

The Social Mobility Concept Paper and Demonstration Project

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A Call to Action

In March 2020, the world stopped. In what has become the defining moment of a generation, COVID-19 is ripping through the Oregon economy in a way that will impact families and create a new epoch in our collective history. Prior to COVID-19, The Contingent committed to recalibrating our organization's efforts in serving leaders from communities of color and low-income rural communities in Oregon. Instead of stepping back in a time of uncertainty, this Social Mobility Concept Paper became the central priority for our work in empowering leaders. We are convinced that now is the time to build aggressively to ensure that Generation Z pushes through this time of adversity to demonstrate and experience an increase in social mobility.

While Covid-19 has impacted every population and every person in some way, both the virus and its economic fallout have disproportionately impacted communities of color and the poor.¹ Nationwide, data suggests that the burden of illness and death among communities of color and the poor are significantly higher than that of whites.² Health and financial disparities between certain communities don't present a new phenomenon; however, the coronavirus offers a chance to change the narrative and experience, or lack thereof, of social mobility for historically underserved communities in Oregon.³ Will Oregonians take this opportunity to support those populations who have been most impacted by this virus? Will we invest in communities of color to help increase income, reduce the wealth gap, and expand social mobility?

The Contingent exists to empower leaders and mobilize community for the common good. With a vision that by 2040, the leaders of Oregon will reflect the people who live here, The Contingent has made an agency commitment to support college graduates and young professionals from communities of color and low-income rural areas with the singular goal of advancing their economic and social status. Oregon's young people of color and those from low-income rural communities face an overwhelming number of obstacles to success in the professional world. These obstacles inform our work and spur the development of community-based solutions designed to keep them on track and mitigate long-term barriers to social mobility.

This concept paper explores the current realities that college graduates from communities of color and low-income rural areas face on their journey into the professional world. In collaboration with community partners and organizations, our goal is to increase social mobility, and in turn, decrease the racial wealth gap and income inequality that plagues these specific

¹ As of April 19, 2020, 22 percent of COVID-19 cases in Oregon were found in Hispanic communities; yet this population only comprises about 13 percent of Oregon's population. "Coronavirus Hits Oregon's Hispanic Community at a Disproportionate Rate | KATU," accessed May 13, 2020, <https://katu.com/news/local/covid-19-hits-oregons-hispanic-community-at-a-disproportionate-rate>.

² "COVID-19 Deaths Analyzed by Race and Ethnicity," APM Research Lab, accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.apmresearchlab.org/covid/deaths-by-race>; CDC, "Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19)," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, February 11, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html>.

³ "The Coronavirus Will Be a Catastrophe for the Poor - The Atlantic," accessed May 18, 2020, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/03/coronavirus-will-supercharge-american-inequality/608419/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=share&mc_cid=58a237b607&mc_eid=27323cf2ba.

populations. The Contingent invites you to join us in a historic effort to empower college graduates from communities of color and low-income rural areas in Oregon.

What is Social Mobility?

In its simplest form, social mobility is understood as “the movement of an individual or group from one social position to another over time.”⁴ Most people would agree that mobility within a society is essential and a fundamental human right. Yet, we see that social mobility has not—and is not—equitably experienced among communities of color and students from low-income rural areas.⁵ It begs the questions: Why is this? And what are we doing about the lack of mobility that is experienced by these populations within our state?

The Contingent defines social mobility as ***the ability for an individual to develop into the fullness of their potential by way of moving from one position in society to the next without the loss of cultural heritage or identity.*** One’s relative position in society is shaped by a host of factors including income, wealth, vocational progression, life satisfaction, among other measures. Social mobility affords choice: it provides a person agency and the ability to make decisions best for their situation. We believe Oregon can lead the nation toward a more meritocratic system by increasing social mobility among communities of color and low-income rural areas. Moreover, we want to see today’s college graduates close current income and wealth gaps so that Oregon’s community leaders reflect Oregon’s growing and diversifying population by 2040.

Far too many Oregonians are unable to look beyond day-to-day survival. This impacts the capacity to see a stable future, which stagnates growth despite aptitude.⁶ A demonstrative investment in increasing social mobility in the lives of historically marginalized communities will build a new security fabric that provides an individual, including their family and community, with the sound foundation to take financial and professional risks. Social mobility empowers leaders with the ability to weather the storms of life (ex. The Great Recession of 2008 and COVID-19), build wealth and a plan for their future, progress with ease through their vocational adventure, innovate, hold political and leadership positions within our state, and move freely within society. The dynamic of one’s social mobility should not be predicted by the family at birth, the color of one’s skin, or their zip code. The investment in social mobility for these communities in Oregon is particularly vital at this moment in history.

⁴ “Social Mobility | Boundless Sociology,” accessed April 27, 2020, <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-sociology/chapter/social-mobility/>.

⁵ Betsy Hammond | The Oregonian/OregonLive, “Children of Rural and Minority Oregonians Suffer, Study Says,” oregonlive, September 23, 2015, https://www.oregonlive.com/education/2015/09/rural_and_minority_oregonians.html; Candid, “Racial Gaps in Upward Mobility Persist Even Among the Rich,” Philanthropy News Digest (PND), accessed May 29, 2020, <http://philanthropynewsdigest.org/news/racial-gaps-in-upward-mobility-persist-even-among-the-rich>.

⁶ “The Great Risk Shift: Jacob Hacker - Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality,” accessed May 13, 2020, <https://inequality.stanford.edu/publications/media/details/great-risk-shift-jacob-hacker>.

The need for a demonstration project that invests in Oregon’s graduating college students who come from families historically in need of increased social mobility is vital at this moment in history. These populations will likely sustain detrimental damage to their health and economies along their lifespan as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷ The ideas captured here will change The Contingent—and hopefully, Oregon—forever.

The Proposition

If we build a robust pool of historically underrepresented college graduates in a vocational-development and wealth-building network, Oregon will see an increase in social mobility across communities of color and low-income rural communities in Oregon.

A college degree is often a necessary but insufficient determinant in the fulfillment of the “American Dream.” In particular, for those college students of color (historically underrepresented in both higher-ed and the private sector) and/or are low-income, it is essential to recognize that, in many cases, these students are also first-generation professionals. They are graduating into a less structured and more chaotic environment than college, with little support in navigating the quickly automating and evolving world of work.⁸ Further, this generation of students from communities of color and low-income rural areas are entering into the professional setting at a time when the economy is in its deepest recession since the great depression.⁹

A college degree is now an output. It tells the story of what has been accomplished (output), not what has been achieved as a result of earning a college degree (outcome). The outcomes we want to see for college graduates include wealth acquisition, an increase in income, influence and leadership within and outside of their cultural group, and civic engagement. All indicators of social mobility. These outcomes should be available, with tremendous rigor, while strengthening rural Oregon and communities of color in the state we love.

An investment in an intentional, scalable model designed to increase mobility for Oregon’s college graduates and young professionals is needed now in order to fulfill the long-term goal of seeing the community and state leaders in Oregon reflect the diverse population of the state in 2040 and beyond. Currently, 25% of the population are people of color. However, according to the report sponsored by the Brookings Institution, the Center for American Progress and the American Enterprise Institute, Oregon’s populations of color are projected to climb to 35 percent by 2040 and 44 percent by 2060.¹⁰ Of course, the demographics of Oregon’s communities of color are concentrated in some counties more than others. For example, some predict that majority of children born in Multnomah County in 2040 will be children of color. Investing in the

⁷ “Protecting Black America from Coronavirus | McKinsey,” accessed May 28, 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/covid-19-investing-in-black-lives-and-livelihoods>.

