



The Mastercard Impact Fund, with support from the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth (MCIG) provided multi-year funding to the emerging non-profit Accelerator for America (AFA), enabling its hyperspeed growth into a recognized center of excellence supporting mayors, cities and their residents across the country. The partnership between MCIG and AFA is a case study in maximizing return on investment with early and sustained funding. The engagement between AFA and MCIG has spanned three distinct eras of challenges for local leaders: federal retrenchment, pandemic, and federal investment.

Accelerator for America was founded in 2017 by the Mayor of Los Angeles and a small group of other leaders from the public, private and non-profit sectors after it became clear that local communities were facing an extended period of federal disinvestment. Fundamentally, AFA was created to bring mayors and local leaders together with each other, and connect them with business leaders, funders and investors, and subject matter experts to identify, develop, share, scale, and replicate the best opportunities for communities to invest in themselves. AFA's core focus centers on economic mobility for city residents – generating well paying jobs, procurement and contracting, and other economic outcomes that drive community wealth, especially in communities historically left behind. AFA is of, by, and for mayors and their cities, recognizing that the best ideas need a sharing platform. Critically, the organization's founding mission was to not operate as a traditional think tank, but to work daily as a "do tank" to quickly deploy solutions. MCIG recognized the urgent moment for America's local communities and responded to AFA's mission with an investment of \$3 million in anchor funding over a three year period, which ultimately leveraged more than \$345 million in new resources (and growing) for communities and impacted more than \$1 billion in federal stimulus spending toward inclusive economic growth. This is an overview of how MCIG's support enabled AFA to be cemented today as a highly regarded non-profit organization and become a trusted partner of the nation's most forward-looking local leaders seeking the new strategies, relationships, and support they need to maximize their impact.

The Mastercard Impact Fund, with support from the Mastercard Center for Inclusive Growth (MCIG) provided the critical anchor funding -- \$3 million -- that allowed AFA to grow into the highest echelon of American NGOs.

## A FOUNDATIONAL PARTNERSHIP

AFA and MCIG began their work together on how to help localities leverage Opportunity Zones to drive private investment that would have strong community benefits for residents and small business owners. Critically, MCIG provided more than funding – it provided unique insights and expertise from its data work and in-house staff. The resulting AFA Opportunity Zone Prospectus model went on to be replicated in 59 cities across the country. This model of cooperation paved the way for AFA's first major pivot – confronting the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, local leaders around the country looked to AFA for leadership and support as they faced the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic. AFA worked with Mastercard City Possible (notably a different entity than the Center, though this opportunity would not have come about without the support of MCIG) and other partners to rapidly develop the Angeleno Card initiative, which provided direct financial assistance to the most vulnerable Los Angeles residents before state and federal assistance programs could be ramped up and fill the need. In less than three months, the Angeleno card provided more than \$36 million in critical assistance to nearly 38,000 households, directly benefiting more than 100,000 Los Angeles residents. This unparalleled and rapid success led AFA to support the replication of the Angeleno Card model in communities nationwide, including in Atlanta, Austin, Chattanooga, Dayton, Birmingham, Oklahoma City, Salt Lake City, Louisville and across Connecticut and Rhode Island. This effort also spurred AFA's partnership with Mayors for a Guaranteed Income in 2021 and 2022 to establish guaranteed income pilots for low-income families in Austin, TX and Louisville, KY and for single mothers in Birmingham, AL, among others. At the same time, AFA and MCIG also partnered with Drexel University's Nowak Metro Finance Lab (Nowak Lab) to create the Small Business Equity Toolkit, which revealed new, localized data insights on small and minority businesses to inform the best ways to support minority and women-owned entrepreneurs in creating wealth.

Whereas AFA was founded during a time of federal retrenchment and disinvestment, 2021 ushered in a time of unprecedented federal investment – and AFA's partnership with and support from MCIG allowed it once again to pivot to meet the needs of local communities. Now, the task was to help localities maximize the benefits of the billions of dollars flowing from the American Rescue Plan and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act/Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (and, later, the Inflation Reduction Act, CHIPS + Science Act and other federal initiatives) and to ensure that those dollars reach the people and places that have been historically left out and left behind.

