

NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR



ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is the culmination of the Neighbor to Neighbor campaign in Cleveland, which was conducted in early 2022. Neighbor to Neighbor is a door-to-door canvassing effort created by the Rocket Community Fund that helps deepen connections between local Community Development Corporations (CDCs) and the residents they serve. Trained ambassadors from neighborhood CDCs have conversations with residents and ask questions to understand the gaps in housing stability and digital inclusion resources, services and programs. Based on these conversations, Neighbor to Neighbor partners can educate residents about existing programs and lay the groundwork for CDCs and residents to work together toward co-developing lasting, sustainable partnerships that provide long-term solutions to seemingly intractable issues.

In Cleveland, the Neighbor to Neighbor campaign was managed by Cleveland Neighborhood Progress through funding from the Rocket Community Fund, The Cleveland Foundation and the George Gund Foundation.

Cleveland Neighborhood Progress partnered with 17 local CDCs to execute the initiative, which focused on digital equity and housing stability issues. Canvassers attempted to complete 44,451 surveys resulting in 9,314 interactions with residents and 3,811 fully completed surveys. A summary of key findings is presented in this report.



THANK YOU

NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR would not have been possible without the coalition of neighborhood organizations, Cleveland residents and others who contributed to its success. The Rocket Community Fund would like to thank everyone involved in this project, including:

- **BELLAIRE-PURITAS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**
- **BURTEN, BELL, CARR DEVELOPMENT INCORPORATED**
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- **NORTHWEST NEIGHBORHOODS DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION**
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- **WEST PARK KAMM'S NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT**

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Westown Community Development Corporation

PROJECT PARTNERS:

Case Western Reserve University, Center on Urban Poverty and Community Development

Case Western Reserve University, Community Innovation Network

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Thank you to the Cleveland residents who answered their door and participated in the survey.

IN COLLABORATION WITH:

Cleveland Neighborhood Progress

Fairfax Renaissance
Development Corporation

Harvard Community Services Center

OUR FINDINGS

1. COST IS THE MAIN FACTOR IN LACK OF HOME BROADBAND INTERNET SERVICE

Nearly 1 in 5 respondents (18%) said they didn't have home broadband internet service, citing cost of service and cost of devices as the two main barriers to access. While some respondents indicated that their smart phone was sufficient, the speed and reliability of in-home internet is significantly better than wireless service. Additionally, smart phones do not provide the best experience for important situations, including banking, education, job hunting and more.

When asked what was considered an affordable price range, the largest percentage of respondents without in-home internet (32%) said less than \$18. While this price point may seem low, many internet service providers have begun offering low-cost service for income-eligible residents through the federal government's Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP). During Neighbor to Neighbor, canvassers provided residents with information about ACP and helped them get connected to enrollment support. Cleveland has enrolled 57% of eligible households in ACP, the second-highest rate of enrollment in the nation, behind only Detroit at 62%.

It is important to note that the latest census data showed 35% of Cleveland residents did not have access to in-home broadband service. While the 18% shown in our Neighbor to Neighbor research represents an improvement thanks to programs like ACP, we recognize it is not a complete picture of Cleveland residents. This data should be continuously collected and audited to understand the complicated and ever-changing landscape of Cleveland's digital divide.

18% *of residents contacted reported they did not have broadband internet service.*

2. BOTH RENTERS AND HOMEOWNERS EXPERIENCED HOUSING INSTABILITY

Neighbor to Neighbor asked respondents to share if they faced housing instability in the previous 12 months. The responses indicated challenges for both renters and homeowners. For renters, 19% of respondents said they have had trouble paying rent. Only 5% indicated that their landlord had attempted an eviction. However, it is clear that nearly one fifth of renters are vulnerable to eviction, and social safety nets like Right to Counsel are critical to supporting this population.

On the homeowner side, housing instability is more prominently associated with property taxes. According to Neighbor to Neighbor data, 16% of respondents said they had trouble paying their property taxes in the previous year, while only 9% said they had trouble paying their mortgage. As home values rise, it is important to implement measures that protect legacy residents from overly burdensome increases in property taxes.

19% *of renters contacted reported they had trouble paying rent.*

16% *of homeowners contacted reported they had trouble paying their property taxes.*

OUR FINDINGS

3. COST OF UTILITIES FACTOR INTO OVERALL STABILITY

Neighbor to Neighbor asked respondents about the cost of their utilities and whether they had experienced any disruptions to service. A significant portion of respondents said their utilities were unaffordable (28% for water/sewer, 32% for gas and 30% for electric). A smaller but still significant portion of respondents said they faced utility shut offs (12% for water/sewer, 13% for gas and 11% for electric). Finally, 25% of respondents said they had received a late utility payment notice, which is the first step in the shut off process.

25% *of residents contacted reported they had received a late utility payment notice.*



NEXT STEPS

COLLECTING DATA THROUGH NEIGHBOR TO NEIGHBOR IS ONLY THE FIRST STEP. The Rocket Community Fund is committed to using this data to inform future investments. Below are next steps we are investing in alongside community partners.

INVESTMENTS IN DIGITAL EQUITY AND ACCESS FOR CLEVELAND RESIDENTS

We believe a connected home is a more stable home, which is why we are working with partners in Cleveland to increase access to internet, digital devices and training. Cleveland has made great strides in its efforts to bridge the digital divide, with a significant recent investment in infrastructure. In September 2023, Cleveland City Council authorized \$20 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding for DigitalC, a nonprofit focused on improving Greater Cleveland's digital literacy and providing residents with an affordable, high-speed Internet plan. The historic investment was championed by Mayor Justin Bibb's administration and will support the deployment of a citywide internet network and widespread digital skills training.

DigitalC is working to connect 23,500 households and reach 50,000 individuals through digital skills training. Infrastructure investments like these have the potential to significantly change the digital connectivity landscape for residents facing exclusion due to cost and other factors. We look forward to partnering with DigitalC to execute its mission, "to bridge the digital divide - for good."

SUPPORT FOR A RENTAL SOCIAL SAFETY NET

A safe, stable place to call home provides the foundation for families to play, learn, grow, and thrive. Yet thousands of people in local communities are threatened by displacement and housing instability through eviction each year. In response to the needs of renters identified here and in other research, we have partnered with the Legal Aid Society of Cleveland to create the Cleveland Eviction Defense Fund (CEDF). Working in alignment with Cleveland's Right to Counsel, the CEDF is a transformative program for Cleveland residents living in rental housing facing acute risk of displacement through eviction.

The Fund provides legal representation to income-eligible individuals and works with clients to identify goals for their cases; including whether they would like to stay in their current residence or move. Helping families avoid housing displacement or other disruptions arising from involuntary moves will lead to a reduction in shelter costs, school absenteeism and overall number of displacement families in the Cleveland community.

BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR HOMEOWNERSHIP

Tenants who face displacement due to tax foreclosure should not suffer the consequences of their landlord's neglect. Renters should have the first opportunity to buy the home they've been renting for the cost of the property taxes owed. We are actively advocating for new methods of property acquisition that will lead to increased homeownership opportunities for Cleveland residents. The proposed legislation would allow land banks to exercise a 'right of first refusal' to purchase property sold at a foreclosure auction. Land banks would then work with local non-profit partners and tenants to make the property available for the renter to acquire for the cost of overdue taxes and minimal administrative fees. This approach has been very successful in Detroit, with the Rocket Community Fund's Make It Home program creating 1,500 new homeowners since its inception. We are excited for the possibilities for Cleveland residents as this approach expands to Cleveland.

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For more information on Neighbor to Neighbor and other Rocket Community Fund programs, visit RocketCommunityFund.org.

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