⁸ “What the Future of Work Will Mean for Jobs, Skills, and Wages: Jobs Lost, Jobs Gained | McKinsey,” accessed May 27, 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/jobs-lost-jobs-gained-what-the-future-of-work-will-mean-for-jobs-skills-and-wages>.

⁹ “Harvard’s Reinhart and Rogoff Say This Time Really Is Different,” *Bloomberg.Com*, May 18, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-05-18/harvard-s-financial-crisis-experts-this-time-really-is-different>.

¹⁰ Ruy Teixeira, William H Frey, and Robert Griffin, “The Demographic Evolution of the American Electorate, 1974–2060,” n.d., 156.

college graduates and young professionals of today increases the probability that they will have the mobility and equitable opportunity to become Oregon's future leaders.

The Social Mobility Project will also address a convergence of systemic factors (see: A Convergence of Vexing Data) and perceptions including:

- **The Myth of Aspiration** – A prevailing and persistent American narrative says if an individual does not succeed, it is because there is a lack of aspiration, drive, and desire. The Contingent's experiences across Oregon suggests that there is not an aspiration gap but an access gap. Too often, mobility decreases in the life of an individual—which impacts a whole community—when aspirations are met with continual structural and societal barriers stemming from a lack of education, poverty, racism, and social marginalization. Thus, equitable opportunity and access should be placed within an awareness of the overarching structures and systems that continue to perpetuate the barriers that many students face.
- **Generation Z: Loss of Mobility Overnight** – Although Generation Z was poised to be the most diverse and best educated generation yet,¹¹ the wake of COVID-19 has caused this generation to lose an exponential amount of social mobility overnight. The first years after graduation are critical years of professional development and wealth building.¹² The first years out of college are crucial as young professionals explore respective fields, develop key skillsets, build community and professional networks, explore different career paths and avenues, and pave the way toward goals and dreams. This period of vocational development is vital for social mobility, and COVID-19 has altered the calculus. Much of the financial struggles that the Millennial generation faces stem from the Great Recession in 2008. Thousands of jobs were lost and finding a job in several industries was incredibly challenging. Some predicted Generation Z would see increased financial mobility due to a record economy these past several years.¹³ This seems like a false assumption now. A targeted effort to serve Generation Z will have a lasting impact on families and the Oregon economy, but a demonstrative investment is needed now.
- **Equitable Opportunity (or lack thereof)** – One of the barriers to social mobility is a young person's lack of awareness of opportunities that create avenues to success.¹⁴ When born into a family that is well versed in the ways of the educational and professional capital, an individual is likely versed in some, if not a majority, of the opportunities for study, work, and scholarships that exist within a desired field of study. When someone is raised within these systems, it is easy to normalize the benefits of

¹¹ "How Millennials Compare with Prior Generations," *Pew Research Center's Social & Demographic Trends Project* (blog), accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/essay/millennial-life-how-young-adulthood-today-compares-with-prior-generations/>.

¹² Janell Ross *Journal National*, "African-Americans With College Degrees Are Twice As Likely to Be Unemployed as Other Graduates," *The Atlantic*, May 27, 2014, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2014/05/african-americans-with-college-degrees-are-twice-as-likely-to-be-unemployed-as-other-graduates/430971/>.

¹³ Jacob Passy, "Gen Z Is Financially 'Better Armed and Better Educated' than Millennials Were at Their Age," *MarketWatch*, accessed May 13, 2020, <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/members-of-generation-z-are-financially-better-armed-and-better-educated-than-millennials-were-at-their-age-2020-01-29>.

¹⁴ Cia Verschelden, *Bandwidth Recovery: Helping Students Reclaim Cognitive Resources Lost to Poverty, Racism, and Social Marginalization*, 1st ed. (Stylus Publishing, LLC, 2017).

pre-existing networks of professionals, whether within our families, circles of friends, or community at large.

However, this normalization is not experienced by all. First generation students, especially those from communities of color and low-income rural areas, may have limited exposure to the opportunities that exist within the professional environment. The Contingent will intentionally direct interventions to create circles of relationships that create equitable opportunity.¹⁵

- **The Private Sector + Competitive Advantage** -- Social mobility is a driver of competitive advantage among businesses and within society as a whole.¹⁶ Due to COVID-19, economic growth in Oregon and particularly in the communities that have been disproportionately harmed, will be vital in the coming years. In the days ahead, businesses will build a competitive advantage if they are able to hire, retain, and invest in a diverse workforce that represents the communities it serves. ^{17,18} We are at a severe disadvantage in the short and long-term if our workforce and leadership do not represent the communities and populations within Oregon. We have an opportunity to invest in students and young professionals of color and those from low-income rural communities so that they have an increased probability to become a part of the economic growth Oregon will experience in the coming years.

A Convergence of Vexing Data

Policies, systems, regulations, and laws have perpetuated systems of advantage based on race, socio-economic status, and geography in Oregon, which have restricted some communities from building wealth and increasing social mobility. For the purposes of this concept paper, we dissect interrelated data schemas to make the case for the Social Mobility Demonstration Project and seize a pivotal moment in Oregon's economic history with a commensurate set of disruptive solutions.

College Attendance and Persistence

As of May 2019, Oregon public and private institutions of higher education enrolled 445,378 total resident and non-resident students.¹⁹ Students of color are increasingly represented on campuses, with nearly a quarter of public college students and 32% of private college students

¹⁵ Christopher Jencks and Laura Tach, "Would Equal Opportunity Mean More Mobility?," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, August 9, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.779507>.

¹⁶ "The Social Mobility Podcast - Sir Ken Olisa," *The Social Mobility Podcast* (blog), July 30, 2019, <https://www.socialmobility.fm/sir-ken-olisa/>.

¹⁷ "Oregon Office of Economic Analysis," Oregon Office of Economic Analysis, accessed May 13, 2020, <https://oregoneconomicanalysis.com/>.

¹⁸ Charlene Li | *The Disruption Mindset | Transformational CMO*, accessed May 27, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Fpk2byJ0no&feature=youtu.be.

¹⁹ "Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission: 2019 Statewide Snapshots Fact Sheet," accessed May 27, 2020, <https://www.oregon.gov/highered/research/Documents/Snapshots/2019-Fact-Sheet-Snapshots-FINAL.docx.pdf>.

in Oregon identifying as students of color.²⁰ However, statewide there are significant disparities in undergraduate completion rates among students in different racial/ethnic groups, with rates being lower among Native American/Alaska Natives, African American, and Hispanic/Latinx populations, and highest among White and Asian American populations. Only 49 percent of first-generation students complete their courses of study within six years at universities or within four years at community colleges, compared to 55 percent of students who are not first-generation.²¹ The 2018 ACS reported that 36 percent of non-Hispanic whites over 25 have a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with 27 percent of people of color.²²

Enrollment and persistence rates vary by geography and urbanicity. In an important study completed by Education Northwest and commissioned by the US Department of Education, they found that rural Oregon students were less likely than nonrural students to enroll in postsecondary education at any time after high school. At all types of two- and four-year institutions—private, public, in-state, and out-of-state—rural Oregon students had lower rates of persistence to the second year of college than nonrural students. These findings suggest that rural students may be at a disadvantage for postsecondary success in Oregon.²³

The Contingent assumes that for students of color and low-income rural students who make the transition to college, the grit shown to persist should be parlayed into further investment in post-graduation social mobility strategies.

