vitality builds resilience. Together, they provide a base of resources for weathering crises and establishing the long-term stability required to permanently reduce poverty and create opportunities for economic mobility. When everyone has the opportunity to save and invest for the future, individuals, families, communities, business, and the state all thrive and prosper. Data demonstrate that assets have broad-based benefits.

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## ASSETS INCLUDE

### *Financial Resources*

- › Cash Savings
- › Homes
- › Stocks and Bonds
- › Vehicles
- › Retirement Accounts
- › Education Savings
- › Business Ownership

### *Human and Social Resources*

- › Education
  - › Job skills and Experience
  - › Healthcare/Good Health
  - › Social Networks
  - › Community Services
- 

## ASSETS:

### *Buffer Against Economic Shocks*

Families with enough savings to cover three months of expenses are less likely to be food insecure, behind on their bills, and unable to meet basic needs when an unexpected income loss occurs.<sup>vii, viii</sup>

### *Improve Family Health*

Assets positively impact health outcomes<sup>ix, x</sup> and serve as an important resource in preventing and mitigating family stress.<sup>xi</sup> Good health, in the earliest years, enables children to thrive and grow up to be healthy adults.<sup>xii</sup>

### *Increase Retirement Security*

Retirement savings supplement Social Security benefits and increase the likelihood that senior citizens will have enough money to live in dignity and maintain well-being.<sup>xiii</sup>

### *Advance Racial and Gender Equity*

Asset building policies and programs help close the wealth gap and achieve greater racial and gender equity through improved access to and opportunities for homeownership, savings, business ownership, and work benefits.<sup>xiv, xv</sup>

### *Expand Educational Opportunities for Children*

Children in families with assets are more likely to enroll in and graduate from college, which expands their opportunities for financial stability.<sup>xvi, xvii</sup>

### *Generate New Opportunities*

Assets enable families to invest in education, homeownership, and other opportunities. They provide financial growth and stability, thus shifting the focus from the short-term to the long-term.<sup>xviii, xix</sup>

## What Is Asset Building?

Asset building consists of programs, policies, institutional practices, and tools that enable individuals, families, and communities to build a strong foundation of resources that they can draw upon to meet more than their basic survival needs. Financial savings and long-term asset building create the capacity to invest in and plan for the future, and to achieve security, stability, upward mobility, and well-being.<sup>xx</sup>

State asset building coalitions are emerging across the country to work toward a growth and equity model in which all of a state's residents can participate and prosper and can move ahead together. Research demonstrates the powerful role that assets play. Assets contribute economically, socially, and psychologically to family and community well-being. When people build assets, the individual, family, community, state, and nation all benefit. State asset-building coalitions play a critical role in advancing policies, programs, and practices that translate research into action. They spread a vision of broad and inclusive prosperity across their state, and drive changes that make asset building a possibility for everyone. ■

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## ASSETS GENERATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES

**With assets people move from making ends meet to planning for their future.**

### *Assets enable people to:*

- › Remain stable through financial emergencies
  - › Live with housing security
  - › Pursue a path to prosperity and upward mobility
  - › Pursue higher education for themselves or their children
  - › Take risks that result in a better job or starting a business
  - › Retire securely
-

Asset building is a strategy to enable greater access to economic security and opportunities, particularly for low-income communities and communities of color.

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## II. AT THE STARTING LINE:

# Why Build State Asset Coalitions?

### The Structure of Asset Building Coalitions

State asset coalition work goes beyond advancing narrowly defined programs or policy goals. Focusing on economic and financial growth, security, and stability, these coalitions cut across issue areas and sectors. They bring people, organizations, and institutions together to accomplish long-term goals that can have impacts of scale.

There is not a one-size-fits-all approach to state asset coalition development. The structure of a coalition depends on its roots, funding, and partnerships, as well as the prioritization of needs and opportunity within each state. Some coalitions begin by focusing on a single approach for building savings such as establishing Individual Development Account (IDA) programs or working to create a state-level Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Others organize a state task force or begin as a project or program from an existing nonprofit.

Asset building coalitions take multiple forms. They may be independent 501(c)(3) organizations or may be housed within, or led, by another organization. Some have several staff members, some have only a part-time director, and others cooperatively rotate leadership rather than have dedicated paid staff. Many include researchers at local universities or formal policy research organizations within their membership, while others have staff dedicated to undertake research and

outreach on behalf of the coalition. Despite differences in how they start and how they function, asset coalitions can strategically advance asset building policies and practices in their states.

#### **Coalition: Washington State Asset Building Coalition (WABC)**

**Roots:** The WABC grew out of an August 2006 Asset Building Summit convened by the Washington State Department of Community, Trade, and Economic Development (now Department of Commerce) and its IDA partners in Ellensburg, WA. The 2006 summit educated participants about asset building policies and imperatives. It engaged many to initiate state and local strategies to improve savings and financial skills with the goal of improving economic outcomes for working families.

**Coalition Development:** From its inception in 2006 to early 2009, the WABC received organizational and staff support from the Department of Commerce. Washington State took a unique approach as the Legislature provided funding to help develop and support the formation and activities of local coalitions. This strategy led to a much broader and deeper involvement of local organizations. Instead of seeing asset building as only a programmatic approach to change, this strategy empowered community leaders to forge collaborative action that harnessed an array of local talents and resources. In 2005, only one community had formed that focused on asset building.

Today, 19 coalitions are organized and taking action. Local asset building coalitions typically include leaders from banks and credit unions, housing and social service organizations, United Ways, community action agencies, debt and credit counseling groups, and many other private and public entities. For a modest investment, the state helped communities promote savings and banking, provided financial education and planning opportunities, helped with credit repair, marketed the EITC, and promoted homeownership and business start-ups. For the 2008-2013 state fiscal years, the Department of Commerce issued competitive grants that spurred coalition start-ups and helped existing ones expand.

**Current Structure:** In early 2009, WABC's steering committee made the decision to incorporate as a 501(c)(3) organization to enable WABC to act independently and pursue its mission and goals. WABC now has an executive director and a board comprised of leaders from across the state.

### **Coalition: RAISE Texas**

**Roots:** RAISE Texas began life as the Texas Individual Development Account Network (TIDAN) in 2002. The lead partner was a community development financial institution (CDFI) called Covenant Community Capital Corporation that had just begun a local IDA program. Initially, TIDAN's work focused on information exchange for IDA practitioners and growing the asset field.

**Coalition Development:** In 2004, as its members expanded their activities, TIDAN's focus began to shift beyond IDAs to include other asset building policies and programs. The organization engaged with other players in the field, including the Center for Public Policy Priorities, the United Way of Texas, AARP-Texas, and the Children's Defense Fund-Texas. By 2005, TIDAN's name was changed to the Texas Asset Building Coalition (TABC) to reflect the broader mission of the network. That same year, TABC held a summit entitled RAISE Texas (Resources, Assets, Investments, Savings, Education) at which participants

## PERSPECTIVES FROM THE FIELD

NC

**Lucy Gorham**  
*North Carolina Assets Alliance*

In **North Carolina**, we addressed the challenge of coalition composition by creating three tiers of membership. Regardless of membership category, each member supports the broad goals of the North Carolina Assets Alliance (NCAA).

1. Voting members are nonprofit organizations willing to take public positions on policy issues. These members vote annually to select the NCAA's policy priorities.
2. Advisory member organizations do not take public positions on policy issues. They are encouraged to discuss the NCAA's policy priorities but do not vote to select the policy agenda.

3. Supporters are individuals and forprofit institutions. These are also non-voting members.

Through this structure, we ensure that those empowered to select the policy priorities are willing to support them publicly, the selection of policy priorities is not unduly influenced by profit considerations, and a broad range of members can participate in a variety of ways.

Our coalition's leadership structure consists of an elected steering committee that includes a representative from each of our two subcommittees—Policy and Research, Outreach and Communications—and paid staff.

This coordinating body ensures continuity and communication. The steering committee also provides a forum where issues of structure, purpose, and fundraising can be addressed before being discussed by the entire NCAA. It is critical to the success and sustainability of our coalition that the leadership structure is transparent and ensures that everyone has a voice in important decisions.

highlighted recommendations for asset building policies and programs. The coalition followed the summit with regional meetings across the state to have local stakeholders respond to the recommendations from the summit. The recommendations from the summit and the regional meetings were turned into a RAISE Texas action agenda. In 2007, the decision was made to form an independent nonprofit organization that would work on the action agenda. In July 2008, RAISE Texas became the first independent 501(c)(3) state asset building coalition in the country.

**Current Structure:** RAISE Texas continues to expand its reach through new partnerships and a larger membership base. Individuals, for profits, and nonprofits pay to be members in the coalition and receive benefits in return. The coalition has two staff members and a Board of Directors representing important partners from different sectors and parts of the state.

#### **Coalition: Massachusetts Asset Building Coalition (MABC)**

**Roots:** In 2002, the Midas Collaborative (a statewide network of asset building nonprofits), the Massachusetts Association for Community Action (MASSCAP), the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations (MACDC), the United Way of Massachusetts Bay, and others formed an asset building steering committee concerned with poverty reduction and asset development. A local foundation provided funding for the Institute on Assets and Social Policy (IASP) at Brandeis University to facilitate several convenings with stakeholders to discuss the role of asset building in creating long-term financial stability. Participants, led by the Midas Collaborative, drafted language to enact a commission that would examine the asset status of state residents and make recommendations to increase asset building opportunities for low- and moderate-income families in Massachusetts. For two years the steering committee met with prospective commissioners and advocated for the bill's passage in the House and Senate. After a gubernatorial veto, the bill was passed in 2006 with a 2/3 majority override in both chambers.

**Coalition Development:** The Massachusetts Asset Development Commission, a body of 26 members, was legislatively created as part of "An Act Relative to Economic Investments in the Commonwealth to Promote Job Creation, Economic Stability, and Competitiveness in the Massachusetts Economy."

From March 2008 to June 2009, the commission conducted research, organized working groups, and held public hearings to discuss asset building efforts in Massachusetts. As part of the strategy to secure support for the passage of the legislation that created the commission, no funding was attached. Therefore, it was necessary for the steering committee to secure funding from another local foundation to staff the commission.

The commission's final report outlined a vision of asset development goals that included removing barriers to financial stability, expanding college savings plans, and creating protections for those facing foreclosure. While numerous commission recommendations are still being pursued, several already have been achieved, such as:

- > Protections for tenants of buildings facing foreclosure
- > The creation of a pilot program incorporating financial education and coaching into the HUD Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program
- > The formation of a statewide office of financial education
- > The creation and funding of a 10-city pilot program to embed financial education into the K-12 curriculum
- > Increased regulation of proprietary post-secondary education programs by the Office of Consumer Affairs and Business Regulation
- > Increased debt collection regulations

**Current Structure:** Key participants in the commission decided to form the Massachusetts Asset Building Coalition (MABC) to work toward the realization of the commission's recommendations. After meeting regularly for two years, the MABC now operates informally, largely by having different members work to advance particular initiatives and by bringing in the now-sensitized network for support as needed. The Midas Collaborative, which promotes financial security initiatives statewide, remains the lead visible organization in the state with a defined focus on asset building and protection. ■

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### III. BENCHMARKS:

# How State Asset Coalitions Make Asset Building a Reality

The participating coalitions in the Mott initiative developed five benchmarks to structure and monitor their progress toward creating sustainable asset building infrastructures and producing long-term impacts. These five benchmarks do not constitute a linear list that must be completed in a particular order, nor is one of the areas more important than another. All five are critical for the success and growth of an asset building coalition but they do not constitute an all-inclusive list of strategies. Each state coalition sets its own priorities based on the unique demographic, economic, and socio-political environment of the state in which it is located—determining where to start and how to proceed. [SEE APPENDIX A FOR THE FULL BENCHMARK TOOL.](#)

The purpose of the benchmark tool is to allow for self-assessment and targeted planning by a coalition. Each state identifies its current stage of development within these benchmarks to locate a starting point for setting priorities, goals, and strategies. States may prioritize a few benchmarks at a time, but are encouraged to advance their work with all five in mind.

