



“When Families Thrive, Children Succeed”

How the Mission Economic Development Agency
Created a Transformational Prenatal-to-Career Model

MARCH 2024

CASE
HIGHLIGHTS

“This type of transformational, community-led initiative should not be a boutique one-off, but rather the normal way that we come together as a society to align systems, fight poverty, and reverse legacies of inequity.”¹

Richard Raya, Senior Advisor and former Chief Strategy Officer, MEDA

MEDA’s Transformative Community Impact

San Francisco’s Mission Economic Development Agency (MEDA) is the backbone agency for the Mission Promise Neighborhood (MPN), which is the collaborative action initiative of MEDA, the city of San Francisco, the San Francisco Unified School District, and 15 vital community partners serving students and families whose goal is to advance a “national equity movement by building Latino

prosperity, community ownership, and civic power.” For the people who live in San Francisco’s Mission District, MEDA has been a lifeline, providing access to stable housing, affordable childcare, afterschool programs, mental health support, financial capability coaching, small business loans, and a host of other services—and, as important, the knowledge that there are those who care about them and want to help.

Founded in 1973, MEDA has grown into a model for communities across the country of a highly effective place-based prenatal-to-career initiative that maintains its strong community roots while continuing to expand the scope of its services, its geographic reach, and its impact on policy at all levels.



EdRedesign at the Harvard Graduate School of Education documented MEDA's development and impact in a case study that shows how they became one of the leading examples of a place-based prenatal-to-career partnership. The case aims to help community leaders, policy makers, and practitioners understand the prenatal-to-career infrastructure MEDA has built, the impact it has had, and how to replicate the core practices within different local contexts.

MEDA's Impact²

Student Results:

- **71%** of preschool children in MPN's programs whose parents also participated in MEDA's programs and services are assessed as kindergarten ready, according to a 2019 study
- The graduation rate at MPN's target high school increased **31.7%** since 2012 to **90%** during the 2021-2022 academic year

Since its founding in 2014, MEDA's Community Real Estate Program has:

- Preserved/produced over **2,000** affordable residential and commercial units, including new affordable housing apartment complexes
- Leased **low-cost space** in its buildings for early childhood programs, small businesses, arts and cultural organizations, and other nonprofits

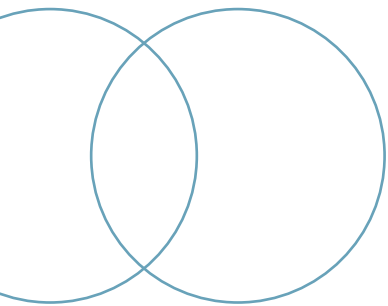
In 2022, MEDA:

- Served approximately **8,750** clients in its asset building programs and approximately **1,750** residents in its Community Real Estate programs
- Helped **3,000+** clients access nearly **\$3.5 million** in economic relief and another **390+** access **\$9.4 million** in rental relief
- Completed nearly **4,000** tax returns, resulting in an estimated **\$7.9 million** returned to local residents
- Helped place **200+** people into quality jobs
- Assisted **400** small businesses with coaching and business development technical assistance
- Achieved a **98%** repayment rate on its active loan portfolio



“We’ve defined what a Promise Neighborhood looks like, incorporating community voice, housing, and economic stability along with school-based supports.”

Luis Granados, CEO, MEDA



“The Promise Neighborhood grant was pivotal. It was transformational. It launched us into these new lines of work and made us a community backbone agency so we could work collectively.”

Richard Raya, MEDA Senior Advisor and former Chief Strategy Officer

Mission Promise Neighborhood: Continuum of Prenatal-to-Career Support

The award of a federal Promise Neighborhoods grant in 2012 transformed MEDA, providing \$30 million in funding over five years, followed by two smaller continuation grants. This award enabled MEDA to expand its scope and build infrastructure to ensure its work would be sustainable through the Mission Promise Neighborhood (MPN). During the planning period, MEDA chose to center family economic success and residential stability as signature tenets of MPN’s two-generation, anti-poverty approach. This key decision distinguished MPN from other Promise Neighborhood initiatives that primarily focus on student outcomes, and ultimately redefined their vision of a Promise Neighborhood.

Family Success Coaches are the core of MPN’s two-generation support to families. The coaches foster relationships with parents and connect them with the supports they need for their children to thrive. There are nine coaches, one based at each of the eight schools in MPN and one who focuses on families with preschool-aged children. In keeping with MEDA and MPN’s commitment to having a staff that reflects the community they serve, most of the Family Success Coaches have lived experience that mirrors that of the residents they serve. Parents who have worked with Family Success Coaches deeply value the connections to housing, food, job training, and mental health supports their coaches had provided.