Student Debt Crisis & Employment Entrance

Given the gap in wealth, families from communities of color and from rural communities have limited resources to support their children through college.²⁴ This means students of color and low-income rural students are attending college with limited resources and are more likely to borrow at higher levels compared to their white peers.²⁵ In 2016, the Urban Institute calculated that 42 percent of families that were led by black adults between the ages of 22 and 55, as compared to 34 percent of families led by white adults, had outstanding student loan debt.²⁶

Outstanding student debt in the U.S. has more than tripled since 2006, surpassing \$1.6 trillion. Student debt started at 4% of gross domestic product in 2006, but rose drastically throughout the Great Recession and stabilized at nearly 8% of GDP in 2016.²⁷ Thus, the amount of debt

²⁰ "Oregon Alliance of Independent Colleges and Universities Snapshot," accessed May 18, 2020, <https://oaicu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Alliance-2016-17-Snapshot-9.17.18-FINAL-2.pdf>.

²¹ "2019 Statewide Snapshots Fact Sheet," accessed May 18, 2020, <https://www.oregon.gov/highered/research/Documents/Snapshots/2019-Fact-Sheet-Snapshots-FINAL.docx.pdf>.

²² "Race and Ethnic Diversity in Oregon's Workforce - Article Display Content - Quality Info," accessed May 18, 2020, <https://www.qualityinfo.org/-/race-and-ethnic-diversity-in-oregon-s-workforce>.

²³ Ashley Pierson and Havalá Hanson, "Comparing Postsecondary Enrollment and Persistence among Rural and Nonrural Students in Oregon," n.d., 68.

²⁴ "Parents' Wealth and Racial Disparities in College Debt | St. Louis Fed," accessed May 18, 2020, <https://www.stlouisfed.org/publications/in-the-balance/2018/parents-wealth-helps-explain-racial-disparities-in-student-loan-debt>.

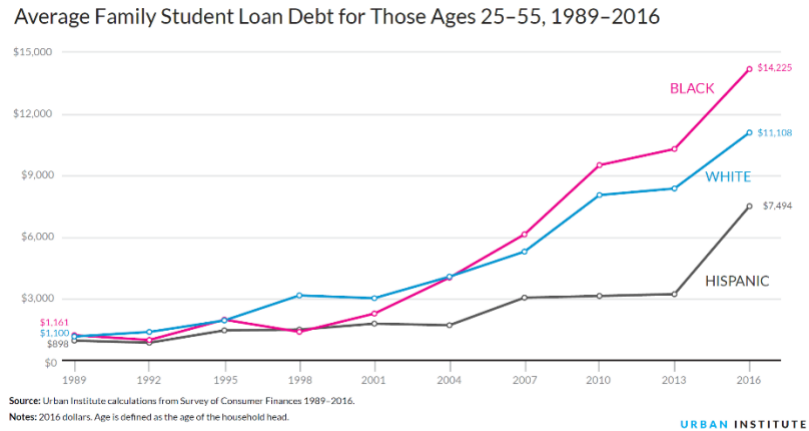
²⁵ Jillian Berman, "All the Ways Student Debt Exacerbates Racial Inequality — 'It's like Landing in Quick Sand,'" MarketWatch, accessed April 22, 2020, <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/all-the-ways-student-debt-is-exacerbating-racial-inequality-its-like-landing-in-quick-sand-one-black-student-says-2019-07-18>.

²⁶ "Nine Charts about Wealth Inequality in America (Updated)," accessed May 28, 2020, <http://urbn.is/wealthcharts>.

²⁷ "Rising Student Debt and the Great Recession | St. Louis Fed," accessed May 18, 2020, <https://www.stlouisfed.org/on-the-economy/2020/january/rising-student-debt-great-recession>.

college students incur while obtaining a college degree is often a significant barrier to wealth building and social mobility. In other words, the same systems that perpetuate the wealth gap—the unequal distribution of assets—reinforce financial situations where debt rises to an insurmountable amount during the crucial wealth building years for many young adults. The average student loan debt is demonstrated in the graph below:²⁸

A college degree also does not guarantee a job in the working world. Many students are faced with the long-term burden of paying off these debts without a plan for vocational progression. For example, a recent analysis showed that 12 years after graduating from college, black graduates saw their student debt *increase* by an average of 12% as compared to their white peers who saw their student debt *decrease* by an average of 36%, respectively.²⁹ Over one-quarter of all student loan borrowers defaulted on their loans within 20 years—approximately half of all Black borrowers and a third of all Latino borrowers.³⁰



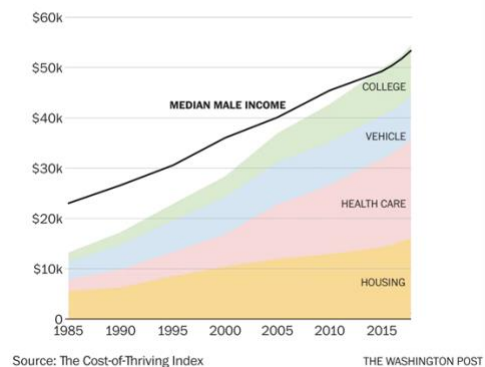
Taken together, student debts coupled with disproportionately high unemployment rates, complicate many young professionals of color in pursuing their dreams. Social mobility provides a way for these students to grow into budding professionals and the future leaders of Oregon, thereby increasing their ability to pay off student debt and build wealth. This is the goal of the Social Mobility Demonstration Project.

Income

The data show that prior to the COVID-19 crisis, households had attained unprecedented prosperity, and wages had (at worst) held their own against inflation, or (at best) risen much faster than prices. By conventional measures, material living standards across the income distribution were at all-time highs, and technological progress continued to suggest an improvement. Yet many jobs able to support a family in the past no longer do. Millennials are in worse financial shape than Generation X at the same age, who themselves had fallen behind the baby boomers. The stories appear irreconcilable. The explanation is

A year of wages no longer covers a year of family expenses

Major annual household expenditures for a family of four vs. median male income, 1985-2018



²⁸ “Nine Charts about Wealth Inequality in America (Updated).”

²⁹ Berman, “All the Ways Student Debt Exacerbates Racial Inequality — ‘It’s like Landing in Quick Sand.’”

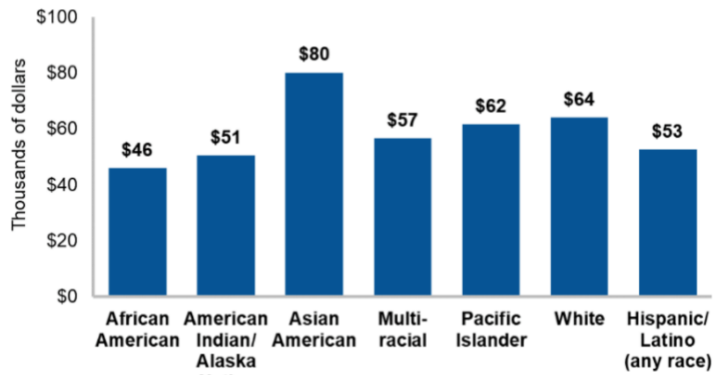
³⁰ “Stalling Dreams: How Student Debt Is Disrupting Life Chances and Widening the Racial Wealth Gap,” accessed May 18, 2020, https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/server_files/media/Stalling%20Dreams.pdf.

this: inflation does not measure affordability. A year of median wages no longer covers a year of family expenses.^{31,32}

