

# Innovations in the Field

## Brownsville Hub Cooperative

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Brownsville  
Hub  
Cooperative

# INNOVATIONS IN THE FIELD

*Innovations in the Field* is a series showcasing JobsFirstNYC's pioneering projects and partnerships that drive economic mobility for young adults and the communities they call home. Through this series, we spotlight dynamic cross-sector collaborations for increasing economic opportunity. These initiatives highlight groundbreaking approaches for scaling effective solutions.



JobsFirstNYC creates and advances solutions that break down barriers and transform the systems supporting young adults and their communities in the pursuit of economic opportunities. Our innovative approach to developing new partnership models has helped shape public policy, private philanthropic investments, and the best practices of employers, colleges, workforce development service providers, high schools, and others. Over the last 17 years, JobsFirstNYC has worked with more than 200 organizations and institutions across New York City and State to build innovative solutions that connect young adults to economic opportunities.



**Brownsville  
Hub  
Cooperative**

Launched in 2021, the Brownsville Hub Cooperative develops community-led solutions to spark economic growth in Brownsville, Brooklyn. The Brownsville Hub Cooperative uses a people-centered, equity-based approach to create a self-sufficient community that builds individual and community wealth through education, ownership, business, and workforce development.

## ROBIN HOOD

**Robin Hood Mobility Learning and Action Bets (Mobility LABs)** is a four-year initiative of the Robin Hood Foundation that seeks to promote innovative ideas to combat systemic barriers faced by historically disenfranchised communities across the country. Mobility LABs sets out to achieve this by providing investment in community-led approaches, building the capacity of community leaders to own the process of developing solutions for economic mobility.

In partnership with leading philanthropic institutions, the solutions offered by inaugural cohorts of Mobility LABs will inform the practices of the philanthropic field as many funders strategize ways to support communities through equitable and inclusive investments. The Brownsville Hub Cooperative has used this opportunity as the engine of a holistic plan to address many challenges faced by Brownsville residents.

# Foreword

As a managing director of the Robin Hood Foundation, I oversaw the implementation of Robin Hood’s Mobility Learning and Action Bets (Mobility LABs). However, as a proud resident of Brownsville, I am deeply honored to introduce the work encapsulated in this document. The Brownsville Hub Cooperative (BHC) stands as a testament to our community’s resilience, creativity, and unwavering commitment to economic mobility and self-sufficiency.

For decades, Brownsville has faced systemic challenges that have tested the strength and resolve of its residents. Yet amidst these trials, our community has consistently demonstrated an indomitable spirit and a deep-seated pride in our heritage and future. The BHC embodies this spirit as a beacon of hope and a catalyst for transformative change.

Launched in 2019, Mobility LABs is a pioneering four-year initiative led by the Robin Hood Foundation and supported by major donors such as the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Foundation, and Tipping Point Community. This initiative partners with local organizations in nine communities across the country to develop community-driven solutions that sustainably lift families out of poverty. Mobility LABs builds on effective models developed in New York City and seeks to replicate successful strategies in other communities.

One of Mobility LABs’ core principles is the belief that those closest to the challenges are also closest to the solutions. This “community-up” approach ensures that the voices, talents, and aspirations of local residents drive the development and implementation of impactful strategies. Our work is grounded in the voices and experiences of those living in poverty, centering racial justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.

The BHC is a shining example of this philosophy in action. By centering the voices and experiences of Brownsville residents, we have created a people-centered, equity-based approach to economic development that is comprehensive and inclusive. Our work is not just about addressing immediate needs but about creating long-term pathways to economic mobility and self-determination.

The strategies outlined in this document reflect Robin Hood’s commitment to building individual and community wealth through education, ownership, business development, and workforce training. These efforts are designed to foster sustainable economic growth and ensure that the benefits of development are shared equitably among all Brownsville residents.

One of the most powerful aspects of Mobility LABs is its cohort model, which emphasizes peer learning across diverse urban, suburban, and rural communities. This approach allows us to share

Photos: Youth Design Center



insights, learn from one another's experiences, and scale successful solutions. The collaboration and collective learning within this cohort have been invaluable in shaping the work of the BHC and ensuring that our strategies are informed by a wide range of perspectives.

