

# Conversation Guide

## Poverty & Economic Mobility

*In both the 2017 & 2018 On the Table surveys, citizens indicated that “good jobs and economic development” and “poverty, economic security and upward economic mobility” are among their most critical issues for our community to address. Fostering positive economic mobility and breaking the cycle of poverty may be our biggest challenges as we look to maximize our community’s potential for a strong future.*

*According to the Opportunity Atlas (opportunityatlas.org), a child in our community who is raised in the bottom fifth of income levels has a 3.5% chance of rising to the top fifth during their lifetime. That places us in the bottom 7% of the country for levels of economic mobility. That kind of seemingly intractable poverty affects not only the jobs we can offer now, but also the jobs we are able to attract to Columbus to build the future we want.*

*Are there things we can do together to bolster The American Dream in Columbus?*

**How might we work together to reduce poverty & foster positive economic mobility?**

In selecting this topic, your Table will discuss ways in which poverty and a lack of upward mobility affects everyone in our community. You’ll consider ways for citizens to partner with government and other organizations to build a more hopeful community for all. Here are statistics to keep in mind:

- The current national unemployment rate is 3.6%, the lowest in 50 years. In Muscogee County, unemployment is at 4.3%, with Whites at 2.7% and Blacks at 6.5%.
- Our 2017 regional poverty rate is 21.7%, higher than the national average of 13.4%. Of those living below the poverty line, 59.6% are Black and 22.3% are White.
- A postsecondary degree or certificate increases economic mobility by 37%.

- According to Durham-based MDC, which helps communities foster “infrastructures of opportunity” (link on reverse), five factors that “keep people stuck” are:
  1. Residential segregation
  2. Income inequality
  3. Local school quality
  4. Family structure
  5. Social capital
- Columbus’ key industries are: Military, Education, Healthcare, Tech Jobs. Columbus 2025 (link on reverse) is focusing on targeted economic growth strategies to attract jobs our workforce can fill now and into the future.

# Sample Conversation Questions

1

What brought you to this table?

2

In reference to the American Dream: how many of you believe that where a person starts in life should NOT determine where they end up?

3

Are there specific events in your family's history that have significantly affected where you are today on the income mobility ladder?

4

What are your hopes for our community from an economic mobility perspective, now and in the long term?

5

What are your thoughts on what is causing some people in our community to be stuck economically while others are moving up?

6

What positive qualities or characteristics of our community could we leverage to strengthen economic mobility?

7

What things might you want to understand better to help support poverty reduction – or improve mobility outcomes – in our community?

8

How might we as a community address any of the five factors (on the previous page) that keep people stuck? Is there good work we should know about?

9

Are there specific things that ordinary citizens – even we as a group – might do to promote positive economic mobility here? Is there one step we might be ready to take, individually or collectively, based on our conversation? (See the Take Action worksheet to help you plan your next steps.)

10

Share one important thing we've accomplished here.

## Additional Resources

Here are a few resources to help you learn more about this issue:

**Columbus 2025**, our community's comprehensive, holistic plan to reduce poverty, increase prosperity & improve the quality of life for all ([columbusga2025.com](http://columbusga2025.com))

**The Basics**, a Columbus 2025-adopted simple strategy for maximizing brain development for children from birth-3. ([cv.thebasics.org](http://cv.thebasics.org))

**The Opportunity Atlas**: Which neighborhoods in America offer children the best chance to rise out of poverty? ([opportunityatlas.org](http://opportunityatlas.org))

**MDC's "State of the South: Recovering Our Courage" report** ([tinyurl.com/y4ox4s63](http://tinyurl.com/y4ox4s63))

**MDC President David Dodson's remarks at the Community Foundation's 20th Anniversary Investors' Luncheon**: Moving on Up: Building an Infrastructure of Opportunity in the Chattahoochee Valley ([tinyurl.com/yxtt96df](http://tinyurl.com/yxtt96df) (Dodson begins at 24:12))

*This discussion guide was developed in consultation with MDC, Inc.*