These benchmarks are meant to be a starting point for coalitions to plan and develop strategically. Coalitions used them to organize their members into committee work, to identify priorities, to seek out new members with specific skills or resources, to remain focused on the big picture, and to take stock periodically of how they were doing and how to move on to a new stage.

Successful coalitions work on five interrelated benchmark objectives of asset building:

1. Building a broad base of *stakeholders* to champion their efforts
2. Conducting *research* to identify areas of need and possible program and policy solutions
3. Setting a *comprehensive policy agenda* that will have broad impact
4. Developing the organizational capacities required to *sustain* asset building development
5. Advancing policies and practices that increase the *scale* and scope of asset building throughout the state

The next several sections of this report dive into these benchmarks. They highlight what the Mott learning partners identified as the most critical elements for moving the work forward. Some of the partners discuss in their own words how they approached each of these objectives. This report only scratches the surface of the work and insights developed over three years. However, it serves as a starting point for other coalitions to engage more broadly in strategic asset building, knowing that these state coalition leaders and their staff are available to share their knowledge and experience.

MI

**Ross Yednock***Michigan Economic Impact Coalition*

The benchmark document helped to organize and focus the work of our coalition, specifically as it related to the often-wide umbrella of policy issues that impact the ability of low-income earners to build, grow, and protect assets. When considering the different policy options coalition members want to address—access to

traditional assistance and asset limits, work supports and benefit access, infrastructure barriers like health care and transportation, savings policies like \$ave USA accounts—a case can be made to add more and more policy change goals under the “asset building” spectrum. By using benchmarks specifically designed for

asset building, it helped us—a coalition of organizations with different missions and objectives—to prioritize our focus and actions, working together on advancing policies and programs that specifically help individuals save across the life-spectrum.

AR

**Tamika Edwards***Southern Bancorp Community Partners*

The Arkansas Assets Coalition (AAC) was founded and staffed by Southern Bancorp Community Partners (SBCP). In its origins, the AAC was solely focused on state-funded IDA administration and policy. The Mott Initiative’s stakeholder engagement benchmark provided the AAC with a broader way to frame our goals and focused our strategies to build a stronger base. Using these strategies, the AAC attempted to engage several organizations that previously had not been connected with the coalition in any significant way. Stakeholder engagement involved hosting public events and conferences that exposed new organizations to the coalition’s work, as well as hosting a kick-off event for the newly expanded coalition.

The challenge we faced in stakeholder engagement was communicating a clear rationale for other organizations to join the AAC that would enhance, not distract from, their own policy work. We found that most potential

members needed a lot of discussion to understand how asset building would help them achieve their own organizational missions. It is nearly impossible to create asset building coalitions without engagement that clearly supports the members’ own defined interests.

Upon self-examination, we recognized that the AAC had a very narrow focus and lacked a concrete, clearly articulated bridge from asset building to other organizations’ missions or interests, limiting greater participation. We needed to make sure that participating in the coalition was easy, meaningful, and useful to members, and that their participation advanced the coalition’s future development and policy successes.

Grappling with this challenge over the years steered the coalition toward a different approach. Instead of trying to create an immediate and compelling self-interest for many members of other organizations to

join the AAC and be actively engaged, we opted for an organic approach. The AAC would serve as a loose umbrella association of independent organizations, other coalitions, and other interested stakeholders. Under such a structure, all could continue to focus on their immediate interests while still being connected to a larger group of like-minded practitioners. The AAC could identify ways for members to help each other and work on new issues to advance the economic security and opportunities for asset building that were on everyone’s agenda.

We continue to work with SBCP to explore opportunities to engage a diverse group of stakeholders to advance asset building policies. The stakeholder benchmark made us take a hard look at how we were working and helped drive us to recognize areas we could strengthen to have greater and more sustainable impact.

## Widen the Circle: Identify and Engage Diverse Asset Building Stakeholders

State asset building coalitions play a critical role in organizing and driving collaborations and partnerships among stakeholders at the local, regional, and state levels.

Expanding opportunity and improving economic security for all families requires the concerted effort of stakeholders drawn from diverse interests and locations within the state. Asset coalitions include stakeholders from *workforce development, housing, education, human services, financial institutions, businesses, community-based organizations, government, policymakers, foundations, neighborhood groups, and others*. Identifying the strengths and resources of the existing members helps determine who else should be brought into the coalition work. Building financial security and stability across the state calls for broad and complementary engagement across sectors, interests, and geographic areas.

- > **Seek out the game changers who bring new perspectives and resources to the table.**

*The private sector* develops and provides new financial opportunities. Banks and credit unions create tools to improve access to mainstream financial services and savings opportunities. Businesses can offer automatic retirement saving opportunities, help with EITC filings, and partner in job training and financial coaching.

*Policymakers and community advocates* who understand the benefits of asset building will increase the likelihood that an asset building policy agenda will be considered, especially if relationships are built across the political spectrum.

*Foundations* partner with practitioners to establish innovative asset building pilot programs, evaluations, technical assistance, and capacity building to advance asset building initiatives.

*Educational institutions* serve as a location for collaborative asset building work across networks and as curriculum developers they drive new asset building perspectives through the K-12 systems as well as into higher education.

*Research institutes* produce the evidence-based research needed to build a strong policy case, model innovative ideas, and evaluate the results of these innovations. These are found in both public and private universities, consulting groups, and think tanks. They often help with writing grants to achieve these goals, and/or draw on advanced students to help move the research forward.

*Constituency groups statewide or based in a community or region* ensure that new programs, policies, and products meet the needs of the diverse communities within the state.

“What keeps stakeholders united is a focus on how their disparate work converges to expand economic opportunity and build a more stable financial future for all in the state. State asset coalitions help build allies to support each other, identifying and advancing interests that may previously have not seemed aligned.”

—Stephanie Bowman, Washington ABC

*National nonprofits and advocacy networks* provide funding to state coalitions for their work, as well as resources on asset building (e.g. best practices from other states).

› **Educate stakeholders about asset building and how it advances their missions.**

*Sharing resources* helps stakeholders understand how others have advanced their own particular goals or areas of interest through asset building. Coalitions can direct stakeholders to articles, research, and websites that provide background information on why assets are important, the benefits of asset building, and programs and policies in their state and other states that impede or advance asset building. **SEE APPENDIX C FOR RESOURCES THAT CAN BE SHARED.**

*Workshops, conferences, meetings, and webinars* provide important continuing education opportunities for coalition members. Through these opportunities, stakeholders learn about strategies for integrating asset building language into their work.

*Communications training opportunities* offer coalition members a chance to learn and practice how to serve as ambassadors and convey the importance of asset building. Knowing facts, figures, and examples from other state initiatives and drawing on personal experience are important for meetings with political leaders, and organizations outside the coalition.

*Keep members purposefully engaged* by offering opportunities for ongoing involvement or work through groups and task forces that convene to focus on specific policy issues.

› **Reach out to engage stakeholders in all areas of the state (rural, suburban, and urban).**

*Regional conferences, task forces, and listening sessions* provide important networking opportunities for coalitions, attract new stakeholders, uncover community needs across the state, and build shared ownership of policy agendas.

*Webinars and interactive technology* enable people in smaller communities and rural areas to engage and participate in trainings and other coalition activities without having to travel.

*Local asset coalitions* offer a way for organizations in smaller communities and rural areas to voice their thoughts and to forge collaborative action based on the needs of the local community.

### Strategies that Work: Examples From the Field

Coalitions in **North Carolina** and **Illinois** recognized that their work primarily focused on urban areas, and they needed to expand their reach into other parts of the state. In response, **Illinois** holds regional meetings, focus groups, and an annual conference in different parts of the state in order to reach new stakeholders and develop stronger ties with existing members.

To engage areas beyond the state capital, **North Carolina** supported the formation of regional asset building coalitions by providing technical assistance and by placing Americorps VISTA members to assist with staff support. The Alliance has also conducted regional forums to introduce its work to local leaders and to listen to local perspectives on what policies and programs are needed. These regional efforts are the beginning of an endeavor to build a statewide system that is organized around counties, this is how North Carolina's power structure is set up for policy change. Charlotte and Durham have joined a project to create their own asset building report cards and to define their own program and policy priorities for financial inclusion and stability.

In **Massachusetts** and **New Mexico**, coalitions decided that a fluid structure would be best, engaging stakeholders around specific policy or programmatic issues as needed. Through different alliances, **Massachusetts** has advanced work to restrict predatory lending, preserved affordable housing, and piloted a K-12 financial education curriculum program.

**New Mexico** is focusing on helping families retain their assets and providing opportunities for them to build assets. The coalition's strategic leadership team has prioritized Children's Savings Accounts, contingency funds for families, a consumer loan fund for immigrant documentation, and new business investments through contemporary saving models and partnerships. They form task groups to concentrate quickly and effectively on specific issues within these focus areas.

**Washington** and **California** have advanced their work through building strong locally-based innovators who demonstrate what can be accomplished in the state and then work to scale up the models and principles behind the work. **California** has demonstrated how to engage participants in the policy and research process and are using that to build a strong constituency of interest.

In **Washington**, local coalitions have organized "Bank On" projects in most state regions to reduce barriers to banking in the financial mainstream.

## ? ASK

Have we engaged all key stakeholders in all regions of the state?

How do the different state asset building issues align?

What resources within our coalition can be drawn upon and is there a gap to be filled?

How will we keep our coalition members involved?

## Research the Issues: Build the Case

State asset building coalitions are ideally positioned to become the primary sources for reliable data on issues related to economic mobility, wealth building, financial security, and asset building policy in their respective states. Research agendas that support policy formation and change, evaluate administrative and implementation practices, and link state and national asset building initiatives are important for the creation of a state's opportunity infrastructure. Objective, evidence-based research leads to the development of new products, programs, policies, and partnerships.

### Why Is Research Important?

- › **Research documents and evaluates effectiveness and builds broader impacts.**

The Bank On San Francisco program is an effective model for leveraging research into action. The program originated from research on the unbanked that revealed the kind of shocking numbers that sparked action from a variety of stakeholders. Approximately 50,000

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**There are three forms of research that move the work forward:**

- › **Evidence of the effect assets have on the well-being of individuals, families, and communities.**
  - › **Impact data from specific asset building policies and programs from other states that can inform efforts to drive policy change.**
  - › **Needs assessment data for the state helps build a profile and documents the urgency for asset building.**
- 

households in San Francisco lacked a checking or savings account, and nearly half of the city's African-Americans and Latinos were found to be unbanked. This research led to the creation of a committee tasked with developing a new program to bank the unbanked. This Bank On San Francisco committee included the asset building coalition, EARN, as well

“Research plays a key role in helping RAISE Texas move forward through the development of cutting edge, high impact, and scalable products and tools. For example, we have obtained voluminous data on the enrollees in Texas’ 529 Plan, which reveal purchasing patterns, geography, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, and income of the account purchaser. We have documented the ‘college savings gap’ in several publications and presentations, making the case for more strategic and inclusive ways to enroll Texans into college savings accounts.”

