Louisville
A Focus on Poverty

Greater Louisville Project
ADVANCING A COMPETITIVE CITY

Competitive City Update 2015
Trailing Our Peers

Louisville ranks 15th out of 17 among our peer cities, with 1 in 7 Louisvillians living in concentrated poverty.

Concentrated poverty is defined as a census tract that is far below the citywide average across income, jobs, education, and health. A census tract in concentrated poverty is one that is in aggregate at least 1 standard deviation worse off than the citywide average in terms of all four MPI indicators highlighted in this report. 

Population in Multidimensionally Poor Areas

- Nashville: 8.1%
- Memphis: 10.1%
- Columbus: 10.7%
- Grand Rapids: 10.8%
- St. Louis: 11.4%
- Knoxville: 11.5%
- Cincinnati: 11.5%
- Oklahoma City: 11.8%
- Kansas City: 12%
- Birmingham: 12.3%
- Indianapolis: 12.3%
- Greenville: 12.5%
- Greensboro: 13%
- Tulsa: 13.1%
- Louisville: 14.5%
- Charlotte: 15.3%
- Omaha: 16.5%

A multidimensionally poor census tract is defined as one where the average z-score is greater than 1, calculated across each of the four indicators. These tracts are orange to red in the Multidimensional Poverty in Louisville map on the poster side of this report.
Concentrated Poverty is Keeping Louisville from Reaching its Competitive Potential

Living in a Poor Neighborhood

Poverty is everything that makes it difficult for individuals and communities to thrive. Its effects are felt not only in the wallet, but in every barrier to health and well-being.

- Low Income
- Poor Health
- Unemployment
- Low Education

People experience poverty in multiple forms. The concept of the Bravenderification of poverty helps us understand how poverty is experienced in a single, multi-dimensional way. The Bravenderification report refines its analytical framework by mapping poverty along with each of the factors that contribute to it. The Bravenderification report is a comprehensive tool to understand poverty through the dynamics of the community. It shows that poverty isn’t just about unemployment, lack of health insurance, lack of high school degree, and living in a poor neighborhood (on average more than 5% of people are poor). While Bravenderification uses the 1970s as a baseline period, the report uses data from the first quarter to identify and evaluate concentrated poverty in Louisville’s neighborhoods.

This report uses Bravenderification case studies to understand poverty in Louisville’s neighborhoods and provides an in-depth look at the challenges that Louisvillians face daily.

If Louisville wants to be at the peak of its competitiveness, it must take steps to include all of its neighborhoods in its progress.

What would Louisville look like if its poorest neighborhoods were brought up to the current average income? These neighborhoods are at a whole new experience.

Imagining a More Competitive Louisville

- $377M
- 8
- 7,200
- 5,200
- 6,200
- 55,000

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Poverty Beyond Income

Concentrated poverty, in and of itself, impacts individual wellbeing.

What is the difference between growing up in one of Louisville’s four most impoverished neighborhoods and growing up in one of its four least impoverished neighborhoods?

Multidimensional Poverty in Louisville

Poverty is experienced as more than just a lack of income. Using a Multidimensional Poverty Index that includes low income (under 150% of the poverty line), unemployment, lack of health insurance, and low education levels (no high school degree) we can identify neighborhoods in Louisville challenged by overlapping barriers to health and wellbeing.

Black residents are much more likely to live in multidimensionally poor neighborhoods.

Louisville’s history of institutional racism and segregation has had—and continues to have—a significant impact on its multidimensionally poor neighborhoods and the populations concentrated within them. While this report highlights the extent of the disparities across factors like income, health insurance, and educational attainment, it does not discuss the mechanisms behind these disparities; it is clear, however, that these systemic problems significantly contribute to the distribution of poverty across racial lines in Louisville.

1 We examine 24 neighborhood areas in Louisville and use the Brookings Institution’s poverty index to identify our four most impoverished neighborhoods and our four least impoverished neighborhoods. We put Louisville’s 190 census tracts into 24 neighborhood areas as defined by the Louisville’s Center for Health Equity.
We All Have a Stake

The experience of multidimensional poverty can decimate hopes, dreams, and possibilities. Systemic barriers created by poverty—such as lack of income, health, employment, education and a feeling of wellbeing—can inhibit a person from considering the possibility that they too can participate in our city’s progress. When those barriers come to define too much of a community or neighborhood, the concentration of poverty itself adds an additional layer of challenges.

Meaningfully acting on this data will require acknowledging our history and incorporating a diverse set of voices from across our community, particularly those most impacted by the barriers of poverty. Making Louisville a more competitive city means creating opportunities for all people—regardless of the neighborhood we live in—to flourish and thrive.

It is important to remember that the data discussed represent human lives. In this report we talk about the impact of multidimensional poverty on our city’s competitiveness, but the most significant impact of reducing poverty is renewing hope.

Our hope for this report is twofold. First, by identifying concentrations of poverty beyond income, this data will facilitate investment in the neighborhoods and communities that can benefit most from reducing barriers to success. Second, we hope to spark meaningful collaborations across sectors that address the interconnected nature of the barriers to living one’s fullest life. The multiple dimensions of poverty do not exist in isolation and cannot be addressed in isolation.

The Greater Louisville Project’s purpose is to provide research and data that catalyzes civic action. We focus on four Deep Drivers and track our progress against our peer cities over time. By engaging community leaders in conversations and planning using that data, we hope to create a more competitive city that benefits all of our community.

Acknowledgements

The Greater Louisville Project is an independent, non-profit civic organization whose mission is to act as a catalyst for civic action by providing research and data analysis that engages the community in a shared agenda for long-term progress. Louisville’s Deep Drivers of Change are reviewed each year, capturing where the city thrives as well as where we collectively fall short.


This report was prepared by the staff of the Greater Louisville Project: Ben Reno-Weber, Kelsie Smithson, and Nate Kratzer, with special assistance provided by: Trisha Finnegan, Arsh Haque, Megan Webb, and Gavin Rienne.

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Visit www.greaterlouisvilleproject.org to view additional resources related to the report and beyond.

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