

## Featured Story: Memphis Fast Forward

They were the days when walking in Memphis meant watching your back. In 2005, this home of the blues was one of the most dangerous and challenging cities in America: a place where violent crime rates were soaring, K-12 student achievement outcomes were abysmal, and government expenditure growth was outpacing tax revenue growth. Key stakeholders in Greater Memphis had no intention of standing idly by in a sinking city – local mayors knew these challenges needed to be addressed and overcome; local business leaders knew it too. The *will* existed – what was needed was the *way*.

Memphis Fast Forward (MFF) arose from the interaction of those mayors and business leaders, and from the very beginning, participants laid out a clear path toward building their collective impact effort. MFF's 20-member cross-sector steering committee finds a common agenda in making improvements in five different focus areas: education, jobs and economic development, crime and public safety, health and wellness, and government fiscal strength. MFF's key insight was that these five focus areas are inextricably linked – as one of its leaders points out, “you can't move education along if you don't also deal with neighborhood safety...you can't have economic development and jobs if you don't manage the workforce” – and improvements in one area would have a cascading, positive effect across the others.

MFF's structure mirrors this insight. Each focus area constitutes its own initiative, with each initiative having its own distinct backbone organization. Each initiative then cascades further into a linked team of cross-sector partners who work together to implement the initiative's plan. The leader of each of the five initiatives, meanwhile, sits on MFF's steering committee, giving MFF a decentralized but linked management structure. The leaders of the five initiatives make a point to meet regularly, use data to inform their work, share knowledge and celebrate successes – and there have been many to celebrate: since 2005, MFF has helped spur the creation of more than 17,000 new jobs, has saved local city and county taxpayers more than \$75 million via improvements in government efficiency, has contributed to a 23% drop in violent crimes, a 31% drop in property crimes, and has helped advance a suite of dramatic K-12 education reforms that has put Memphis at ground zero for national reform. As a result, in 2013, Tennessee was ranked #1 among all states in the nation for K-12 education gains per the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP).

Tonight, as the sun goes down over the bars on Beale Street, the notes will turn blue as performers sing the old songs – while outside, on the boulevards and the avenues, along the banks of the Mississippi, the people of Greater Memphis are writing their new future.