—Woody Widrow, RAISE Texas; Don Baylor, Center for Public Policy Priorities

as financial institutions, influential elected officials, and nonprofits in San Francisco.

The committee spent many months uncovering what kept San Francisco area African-Americans and Mexican immigrants from having bank accounts. The information gleaned from this research was used to design the specific features of the program's offerings, and informed what turned out to be a very effective marketing campaign that attracted participants. The Bank On San Francisco model demonstrates the importance of various kinds of research throughout the life of an endeavor.

› **Research drives program changes at the state level for immediate broad impact.**

RAISE Texas and the Center for Public Policy Priorities were looking for a large-scale way to expand college savings accounts in Texas. They were approached in 2010 by the Texas Attorney General's Child Support Division to partner in developing asset building programs to serve the 1.4 million cases that were part of the Texas Child Support System. This seemed like a good starting point to expand college savings accounts to a large percent of the state's population. A survey was developed in 2011 to find out more about the needs of the families in the child support system. The survey particularly focused on financial products and services.

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*Research Topic Examples*

- › **Asset Limit Reform**
  - › **Banking the Unbanked**
  - › **Children's Savings Accounts**
  - › **Payday Lending: Reforms**
  - › **Small Dollar Loans**
  - › **The Racial Wealth Gap**
  - › **Universal Retirement Savings/Plan Participation**
  - › **Small Business Ownership**
  - › **Credit Card Debt**
- 

One of the major findings of the survey was that custodial and noncustodial parents have a strong desire to save for their children's future educational endeavors. An overwhelming majority of parents expressed interest in establishing a "shared" college savings account for their children, one in which both parents could jointly contribute.

As a result of the survey and financial support from a Citi Foundation innovation grant, the Child Support for College (CS4C) program was created in 2011 to expand college savings accounts for child support families. Working with three local nonprofit organizations with financial coaches in three different cities, the Child Support Division provided information to clients about the availability of matched funds and financial coaching services for families interested in opening up a Texas 529 college savings account. The Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas is currently evaluating the program. RAISE Texas and its partners hope to determine what works and what changes need to occur in the Texas 529 program to increase the number of low-income families saving for their children's future college education.

› **Data needs drive new collaborations for research production and program/policy development.**

The Michigan Economic Impact Coalition (MEIC), operating as part of the Community Economic Development Association of Michigan (CEDAM), has partnered with other nonprofits and researchers on several issues, including the economic impact of the EITC and the potential impact of establishing tax time savings accounts. MEIC and another statewide nonprofit hired a consultant to gain insight into how the EITC economically impacts Michigan's communities. Prior to this, they only had numbers from other states and cities. The analysis of Michigan-specific data in the final report became very helpful in framing the issue of the EITC from an economic standpoint and in garnering support for EITC outreach.

IL

**Lucy Mullany**  
*Illinois Asset Building Group*

Research is crucial to our work. We look to research, combined with on-the-ground feedback, to inform our policy agenda. Over the years we have partnered with organizations on research projects and have led our own research work. Our research partners include the Woodstock Institute (retirement insecurity in Illinois), the Chicago Appleseed Fund for Justice (alternative small dollar loans), and the Social Impact Research Center (racial inequity). We

have also benefited from our national partners' research on asset building policies and wealth inequality. While this national research does not always contain Illinois references, it does help us raise awareness of the broader asset building movement and our work in Illinois. Finally, access to data has played a crucial role in helping us move policy forward. We led a successful campaign to remove the TANF asset test after securing cost savings estimates from the

Illinois Department of Human Services. Additionally, we successfully advocated for the State Treasurer's Office to collect demographic data on who is opening 529 college savings accounts through the state-run program, Illinois Bright Start. Access to this data will help us better understand existing access issues for different groups of people.

CA

**Ben Mangan**  
*EARN*

EARN founded the EARN Research Institute because we saw a paucity of research originating from front-line provision of asset building products and services to low-income people. As direct service providers, we knew how often assumptions were wildly wrong in designing programs and products. We wanted to inform our own journey to scale, and the field's journey, by adding an important research voice to the national conversation about sparking prosperity for low-income workers.

The EARN Research Institute is grounded in what we call the three E's—effectiveness, efficiency, and equity. *Effectiveness* is whether what we are doing actually works and to what degree. The challenge for EARN is balancing our inquiry with

independence. We do this by hiring outside evaluators to conduct randomized control trials to provide an independent gauge of our effectiveness.

*Efficiency* is how much it costs for us to deliver our outcomes. To understand efficiency we need honest, transparent financials and a way to really price what it costs us to deliver our products and services. Many enterprises in the social sector claim ownership for indirect “influence,” but this is notoriously difficult to truly own, and hard to cost out. We often use a simple, eye-opening test of how much it costs to deliver the products and services we directly provide by taking our entire budget and dividing it by the number of people we can measurably impact directly.

*Equity* is a far more normative measure and requires an ongoing discussion among leaders and managers about whether the blend of cost and quality is appropriately balanced. Measuring equity also involves benchmarking: How do our contributions to creating value compare in cost and quality to others in your field? We try hard not to give in to relativism. One question I don't see asked nearly often enough is whether there's a cheaper alternative to deliver the outcomes we seek. If so, why haven't we pivoted to change the way we serve people to embrace this alternative?

MEIC at CEDAM works with Michigan State University students on tax time savings accounts. The students spent a year working with the University of North Carolina to use the data they received from the Save USA pilot run in New York City. This data predicted how a similar program would impact Michigan communities. MEIC will use these predictions at the county and city levels to understand how a tax time savings program will help Michigan savers.

### **Increase the coalition's research capacity**

Many coalitions struggle to secure funds to conduct research or they shy away from prioritizing research because of a lack of identified expertise or funding. The following strategies include increasing a coalition's research capacity, using primary or secondary data to identify needs, and building a case for asset policies.

**Conduct research "in-house"** when staff or coalition members have the requisite skills and commit sufficient resources to support the work.

**Forge a working partnership with researchers at local universities** to increase the coalitions' capacity to undertake research or to go beyond what is possible in-house. Such partnerships also add external credibility and expertise to the research findings.

**Reach out to national think tanks and research institutes** who strive to examine asset building issues that extend across state borders. They are open to new ways to involve state asset building coalitions as research laboratories.

**Integrate asset building research inquiries into the on-going data collection** of other organizations or independent researchers to collect data that will be challenging for the coalition to undertake on its own.

#### **> Use data to identify specific needs and concerns within the state and determine policy priorities.**

**A comprehensive overview of state demographics, wealth, and asset building** can reveal the unique needs of residents that the coalition should address. This overview influences the policy agenda, builds a policy case, and mobilizes stakeholders.

**Identifying and reporting on best practices and innovative asset building policies and programs in other states** helps to make a case for similar asset building policies in your state.

**Connecting state or local data to national data findings** makes a powerful case for particular policies or programs. National asset building data can serve as a springboard for an asset coalition to establish new initiatives.

#### **> Build a strong case for asset building.**

**Knowing what data are persuasive for policymakers from both sides of the aisle** is important for a coalition and its members to build a broad base of support. Data about the benefits of asset building to local- or state-level constituencies often have the greatest impact on politicians. Data and the resulting policy and programmatic proposals need to be formulated in context of the state's administrative, regulatory, and legislative environment.

**Engaging constituents most affected by the issues raised in the research** ensures that policies have their intended impact and builds stakeholder support to achieve and sustain asset-building policy goals. Personal stories and testimony supplement data and can be very persuasive at public meetings and in conversations with legislators. Letters of support, petitions, and videos are other effective tools constituents can use to press for policy change.

#### **> Examples of Research Partners**

**Center for Community Capital, University of North Carolina** conducts research and policy analysis on the transformative power of financial capital on households and communities in the United States.

**Center for Social Development, Washington University** creates and studies innovations in public policy that enable individuals, families, and communities to formulate and achieve life goals that contribute to the economy and society.

**CFED** works at the local, state, and federal level to create economic opportunity that alleviates poverty.

*Filene Research Institute* explores issues vital to the future of credit unions and consumer finance through independent research and innovation.

*Institute on Assets and Social Policy, Brandeis University* develops strategies, processes, and policy alternatives that enable vulnerable populations to build and secure resources and access opportunities to live securely and participate fully in all aspects of social and economic life.

*Maryland School of Social Work*, The Financial Social Work Initiative accelerates the integration of social work practice and theory into the evolving fields of individual and community wealth building.

*NeighborWorks America* strives to create opportunities for lower-income people to live in affordable homes in safe, sustainable neighborhoods that are healthy places for families to grow.

*Woodstock Institute* performs research in the areas of fair lending, wealth creation, and financial systems reform that works locally and nationally.

**? ASK**

**Do we have someone on staff or within our membership who can produce research for us?**

**Who can we partner with to conduct research in our state or region?**

**What data/evidence do we need to identify asset building challenges in our state?**

**What existing data are available through state/federal agencies or other sources that might be applicable to our work?**

**Have we fully utilized data already compiled by others, such as think tanks and universities?**

**Who might fund this work?**

## Focus on Impact: Establish a Comprehensive Asset Building Policy Agenda

Asset building coalitions play an important role in shaping public policy within states. The development of a comprehensive asset building policy agenda helps coalitions focus on specific, attainable policy goals while expressing a unified message to policymakers. By coordinating the efforts of its members and policy partners, asset building coalitions advance policy changes that are sustainable, equitable, and beneficial to people of all ages.

### State asset building coalitions develop and structure their activities around a range of policies that include:

- › Eliminating barrier to asset building
- › Improving access to financial services and education
- › Creating opportunities for savings and investments across the life course
- › Establishing protective measures to limit wealth-stripping

### State Policies Can Shape Asset Building Opportunities

In 2010, **Massachusetts** enacted Senate Bill 2557, which was supported by the Massachusetts Asset Development Commission. This bill increased the amount and type of assets exempt from seizure by debt collectors in

Massachusetts courts. These assets included bank account balances up to \$2,500, a portion of the person's wages, all public assistance, vehicles with a value of up to \$7,500 (or \$15,000 if the debtor is disabled or over 60 years old), and household furniture up to \$15,000 in value. By enacting this bill, Massachusetts protected its residents from aggressive debt collection practices that had been rampant in the state, even in small claims cases. Residents no longer had to fear that they would be stripped of important assets, such as a car to get to work or school.

In 2013, Illinois joined Ohio, Virginia, Louisiana, Alabama, Maryland, and Hawaii in eliminating the asset test that families previously had to pass to be eligible for TANF. Advocates in Illinois initially called for the removal of the TANF asset test in 2009. At that time, through administrative rule change, the asset test was removed from SNAP and medical assistance programs, but the TANF asset test remained. In 2013, IABG decided to push for legislation to eliminate the asset test. Legislative champions who understood the importance of savings were quick to sign on to the bill as co-sponsors. The success of the campaign can be

“We have worked to build a comprehensive policy agenda that reflects the challenges individuals and families face in Illinois as they work to build financially secure futures. Each year we reassess our agenda to ensure that it's responding to these challenges and supported by research from the field. Our broad advocacy work allows us to move different issues forward depending on the political environment, develop committed, long-term champions for comprehensive change, and engage unlikely allies on specific issues.”