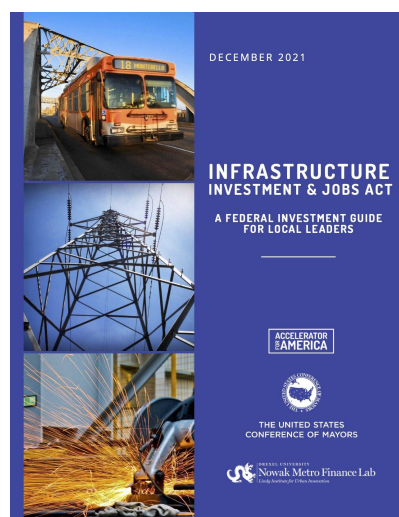
This new era of federal abundance has been welcomed by local leaders; however, few local governments have the capacity to manage an influx of funding at this scale.

After the American Rescue Plan was enacted at the federal level, AFA partnered with MCIG to develop the Stimulus Command Center model and establish such Centers in St. Louis, MO; Birmingham, AL; Dayton, OH; Louisville, KY; Los Angeles, CA; Philadelphia, PA; and Kansas City, MO. Through the Centers, AFA, MCIG and city leaders identified the best strategies for deploying new federal relief dollars to optimally support an inclusive recovery from the immediate aftermath of the economic disruptions caused by COVID-19, and also to recover from historic inequities that led to cycles that now could be broken.

All together, AFA's work with Stimulus Command Center cities helped them allocate \$1.1 billion in State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds alone, with technical assistance toward an additional \$2 billion.

## RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITIES NATIONWIDE

In addition to direct technical assistance in key cities, AFA created immediate and actionable tools for communities nationally to navigate and take advantage of ARPA and IIJA/BIL. AFA developed the American Rescue Plan Federal Investment Guide and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act Federal Investment Guide prior to federal guidance on these massive initiatives and represented a collaboration among AFA, MCIG, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and the Nowak Lab. These timely, targeted, and user-friendly guides allowed communities to get a head-start and have been closely consulted by mayors and city leaders as well as featured at national gatherings.



During the pandemic-era monthly meetings with Stimulus Command Center mayors and senior city leaders, AFA gathered real-time, frontline insights on the challenges and opportunities that were shared with leaders nationally through [Averting a Lost Decade: Rethinking an Inclusive Recovery for Disadvantaged Neighborhoods](#), which was developed in collaboration with MCIG and the Nowak Lab. AFA further leveraged the insights it gathered and its own experiences to launch the Economic and Community Development Practitioners' Network (ECDPN).

AFA's ECDPN is a network of economic and community development practitioners from more than 70 cities nationwide.

The ECDPN meets monthly to learn from each other, convene with national leaders, and produce greater economic mobility for more Americans, and MCIG has been a meaningful leadership voice in these convenings and with local leaders.

### A FOCUS ON THE MOST VULNERABLE

While addressing a wide range of city needs and opportunities during this time, AFA placed a specific emphasis on advancing initiatives to support historically marginalized communities and help small businesses benefit from the new influx of federal investment.

In alignment with MCIG's commitment to the In Solidarity and Strive USA cities, AFA targeted its efforts with mayors, city leaders, and community-based organizations in St. Louis, Birmingham, Dayton, New Orleans, and Atlanta.



In St. Louis, AFA continues to work closely with the city and its development arm to support small businesses in North City and other neighborhoods, while assisting them in developing the

Economic Justice Action Plan and implementing the new Economic Justice Accelerator initiative. In Birmingham, AFA worked with two of the leading small business support organizations on the ground, while supporting the city in pursuing federal funds to support local priorities and advance key development projects.

In Dayton, AFA leveraged the Small Business Equity Toolkit to quantify local challenges and opportunities, then partnered with the city and community partners to outline actionable steps to assist businesses and communities in recovery, including the new Inclusive Business Recovery Opportunity Center and the First Floor Fund.

In New Orleans, AFA engaged city officials and local leaders on various initiatives related to economic development organization structures, place-based development, leveraging ARPA funding to advance economic mobility, advisory services, and connections to national capital sources and opportunities to grow New Orleans into the “climate tech capital” of the U.S. and support for Finance New Orleans. In Atlanta, AFA continues to support Mayor Dickens and local philanthropic and nonprofit leaders on several local economic development and infrastructure initiatives.

## **AFA TODAY**

AFA’s early and multi-year support from MCIG – and the extension of the partnership beyond financial to include targeted expertise and data insights – unlocked the Accelerator’s potential to become a nationally recognized center of excellence in just a few short years. As of September 2023, Accelerator’s impact spans more than 80 cities and greater than \$40 billion in new funds for local impact across both economic development and infrastructure initiatives.