Our [Robin Hood Mobility LABs: Year 2 Learning and Evaluation Report](#) highlights significant progress in areas such as economic success, power and autonomy, and sense of belonging. Through direct services like job training, leadership and advocacy training, and community engagement activities, we have seen meaningful changes in our community. Moreover, our efforts in narrative and policy change have started to address the structural barriers that perpetuate poverty.

As it builds on these successes, the BHC aims to increase and improve access to essential services, enhance economic and ownership opportunities, generate community-wide revenue, and disrupt systems that contribute to economic stagnation. We are creating a space where growth, innovation, and healing are centered through interactions with and among community residents. By focusing on access, ownership, and self-sufficiency, and by prioritizing the needs and voices of young people, we are building a self-sufficient community that thrives on individual and collective economic mobility.

As you read through this document, I encourage you to see beyond the data and strategies to the heart of our community—a heart that beats with a desire for justice, equity, and opportunity for all. The BHC is more than a project; it is a movement led by the people of Brownsville, for the people of Brownsville.

I am proud of the progress the BHC has made, but its journey is far from over. With continued support, collaboration, and investment, we are confident that the BHC will serve as a model for other communities seeking to uplift themselves and create sustainable economic futures.

Thank you for joining us on this journey. Together, we can ensure that Brownsville not only survives but thrives, embodying the true spirit of our motto: "Never ran, never will."

**Lori Boozer**

*Managing Director, Mobility LABs Robin Hood  
Proud Brownsville resident*



# Executive Summary

## WHAT THE BROWNSVILLE HUB COOPERATIVE IS

Launched in 2021, the Brownsville Hub Cooperative (BHC) develops community-led solutions to spark economic growth in Brownsville, Brooklyn. The BHC uses a people-centered, equity-based approach to create a self-sufficient community that builds individual and community wealth through education, ownership, business, and workforce development.

## WHY THE BROWNSVILLE HUB COOPERATIVE IS NEEDED

The establishment of the BHC is rooted in the enduring spirit and resilience of the Brownsville community in Brooklyn. Despite its rich history of community-led initiatives and strong sense of service and pride among residents, Brownsville faces significant challenges, such as economic disadvantage, high unemployment, and health disparities. The BHC was established to bridge this gap, transforming plans into action and ensuring that community initiatives directly benefit residents.





## Key Strategies of the Brownsville Hub Cooperative

- 1 Incubate entrepreneurial solutions and provide special services to start-ups focused on positively influencing the key economic mobility indicators.**  
The BHC fosters innovative methods to address education, health, housing, jobs, and business development in Brownsville. This includes offering grants and continuous support for local nonprofits, small businesses, and entrepreneurs, as well as conducting needs assessments to guide their efforts.
- 2 Increase community wealth through business and residential ownership.**  
Many Brownsville entrepreneurs operate informally and need better connections to the formal economy. The BHC helps bridge this gap by providing resources and support to formalize and grow these businesses. Additionally, it enhances residents' readiness for home ownership through financial education and access to capital.
- 3 Connect young people (ages 14–26) to training, wealth-building opportunities, and wraparound support.** To disrupt the cycle of poverty, the BHC focuses on workforce and postsecondary development for young adults. Programs include apprenticeship training, a Street Team Fellowship Program, and strategic youth engagement in community planning.
- 4 Provide opportunities for cooperative economics in the community.** The BHC aims to integrate the underground job market into the formal economy, providing necessary resources for small businesses to thrive. A cooperative accelerator program, initially targeting food justice, aims to support local co-op models with seed funding.
- 5 Build trust and close the communications gap so that credible information is readily available, thereby improving community engagement, changing the narrative, and reclaiming community power.** The success of the BHC relies on a strong communication and marketing plan that connects residents with the partnership and with one another. This includes a comprehensive website and regular community meetings to highlight local voices and stories.