—Lucy Mullany, Illinois Asset Building Group

attributed to a strong coalition of advocates, coordination with the Department of Human Services, a consistent presence in Springfield, and effective messaging. By removing the asset test on TANF, Illinois families in need can retain their assets and build savings, positioning them for greater success when they leave the program.

The coalition determines its priorities and policy goals by considering the state's unique predisposing factors, such as the demographic and socioeconomic status of its residents, its political environment, and its statewide advocacy network.

**No state's comprehensive policy agenda will look exactly like another's but certain common considerations increase a coalition's chances for asset building policy advancement.**

- › Know your starting point.

*An assessment of existing state asset building policies* helps to determine how well they address diversity and equity.

*Existing state laws sometimes impose barriers* (such as asset limits on public benefits) that hinder efforts to establish a broad continuum of asset building policies. Effective coalitions are aware of the interconnectedness of different programs and policies.

- › Identify the policies or policy areas that have the most traction among stakeholders.

*Building consensus around a few key policies at a time* is more feasible than tackling the entire platform at once.

*Policies that are "low-hanging fruit"* have broad support and might be an early victory. Sometimes these opportunities present themselves abruptly, so a successful coalition must be able to seize the moment and mobilize quickly around a policy issue.

- › Find political partners who will support an asset building agenda.

*Policy advocates who have experience in policy development and implementation* are crucial assets for a coalition. Information gained from these partners will help the coalition choose the best strategic path when proposing

policy changes.

*Engage state senators, representatives, and/or senior staff in discussions about asset building and financial security* before you drive forward a policy issue or agenda. Building relationships and having discussions may encourage an elected official to draw on the coalition for data or support for related issues.

- › Use marketing materials and social media to build awareness and knowledge about asset building policies among politicians, the media, and others.

*Providing stakeholders with materials* such as one-page bulleted handouts, infographics, and elevator pitches can help them to spread the word about asset building extending the reach of the coalition.

*Facebook, Twitter, blogs, and other forms of social media* increase a coalition's exposure and broaden support for policies.

- › Understand the different processes used to change

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#### *What Policies Have States Identified as Priorities?*

- › Reform asset limits for public assistance eligibility
  - › Provide protection from predatory loans
  - › Raise the minimum wage
  - › Provide affordable child care
  - › Increase access to health insurance
  - › Set up child savings accounts
  - › Provide alternatives to the foreclosure process
  - › Regulate debt collection
  - › Reform payday lending
  - › Integrate financial education into the school system
  - › Remove savings barriers for people with disabilities
  - › Increase access to universal voluntary retirement accounts
  - › Expand tax credits for working families
  - › Close the racial wealth gap
-

NM

**Sharon Henderson***Prosperity Works*

Good communication is incredibly important when pushing for policy change. One of our focus policy areas is energy advocacy—ensuring that all New Mexicans can access affordable home energy as an essential commodity. One in five New Mexican families spends at least 20 percent of their income to pay for utilities. When added to the costs of other basic needs, these families have nothing left over to save and invest in their futures. Weatherization, other efficiency measures, fair rates, reasonable late payment and reconnect fees, and the elimination of high deposit requirements can make a significant difference to the balance sheets of low-income

families. In partnership with the Center for Civic Policy, we mounted a five-day strategically targeted patch-through calling campaign which added fire to the earned and paid media work launched in the two previous weeks. Combining these communications with our legal status as interveners in the case netted us the win we sought: a \$20 million reduction in rates. Using our narrative as their rationale, the commission voted for our position even though we were outspent 4,000 to 1.

Successful policy advocacy campaigns depend on all of our supporters communicating a clear and consistent message. Toward that end, we created

a communications strategy framing worksheet that is used in the pre-planning of each policy advocacy campaign. The worksheet offers guidance and clarity to ensure our policy advocates have a clear understanding of their target audience, the objective of the interaction, key points to cover, the commitment to action step, and follow-up. Our campaigns require the collective action of many, but policy change is achieved only when we speak with one voice on behalf of New Mexico's families and their future prosperity.

MD

**Robin McKinney***Maryland CASH*

The basis of creating a comprehensive policy framework and engaging stakeholders in Maryland has hinged on creating a common understanding of what asset building can mean and its applicability over a person's lifetime. In 2008, we created a visual that lays out asset building as a continuum of programs, products, and policies that can support individuals and families on the journey to financial stability and wealth creation. The continuum organizes these supports into four main categories: emergency and transitional services, financial stability, short-term asset ownership, and long-term wealth creation. [See Appendix B for the MD CASH Policy Framework]

The asset building continuum became the main educational tool that we used when describing both the economic need and the potential solutions for helping Maryland's families to build savings and to be financially secure. Legislators appreciate that it is straightforward and shows policy as an important part of, but not the whole solution to, economic mobility. Potential partners and human service workers like that they can identify where their clients fit and that they don't have to become financial experts on every topic in order to help their clients to move forward through the continuum. They can also identify key next steps of program and product support to facilitate referrals and future planning.

This simple visual is a starting point for conversation, not a comprehensive menu or an edict of linearity and prescription. This allows the viewer to make the connection of how asset building fits into their universe. The visual has also shifted our reputation from being "the tax prep people" to an advocacy and educational group dedicated to improving financial security for low-income families and building a culture of saving in the state.

**policy in your state.**

*Using legislation to make policy changes* works well when a coalition has strong support from state legislators who can convince others of the merits of the proposed bill. Having allies who sit on key committees like finance or education is critical to ensure the passage of a bill; although, it still might take several sessions to succeed.

*Revising regulations* makes sense when the focus is on financial issues like payday lending, foreclosures, or debt collection.

*Administrative rule change* is a good choice when the

coalition has strong support from the heads of state agencies. Administrative rules are issued by the executive branch (through agencies) and have the full weight of the law behind them. Unlike legislation, administrative rules can be written at any time, making them a useful tool in states with short or biennial legislative sessions.

*Asset building requires multiple entry points, takes time, and has broad reach.* A comprehensive asset-building policy framework and related strategies can shape future policy development in many ways. Sustainable and scalable asset building policy initiatives are inclusive of all income groups, reach across all life stages, and advance to achieve short, middle, and long-term goals and impacts.

**? ASK**

**Have we cultivated relationships with key politicians and their staffs?**

**Do we know the key players in state agencies and do we have a working relationship with them?**

**Is our communications strategy and delivery infrastructure in place?**

**Do we understand how our state legislature works and where and when we can advance policy initiatives?**

## Put the Plumbing in Place: Develop a Sustainable State Asset Building Infrastructure.

The work of building prosperity and opportunities for all families takes years to accomplish. State asset building coalitions work to bolster their organizational capacity to ensure that advances in asset building persist. This means building a strong infrastructure that can withstand fluctuating economic and political cycles, policy agendas, or staffing. As state coalitions become more sustainable, they create and reinforce the asset building momentum in the state as a whole. Several strategies increase the sustainability of coalitions and thus the work they strive to advance.

- › **Secure sufficient diversity of dedicated funding to sustain long-term asset-building work in the state.**

*Foundations* provide the funds necessary to strengthen a coalition's organizational structure and capacity, a role that complements dedicated program funding.

*State and federal funding* can support specific core asset building work upon which other funding can be built. The challenge is that these funds are generally dependent upon the political and economic climate and often must be received with each legislative session.

*Financial institutions, corporations, and other nonprofits* often provide multi-year support for asset building coalitions through direct funding, in-kind support, and

network development.

*Paid membership* creates a flow of resources and invests members. If a coalition cannot have paid members or does not wish to go this route then other possibilities exist. Some coalitions ask member organizations to make annual budget commitments to advance the coalition's work. Others allocate staff time and resources from member organizations to share the costs of the work.

- › **Develop and articulate a well-defined organizational infrastructure to ensure that the coalition has the requisite governance, processes, and mutual goals in place to sustain the activity.**

*Develop staff leadership and networking opportunities* to enable staff to strengthen their skills, stay informed, and draw upon new developments and resources in asset building.

*Formalize governance structures and have clear decision-making policies in place.* This makes coalitions less vulnerable or dependent on one strong leader. Some coalitions have paid staff with member-led task forces. Others have an executive committee or advisory board of members.

*Institutionalizing recordkeeping, operational knowledge,*

“Sustaining asset building requires cultivating and training leaders, connecting program participants to broader policy work, and diversifying the number and types of institutional structures that support economic security. The ultimate goal is to create a culture of investment and a commitment to consumer financial protections that are embedded in the public psyche, as well as in our institutions.”

—Margaret Miley, *The Midas Collaborative*

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## Where Coalitions Find Funding for Their Work

Coalitions receive funding from a wide range of supporters. The following are a few of the funders of existing asset building coalitions:

### *National Foundations*

- › Annie E. Casey Foundation
- › Charles Stewart Mott Foundation
- › Citi Foundation
- › Ford Foundation
- › F.B. Heron Foundation
- › The Rockefeller Foundation
- › W.K. Kellogg Foundation

### *Local/Regional/ Foundations*

- › CNM Foundation
- › Fund for Change
- › Hyams Foundation
- › Mary Reynolds Babcock Foundation
- › McCune Charitable Foundation
- › The Boston Foundation
- › The San Francisco Foundation
- › Thomson Family Foundation
- › Walter and Elise Haas Fund
- › Woods Fund of Chicago

### *Community Foundations*

- › Baltimore Community Foundation
- › Marin Community Foundation
- › New Mexico Community Foundation
- › Silicon Valley Community Foundation
- › Tipping Point Community

### *Research Institutes/Think Tanks/Nonprofits*

- › Center for Public Policy Priorities
- › Center for Social Development
- › CFED
- › Institute on Assets and Social Policy
- › Local Initiatives Support Corporation
- › United Way

### *Government*

- › Administration for Children and Families
- › Federal Reserve Bank
- › Internal Revenue Service
- › Maryland Department of Housing and Community Development
- › State of New Mexico

### *Banks*

- › Bank of America
- › Capital One Bank
- › Citibank
- › First American Bank
- › Wells Fargo

### *Corporations*

- › Chevron
- › Entergy Texas Inc.
- › Merrion Oil and Gas
- › VISA Inc.

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*and partnerships to smooth leadership transitions and ensure that the work of the coalition continues despite changes in staffing or policymakers.*

- › **Make explicit the value the coalition adds to the community.**

*Asset building work should tie explicitly to economic security for all.* Data and stories from members can engage a broad audience around the issues.

*Include middle class concerns as well as those of the most vulnerable* when creating messages. This will touch the interests and concerns of many. Keeping the impact

message broad enables a more inclusive coalition development and will reach a larger constituent base for policy makers.

*Structure the coalition to be a flexible and responsive "go-to" resource* for addressing a range of issues as they arise; this demonstrates the value and impact of the coalition to state policy discussions.

- › **Use language that resonates with stakeholders and policymakers.**

*Narratives about local places and people are useful to reflect the social and cultural context* of the target state, region, or locality. These narratives transcend politics and help bring issues into focus.