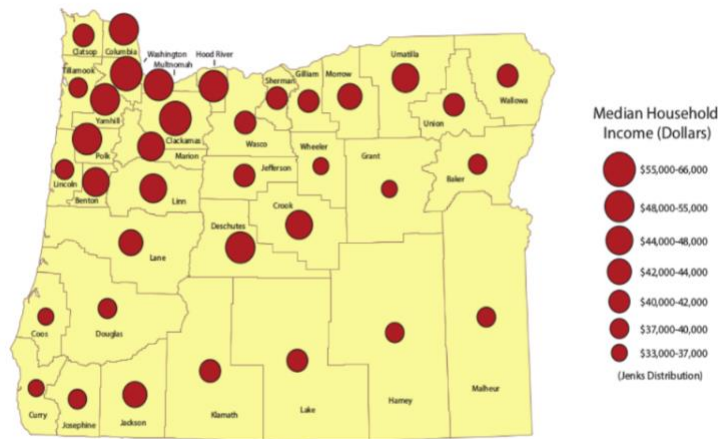
Throw in a pending recession and record unemployment, it is clear the economy was not as strong as perceived. It is also safe to surmise that income and savings rates will tumble in the months and years ahead. Communities of color and low-income rural communities will undoubtedly bear the brunt of the impacts.

National statistics on racial/ethnic income inequality report persistent gaps between White and Asian communities and Black and Hispanic communities.^{33,34} In Oregon, similar gaps emerge between White and Asian communities and all other ethnicities. Furthermore, in many rural Oregon communities, one's ZIP code at birth is a strong predictor of long-term education, labor market, and health outcomes, which emphasizes the importance of investment in social mobility in less populous communities.³⁵

Median household income by race/ethnicity, Oregon, 2018



Source: American Community Survey (ACS)



Income-Related Health and Intergenerational Impacts

Income inequality can have broad health impacts, including increased risk of mortality, poor health, and increased cardiovascular disease risks. This increase in risk is due to health factors that shape an individual and community's opportunity to be healthy and to access quality

³¹ Oren Cass, "The Cost-of-Thriving Index: Reevaluating the Prosperity of the American Family," n.d., 24.
³² Christopher Ingraham, "Analysis | This Chart Is the Best Explanation of Middle-Class Finances You Will Ever See," *Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/02/24/this-chart-is-best-explanation-middle-class-finances-you-will-ever-see/>.
³³ "US Bureau of Labor Statistics: Median Usual Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers by Selected Characteristics, Quarterly Averages, Not Seasonally Adjusted," accessed May 18, 2020, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/wkyeng.t02.htm>.
³⁴ "US Bureau of Labor Statistics: Usual Weekly Earnings of Wage and Salary Workers," April 15, 2020, 10.
³⁵ "See How Much a Degree Earns in Every Oregon County," *Portland Business Journal*, accessed May 29, 2020, <https://www.bizjournals.com/portland/news/2019/09/12/what-an-education-earns-in-oregon-can-depend-on.html>.

education, good paying jobs, quality health care clinics, safe green spaces, and secure and affordable housing.³⁶ Across Oregon, median household income and access to quality health factors varies drastically by county.³⁷

Inequalities within a community can accentuate differences in social class and status and serve as a social stressor. Communities with greater income inequality can experience a loss of social

connectedness, as well as decreases in trust, social support, and a sense of community for all residents.³⁸ Evidence suggests that prospects of upward mobility have a positive influence on life satisfaction and well-being.³⁹ Inversely, high risks of downward mobility and loss of social status tend to reduce life satisfaction and undermine social cohesion.⁴⁰

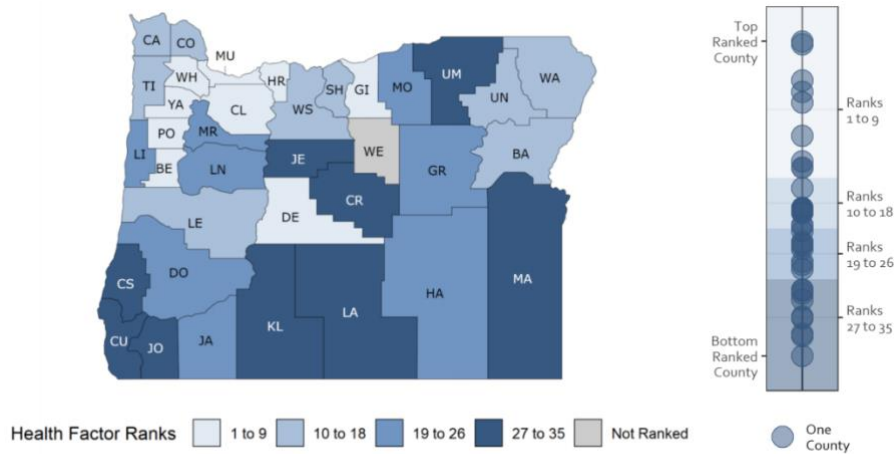


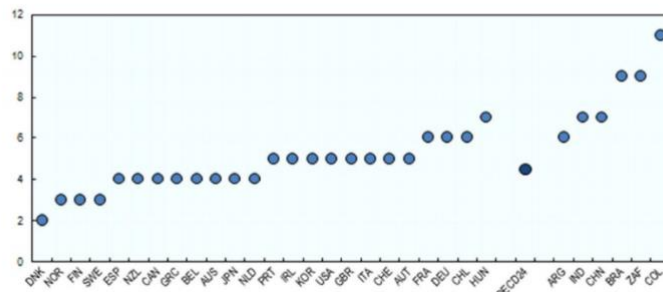
Figure 2. Health factor ranks displayed using quartiles (map) and underlying health factor scores (chart)

Perhaps most important to the study of income differentials is the consideration of the impact of social mobility on the lives of future generations.

Intergenerational elasticity, otherwise known as the Great Gatsby Curve, is the most common measure reported when looking at mobility. A parent's income is the greatest predictor of the future income of the child.⁴¹ This is a trend The Contingent seeks to break.

Figure 1.5. At the current level of intergenerational mobility, it takes on average four to five generations for the offspring of a low-income family to reach the average income

Expected number of generations it would take the offspring from a family at the bottom 10% to reach the mean income in society



While communities with higher income inequality exist, the same communities do not have to have low income mobility. However, we need to be intentional with our efforts (e.g., Demonstration Project) to disrupt this persistent, but not inevitable pattern.

³⁶ "2020 Oregon County Health Rankings," 2020, 12.

³⁷ "2020 Oregon County Health Rankings."

³⁸ "Social Determinants of Health: Income Inequality," n.d., 3.

³⁹ OECD, *A Broken Social Elevator? How to Promote Social Mobility* (OECD, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264301085-en>.

⁴⁰ OECD.

⁴¹ Brantly Callaway and Weige Huang, "Local Intergenerational Elasticities," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, April 15, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3233873>.

