

mapping data around community solutions

STORIES FROM THE NETWORK

UP Partnership | Bexar County, Texas



*from
A guide to race and ethnic
equity systems indicators*

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STORIES FROM THE NETWORK

UP Partnership is using systems indicators to create community-centered recommendations that address equity gaps for area youth.

These indicators are featured or discussed in this story:

- Per-pupil funding
- Food security
- Health
- Housing and homelessness
- Legal system

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fiscal mapping

- ▶ If you're a parent, practitioner or researcher and live in Bexar County, Texas, you can explore the amount and types of funding identified for young people in your community through UP Partnership's recently developed [fiscal map](#).

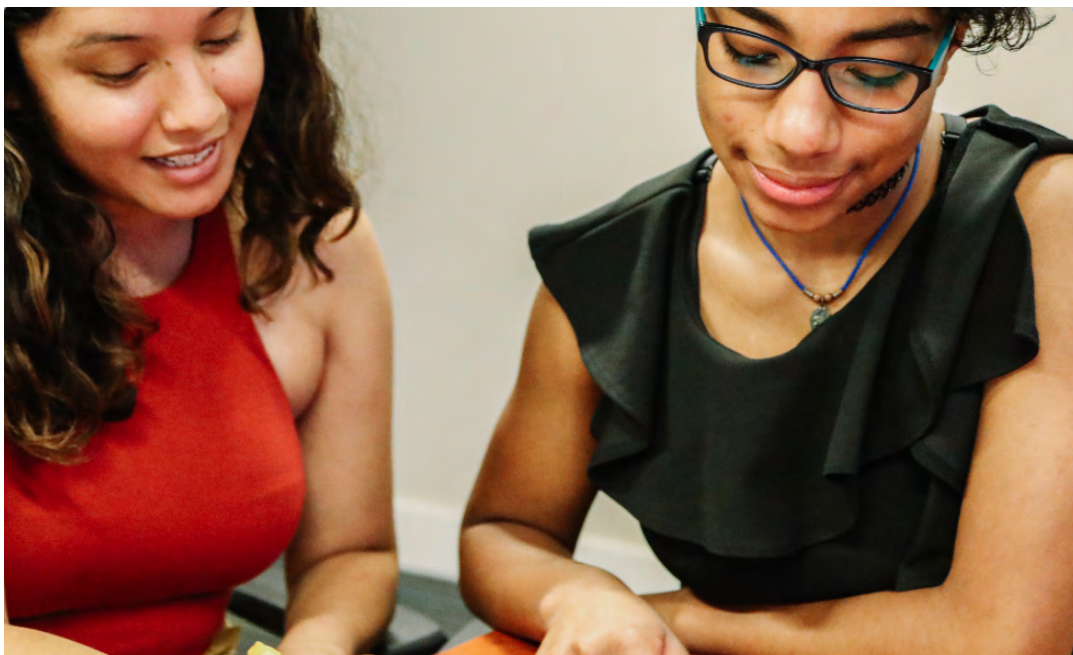
Available online, the fiscal map is an effort to study San Antonio's priorities for young people and offers a data-driven way to engage with the community. The research — which looks specifically at funding sources for youth programs and services, rather than for public education — breaks down data not only by funding level, but also into six categories based on the type of youth outcome they are meant to achieve, such as "safe and stable," "healthy" and "academically prepared."

Short for "unlocking potential," UP Partnership decided to create a fiscal map alongside another research project in which team members mapped youth programs and services in the community. The service map consolidates information from more than 80 nonprofit agencies and 500 programs and [is also available online](#) as a data resource.

Senior Director of Investment and Sustainability Kimberly Sama said gaps in services and resources led to a focus on funding streams. "Knowing that it's not enough," she said, referring to the availability of resources, "how do we think about the fiscal flow of dollars into San Antonio for youth outcomes, and are they really being used effectively and toward their end goal?"

The fiscal map is only a stepping stone for UP Partnership, whose goal is "ensuring every young person is ready for their future."

UP Partnership is in progress with the work of their Strategic Funding Alignment Task Force. Using the fiscal map as a resource, task force members develop practical, community-centered recommendations to address gaps and barriers for San Antonio youth. While UP Partnership "ultimately [wants] to grow dollars for students," according to Executive Director Ryan Lugalía-Hollon, a short-term goal is to send recommendations to relevant groups and organizations who will, in turn, implement solutions.



the strategies

- ▶ The task force convened for its first meeting in August 2020. Funders and practitioners, as well as community and youth representatives, gathered on Zoom, creating an intergenerational space. The move to include young people in the task force is intentional and reflective of the organization's overall commitment to youth, whom Sama called their "end audience." Two young people are on each of the alignment task force's three smaller working groups and bring their perspectives to the larger conversation.

As young as 13 and often high school age, they apply and are selected for project-based teams through Our Tomorrow, one of UP Partnership's four collaborative action networks, which cultivates youth ownership in community solutions and creates opportunities for youth-led initiatives. In projects such as this one, young people receive training in policy advocacy and development. Sama said that the organization regularly references the ladder of youth engagement as a model for how to authentically engage with and avoid tokenizing youth. Making sure that they receive stipends is one way. Sharing data with them is another.