TX

**Woody Widrow**  
RAISE Texas

As we transitioned from being a project of a local community-based organization into an independent 501(c)(3) entity, we held a number of statewide convenings. At these convenings, we provided information and technical assistance to support the local work of advocates and practitioners, and engaged them in the development of a statewide coalition. Our work on policy was limited, and our impact was marginal.

Starting in 2005, we decided to hold a statewide summit inviting community leaders from across the state to help us define and shape our policy agenda in the newly emerging asset building field and to expand the key programs we wanted to advance throughout Texas. Over 60 invited stakeholders attended the gathering in Austin.

Through facilitated small groups and then meeting as a whole, we worked on defining the issues and key policies. A number of key

recommendations to support our work and grow the field came out of the summit. After refining and synthesizing these recommendations, we decided that we needed to have more input from local leaders to ensure that the recommendations reflected all parts of the state: major metropolitan areas, our smaller cities, and rural communities.

In 2006, we held seven regional meetings that were co-hosted by local organizations that attended our summit. The local groups helped provide the invitation list and provided the location. The recommendations from the summit were presented at these regional meetings, and local leaders responded to our set of priorities. Based on the feedback from these regional meetings and from the initial asset-building summit, a RAISE Texas action agenda was developed and presented at the 2008 summit.

The four key priorities for policies and products were presented as action campaigns: Matched Savings, Community Tax Centers, Alternative Small Dollar Consumer Loans, and Home Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention. Over the last five years, we have continued our campaigns, although Home Mortgage Foreclosure Prevention has since moved under another coalition. In its stead, we have Access to Education.

Since 2009, these four campaigns have guided our work in terms of public policy activity. They also have guided our support for the tools, products, and programs that advance our agenda and our members' agendas across the state. We have developed a broad base of understanding about these critical issues across the state and have a committed and engaged membership who can and will sustain the work.

*Metaphors and phrases other than “assets” or “asset building”* often convey the purpose of a coalition's work. This language should help move the coalition towards developing social and economic security opportunities.

Instead of using the terms “assets” and “asset building,” many coalitions chose to use the phrases on the right to describe their work. These are goals of asset building coalitions. These phrases often resonate with a broader public and clearly express the intent of the coalition.

- › Economic opportunity
- › Upward mobility
- › Financial stability
- › Financial empowerment
- › Economic security
- › Strengthening communities
- › Financial independence
- › Building opportunity

Many coalitions do not refer to assets at all in their mission statements. For example:

- > Maryland CASH promotes programs, products, and policies that *protect and grow the financial security of working families* by improving the availability of financial education, providing practitioner trainings and professional development, conducting research, and advocating for policy change.
- > Prosperity Works builds the capacity of organizations and advocates for policies that *generate economic prosperity for all New Mexicans*.
- > RAISE Texas' mission is to advance policies and programs that *foster financial success and economic stability for all Texans*.

- > The North Carolina Assets Alliance is a state-wide coalition of public, private, and nonprofit institutions whose shared vision is to *expand economic opportunity and build a more stable financial future for all North Carolinians*.

States talk about asset building and wealth creation but use a range of language that brings many stakeholders to the table and keeps them there. Over time, “building assets” may enter into their mission statements, but the consensus is the work of asset building is not predicated on always labeling the engagement with that term.

## ? ASK

**How will we fund and structure continuing asset building work in the state?**

**Do we rely too heavily on one source of funding or do we have diverse funding sources?**

**Will our coalition remain strong and continue its work even if a key staff member leaves or one of the member organizations can no longer provide leadership?**

**Is the policy and program agenda broad and inclusive of the interests of many to help keep people engaged?**

## *Change More Lives: Expand the Scale and Impact of State Asset Building*

Millions of families will benefit from better access to asset building opportunities and greater economic security. State asset building coalitions strive to produce impacts of scale, setting up their work to reach hundreds of thousands, even millions, in their states.

Scale requires an understanding that broad-based investments, incentives, and policies are required to build the assets of those at low and middle income levels, and a recognition that these opportunities do not exist for many. Achieving scale requires partnerships, resources, innovations, and a focus on the development and implementation of systems and policies that have broad impact.

Several strategies shape the potential of asset coalitions to achieve scalable outcomes.

› **Embed asset building products into existing institutional systems and structures.**

*Elementary and secondary schools* provide coalitions with avenues for offering millions of school-age children access to savings accounts, financial education, and other asset building strategies that can be woven into the curriculum.

*Community colleges and Head Start programs* offer financial coaching to low-income students and parents; they can connect individuals with federal job training opportunities, savings vehicles, and other resource building opportunities.

*Housing authorities* can integrate the acquisition of financial knowledge, skills, and savings through enrollment in the Family Self-Sufficiency program and other housing-based asset development opportunities.

*Employers* can set-up automatic savings and retirement accounts for employees through payroll deduction, can offer tax-filing opportunities to increase the use of EITC, and can provide other benefits for education, health, and investment.

*Existing statewide programs*, such as 529 plans, can broaden to bring in low-income savers if outreach and matched saving opportunities are made available.

“When all children in a state can approach their adult years with savings that can be used for education, building a business, or buying a home...when their future is seeded with opportunity, hope, and real dollars, then we can say we have reached scale in a critical piece of the asset development continuum. Without savings and financial knowledge people cannot invest. Without investments a secure future is out of reach.”

- Ona Porter, Prosperity Works

MD

**Robin McKinney***Maryland CASH*

Maryland CASH defines scale for public policies in two ways. First, there are policies that create the infrastructure that cements the opportunities to build assets into state systems. Two examples of bills that Maryland CASH has passed in this category are the creation of mechanisms for the Comptroller of Maryland to split tax refunds into multiple bank accounts and to purchase federal savings bonds using state tax refunds. These efforts put an enduring system into place that serves as a base for future efforts. The mechanisms could each be available to over two million Marylanders.

While there may be early take-up issues that necessitate future outreach and awareness efforts, the goal is to get the system in place and working.

The second definition for a scaled policy is one that reaches a critical volume of residents, thereby improving the overall savings culture for the state. An example is prize-linked savings, which allows banks and credits unions in Maryland to offer financial incentives tied to monthly savings deposits. The program will be run by the private

sector with oversight from the Commissioner of Financial Regulation, but the necessary policy levers to accommodate its creation were put in place by legislation championed by Maryland CASH. This program could reach over 4.5 million Marylanders once implemented state-wide. Maryland CASH is also considering other scaled policies to increase savings for emergencies, higher education opportunities like college or trade schools, and for retirement by Maryland residents.

CA

**Ben Mangan***EARN*

EARN has been dedicated to scale since our founding in 2001. To us, scale means reaching the millions of low-income Americans who can benefit from the savings products we offer. EARN is one of the two largest providers of matched savings accounts to low-income Americans, and we have been very successful, gaining high impact for our clients and strong support from big funders. However, we found that matched savings accounts in their traditional form were resource intensive and costly to provide, and that we needed to innovate to increase the scale of our impact.

Through research, self-assessments, and brainstorming meetings with our partners, we developed a more

streamlined and efficient savings product by harnessing the power of technology and reducing the number of rules and regulations. This new product creates economies of scale that enable us to open and serve several thousand accounts per year for the same resources and staff time expended to open 600 accounts per year—our annual average under the traditional “high touch” method—while maintaining the same or greater impact for the saver.

When our society is facing massive social and economic problems involving millions of people, too much funding, brainpower, and attention is given to models that will clearly never scale to match the size of our problems. Scaling solutions to

the world’s social and economic problems is already astonishingly difficult, but it is also impossible if “success” is measured just a few marginal increments from the status quo. We have to set the bar high and think about how to have broad scale, long-term impacts or our own impact will be embarrassingly small compared to the size of the problems we are trying to solve. Achieving scale will take time and will not be easy, but it is a goal we must strive toward to ensure families are moving forward toward positive futures with long-term financial security.

- > **Simplify and streamline products to achieve efficiency and cost effectiveness.**

*Determine which products are resource intensive and costly to provide* through research and evaluations.

*New technology enables innovation and a reduction in costs* associated with products.

*Investigate whether other states have created more efficient products or passed policies that streamlined program administration.* Eliminating asset tests, for example, can lower overhead administrative costs in public assistance programs.

- > **Avoid duplication of efforts and the “silo” mentality.**

*Combining the resources of several coalition members* enables them to take on larger projects that have a greater impact—projects they could not have undertaken alone.

*Stay aware of large and small asset building initiatives in the state,* make sure members' work is coordinated and complimentary to leverage resources, outcomes and impacts.

- > **Spread the word through the media and social networks.**

*Opinion pieces, letters to the editor, blogs, and coverage in coalition members' newsletters* draw attention to the need for more investments in asset building and for broader opportunity infrastructures.

*Press releases to newspapers, radio, and other media* inform people of new research or new policies. Press releases also ensure that the media understands asset building so that they feel comfortable talking about it. ■

## ? ASK

**Do our policy proposals lead to impacts for many, not just a few in the state?**

**How can new programs and policies be implemented through existing platforms?**

**What are one or two big changes we can work toward that will increase economic opportunities for low-income individuals and families in the state?**

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## IV. SHARE WHAT YOU KNOW:

# The Power of Peer Engagement

The asset building field is innovating and expanding at a rapid pace. While the importance of assets in helping families move up and out of poverty has gained broad-based acceptance, the asset building movement is still gaining momentum. Spearheading this movement, each state has a growing number of visionary leaders. Asset building coalitions are at the center of the efforts to build savings and economic security across the nation for those out of the opportunity infrastructure.

Structured opportunities for these leaders to gather together to learn from one another, network, and problem-solve have accelerated asset building policies and practices at all levels. One such opportunity was the Mott Foundation's State Asset Coalition learning process. Three years of in-person meetings, occurred three times a year. This fostered an open exchange of ideas, successes, challenges, insights, and experiences as participants built their coalitions and advanced their asset policy agendas.

“As a newcomer to asset coalition work, I had a lot of questions. This group became my sounding board. I saw how those with asset building experience supported each other in sharing innovations and discussing how to adapt strategies from one state to another. Gathering with and learning from those doing similar work in other states is both energizing and inspiring. This is time well spent.”

—*Tamika Edwards, Southern Bancorp Community Partners*

**Making time to engage in peer learning and maintaining the relationships has proven to be critical in helping state coalitions grow and innovate. Peer Engagement:**

> **Builds Social Capital**

Gathering together to discuss challenges and innovations builds rapport and trust over time. It creates an environment that supports open information sharing both at the table where everyone is talking and in side meetings “offline.” These relationships have proven critical as states now call on each other for information, advice, and collaboration.

In the case of the Mott group, they developed their own internal listserv allowing them to communicate with each other regularly through on-line discussions. Significant advice was shared through the listserv which led to calls for more in-depth discussions. Coalitions at a more advanced stage of development mentored coalitions in earlier stages and all participants reported that they benefitted from these interactions. For example, having to explain something to a new coalition or new member helped clarify issues for those who were more seasoned.

> **Creates Collaborative Learning**

Participants are their own state's leaders on policy, research, organizing, or program development. Meeting together creates learning. It provides access to key players in the asset field to share insights into the challenges of pursuing particular directions, enables learning from those who have had common experiences, and builds on knowledge and perspectives that advance their work. They challenge each other and do not always leave with consensus but with food for thought. The small group meetings produce a high level of political and intellectual capital, creating an ideal environment for innovative thinking. Through these in-person meetings, state asset building leaders not only learn from each other, but also identify areas where they need to learn more. Together they identify and bring in experts to guide them in new directions.