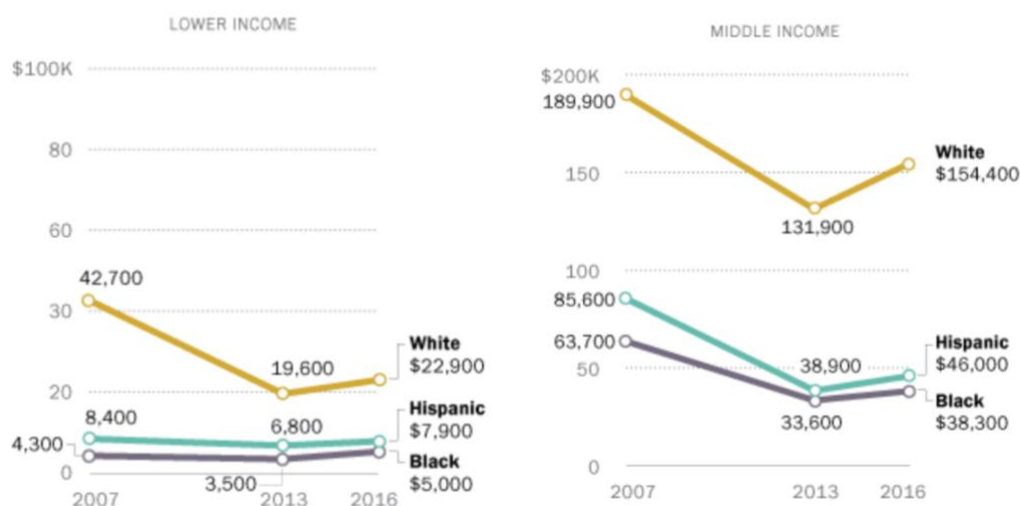
Wealth

Wealth is the stock of all the assets people own, including their homes, pension, savings, and bank accounts, minus all debts. Much has been discussed—and will be discussed in this election cycle—about the wealth gap and how public policy can work to rebuild the middle class. Regardless of proposed political solutions, the growing indebtedness of most Americans—matched by wage stagnation in relation to cost of living—is the main reason behind the erosion of the wealth share of the bottom 90% of families. Although a good portion of middle-class families own homes and have pensions, many of these families also have much higher mortgages to repay and much higher consumer credit and student loans to service than before.⁴²

The study of median wealth shows detrimental gaps between races across generations and within both lower income and middle-income brackets. In both communities of color and low-income rural communities, the wealth gap exists because of generations of cumulative factors. There is no evidence that wealth gaps are easily overcome in attempts to inspire higher income mobility.

Median net worth demonstrating racial wealth gap⁴³

Median net worth of households, in 2016 dollars



To the contrary, The Ever-Growing Gap publication reported, “If the average Black family wealth continues to grow at the same pace it has over the past three decades, it would take Black families 228 years to amass the same amount of wealth White families have today.”⁴⁴ To avoid “permanent” inequality,” demonstrative investments are required to have a public discussion about the gap while building targeted interventions designed to increase social mobility.⁴⁵

⁴² Emmanuel Saez and Gabriel Zucman, “Exploding Wealth Inequality in the United States,” *VoxEU.Org* (blog), October 28, 2014, <https://voxeu.org/article/exploding-wealth-inequality-united-states>.

⁴³ “How U.S. Wealth Inequality Has Changed since Great Recession,” *Pew Research Center* (blog), accessed May 18, 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/11/01/how-wealth-inequality-has-changed-in-the-u-s-since-the-great-recession-by-race-ethnicity-and-income/>.

⁴⁴ “The Ever Growing Gap,” Institute for Policy Studies, August 8, 2016, <https://ips-dc.org/report-ever-growing-gap/>.

⁴⁵ OECD, *A Broken Social Elevator?*

Building wealth requires more than increased income. At the basic level, to build wealth requires saving more than one spends over time. While the math around compound interest can be understood intellectually, there are psycho-social barriers that also must be overcome—usually rooted in adverse experiences in childhood—to inspire new spending and saving behaviors that grow social mobility. For example, food and housing insecurity affects many college students in our current society. The Hope Center for College, Community and Justice conducted a survey of over 330,000 college students nationwide to identify the percentage of students experiencing food insecurity, housing insecurity, and who were homeless. They found that 39% experienced food insecurity in the prior 30 days, 46% experienced housing insecurity within the previous year, and 17% were homeless in the previous year.⁴⁶ These numbers are staggering and a reality for many Oregon students, especially those that enter into college with limited resources to begin. When students, and individuals in general, experience continual insecurity around their basic needs (i.e. the first two levels of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs - physiological and safety needs), it’s incredibly challenging, if not impossible, to think about saving money, much less plan and invest for the future.

McKinsey & Company argues that the US economy would be significantly larger now if it had closed achievement gaps in the prior recession. This same opportunity exists now.⁴⁷ Will we intentionally work to improve social mobility in this historic moment? The Contingent seeks to journey alongside and empower these students and young professionals to build a strong foundation that provides security for basic needs so that they can experience belongingness, pursue accomplishment, and ultimately build wealth. The speed to market is paramount—especially in light of the economic fallout of COVID-19.

Additional Nuances in Considering Post-Graduation Interventions

The Contingent believes higher education and a college degree are vital, for many, to build a future. With this said, as the financial returns of earning a college degree have decreased, debt has increased, and the value proposition is being challenged by the market, it is safe to assume that all degrees are not equal.⁴⁸ As a state, we have seen growth in the rates of young people earning a higher education degree, and this is undeniably a great accomplishment. Thirty-four percent of Oregon-born Millennials have earned degrees.⁴⁹ But what is needed beyond a degree if the debt, income, wealth, and social mobility trend lines are not changing?

⁴⁶ “#RealCollege 2020: Five Years of Evidence on Basic Needs Insecurity,” The Hope Center, February 12, 2020, <https://hope4college.com/realcollege-2020-five-years-of-evidence-on-basic-needs-insecurity/>.

⁴⁷ “Achievement Gap and Coronavirus | McKinsey,” accessed July 20, 2020, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/covid-19-and-student-learning-in-the-united-states-the-hurt-could-last-a-lifetime>.

⁴⁸ Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic and Becky Frankiewicz, “Does Higher Education Still Prepare People for Jobs?,” *Harvard Business Review*, January 7, 2019, <https://hbr.org/2019/01/does-higher-education-still-prepare-people-for-jobs>.

⁴⁹ “For Oregon Millennials, a College Degree Is Often a Ticket Out of State,” Willamette Week, accessed May 15, 2020, <https://www.wweek.com/news/schools/2019/03/11/for-oregon-millennials-a-college-degree-is-a-ticket-out-of-state/>; “Educational Attainment Continues to Increase,” *Oregon Office of Economic Analysis* (blog), March 11, 2019, <https://oregoneconomicanalysis.com/2019/03/11/educational-attainment-continues-to-increase/>.

The idea that American success is built upon a lone individual's ability to channel greatness is more of an anomaly than the rule. Upon graduation, young professionals need a robust social network, a community of professionals, and the right coaching to navigate the vulnerable stages of a young career. Thus, building a social network is a critical component of addressing social mobility for college graduates, and it won't happen by accident.

