



# City of Cambridge

## Executive Department

**YI-AN HUANG**  
City Manager

CMA 2025 #128  
**IN CITY COUNCIL**  
May 19, 2025

To the Honorable, the City Council:

I am pleased to transmit to you the Executive Summary of the City's Community Benefits Advisory Committee's work over the past several years. As you know, the Committee was formed as a result of a 2015 City Council Ordinance with the purpose of recommending to the City Manager allocation of community benefits funding to non-profits consistent with the priorities of the City Council. The funds that the Committee is tasked with distributing are those, "received by the City in connection with the enactment of an amendment to the City's Zoning Ordinance or other agreements entered into with the City which provide funds to the City and are held by the City to be expended for community benefits or other related purposes."

The Committee by ordinance is made up of 13 members including City employees, representatives of non-profits, residents, a university representative, a foundation representative and a business representative. The Committee put out the call in 2019 for non-profit organizations to plan how they could work in partnerships to meet the needs of low income families. In March 2020, the City issued multi-year grants to 4 Partnerships to implement their proposals. The Committee and the Partnerships were forced by COVID to work in very different ways than either the Committee or the Partnerships had planned. Over the last 5 years, the Committee and the non-profit partners have learned a lot about the value of investing in partnerships to meet the complex needs of families.

The Executive Summary provides information about the Committee's learnings as well as information about each of the 4 funded Partnerships. The Partnerships were provided with 1 million dollars each over 4 years. The Committee also allocated 2 million dollars in emergency grants of up to \$10,000 during the pandemic to support services provided by over 130 Cambridge non-profit providers.

Both the members of the Committee and the approximately 20 partners that were funded through the 4 Partnerships would welcome the opportunity to share more with the City Council about their work and what was learned.

I recommend that the City Council refer the Executive Summary to the City Council Human Services and Veteran's Committee.

Yi-An Huang



City Manager





# Community Benefits Advisory Committee

Executive  
Summary  
2025







I am excited to share the Executive Summary of the Community Benefits Advisory Committee's work during the past several years. I have had the honor of serving on the Committee since its inception in 2017. In alignment with the City Council's charge, our goal has been to thoughtfully distribute funds through nonprofit organizations to respond to the needs of our most vulnerable community members.

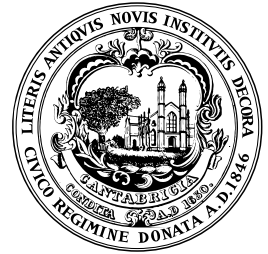
Through our own collaborative process, our desire has been to foster outcomes that have a positive impact on community members. At the same time, we have strived to learn how we can best support nonprofit organizations as they work together to address their client's needs related to housing, financial stability, and mental & behavioral health.

When we put out the call in 2019 for nonprofit organizations to plan how they could work in partnerships, and then in early 2020 issued grants to implement their proposed plans, we had no idea how much this support would be needed as COVID-19 arrived. It would have a deep and long-lasting impact on community members and the organizations that worked tirelessly to assist them. We have learned so much about what it takes to support our community, and that much more is needed. My hope is that this Summary provides a window into what we've done so far and into what the journey may look like as we move forward.

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**Ellen Semonoff**

*Chair, Community Benefits  
Advisory Committee  
Cambridge, Massachusetts*



# Executive Summary

The City of Cambridge's Community Benefits Advisory Committee (CBAC) is proud to share this Executive Summary and offer our perspective and insights about the impact of the Community Benefits Fund. Over the past six years, we have worked to implement the Fund's goals of addressing the complex needs of Cambridge residents that are low-income, particularly families with children with a single parent or guardian, and to support creative collaborations among nonprofit

organizations to address these needs. CBAC as a committee is unique. We are a cross-sector group that includes community residents, representatives from the nonprofit, business, and university communities, and City staff. Our approach to funding reflects a thoughtful process that integrates the perspectives of our members and the expertise and experience of local nonprofit organizations.