To ensure each child, in addition to each family, has personalized supports and an adult who serves as their Navigator, MPN joined EdRedesign’s [Institute for Success Planning Community of Practice](#) in the summer of 2023. Success Planning is a relationship-based approach that connects each child or youth to an adult navigator who co-creates a personalized plan for action in partnership with their families and other caring adults. The plan highlights the child’s needs and strengths and identifies supports, enrichments, and other resources to remove barriers, help them thrive, and support their goals. Through a whole-child approach, Success Planning provides a mechanism to ensure every child is known, seen, and heard, has a positive connection to a caring adult, and has agency over their pathway to success. The MPN Success Planning initiative will extend the Family Success Coach model to individual students.

“When we first started this work in 2014, this neighborhood had already been written off as a neighborhood in gentrification, a neighborhood where the writing was on the wall. We were going to disappear as a neighborhood.”³

Karoleen Feng, MEDA Chief Community Real Estate Officer

Combatting the Mission District’s Housing Crisis

After hearing from the community that stable housing is one of the biggest barriers to family security, MEDA has made affordable housing a centerpiece of its work. MEDA’s Community Real Estate program includes building and buying affordable housing to enable low-income Latino residents of the Mission District, as well as small businesses and nonprofits, to remain in the neighborhood. MEDA also educates residents about their rights to public and subsidized housing.

Building a National Equity Movement

Having established MEDA and MPN as proofs of concept, MEDA is committed to expanding and sustaining Promise Neighborhoods and other place-based

cradle-to-career initiatives at the local, state, and national levels. In 2017, MEDA formed the California Promise Neighborhoods Network whose members exchange ideas and strategies, share their progress, and engage in joint advocacy efforts focused on institutionalizing the model at the state level. Recently, they successfully secured a total of \$12 million in state funding for three years of operating support grants of \$1 million each to four Promise Neighborhoods sites whose federal funding expires in 2023.

In 2022, MEDA created the Equitable Recovery Institute, which offers technical assistance and advocacy at the local, state, and national levels. MEDA also created Promise City in 2022 to establish additional Promise Neighborhoods in San Francisco.

10 Takeaways for Place-Based Leaders

MEDA’s success is built on a number of strategic moves that other partnerships can adapt and employ in their own local contexts. While each community has different histories, cultures, assets, needs, and existing initiatives, these strategies address both the mindsets and the actions needed for transformational and sustained cradle-to-career cross-sector efforts.

1. Keep the community’s needs and aspirations at the center of the work
2. Have an audacious vision
3. Build on what already exists through strategic, relationship-based partnerships
4. Hire and cultivate committed, proximate leaders
5. Embed data—both quantitative and qualitative—to understand needs and measure progress
6. Blend direct services with capacity building and infrastructure development
7. Personalize supports
8. Braid multiple funding streams and networks
9. Advocate to influence structures and policies
10. When you succeed, bring others with you



EdRedesign

OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

About The EdRedesign Lab

Founded in 2014 by Paul Reville, Francis Keppel Professor of Practice of Educational Policy and Administration at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, EdRedesign provides catalytic support to the cradle-to-career place-based field to drive systems-level change and open personalized pathways to well-being, educational attainment, civic engagement, and upward mobility. To support this growing field to effect transformational change that serves the needs and talents of individual children and youth, our work focuses on talent development, actionable research, our Institute for Success Planning, and our By All Means initiatives. Our mission is to ensure the social, emotional, physical, and academic development and well-being of *all* children and youth, especially those affected by racism and poverty.

Endnotes

- 1 "Partnering with UC Berkeley on Equitable Recovery," MEDA Blog, February 11, 2022, <https://medasf.org/partnering-with-uc-berkeley-on-equitable-recovery>.
- 2 Clarity Social Research Group and Mission Promise Neighborhood, School Readiness in the Mission Promise Neighborhood, April 2020, <https://missionpromise.org/update/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/MPN-School-Readiness-Report-April-2020.pdf>; Mission Promise Neighborhood, A Community Anti-Poverty Education Initiative, 2022, https://missionpromise.org/update/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/3271-07082019_MPN-Funders-Report-with-Results-2022_v6.pdf; Mission Economic Development Agency, Mission Roots, National Legacy, 2022 Impact Report, August 2023, <https://medasf.org/2022-impact-report/?page=1>; Pablo Solares-Rowbury, email message to authors, November 19, 2023.
- 3 "MEDA Real Estate," accessed June 1, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpDpufeEZ8w>.

©2024 The President and Fellows of Harvard College



Learn more about MEDA's transformative impact in the Mission district of San Francisco in our full [case study](#).