> **Improves Inter-State Discussions and Contributes to Setting a National Agenda**

A number of national intermediary organizations develop and advance asset building policies. However, state-level organizations rarely have the time and space to talk and meet with each other to identify issues and interests that they would like to see trickle up to the national level. Carving out time to meet with each other provides the opportunity for this reflective work and makes state coalitions active participants in shaping a national asset building agenda.

> **Provides Structure for Creating Scalable Impacts**

The benchmarks, created by the Mott Learning Initiative, established a framework for progress and evaluation for each group to achieve over the time period of the grant. At the completion of the grant, many state coalitions achieved major progress in a range of the fields listed. By convening, coalition leaders learned how to move work forward within their states and discussed how to engage outside of their states to move policies that will have impacts of scale, benefiting their own state and others. ■

MI

**Ross Yednock***Michigan Economic Impact Coalition*

The ability to meet, discuss, and debate with others from across the country was invaluable. Not only did it improve the quality of our work and strengthen our arguments and policy recommendations, but it also re-energized our efforts in a way that is not quantifiable by any metric. Often, working to advance asset building policy in our home state can feel isolating, not because there is a lack of support from in-state allies,

but because there is not the in-depth level of understanding of the nuances of the asset policy agenda. Spending time with others who are deeply immersed in savings and asset building policy provides a unique opportunity to learn from each other, as well as a much needed break from the daily challenges to reflect, gain perspective, and strategize.

NC

**Lucy Gorham***North Carolina Assets Alliance*

In an environment where email notices of compelling assets-related webinars arrive on almost a daily basis, it might seem like an extravagance to bring people together in one physical location to share ideas. However, our experience through this learning cluster has reinforced the importance of personal relationships built over time and the opportunity for informal time and sharing that only comes when people are in the same place.

One example of how this peer learning exchange has enhanced our work happened early on in our learning cluster get-togethers. We heard a compelling presentation on the Save To Win prize-linked savings program from the Doorways to Dreams (D2D) Fund. Soon after, we heard that D2D staff would be in North Carolina for a national meeting of credit unions, and we helped set up some local meetings for them with

the intention of assessing whether there was interest in bringing Save to Win to our state. The wheels were quickly in motion for a campaign to change North Carolina regulations to allow a full-fledged Save to Win program, led by the North Carolina Credit Union League and supported by the North Carolina Assets Alliance. After a legislative win, we now have a very successful Save to Win program in place. Along the way, we sought advice and resources on both the policy and implementation aspects of our initiative from our cluster colleagues from Michigan, home of the Michigan Credit Union League that spearheaded the original Save to Win program.

To return the favor, North Carolina provided the Michigan team with technical assistance when they wanted to assess the potential impact of a savings program modeled on the \$aveNYC program. The University of

North Carolina Center for Community Capital (CCC), which provides leadership to the North Carolina Assets Alliance research and policy development, had done an evaluation of the \$aveNYC program. CCC researchers were able to give Michigan guidance on how to use our evaluation results to estimate the level of new savings that could be generated and the resulting impacts on household financial stability.

Looking ahead, the high level of interest in both children's savings accounts and innovations to support emergency savings is producing a great deal of information sharing among state teams. Every state's political climate is different, but there are many similarities as well in the challenges we face. The opportunity to brainstorm together on how to meet those challenges has been, and will continue to be, invaluable.

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## V. REFLECTIONS AND LESSONS LEARNED

Recent events such as the Great Recession, the foreclosure crisis, and the Occupy movement have raised awareness of the immense wealth disparities in the United States. These events have opened eyes and ears, bringing opportunities for education and answers to new questions about building savings for security and opportunity.

State asset building coalitions are working harder than ever to develop strategic investments and policy initiatives that advance and build savings and opportunity infrastructures. These coalitions work to reduce economic inequalities, shrink the racial and gender wealth gaps, and build the social and economic security and well-being of everyone in their states. Through research, discussion, debate, and problem-solving, coalitions have identified and modeled innovative approaches to asset building and have accomplished significant policy changes. The work of these ten state coalitions confirm that individual state efforts do matter and are critical to informing and advancing asset policy in their states and the nation.

### *A Learning Initiative*

This report cannot begin to capture the learning, the breadth, and the depth of the meetings and discussions that occurred over three years—but it is a start. Two broad insights and lessons can be drawn from this work.

First, the development and advancement of the Benchmarks, a tool for assessing and structuring progress in asset building at the state level, provides a

guide for other state coalitions as they seek to move their work forward. Structuring intentional and focused work on stakeholder engagement, research, sustainability, and a comprehensive policy agenda will create impacts of scale, building the savings and financial security infrastructure that will strengthen every household in every part of the state.

Second, the importance of convening in relatively small groups to learn, share experiences, and develop resource networks cannot be overstated. Coalition leaders committed to sharing information and networked across states, bringing information and resources back to their own state networks. The shared work and discussions from these ten states demonstrates that policy innovations can be effectively achieved by a high level of information sharing across states. Initiative members without fail indicated that the learning and networking that occurs in groups of 20-30 participants is unique and of substantial value in advancing their work.

Ongoing support and commitment of the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation enables twelve states to continue meeting twice a year. Together, they bring in experts, challenge conventions, stimulate innovation, and move asset building work forward throughout the country. As the learning continues, asset building policies and programs will become more commonplace in these states and others, helping families build new and greater opportunities for economic security, stability, and well-being. ■

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## VI. APPENDICES

- A. Mott State Asset Building Learning Initiative Benchmark Tool
- B. MD CASH Policy Framework
- C. Asset Building Resources

## Appendix A

# Mott State Asset Building Learning Initiative Benchmark Tool (a draft always in process)

The overarching goal of the Mott Foundation’s State Asset Coalition Initiative is to build enduring state infrastructures that will drive, support, and enable asset building policies and practices that have impacts of scale for decades to come. In order to achieve this goal, Mott and its grantees identified five core objectives that need to advance in a complementary fashion. On the next few pages you will find each objective linked to a set of suggested targeted actions. The nine funded state coalitions engaged in an interactive process to develop these benchmarks which can now be used as a guide of progress for achieving goals along a continuum. Please note that the action targets have flexible boundaries and are indicators of the kinds of activity that can move a coalition’s work forward. The purpose of the benchmark tool is to allow for self-assessment and targeted planning. The goal is for each state to identify its current stage of development within each of these objectives. This will help to locate a starting point for the coalition’s process and to determine priorities, goals, and strategies. Each state should select two or three priority objectives to focus upon in the coming year to advance its coalition’s work.

### 1. The Five Core Objectives for Asset Policy and Program Development

*Objective I:* STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

*Objective II:* RESEARCH

*Objective III:* COMPREHENSIVE POLICY FRAMEWORK

*Objective IV:* SUSTAINABILITY

*Objective V:* SCALE

### 2. Stage of Development Definitions

- › **Requires Improvement:** Process of identifying clear strategies and measures of progress underway; implementation has not begun.

- › **In Development:** Strategies and measures of progress are established and activities may be underway; progress is not yet visible.
- › **Satisfactory:** Active implementation of strategies are underway; some measures of progress are beginning to become evident.
- › **Good:** Initial signs of effectiveness are present based on measures of progress.
- › **Exceptional:** Demonstrated effectiveness of strategies based on measures of progress.

### 3. Working Definitions of a Few Key Terms Used in the document (Glossary)

- › **Measures of Progress:** Each targeted action point (A, B, C) will have a specific outcome measure of progress associated with it. “Progress” is tied to moving along or achieving these outcomes over time; it is the extent to which actual coalition activity compares with targeted action goals.
- › **Effectiveness:** Objectives are fully achieved and have the intended or expected effect and the targeted problem(s) they are meant to address are resolved.
- › **Inclusivity:** Refers to how we work together to engage and bring others to the table. This means creating an inclusive culture where everyone feels valued, creating opportunities for broad participation, sharing ideas from multiple perspectives, and working together across differences to create success for a common purpose. Inclusivity recognizes that there are differences of thought, priorities, and opinions and works to create a culture of activity that bridges these differences to enable shared goals and activities to move forward.

- > **Diversity:** Coalitions engage with other stakeholder groups that: *a) represent the interests of and work with a mix of populations—individuals within their state, reaching across race, ethnicity, gender, physical and other disabilities, sexual orientation, nativity, religion, and age groups within their state. This last includes bringing in the business and nonprofit sectors, unions, policymakers, government agencies, advocacy groups, think tanks, and key institutions which may include utilities, schools, and banks.; b) include a mix of organizations that focus on specific asset-building or asset-bridging issues, such as IDA’s, EITC, car ownership, financial services, cliff effects, asset limits; and c) cut across urban, suburban, rural, and other geographic characteristics within states to ensure that policies and practices engage and reach all of the citizens of the state.*
  
- > **Comprehensive:** Policies that address asset development across the life course and build on a complement of regulatory, administrative, and programmatic solutions that will have impacts of scale.

*Scale, sustainability, and creation of an enduring infrastructure can only be achieved if each of the benchmark objectives are pursued with attention—at all times—to issues of inclusivity, diversity, and comprehensive policy development.*

## Objective I: STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Strategic stakeholders working across asset-building areas and diverse fields of practice will engage to identify areas of interest, aligning and leveraging to: inform other fields about and sustainably engage in asset development, influencing and driving policy change by more stakeholders, and a broad range of asset-building opportunities with wider impact delivers and sustains wide support throughout the state. Stakeholder interests align and engage in areas of work, helping to move toward the policy change and level of scale we hope to achieve.

Identify your coalition's stage of development for implementing these targeted actions					
Action Targets	Requires Improvement	In Development	Satisfactory	Good	Exceptional
<b>A.</b> Diverse stakeholders whose current research, policy, practice, and strategies complement or align with the asset-building goals of the coalition are identified and engaged.	Coalition continues to work with its original network of asset-building partners. Coalition has not identified new stakeholders for engagement.	New stakeholders have been identified. Develop a strategy for outreach and inclusion. No outreach has occurred.	Outreach plan is in place and outreach has occurred. Coalition begins to familiarize others with the asset-building field and to identify complimentary areas of alignment.	New and established stakeholders begin to regularly engage in coalition meetings. An inclusive process is underway to align and specify common interests.	Diverse stakeholder representatives are fully engaged in coalition meetings, forums, and discussions. They can clearly articulate their alignment with the asset-building agenda and identify a purpose for involvement.
<b>B.</b> A new group of stakeholders and founding coalition members incorporate asset-building approaches and strategies into their own organization's current research, practice, and/or policy framework.	Key stakeholders staff (including coalition members) have not been broadly exposed to asset-building research or frameworks.	Key stakeholders have seen some research but do not yet understand the value or way to include asset-building within their own institutional framework or mission.	Key stakeholders understand asset research and are engaging in discussions about the benefits of integrating asset-building strategies into their own framework or mission.	Key stakeholders are testing out the integration of asset-building strategies into their own framework by actively working on at least one asset-building strategy policy, practice, or research connected to their institutional agenda.	Key stakeholders understand the contribution and effectiveness of asset-building and have integrated asset-building strategies into their own framework, mission, and research.
<b>C.</b> Diverse stakeholders share their asset-building work both within their networks and with a broad range of others externally. This broad group of stakeholders includes asset-building strategies in their research, practice, and/or policy frameworks.	Stakeholders have not externally shared their newly-engaged asset-building work.	Stakeholders have developed plans to share their alignment with asset development in their broader field but no action has been taken.	Stakeholders have shared their asset-building work within their own networks. There may not be evidence that it has influenced the work of others.	Stakeholders have shared their asset-building work within their own networks—with a broad range of others—and there is some evidence that it has influenced the work of others within the field.	Stakeholders have shared their asset-building work broadly. There is clear evidence that it is embedded in their institutional activities, shaped their work with external partners, informed their research and policy agenda, and supported and extended the asset-building efforts of the coalition.