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Photo courtesy of  
Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee

## What we have accomplished

CBAC provided multi-year funding for four Partnerships, each made up of three or more nonprofits, to respond to the interrelated needs of housing stability, financial security, and mental health, in hopes that these grants would

address the identified needs as well as the economic and racial disparities that exist in Cambridge. We prioritized creativity, innovation, and collaboration among the Partnerships, with a focus on participating Cambridge-based nonprofit organizations working together and with families, to provide services that enhanced housing stability, financial security, and mental health. We decided to take a citywide approach rather than focus on a particular neighborhood given that all residents are impacted by development and changes in any neighborhood in a small City like ours.

Over the four years of implementation, the Partnerships were a critical stabilizing and supportive resource with and for families and each other, particularly in light of the intense effects of COVID. Partnerships engaged families through two distinct approaches: two employed a cohort model where families enrolled and received deep ongoing support; two employed an ongoing enrollment model where families received services based on presenting needs.

Survey results demonstrated a significant increase in families' perceptions of their own well-being, as well as the significant value and benefits of a case management approach with participating families. Family-level impacts related to the top-tier needs include<sup>1</sup>:

On average, Partnerships engaged a total of

**400 participants**

each quarter, with

**68 of these**

enrolled in a **cohort model**.

The final evaluation sample included

**101 participants**

who had completed **Family Survey** data at baseline and at least one follow-up timepoint.

### Housing stability:



**Increases** in families' perceptions of their housing stability, and some participants described substantial **improvements** in their housing situation.

*Between baseline and endpoint, the percentage who reported their housing to be 'somewhat' or 'extremely stable' increased significantly from **↑ 64% to 81%***

### Financial security:



**Improvements** in families' perceptions in their financial situation.

*The percentage who reported their financial situation to be 'somewhat' or 'extremely stable' increased significantly from **↑ 52% to 64%***

<sup>1</sup>The data and language provided in the bullets in this section reflects content in the formal evaluation conducted by CBAC's evaluation partner, Health Resources in Action



## Mental and behavioral health:



- A significant **increase** in knowledge of where to go within Cambridge for support related to urgent mental or behavioral health problems.

*The percentage who reported that they knew where to go in Cambridge for urgent mental or behavioral health problems increased significantly from **↑ 30% to 46%***

- Significant **reductions** in depression and anxiety symptoms over the course of the partnerships.

*The percentage of respondents that screened positive for depression symptoms decreased significantly from **↓ 26% to 16%**; the percentage that screened positive for anxiety symptoms declined significantly from **↓ 29% to 18%***

For partnering organizations, we also saw how intentionally funding collaboration yields significant benefits including:

- Providing a protective factor for partnering organizations, such that they were **better** able to pivot or adapt programming to meet emerging needs because of their connections as a funded partnership – particularly in response to COVID.  
*By the middle of the **Implementation Years** nearly all organizations (94%) conveyed that their need to pivot or adapt programming to meet emerging needs was made easier because of their connections as a funded partnership*
- An **increased** ability to coordinate and collaborate with other nonprofits in addressing the needs of vulnerable families by supporting stronger and more comprehensive service delivery.  
*By the final **Implementation Year**, one organization felt their partnership had ‘Achieved All’ of their goals, and the remaining 11 organizations reported their partnership had made ‘A Lot of Progress’ towards their goals. These data were collected prior to the conclusion of the **Implementation Years**, leaving room for continued progress by the partnerships*

**\$30,000 Planning  
Grants per Partnership**

**\$250,000/year Implementation  
Grants per Partnership**

**\$50,000 Transition  
Funding per Partnership**



As a committee, we maintained our own commitment to ongoing learning with and from the Partnerships to inform future efforts. Initial funding included 6-month planning grants (\$30,000 for each Partnership) and 3 years of implementation (\$250,000 per year for each Partnership). CBAC then added a fourth year of full funding (at \$250,000), in response to a request from the Partnerships due to the significant stress COVID placed on organizations and on the people they serve. CBAC also provided transition funding after year 4 for each Partnership (\$50,000 each), as they endeavor to maintain these programs in some form. We are excited to report that all Partnerships are each finding ways to continue some or all of their respective models with other resources after CBAC's funding ended.