**As of September 2023, Accelerator’s impact spans more than 80 cities and greater than \$40 billion in new funds for local impact.**

AFA is guided by an Advisory Council that includes 13 mayors and other preeminent leaders from the worlds of business, labor, academia/nonprofit, and philanthropy, including MCIG.

MCIG’s partnership positioned AFA to engage in other philanthropic and corporate partnerships to bring new resources and capacity to local communities. By securing pro bono investment from WSP USA, AFA supported planning and application for funding for large-scale infrastructure projects resulting in \$25.5 million in new federal funding. In 2022, WSP and AFA, along with North Carolina A&T, were selected to provide technical assistance and capacity building to 14

communities across the U.S. through the federal Thriving Communities program. With Honeywell, AFA is providing city leaders with the technical assistance and capacity needed to implement Smart City initiatives, with an in-kind value exceeding \$1 million. Five Smart City Strategic Plans have already been completed, identifying high-impact projects that the cities could implement to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government services. AFA and Honeywell are also providing the participating cities with support for up to 15 federal grant applications, with Louisville having already secured a \$2 million grant from USDOT to support climate resiliency and flood mitigation efforts. With HNTB, Accelerator continues a unique partnership to support local leaders in their vision to add new local funding to support transit, transportation, and infrastructure investments that create new jobs and connect local residents to new opportunities.

In 2023, AFA and Tolemi committed to supporting at least 10 cities in addressing the affordable housing crisis in their communities. AFA and Tolemi are providing no-cost access to an advanced analytical tool and a peer learning cohort to provide insights into property ownership, land use, and other elements of local real estate markets. Cities will leverage these resources to preserve and build affordable housing, keep families in their homes and their homes in good repair, combat predatory private sector real estate investments, and ensure publicly-owned real estate is utilized for the highest possible economic and community benefit. This commitment was publicly announced as part of the Clinton Global Initiative in September 2023.

The multi-year relationship between AFA and MCIG is an exemplar of the power and opportunity of true partnership. Philanthropy often provides necessary resources to attack core issues and big problems. Rarely does philanthropy engage deeply and meaningfully in the work. Similarly, philanthropy often funds the established entity or long chronicled initiative. Too seldom does philanthropy seize the moment and partner with the entrepreneurial start-up social enterprise, providing the financial resources needed but also rolling up sleeves and jumping into the trenches together. AFA and MCIG built an example for other nonprofits and philanthropy to follow.



## TESTIMONIALS

*From Mitch Landrieu (tweet): @usaccelerate is providing in-kind support for strategic planning and grant writing, communications strategy, and guides to help local government navigate the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Its work with 20 cities will expand.*

*Mayor Gallego: "Mayors are on the front lines of our economic recovery, and the experience and ideas these seven mayors will bring to our Advisory Council will be an incredible asset to the Accelerator's work in cities across the country,"*

*Mayor Kelly: "Accelerator for America is emerging as one of our nation's most essential conveners by bringing together local leaders to find solutions that create lasting change."*

*Mayor Parker: "Accelerator for America is committed to lifting the voices of mayors and cities to push for smart, bold solutions to big challenges, and I am looking forward to working with excellent leaders from across the country in this effort to support thriving communities,"*

*Mayor Giles: "I'm proud to have worked closely with Accelerator on the efforts to pass the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law that will have a lasting impact on the local level."*

*Mayor Nirenberg: "I have been honored to work with Accelerator for America to advocate for unprecedented levels of federal infrastructure funding."*

*Mayor Gloria: "I'm excited to join Accelerator for America's Advisory Council and help build on the organization's success in advocating for federal investment in and partnership with America's cities."*

*Mayor Castor: "Accelerator for America provides our nation's cities with tested best practices to reduce economic insecurities, and focuses on issues that impact us here in Tampa including transportation, housing and workforce development."*

*Matt Mullin, International Economic Development Council: "AFA is a leading catalyst in the vital work of seizing this moment of opportunity, learning from past efforts, and identifying innovative solutions that will set into motion lasting and equitable growth for all."*

*Mayor Bibb: "Accelerator for America is a national center of excellence and trusted resource in developing and sharing resources in economic development, transit, infrastructure, and workforce enhancement across the nation."*