## Objective II: RESEARCH

The coalition establishes a clear research agenda that supports policy change, produces and disseminates reliable and objective research, and becomes the key state resource for asset-based research and knowledge. Coalition generated research (primary and secondary) reveals a clear evidence-based analysis of the asset development needs and opportunities in the state. It will support policy formation and implementation, be drawn upon by diverse constituencies, will be integrated into their own research and policy work, connects to national policy developments, and will become the primary source for reliable asset information in the state.

### Action Targets

### Identify your coalition's stage of development for implementing these targeted actions

	Requires Improvement	In Development	Satisfactory	Good	Exceptional
<p><b>A.</b> Research that is produced is evidence-based and builds the policy case for expanding asset-building opportunities in the state.</p>	<p>Coalition is at the beginning stages of identifying areas of research that could contribute to a policy agenda. Strategies are developing for conducting research directly, through partnerships, through contracts, or by influencing others in its development.</p>	<p>Evidence-based research is made available. The capacity to translate research findings into a policy agenda is underway. Research reaches new audiences with attention to issues of inclusivity, reliability, and validity.</p>	<p>Evidence-based data exists. Data reveals and supports areas of asset development policy change needs in the state and policy case is developing. Research findings are available in a variety of forms to reach different audiences. A range of dissemination strategies is underway and becoming effective.</p>	<p>Evidence-based policy agenda has begun to attract policy allies. Coalition presents, contributes to, or helps organize research and policy findings for state meetings, conferences, and other public/private forums. This will demonstrate the reliability and the contribution of the data to a policy agenda.</p>	<p>Evidence-based policy agenda is producing policy victories. Coalition is first organization media calls for data or insight on asset development issues and/or broad asset related issues. Coalition assists in drafting relevant legislation based upon evidence-based research.</p>
<p><b>B.</b> Research is produced and disseminated in a number of ways to deepen the knowledge and understanding of asset-related topics, including asset effects, asset poverty, the relationship between assets and well-being, etc.</p>	<p>Coalition is at beginning stages of identifying and expanding knowledge about the critical asset topics on the state agenda; research has little influence outside narrow band of stakeholders.</p>	<p>Stakeholder and policy developments are incorporated into the research and dissemination strategy. This will be broadcasted through a variety of forms, reaching different audiences.</p>	<p>Initial signs of research effectiveness becomes evident through stakeholder discussions and use of data; Coalition members utilize the research and asset knowledge or frameworks in their own work.</p>	<p>Stakeholder groups outside of the immediate coalition (as well as within the coalition) incorporate asset-building goals into their institutional mission and practice. A range of dissemination strategies are underway and are becoming effective.</p>	<p>Asset-building is understood and accepted as an effective part of the broad policy agenda for economic and social stability, security, and growth among stakeholder organizations. This enables the coordination of policy action.</p>
<p><b>C.</b> Research is used to inform organizational changes in asset-building implementation, practice, and products available through public, nonprofit, and private organizations producing measurable benefits.</p>	<p>Research has not affected change in the state and community organizations. These organizations have the potential to impact the asset-building experiences of individuals and families outside of the policy arena.</p>	<p>Drawing on the research, the coalition develops strategies and recommendations that can support organizational change.</p>	<p>Asset-related research is producing visible changes in state organizations; coalition is sought out for help in developing strategies to support organizational change.</p>	<p>Research is the basis for asset-building changes in the implementation, practice, and products available. It assists in developing the program policy design and evaluation among stakeholder organizations. It is a visible component of community engagement.</p>	<p>Research sets the standards for asset development integration and implementation for a range of public/private/nonprofit organizations.</p>

### Objective III: COMPREHENSIVE POLICY FRAMEWORK

Establishment of comprehensive asset-building policies in the state enables people at all income levels to build assets across the course of their lives to meet important development goals and to facilitate investments in their present and future. Policies should be sustainable and establish sufficient levels of funding and have broad base constituency support.

#### Action Targets

#### Identify your coalition's stage of development for implementing these targeted actions

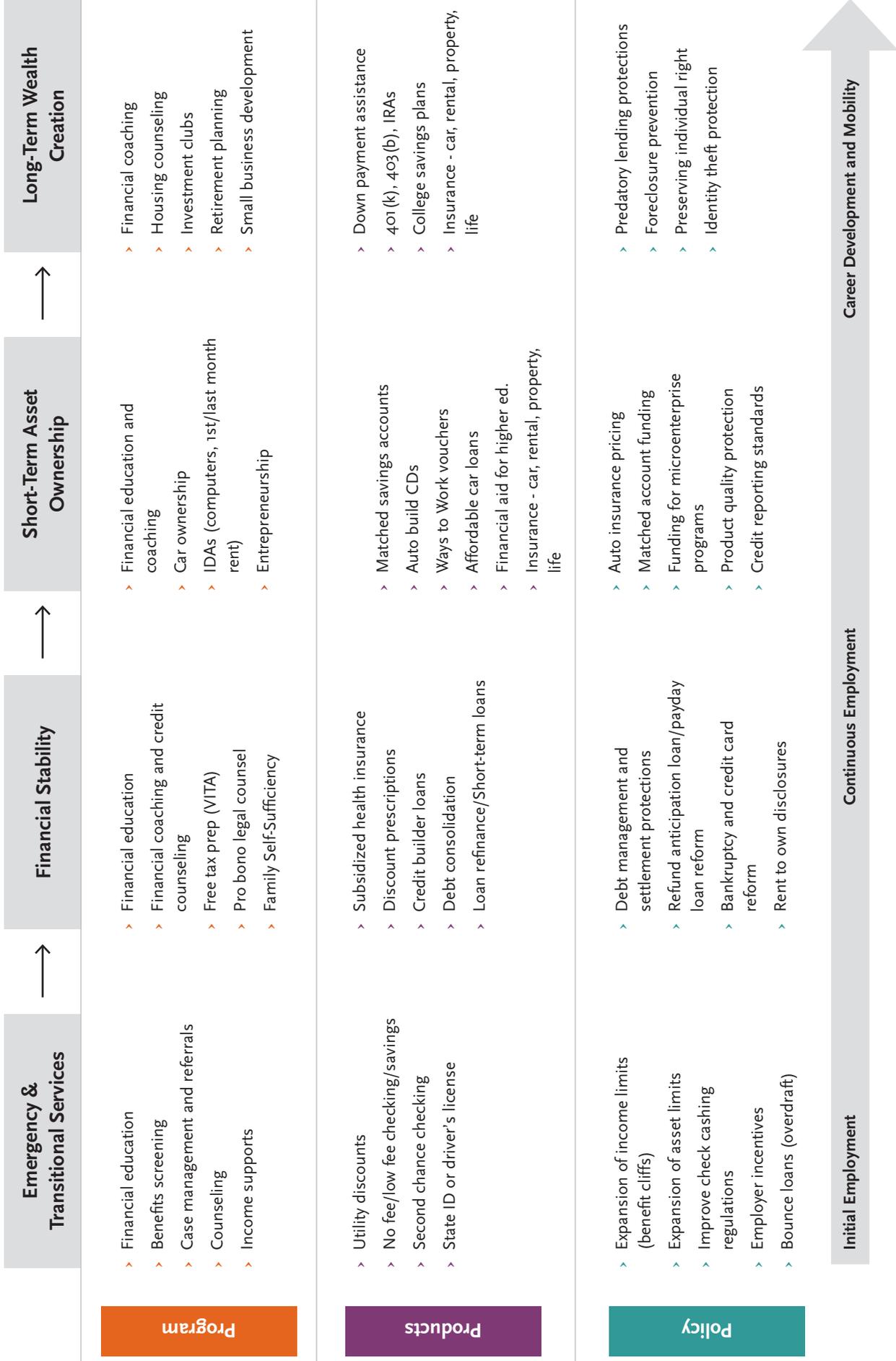
	Requires Improvement	In Development	Satisfactory	Good	Exceptional
<b>A. Policy Assessment:</b> Coalition identifies and examines existing state asset-building policies and policy gaps. They use a lens for creating asset-building opportunities at all stages across the life-course with attention to issues of diversity and inclusivity. They identify research that reveal the effectiveness of existing policies for building assets.	Coalition members join stakeholders in a series of meetings to identify a common starting point in establishing inclusive asset-building policies across the life course (where do common interests converge and how would increasing opportunities to build assets serve common interests?).	Coalition members and stakeholders have agreed that establishing a number of inclusive, life-course asset-building policies is a priority across interests but have not assessed current policies and initiatives in the state to determine a starting point for moving forward.	Coalition members and stakeholders are fully engaged in a state assets policy assessment—are finding “inclusiveness gaps,” and determining how state legislators perceive inclusive a-b policies (positive or negative).	Assessment is near completion and is approaching informed consensus on the nature and effectiveness of existing a-b policies and how many inclusive a-b policy gaps exist.	The state policy assessment is completed by the coalition and stakeholders; effective policies and policy gaps have been identified through a collaborative process; a simple report on findings has been created and disseminated for further discussion. This report will determine action steps.
<b>B. Policy Framework Development:</b> The coalition and its partners have developed and articulated a comprehensive asset-building policy framework and strategy that shapes its future policy activities and that of its partners (comprehensive includes life-stages, inclusive, and effective policies that may include but go beyond IDAs and EITC, etc.).	The coalition and a diverse network of collaborators create an assets policy framework that shapes and directs policy strategy development (life-course, inclusive, effective). The coalition and partners have not developed an implementation plan for initiating a policy strategy.	The coalition and partnering network (policy partners) are using a consensus process to develop a unified framework and message on the benefits of establishing inclusive asset-building policies for all people in the state. This framework will assist the coalition in implementing a policy strategy.	Unified messaging and a collaborative process by the coalition engages policy partners in developing a comprehensive asset-building policymaking strategy.	Coalition members and key partners have committed to working on a unified policy framework, message, and strategy. This will yield a high level of activity that creates an on-going process; a consensus for strategy prioritization is emerging.	State legislators and other key policy partners understand the framework, strategy, and priorities; they accept the need for comprehensive state asset-development policies; they are actively engaging in inserting framework and strategy elements in state policy formation with visible results.
<b>C. Policy Implementation:</b> A comprehensive and inclusive asset-building policy strategy for the state is in the process of implementation by coalition and policy partners on a priority policy basis.	Coalition begins effort to implement the asset-building policy development strategy; a “short-term” or immediate asset policy development priority list is identified but no action is underway.	Implementation actions are underway but coordination with the coalition’s strategy plan has not occurred. One or more “short-term” policy priorities are moving along and a legislative champion is being secured.	Coordinated actions on some priority steps have begun. At least one inclusive, asset-building policy has been proposed and endorsed by elected officials.	The framework and strategic plan drives the coalition’s activities. Clear progress is being made in one or more strategic areas through the enacting of a new comprehensive policy.	Coalition activity leads to the passage of a new asset policy law and receives support through sustainable funding streams; key state legislators commit to continue to advance a comprehensive and inclusive asset policy agenda.