Using a youth-oriented lens like this helps UP Partnership not only engage the people they seek to support, but also work with youth-serving organizations more effectively. Prior to the task force, strategic funding alignment began in 2019, when UP Partnership started a relationship with the Children's Funding Project. A five-month design process ensued before the team began combing through state and federal funding sources to identify budgets. Team members connected with state and federal employees to better understand specific data.

UP Partnership also reached out to local funders they had relationships with, five of which "actually sent us their budgets and the coding directly," said Sama. The coding, which refers to the way the data was categorized,

allowed funders to be part of the process themselves.

Relationships are crucial to this project and to UP Partnership's ethos in general. Sama described coffee meetings, lunches and trainings — including a 15-month-long academy that emphasized experiential learning — as important spaces for building connection and trust.

"If I don't feel trust, I can't share my data," she said, describing a common perspective. During our interview, Sama's Zoom background read "Relationships are the work," the tagline of Excel Beyond the Bell, one of UP Partnership's collaborative action networks. This background serves as a conversation starter with partners on the importance of relationships in collective impact work.

Strategies of relationship building and engaging youth are rooted in a strong organizational culture. Lugalía-Hollon, who has a restorative justice background, described UP Partnership's culture as the meeting point between "rigid accountability" and "deep commitment to relationship," which is a "constant, very live and appropriate tension for us."

Sama said that Lugalía-Hollon's leadership approach models how the team should center community members in their work. She also emphasized the importance of creating a culture of learning:

"A lot of times what'll happen is: if your data is not proving effectiveness, then you're at risk, but then you lose all the learning. Cutting funding to someone, you lose all the questions you would really want to dive into around how you could really turn the needle."

– Kimberly Sama

Sama circled back to relationship building, which she called "interpersonal, but also organizational and intraorganizational."

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challenges

For UP Partnership, the project of strategic alignment funding is a four-meeting process. Each meeting corresponds to one of four phases — identify, quantify, recommend and prioritize, a framework from the Children's Funding Project. Because these meetings occurred after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, virtual relationship building has been a challenge.

Sama discussed how the three-hour-long Zoom meetings, despite their productivity and homework between sessions, lacked opportunities for informal conversations before and after meetings — moments where members commune with each other, and where ideas may develop more organically.

Another challenge is the fact that funders don't geocode their race and ethnicity data, making resource-mapping difficult. "Racial equity is a geographical problem," Lugalia-Hollon said.

He described the milestones that led up to this moment: In 2017, the board made a formal commitment to equity for the first time. In January 2020, UP Partnership's multi-year strategic plan centered racial equity for the first time.

"Now the next chapter of the work is making that mean something and holding institutions' feet to the fire."

- Ryan Lugalia-Hollon



community representation and ballot initiative

- ▶ UP Partnership has noticed a change in the tenor of conversations around youth and funding. It's easier to talk about challenges in the community. Practitioners are more willing to do homework. Participating stakeholders have signed on to an **Equitable Recovery Pledge**; more and different voices are at the table. A recently released landscape report details the progress of their work.

Funders, who are more willing to share data, are looking forward to seeing the data that comes from this project. In working with funders, UP Partnership has gained more credibility within the funding community.

On an immediately practical level, the timing of UP Partnership's research helped support the ballot initiative Pre-K 4 SA in the 2020 November election. Voters renewed a tax that

will continue to provide \$38 million in pre-k funding. UP Partnership's research was one of multiple evaluations showing, according to the Children's Funding Project, "that students who attend a Pre-K 4 SA Program, particularly students who are economically disadvantaged or with limited English proficiency, end the year ahead of their peers in math and language."

Lugalia-Hollon also called the Alignment Task Force itself an "example of a new engagement strategy that's really successful." He's celebrating success but is always ready to reflect and move forward. "It's back to that sequencing question," he explained. "Knowing what the next move is and what people's roles are."

continuing the work

- ▶ At the time of our interview, the Alignment Task Force had yet to convene for its last meeting, when they would finalize the list of recommendations for improving funding alignment and appoint "messengers" to carry the recommendations out to those who would implement.

Data gathered before the pandemic provides context for what happened after the start of COVID-19. The project has since been refined with the impacts of the pandemic in mind.

"What we know is that the inequities that COVID-19 raised were already the inequities that were there. These are not new inequities. There's a light that's shining on them differently."

- Kimberly Sama

Staff at UP Partnership continue to ask themselves questions raised by the pandemic and explore different ways to engage with partners and the community. Lugalia-Hollon described how engagement, as it's practiced now, is "either symbolic, or you're all in on this strategy." "What are the other options or lanes we could create for that?" he asked.

conclusion

- ▶ As UP Partnership moves toward their goal of generating more public revenue dedicated to children and youth nationwide — and to promote this goal nationally — Lugalia-Hollon remembers why people come to the table in the first place: "Everybody has a natural

systems thinker inside of them they don't often get to exercise."

He added, "We give them a space to do that. I think that's as true, if not truer, than ever now."