Post-graduation relational supports are needed, but what other factors impact building wealth and increasing social mobility that should be considered? Additional challenges to overcome regarding the multifaceted challenge of increasing mobility include:

- **An individual's relationship to wealth and finances:** The way an individual perceives wealth is often shaped through his or her family heritage, culture, life experiences, and narratives regarding money. To some, wealth has a positive connotation and to others, wealth is found on an unhealthy quest. The Contingent engages with a wide range of Generation Z college students, and the opinions about money in our network are as diverse as the young leaders we serve. The Social Mobility Demonstration Project will build vital discussions into the structure of the project to ensure professionals of color and professionals from low-income rural communities explore both their conscious and unconscious biases about money.
- **Culture, Cool, and Cash:** In the writing of this concept paper, The Contingent staff met with a group of young leaders on the topic of wealth building and social mobility. When asked why they were not currently leveraging their company's retirement match or putting money in the stock market, one leader responded, "Saving isn't cool. We're afraid of losing what we have for the unknown of what we don't have." Another leader noted, "I'm comfortable with cash. I've never learned the ins and outs of the market. I'm leery of what I don't know." The Social Mobility Demonstration Project will build a brand designed to enter into culture and address these challenges head-on.
- **Ecology of the family system:** For many families in communities of color and low-income rural communities, wealth is found in countless expressions beyond net assets. Wealth can manifest in the form of relationships, experiences, clothes and cultural goods, etc. Even more important to consider is the ecology of the family system. In many cases, social mobility may be low in certain communities while family loyalty abounds. Cultural wealth is often seen as more important than financial wealth. Capitalism can often be seen as a shrewd individualistic endeavor, which in many communities is anti-thriving. The Social Mobility Demonstration Project will recognize that for many post-graduate professionals, building wealth creates conflict in the ecology of the family system. Money being saved can often feel like the betrayal of a family member in need.

Together, with our community partners in government, higher education, private, and not-profit sectors, The Contingent believes we have a social justice imperative to build a demonstration project that interrupts the long-standing patterns articulated above. Instead, let us work to support ethnically and geographically diverse Generation Z professionals by fostering social mobility in preparation to be tomorrow's leaders of Oregon.

The Social Mobility Demonstration Project

The Contingent exists to empower leaders and mobilize community for the common good. In its Action Lab, The Contingent is committed to investing in incubating new initiatives on a regular

basis. Central to success is creating an environment where new solutions are tried with a commitment to radical transparency through a demonstration project. Both time-based and resource-constrained, a demonstration project tests the ability for good intentions to translate to effective outcomes. As has been previously stated, The Contingent’s proposal is that a college degree is quickly becoming more an output than an outcome indicator when studying long term social mobility for historically under-represented and under-resourced communities. As such, The Contingent proposes a set of unique post-graduation interventions designed to attract college graduates of color and graduates from low-income rural communities across Oregon. In being committed to the precise tracking of key strategic indicators, the demonstration is described in detail below:

Target Audience

For purposes of this demonstration phase, over the next five years, the Social Mobility Project will build a robust network of 1,500 to 4,000⁵⁰ civically engaged students and young professionals of color and from low-income rural areas in Oregon and SW Washington that are between the ages of 17 and 35 years old.⁵¹ This age range is further broken down into stages, as discussed in subsequent sections. Within these 5 years, the intervention, logic model, evaluation plan, and longitudinal framework will be solidified and used to catapult the project into the long-term phase of measuring and tracking data along the life course. The Contingent is committed to tracking longitudinal data of members beginning from the date of college graduation through mid-career.

The student achievements, debt ratios, and naturally occurring networks will represent an intentionally broad range. This network will prove the adage, “your net worth is commensurate with your network.” Through this demonstration project, members will not only expand their network connections to each other and allies, but there will be an intentional focus on the *QUALITY of members’ professional connections* (e.g. LinkedIn with intention).⁵²

Objectives

1. Build a strong brand—designed to attract and empower college graduates from communities of color and low-income rural communities in Oregon—that reflects a dynamic network of rising professionals building wealth and increasing social mobility.
2. Develop a multi-faceted relational ecosystem for professionals (or members) who will commit to accountability toward professional development, building wealth, and being civically engaged.
 - a. Members will be required to participate in these activities.

⁵⁰ The Contingent is in the process of finalizing the logic model and evaluation plan. These will be completed during the validation phase and Stage 1 phase of the demonstration project. Once complete, this target audience range will be narrower in scope.

⁵¹ The Contingent has a long history of scholarship and college access work. Differentiated from previous initiatives, the Social Mobility Demonstration Project will not work exclusively with high achieving students. Conversely, we seek to build a brand that attracts a larger set of graduates with a wide range of academic experiences and student debt ratios.

⁵² “LinkedIn CEO Steps Down To Focus On Increasing Network Diversity,” accessed May 18, 2020, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kimelsesser/2020/02/05/linkedin-ceo-steps-down-and-focuses-on-increasing-network-diversity/#5649683c11ed>.

3. Offer world-class incentives for members, including brand discounts for company partners, access to wealth management, skill development, relational introductions, the first awareness of job availability with company partners.
4. Offer incentives (i.e. access to exclusive talent network) for company partners to sign on as a member company.

Desired Outcomes

1. Members build wealth over time
2. Members and their families experience an increase in social mobility for current and future generations
3. Build the largest network of diverse, rising Generation Z professionals in Oregon
4. Build a company network to pay fees for services and access to members
5. Publish Oregon's largest longitudinal study on social mobility
6. LONG TERM: Oregon's leaders reflect the people who live in Oregon

Shifting from blame to solutions: the role of the private sector and member companies

For far too long, the conversation about income inequality, the wealth gap, and the systemic inequities in the economy has shifted blame to the private sector without proposing how the private sector can utilize its strength to be a solution-driver. The Contingent respectfully acknowledges the importance of the public and social sectors; however, improvements in social mobility for Generation Z is significantly more feasible with an intentional and systemic market-supported solution with less dependence on government or social service sectors

The Social Mobility Demonstration Project is predicated upon hundreds of company executives recognizing the necessity of a more diverse workforce. As the case for a large-scale project of this sort is made, so will the call for companies to consider membership. Member companies will experience a myriad of benefits, including, but not limited to: 1) the opportunity to speak uniquely to Oregon's most dynamic and diverse network of young professionals. 2) exclusive access to exceptionally qualified rising talent.⁵³ 3) brand promotion within the marketing strategy for the proposed demonstration. 4) the opportunity to build a just and equitable Oregon.

In return, companies will be asked to contribute to the construction of the Social Mobility Demonstration Project, both financially and relationally.

Demonstration Project Stages:

Stage One – Recruiting a wide range of college students: ages 17-23

When considering low-income rural students and students of color, perhaps one of the largest barriers to overcome is the psycho-social dilemma fed by the narrative that these audiences “don't belong” in the rising professional class. The Social Mobility Demonstration Project seeks to unwrap the gift of perspective to enhance students' awareness regarding post-college graduation career development and the process of building wealth. The Contingent staff will develop a comprehensive approach to recruiting members prior to their college graduation (whereby students will apply), including:

⁵³ Through the Social Mobility Project, The Contingent will continuously cultivate and coach this talent throughout the process to increase retention rates.

- **Building a 🧨 (bomb!) brand:** It cannot be overstated how important it is to strategically brand this demonstration project with a name, logo, and brand strategy designed to captivate the imagination of Generation Z. The brand must immediately connect, draw young professionals, and speak in a way that understands the numerous personas we are engaging in this effort. We will work with [Thesis Agency](#) to put forward the most strategic brand we've ever built.
- **Recruiting at Oregon colleges and universities:** The Contingent has a rich history of recruiting leaders. This is a core skill. Our ability to sustainably navigate Oregon's higher education institutions will be tantamount to any marketing efforts. In response to COVID-19, The Contingent will utilize a hybrid approach in connecting with and recruiting students via virtual, online, and in-person platforms. The Contingent will demonstrate the social market value of its work by working both directly with students and higher education administrators to provide:
 - Workshop environments on a number of topics: the impact of the wealth gap; financially literacy; networking; job search
 - Exclusive seminars for graduating seniors explaining the benefits, expectations, and social implications of graduating into this demonstration project.
- **Intentional online engagement:** Using Instagram, Facebook, TikTok, YouTube, Twitter, LinkedIn, among other platforms, The Social Mobility Demonstration Project will create a new integrated marketing strategy to reach:
 - 1) students preparing for college graduation and 2) current members of the initiative committed to content that is relevant and consistent.
 - **Relevant Market Position:** From the language used to the imagery cultivated to the type of content created, each post must be relevant and in tune with the culture. Imperative to success in recruiting and retaining members will be quality, relatable, engaging, and entertaining information. There is not a shortage of brands discussing the importance of professional skills, leadership development, and financial literacy with a focus on building wealth. However, to our knowledge, these brands are not communicating at this scope, to this audience, with the quality of messaging previously demonstrated by The Contingent and its initiatives. Further, we are not aware of a group or organization seeking to empower and mobilize college graduates at scale across the Pacific Northwest. We can capitalize on this opportunity.
 - **Consistent and Tactical:** The need to post consistently is vital to the success of a robust relationship with graduating students and current members. The goal is to be where students are, and students are online all day, every day.