<b>Objective IV: SUSTAINABILITY</b>					
The coalition has the organizational capacity, demonstrated ability, and sufficient support needed to drive development of a sustainable asset-building infrastructure which is capable of advancing asset-building policies and practices on an ongoing basis.					
<b>Identify your coalition's stage of development for implementing these targeted actions</b>					
<b>Action Targets</b>	<b>Requires Improvement</b>	<b>In Development</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Exceptional</b>
<b>A.</b> The coalition (through its members) has secured sufficient diversity of dedicated funding to sustain its asset-building work in the state; i.e., from the legislature, community, philanthropy, private sectors, etc.	The funding for the coalition is inconsistent, reactive, and/or not directly tied to asset development strategies or initiatives.	Funding for the coalition's asset-building work is growing but from no new sources; develop strategies to identify and pursue funding diversification, targeting defined asset-building methods.	The coalition is pursuing funding from diverse sources based on a defined strategy and are developing objectives to advance asset-building policy and build coalition capacity in the state.	The coalition has successfully secured funding for specific asset-building initiatives and efforts to build coalition capacity.	Sufficient funding is available to ensure the long-term viability of the coalition's asset-building work.
<b>B.</b> The coalition has developed its organizational infrastructure to ensure it has the governance and internal processes needed to sustain its activity.	The coalition has not developed the necessary processes to promote the growth of its staff, ensured sound governance, and provided for effective operations.	The coalition has made some progress in building its organizational infrastructure in the area of governance, staff development, and accountability.	A strategic effort to identify ways to improve the operations of the coalition and promote its sustainability by developing staff and aligning operational processes with strategic objectives has been completed.	The implementation of processes to promote the development of staff, ensure sound governance, and provide for effective operations is underway.	The coalition has developed a sustainable infrastructure with governance, a staff development plan, and operational processes are in place —refining these features on a continual basis.
<b>C.</b> The coalition advances an array of sustainable asset policy and programs.	The coalition is focusing on one asset-building strategy versus a wide array of asset-building strategies.	A variety of asset-building policies and practices are advancing for inclusion in asset policy.	A variety of asset-building features and strategies have been identified and integrated into proposed legislative policies and regulatory practices.	The coalition has successfully supported the adoption of policies and features reflecting an array of asset-building strategies along the life continuum.	Policies developed across multiple fields of focus contain features that promote sustainable asset development.

<b>Objective V: SCALE</b>					
Progress is made towards the development and implementation of strategies and policies that create incentives and infrastructures to expand asset-building opportunities for hundreds of thousands or millions of low- to moderate-income families, moving impact goals far beyond hundreds or thousands. Progress is made within the public sphere in shifting the widespread analysis and acceptance of the need for broad based investments, incentives, and policies to build the assets of those at the low-income levels.					
<b>Identify your coalition's stage of development for implementing these targeted actions</b>					
<b>Action Targets</b>	<b>Requires Improvement</b>	<b>In Development</b>	<b>Satisfactory</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Exceptional</b>
<b>A.</b> Coalition embraces and commits to scale as a goal and expressly acknowledges impacts of scale as a key outcome of its work.	Coalition leaders acknowledge the importance of scale; however, scale concepts are notably absent in the coalition's public face (i.e. website, reports, activities beyond IDA's, etc.).	Scale is an expressly articulated goal but receives little attention in the coalition's work plan and/or meetings. Strategies are developing to advance discussions and activities on the issue and to create champions to drive it at appropriate levels.	There is an explicit focus on scale in coalition's identity as reflected in written materials, oral presentations, and leadership.	The goal of "scale" within the coalition is evidence by a broadly shared and articulated analysis and theory of change that reflects an understanding of how dedication to scale helps advance their missions.	Creating asset-building opportunities at scale is among the coalitions top 2 or 3 priorities. A majority of coalition members pursue strategies to achieve scale collectively as well as through complementary activities within their own organizations.
<b>B.</b> Coalition works to expand the evolution of the asset-building conversation within the public sphere and works towards achieving this as a key outcome of its work.	Coalition articulates the need for scale but conversations remain within the group (ex: evolving understanding of successful outcomes from 15 more IDA's to strategies to getting baby bonds in place on the 529 system.	Coalition, through stakeholder engagement, advances the analysis of scale. Strategies are developing and engage staff, executive directors, trustees, media, and other opinion makers.	Widespread belief of the asset-building conversation is moving outward through stakeholder discussions and accomplishments in their own institutions and on behalf of coalition activity. New strategies are developed and implemented to engage policy makers and the public.	Evolution of policy ideas from programs to systems is becoming visible through public media coverage. Influence of the analysis of asset-building is growing.	At the end of the day columnists are editorializing about it; policy makers are saying we need more investments and infrastructure to build assets at the lower rung of income level from cradle to grave enabling millions to benefit.
<b>C.</b> The coalition's activities reflect an explicit orientation toward creating, demonstrating, evaluating, and/or promoting innovative asset-building strategies and policies that can be replicated on a large scale or have large scale impacts.	Development of strategies for moving coalition work towards achieving scale have been discussed and/or explored.	Scale is an expressly articulated goal and a strategic plan for articulating a theory of change and directing coalition activity towards achieving impacts of scale is underway.	Active pursuit of scale strategies has begun and are potentially visible in research products, partnerships, and other coalition functions.	Emphasis on concepts of scale is visible in the choices of core coalition activity and its broader members over time, steering towards scalable solutions.	Scale concepts are penetrating policy discussions as evidenced by legislation introduced, policymaker rhetoric, and/or diffusion in other fields of endeavor (i.e., health care, education, etc.) through coalition stakeholder influences.

# Appendix B: MD CASH Policy Framework

## Asset Building Continuum



## Appendix C: Asset Building Resources

The organizations and website links below offer valuable information to help state asset-building coalitions expand their capacity and maximize their policy and programmatic impact:

### Asset Building Websites/Networking

- › ACCESS to Financial Security for All  
<http://accesstofinancialsecurity.org>
- › Aspen Institute's Asset Platform  
<http://assetplatform.org>
- › The Asset Coalition Toolkit for States (ACTS)  
<http://assetcoalitiontoolkit.org>
- › CFED's Assets and Opportunity Network  
<http://assetsandopportunity.org/network>
- › Spotlight on Poverty and Opportunity  
<http://www.spotlightonpoverty.org>

### Research and Policy Centers

- › INSIGHT: Center for Community Economic Development  
<http://www.insightccd.org/programs/assets.html>
- › New America Foundation Asset Building Program  
<http://assets.newamerica.net>
- › Opportunity Nation  
<http://www.opportunitynation.org>
- › PolicyLink  
<http://www.policylink.org>

### Universities

- › Assets and Education Initiative, University of Kansas  
<http://aedi.ku.edu>
- › Center for Financial Security, University of Wisconsin  
<http://www.cfs.wisc.edu/>
- › Center for Social Development, Washington University  
<http://csd.wustl.edu>
- › Community Wealth Building Initiative, The Democracy Collaborative, University of Maryland  
<http://community-wealth.org>
- › Institute on Assets and Social Policy, Brandeis University  
<http://iasp.brandeis.edu/>

## Endnotes

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Financial Security

College Completion

Thriving Communities

Equity

Increased Savings

Business Growth

Wealth Building

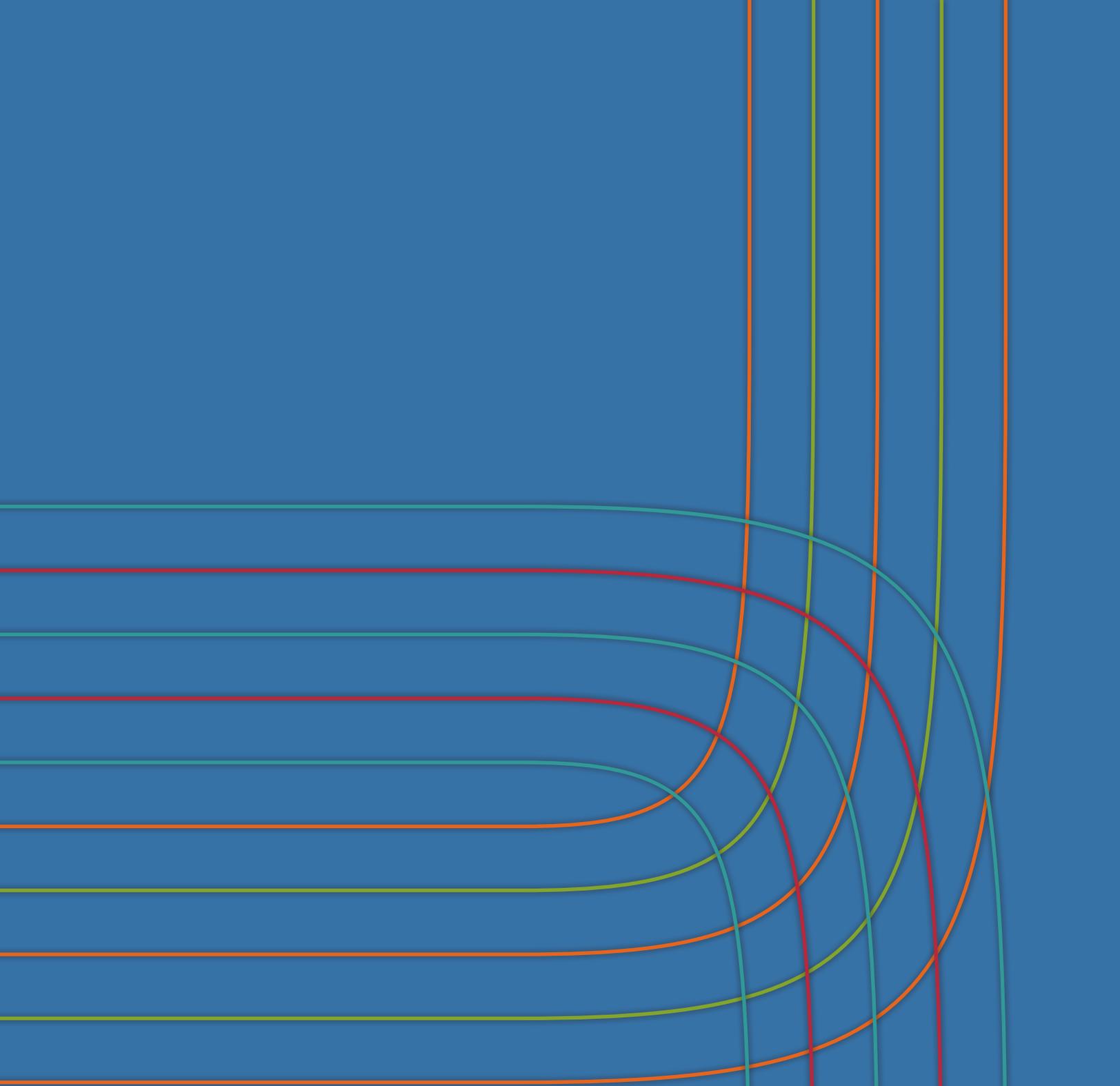
Economic Development

Security

Economic Stability

Expanded Home Ownership

Family Well-Being



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