

Investing in Evidence to Drive Upward Mobility

Smart investment decisions rely on strong data—especially for investments in people and their opportunities to thrive. That’s why the Constellation Fund and Foundation for Educational Research (FERD) launched CoLab in 2023 to create actionable evidence on program and policy solutions that bolster upward mobility for children and families.

Unfortunately, despite large public programs and significant charitable giving, people’s belief in the American dream is eroding. Fifty-two percent of Americans are unable to save. The share of people who say they have a good chance of improving their standard of living is down to just one in four, a record low.* We need to increase opportunities for people to access well-paying jobs and build wealth.

The problem is a lack of rigorous evidence about what works. Few programs and policies are well-evaluated, and most evaluations only follow outcomes for up to one or two years. We have little understanding of whether and for whom existing programs and policies lead to sustained results. We also have little data on their return on investment (ROI).

COLAB’S APPROACH: EVIDENCE FOR IMPACT

CoLab invests in actionable evidence to inform public and philanthropic funding and community efforts. We do this by advancing data infrastructure, funding independent research, and translating evidence to policy. CoLab funds actionable research nationally while treating Minnesota as its center of gravity.

CoLab doesn’t advance a programmatic or partisan ideology; we focus on outcomes with curiosity and a commitment to population-level upward mobility. We identify potential solutions by listening to poverty-affected communities and policymakers across the political spectrum, we invest in independent research on those solutions, and we connect credible data to decision-making.

RESEARCH INVESTMENT: We fund longitudinal impact evaluations of promising poverty-fighting solutions that measure outcomes for up to 20 years while sharing practical insights along the way using world-class research methodologies. As of 2025, we have awarded over \$10 million in trailblazing research grants.



* “Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2023,” Federal Reserve Board, May 2024; “Americans Lose Faith That Hard Work Leads to Economic Gains, WSJ/NORC Poll Finds,” The Wall Street Journal, Sept. 1, 2025

DATA INVESTMENT: We're working alongside government and community partners to strengthen Minnesota's data ecosystem to build a nation-leading linked data system that researchers and government agencies can use to understand program impacts across public systems while protecting privacy.

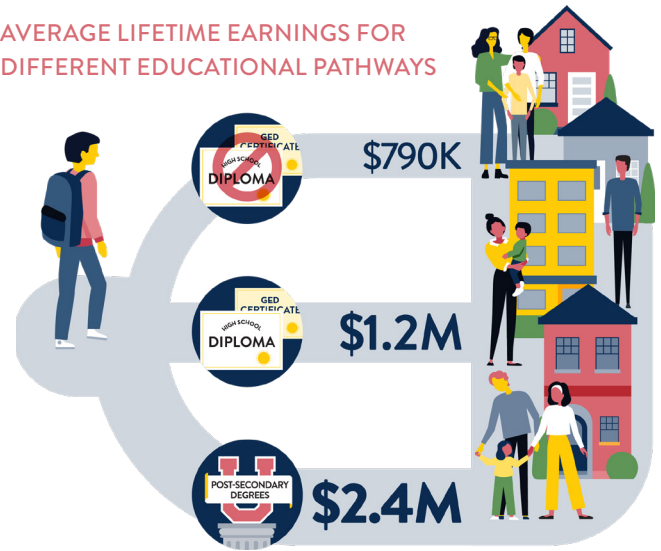
POLICY IMPACT: We collaborate with local, state, and federal policy-makers to identify policy questions that need better data to maximize government effectiveness and efficiency in driving children and young people's upward mobility. We also work to translate research findings into sensible, bipartisan policy action in Minnesota and beyond.

WHY LONGITUDINAL EVALUATION MATTERS

Most poverty-fighting programs have good stories, but anecdotes don't tell us whether programs improve outcomes for most participants and lead to long-term changes. CoLab-funded research answers key questions for driving population-level impact:

- What is the true impact of a program or policy and does it last?
- What solutions maximize ROI?
- Which approaches work best for specific populations or contexts?
- How can programs and policies be improved and scaled?

AVERAGE LIFETIME EARNINGS FOR DIFFERENT EDUCATIONAL PATHWAYS



CURRENT COLAB RESEARCH PRIORITIES



Affordable Housing & Homelessness Prevention



Two-Generational Solutions During Early Childhood



Education & Career Pathways



Income & Wealth-Building

WORLD-CLASS RESEARCH CAN STRENGTHEN COMMUNITIES

Policy-making and philanthropic decisions are complicated; better community listening and stronger data make them more effective. CoLab works to ensure that investments in upward mobility programs are measurably effective for the long-term and efficiently delivered at scale.

WHAT'S NEXT



Strengthen and link public data to illuminate multi-system impacts of programs.



Identify research investment priorities and innovative solutions for evaluation.



Apply evidence to maximize people's well-being, economic mobility, and smart use of public dollars.



Partner with us on longitudinal impact evaluations of promising solutions.

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