## The 4 Partnerships and Their Models

Partnership Name & Members	Summary Description
<b>Families Moving Forward: (Single Cohort Model)</b> Just-A-Start Corporation (Lead Organization), Bridges Homeward, Cambridge Health Alliance, Cambridge Housing Authority, Community Action Agency of Somerville, Institute for Health and Recovery	An <u>EMPath</u> -inspired program designed to work with parents over three years. Mobility Mentors meet monthly with participants to evaluate their needs, to set goals related to those needs, and, upon accomplishing their goals, to celebrate their efforts and reward them with a financial incentive. In addition to their individual work, participants attend a bi-monthly community meeting and the partnership maintains a matched savings account for each participant. <sup>2</sup>
<b>Family Stability Project: (Ongoing Enrollment Model)</b> De Novo, Inc. (Lead Organization), Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee, Transition House	Comprehensive, wraparound direct services and targeted training to improve housing stability, financial security, and overall well-being of families. Partners broadened goals to coordinate, expand, and integrate direct services and outreach with co-location and inter-partnership referrals. Each organization leverages a network of partners to expand the depth and breadth of support available to families through a “no wrong door” approach.
<b>Port Arise Institute: (Multiple Cohorts Model)</b> Community Art Center (Lead Organization), Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House, Tutoring Plus	Multi-year training and community building program in the Port neighborhood to provide case management support, referrals, coaching, and training to families. Focus is on social capital, early childhood development, postsecondary/ employment pathways, economic assets, and health/ well-being. Partners provide a stronger safety net for families through both proactive and responsive support. <sup>3</sup>
<b>Strengthening Families Together Project: (Ongoing Enrollment Model)</b> Cambridge Community Center (Lead Organization), East End House, Maria L Baldwin Community Center	Fostering the five protective factors for families – parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social-emotional competence of children. Using case management and leveraging strong relationships with families, partners seek to increase engagement through targeted interventions and co-creation of strategies with families to build capacity and greater resilience.

<sup>2</sup> For additional information: [White Paper - Families Moving Forward.pdf](#)

<sup>3</sup> For additional information: [‘Making people feel safe’: Port Arise nonprofit helps Cambridge residents with a personal touch](#)



**“From the very first day of the program, my mentor was there for me and my family, holding my hand and guiding me towards my goals for a better life. There was never any judgment.”**

**– Participant**

## ***What we have learned***

From the outset, we have understood our efforts as a learning opportunity, and it is clear that it is possible to make a difference when we invest time, money, and support in the well-being of families and the organizations that serve them — and it requires systematic changes as well as a deep and sustained commitment. Some of our most significant takeaways include:

### **Relationships, and the time to develop them, are key.**

- It takes significant time for service providers to build enduring relationships and trust with families – and it is essential to fully understand the complexity and interconnectedness of each family’s needs
- It takes time for organizations to realize the potential of their complementary capacities and collaborate at different levels – and leadership and staffing stability and continuity are critical factors
- It took time for us, as a committee, to be a more responsive partner to the partnerships, and we could have been more effective with greater attention to relationship- and trust-building at the outset and over time

**Meaningful collaboration strengthens nonprofit organizations and their services: Multi-year investment, including funding for planning, makes a significant difference in advancing effective collaboration among nonprofits and provides families with continuity around support and services.**

**Case management is a powerful approach with and for families: Holistic services rooted in relationships that can respond to each family’s unique circumstances over time improves families’ well-being.**

- The difference in each Partnership’s model and approach was a strength — and their trusting relationships with families enabled them to adapt and respond in real time

**As a committee, we have deepened our appreciation of the incredible resourcefulness of our community-based nonprofit organizations, particularly given that many operate with very slim margins.**