Commitments to become a member: The goal of this project is to increase the likelihood that professionals from underrepresented communities progress within their vocational development and into positions of leadership swiftly and efficiently - a sharp contrast to the usual economic and relational uncertainty that is the hallmark post-college transition experience. After a selective application and selection process and to ensure collective buy in, Social Mobility Demonstration members will commit to the following:

1. Utilizing "the portal" used by The Contingent (leveraging Dynamics 365 as a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system) to complete a robust profile and agreeing to regularly update profile information
2. Paying down student debt

3. Saving a minimum of \$50 per month
4. Leveraging employer's retirement matching vehicle (401k, Simple IRA, etc.), when available to employees⁵⁴
5. Enrolling in a health insurance plan
6. Registering to vote and engaging with at least one non-profit
7. Participating in "Circles" and accessing professional development opportunities (e.g., wealth building consultations, career coaching sessions, etc.).

Considering Higher-Ed Institutional Dynamics: After 15 years of experience in working with higher education institutions, The Contingent is aware of the challenges to integrating a community-based resource institutionally. While The Contingent has networks of relationships within many universities and colleges, the importance of support from influential leadership cannot be understated. Higher education accreditations⁵⁵ require evidence of post-graduation labor market outcomes with increasing public and media scrutiny when published in the United States Department of Education College Scorecard.⁵⁶ Moreover, a growing number of accreditation agencies are focusing on equity and now require their colleges to disaggregate performance data by demographic groups. Finally, many programs still struggle to longitudinally track⁵⁷ graduates and their career trajectories, particularly after departure of initial employment.

The Social Mobility Demonstration Project seeks to solution with institutional partners by creating a robust and diverse workforce readiness program that builds upon the college experience to meet the professional needs of students from communities of color and low-income rural areas - often those very subgroups who struggle to actualize their credentials post-graduation. Thus, not only does the Social Mobility Demonstration Project build networks and skills, but it is also designed to increase graduation rates, job placements, overall student quality of life, and "outputs" for colleges/universities. Combined with The Contingent's ability to track longitudinal data over time, we will facilitate data sharing so institutions experience the ability to better complete the scorecard over time. This will also increase institutions' ability to celebrate the success of alumni.

Stage Two – Joining “Circles”: engaging in basics of wealth building, skilling-up, networking: ages 22-28

Upon successful application and enrollment (via The Contingent's CRM), members will experience layers of immediate and notable value. Young professionals will be welcomed into a network and community that provides a range of benefits.

The Power of Small Groups: For the member network to thrive, small groups will be critical to the structure of the network, as they provide a way to keep one another accountable,

⁵⁴ "Northwest Economic Research Center: Retirement Security Final Report," accessed May 28, 2020, http://media.oregonlive.com/business_impact/other/Retirement%20Security%20Final%20Report.pdf.

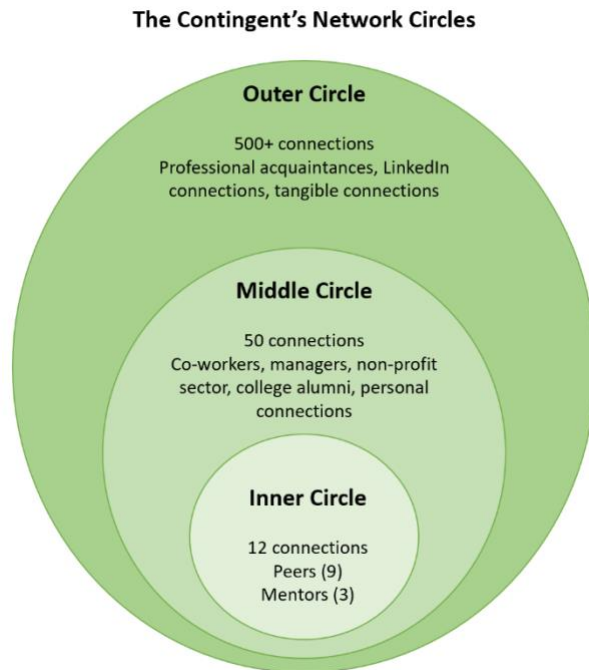
⁵⁵ Flores, Antoinette. "How College Accreditors Miss the Mark on Student Outcomes." Center for American Progress, accessed September 29 (2018).

⁵⁶ "U.S. Department of Education - College Scorecard," accessed May 28, 2020, <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/data/glossary/>.

⁵⁷ Ben Miller, "Improving Federal Accountability for Higher Education" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2017), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-postsecondary/reports/2017/10/24/440931/improving-federal-accountability-for-higher-education>

connected, emotionally engaged, and committed to building wealth over time. Networks will be built using “Circles”:

- **Inner circle (12 connections):** This could include up to nine connections in an industry-based small group and as many as three mentors (e.g., a more senior person in their own discipline - designer, programmer, project manager, etc., a company executive, and a community leader).
- **Middle circle (50 connections):** This is a mapped circle built to include co-workers, managers, nonprofit co-committee members, Emerging Leaders alumni network, fellow college alumni, and people who they have built shared experiences with over time.
- **Outer circle (500+ connections):** This is a constellation circle that includes professional acquaintances and tangible connections and exchanges on LinkedIn that are critical “weak ties.”⁵⁸



Additionally, each member will receive high quality exchanges with a curated list of experts on different topics including: the “chutes” and “ladders” of the professional world, investing advice, navigating marriage, raising kids, holistic health, managing people, leadership development, navigating friendships, family dynamics, and paying off college debt or other debts.

Risk factors with a “Circle” strategy include:

- Limited attendance
- The same few small group members always dominate the conversation and do not leave room for more introverted members to talk
- Unprepared and unengaged members

Strategies to address the above risk factors:

- **Limited attendance** – Consistently attending small groups is one of the many ways to create community, belonging, and accountability among young professionals. When becoming a member, this consistency will be expressed as a deep priority of the program because of the benefits that stem from meeting on a consistent basis (ex. building strong relationships and having people in life to hold them accountable). To help address this risk, the mentors and fellow small group members will journey alongside the member to help hold them accountable and alleviate and/or address the barriers that impede them from attending. The Contingent will also address this

⁵⁸ Granovetter, Mark S. "The strength of weak ties." Social networks. Academic Press, 1977. 347-367.

risk by meeting the members by providing a hybrid model of communication and engagement via in-person and virtual gatherings.