## Critical Insights Learned from the Brownsville Hub Cooperative Thus Far

- 1 Do not reinvent the wheel:** The BHC modified its approach to build from existing plans, lifting up the community engagement work that had been in progress for decades.
- 2 Center humanity and lived experience:** Recognizing and addressing community trauma and distrust has been foundational. Ensuring that gatherings felt community driven and allowing extra time for program recruitment were among the ways the BHC built trust with the community during its inception phase.
- 3 Identify ways to build and keep wealth in the community:** The BHC's strategic plan focuses on creating pathways to owning a business and purchasing a home through education and access to capital, reflecting both immediate and long-term economic mobility.
- 4 Uplift resident leaders:** The BHC emphasizes the importance of resident leaders who have a personal stake in the community. These leaders contribute their deep understanding of the community's history to development projects, and the BHC's initiatives would not succeed without their buy-in and vision.
- 5 Dedicate time to partnership development:** True community engagement is challenging but rewarding. The BHC values the importance of communication, pivoting as needed, showing grace and empathy, and ensuring that joy and laughter are part of the process.
- 6 No crisis can stop the Brownsville community:** The BHC recognizes the resilience of the Brownsville community in the face of crises such as COVID-19 and the fight for racial justice. The partnership continues to support community members through difficult times.





## Early Impacts

In its first three years of implementation (2020–2023), the BHC achieved significant milestones across its five strategic areas.

→ **Strategy #1: Incubate entrepreneurial solutions and provide special services to start-ups focused on positively influencing key economic mobility indicators.**

- The **College Partnership for Entrepreneurship Initiative**, made up of four colleges and a legal services institution, partnered to train community members with a newly developed entrepreneurship curriculum. The New York State Education Department approved the resulting **Community Entrepreneurship Certificate**, ensuring that participants receive college credit for completing the course.
- The BHC established the **Brownsville Business Corridor Revitalization Project**. The project will incubate Black-owned businesses and provide them with **free commercial space and entrepreneurial training**.
- The BHC is partnering with **ten local businesses** to expand their footprint in the Brownsville community. Two of these businesses, Cornbread and Stuart Cinemas have already found locations and Stuart Cinemas is on schedule to open in Spring of 2025.

→ **Strategy #2: Increase community wealth through business and residential ownership.**

- The BHC **served as inspiration for New York City's proposed economic mobility hubs**. The BHC's influence was recognized by City Hall, which cited the partnership as a model for their community development strategy.

→ **Strategy #3: Connect young people (ages 14–26) to training, wealth-building opportunities, and wraparound support.**

- The BHC established the **Brownsville Workforce Alliance**, streamlining the process for residents to access training opportunities and employment. The alliance launched a **construction and trades initiative** that **provided 125 graduates with OSHA certificates**, opening pathways to quality job opportunities.
- The BHC **empowered 50 young residents** to actively shape Brownsville's future by engaging them in community planning meetings, where they analyzed local data and proposed solutions to be implemented by the BHC.



→ **Strategy #4: Provide opportunities for cooperative economics in the community.**

- The BHC's investment in the **Central Brooklyn Economic Development Corporation (CBEDC)** expanded its capacity by **transitioning the executive director to full time and adding three new staff members**. This strengthened team has been key in developing the BHC subcommittees and implementing an effective community engagement strategy, solidifying CBEDC's role as the partnership's backbone.

→ **Strategy #5: Build trust and close the communications gap so that credible information is readily available, thereby improving community engagement, changing the narrative, and reclaiming community power.**

- The BHC's community outreach evolved from the successful **"Brownsville Minute"** show to **highly attended monthly in-person events**.
- The BHC's leadership in community safety and youth employment was recognized by City Hall, which enlisted the BHC to head **Brownsville's Neighborhood Safety Council**, setting a model for other neighborhoods under the city's **Blueprint for Community Safety** initiative.

## CONCLUSION

The BHC represents a transformative model for community-led economic development. By centering local voices, fostering collaboration, and addressing systemic barriers, the partnership aims to create sustainable economic growth and self-sufficiency in Brownsville. The early successes and lessons learned provide a blueprint for other communities seeking to uplift themselves through innovative, community-driven approaches.





For more information:

Email us at  
**info@jobsfirstnyc.org**

Call us at  
**(646) 876-6835**

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**jobsfirstnyc.org**

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