## What we might do differently

- Maintain strong relationships with, and openness to listening and responding to the experiences of, Partnerships from the outset: Building strong, trusting relationships that include regular communication supports both the committee and Partnerships, and this requires ongoing and careful attention and follow-through from the committee
- Develop, and, as needed, adjust, an approach to evaluation and data collection that includes story-telling and qualitative data as a vital complement to quantitative data: It is important to integrate a multi-faceted approach to evaluation and data collection that responds to each Partnership's unique context to ensure it advances shared learning and ongoing improvement without detracting from Partnerships' programming and engagement with program participants
- Be clear that it takes sustained time and commitment to impact families and address deeply entrenched, generational and systemic issues (including the affordable housing crisis and lack of access to behavioral and mental health services) – it goes beyond any one approach and requires deep and trusting relationships and responsive and comprehensive service provision

**“If you want system-level change, it has to be authentic partnership.... I hope this project shows what nonprofits can do when there is city support and structure, that allows authentic relationships.” – Partner**



Photo by Lee-Daniel Tran Photography

## Between 2010 and 2018, over \$20M in mitigation funds

designated for community benefits purposes were pledged to the City through zoning amendments and agreements with developers. Though some of these funds were restricted to specific projects, the remaining dollars were set aside as public monies to be used for Community Benefits purposes—and specifically for the City to partner with the nonprofit community to expand services that respond to residents' unmet needs and help address persistent disparities. To date, approximately \$8.6M has been received by the City for the Community Benefits Fund, and approximately \$7M of that has been spent on the four Partnerships, evaluation, and two rounds of COVID emergency and recovery funding. In the months ahead, CBAC intends to make recommendations about what to do with the remaining funds that have been received and not allocated. Discussion will include consideration of a next needs assessment. The actual remaining amount of mitigation funds originally pledged will depend on the final scope of building development.

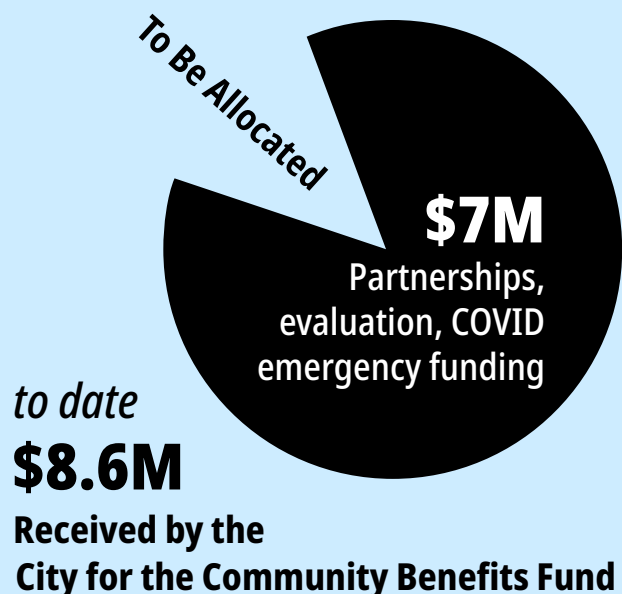
There are several shifts in the City funding context that are both deeply impacting the funding that supports nonprofit organizations to work with residents and also impact the Community Benefits Funds and its goals. These include: the end of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding to both nonprofit organizations and directly to families through rental assistance and

**2010–2018**  
**\$20M+**  
**Mitigation Funds**

## Where we are now

**“This program has empowered me to feel my best and because of that, I know my family is feeling their best too. Every day is a new start with my family moving forward.” – Participant**

guaranteed minimum income; a new federal administration that will likely cut federal funding for programs that support low-income families; a slowdown in commercial development overall (which reduces the potential for future mitigation funds outside of what has already been pledged); and an increase in developers seeking to negotiate directly with nonprofits.