- **The same few small group members always dominate the conversation and do not leave room for more introverted members to talk** – To address this risk, a leader will be designated within each small group and trained on effective facilitation skills. This leader will lead for 3 months and then the position will shift to another member of the group. Thus, each member of the group will be asked to rotate into this leadership position every 3 months. This allows space for all members to practice their leadership skills and for each member to be exposed to different leadership styles. It also allows space for all voices in the group to be heard. Further, the Contingent will facilitate group-initiated community agreements⁵⁹ that each small group authors to establish peer expectations, topical and social cohesion, and build collective ownership of community.
- **Unprepared and unengaged members** – Coming unprepared and being unengaged in small groups can be disruptive for the individual member and all of the small group members. To help address this risk factor, The Contingent facilitators and mentors will clearly communicate the expectations around preparation and the desired level of engagement. When these expectations are chronically unmet, the mentor will schedule a mentor-mentee meeting to discuss the barriers that that member is currently facing and how they can create and execute solutions on alleviating said barriers.

Stage Three – Leveling-up to mid-management: ages 28-35

Representation matters. At the core of The Contingent’s mission is a commitment to empower leaders for the common good, and as Oregon continues to change, it is imperative that the leaders of Oregon reflect the people who live here. The Social Mobility Demonstration project, should it work in its early stages, will be making a long-term commitment to members. Leveraging the scope of the network over time, we expect these young professionals to place into strategic jobs across hundreds of companies. The goal is a flywheel effect, where members level up to mid-management and begin making hiring decisions.

Measuring Success: Evaluation Plan

Early in the formation of The Social Mobility Demonstration project, The Contingent will work alongside evaluation and technology specialists and community partners to develop a logic model, technology plan, and robust evaluation program that will clearly articulate the intention of the demonstration plan and ability to track longitudinal data over time. More specifically, this plan will describe the program’s inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes; evaluation questions; data collection plan (i.e., timeline, data collection methods, data sources and data fields); data analysis and reporting plan (i.e., timeline, data analysis methods, and report format); a discussion of data security needs (i.e., data sharing agreements, confidentiality agreements, and informed client consent), a technology proposal, and, finally, a set of recommendations at the culmination of the demonstration project.

A logic model is a visual representation that describes how and why a program will work. It describes a program’s inputs (e.g., program beneficiaries, human resources/talent, financial

⁵⁹ Lapadat, Judith. "Discourse devices used to establish community, increase coherence, and negotiate agreement in an online university course." *Journal of Distance Education* 21.3 (2007): 59-92.

support, organizational tools and infrastructure/equipment), activities (e.g., indirect and direct services), outputs (i.e., counts of services provided) and outcomes (e.g., measurable short-term, intermediate and long-term goals). Building a logic model is critical to ensure team consensus on the program design and program goals. It serves as the roadmap to determine meaningful measurement and evaluation priorities by identifying the most important program activities and outcomes through mapping the relationship between each activity and each outcome.

The Contingent will track real-time community data using Microsoft Dynamics and Power BI and will publish an annual report articulating short, intermediate, and long-term outcome data.

Quantitative: Longitudinal Data

In addition to this plan, the goal of The Social Mobility Demonstration project is to publish Oregon's largest longitudinal study on the quantitative and qualitative aspects of social mobility. There are key strategic indicators and outcomes that are critical to track along the lifespan of this project. These include, but are not limited to measuring and tracking changes in:

- **Social mobility:** an individual's fulfillment of potential, the movement between positions in the workforce, maintenance of cultural heritage or identity, and quality of life
- **Wealth building:** assets, income, debt, cash flow, expenses, credit (reputation), and financial attitudes
- **Civic engagement:** tracking the involvement in community outreach, civic organizations, and voting frequency
- **Mindset:** growth mindset, curiosity, hunger for learning, grit, and self-awareness (e.g., social and emotional learning)
- **Skills acquisition:** hard skills learned (e.g., financial management and data and technology literacy)
- **Network:** connections to other students, associations, and affiliations

Quantitative evaluation reports measuring the agreed-upon outputs and outcomes in the logic model will be generated every six months for the length of this demonstration project.

Qualitative: Storytelling and the Lived Experience of Social Mobility

When considering the cultural, interpersonal, and relational aspects of social mobility, much of the impact cannot be measured quantitatively. The Contingent will create a new communications and storytelling platform to share stories of the lived experiences of social mobility. Leveraging Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Twitter, and LinkedIn, this new platform will track, measure, and share the impact that this demonstration has on the lives of the students and young professionals in the program within the following categories:

- **The Individual Journey** – sharing the peaks, challenges, breakthrough, and ah-ha moments along the journey
- **The Gap** – sharing the gaps that have been filled and/or have yet to be filled; asking the question, “what statistically would the individual journey have looked like without this intervention?”
- **The System** – sharing the shifts in the systems that occur; asking the big questions, “What do contextual changes look like with a continuously evolving social mobility escalator and what does the alternative path look like for those who do not have access to the system? Are there knock-on, spill-over, or ripple effects (family, community e.g. crime rates, decreased homelessness, increased food security, health, nutrition)?”

This storytelling platform will also be used to benefit future members, students, and young professionals who are making the decision to put their plan into action and join The Social Mobility Project.

Both the quantitative and qualitative measures ultimately feed into the macro-indicators of social mobility, wealth, and inequality across Oregon. When considering the impact of the multiple layers of this project, it will be fair to ask the questions, “Is this investment working? Are lives being changed? How do we know?” An affirmative answer should correlate with the story that is told across the state of Oregon.

Validation Phase

In The Contingent’s formal process of ideation, upon completion of a concept paper, The Contingent undergoes a validation phase. In this phase, our staff will meet with no less than 50 cross-sector leaders in the public, private, and social sectors. The goal of these meetings is four-fold: 1. Ask for and receive critique. 2. Improve concepts upon receiving feedback. 3. Solidify partnerships. 4. Set outcome goals for formal evaluation. 5. Identify investors to fund the demonstration project.

The validation phase will take place between June 15, 2020 and September 15, 2020. If all stakeholders approve of the direction of the Social Mobility Demonstration Project and funding is secured, formal launch of the project will begin in January 2021.

Urgency

In order to see the community and state leaders in Oregon reflect the diverse population of the state in 2040, Oregon must act now. COVID-19 has created an economic environment that will test Generation Z’s social mobility regardless of demographic— not to mention those already with low mobility. We acknowledge that measuring social mobility will require a patient approach to true, systematic change over the long-term, and the ideas presented here suggest The Contingent may face significant challenges to overcome generational entrenchment of the status quo. However, if the Social Mobility Demonstration Project shows promise, Oregon’s society, economy, and overall well-being will experience significant improvements and milestones throughout these 20 years. The Contingent commits to working tirelessly to ensure that Oregon’s young people experience equitable social mobility and that the leadership of Oregon directly reflects the people who live here.

Next Steps

For far too long, we’ve allowed our societal goals to be defined by divisive politics. What has formed is a set of polarities that keep us apart ideologically and economically. When considering the future of Oregon, The Contingent believes that what is needed is more “third way” thinking. We ought not to be defined by “urban vs. rural” or “rich vs. poor.” A rising tide in Oregon can raise all of the boats, but it cannot be assumed that the institutions of education and professional development have a strategy for such a redemptive lift. The Social Mobility

Demonstration Project will swing big to serve Generation Z with the goal of ensuring that social mobility stands against a multi-generational current that has kept families static.

We believe the time to invest in a social mobility system for post-college graduates is now. The result will be the largest longitudinal effort (and study) of its kind in Oregon's history. The future is bright. The future is diverse. The future is now.