## ***How we move forward***

**“It was pretty overwhelming to suddenly become a single parent of three kids,” one participant reflected. She was grateful for the help she received from the Port Arise family advocate. She now feels like the “future is bright,” and will graduate from her local university with a biology degree next year.**

### **1** Continue to fund and sustain investment in Cambridge nonprofits through the Community Benefits Fund: It has proven to be a unique and effective model for responding to unmet needs and addressing persistent disparities among residents

- CBAC serves as an important conduit between the City and our community-based nonprofit organizations
- Community-based nonprofit organizations have deep knowledge and relationships in and with the communities and residents they serve, and they often are able to respond more quickly and flexibly than the City to emerging issues
- Multi-year, flexible funding allows community-based nonprofit organizations, which often operate with insufficient resources, to try innovative approaches and take risks





## **2 Invest in collaborative efforts: Responding to the unmet needs of residents and addressing persistent disparities requires holistic, comprehensive, and creative approaches that are often beyond the capacity of any one program or organization. Residents and organizations benefit from being in relationship with, and connected to, a broader network of service providers**

- Partnerships were clear that having dedicated funding for collaborative work was a key factor in their success
- Initiatives that actively facilitate connections between organizations are more likely to be successful in their support of residents, particularly families – and more comprehensive networks of organizations can achieve a more sustained and broader impact across the community

## **3 Build on, and integrate in other contexts, the successes of CBAC's approach to funding, including:**

- Sustained, multi-year, flexible funding
- Collaboration with and among nonprofit organizations
- Support for program and evaluation planning, including time, money, and any other necessary resources
- Development of a trust-based partnership with funded organizations
- Flexibility and responsiveness due to unexpected circumstances with and for residents and funded organizations (e.g., global pandemic, staffing changes)
- Commitment to ongoing learning and improvement
- Case management models as an effective way to respond to residents' needs by building strong relationships between providers, staff, and residents



## CBAC Members

### City Staff Appointed by the City Manager

**Ellen Semonoff**, *Assistant City Manager for Department Human Services Programs (Committee Chair)*

**Sandra Clarke**, *Chief of Administration and Operations, Community Development Department*

**Taha Jennings**, *Budget Director, Finance Department*

### Representatives of the Local Nonprofit Community

**Elizabeth Aguilo**, *Executive Director, Paine Senior Services*

**Erin Muirhead McCarty**, *Executive Director, Community Art Center*

**Elena Sokolow-Kaufman**, *Executive Director, Cambridge Nonprofit Coalition*

### Cambridge Community Foundation Representative

**Geeta Pradhan**, *President & CEO, Cambridge Community Foundation*

### Business/Property Development Representative

**Michelle Lower**, *Vice President, Real Estate Development & Community Relations, Alexandria Real Estate*

### University Representative

**Anya Alexandra Bear**, *Community Engagement Administrator, MIT*

### Resident Members

**Amal Mohamed**

**Rowan Murphy**

**Anna Spier**

### Consultant to the Committee

**Daniel Weinstock Michaud**

### Staff to the Committee

**Lev McCarthy**

## City Manager

**Yi-An Huang**, *City Manager*

**Owen O’Riordan**, *Deputy City Manager*

## City Council

**E. Denise Simmons**, *Mayor*

**Marc C. McGovern**, *Vice Mayor*

**Burhan Azeem**

**Patricia M. Nolan**

**Sumbul Siddiqui**

**Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler**

**Paul F. Toner**

**Ayesha M. Wilson**

**Catherine Zusy**

## Acknowledgments

### Community Benefits Advisory Committee Members, Writers

**Annie Shawn**, *Communications Editor*

**Kay Ingulli**, *Graphic Designer*

**Gretchen Ertl**, *Cover Image Photographer*

**Health Resources in Action**, *Evaluators*

To view the Partnership Level Evaluation Findings and the Overarching Evaluation Key Findings that inform this Executive Summary please see:

[www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Planning/communitybenefitsadvisorycommittee](http://www.cambridgema.gov/CDD/Projects/Planning/communitybenefitsadvisorycommittee)