



How will the Community Conditions Survey help us serve you?

by: Steven Howland

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You are critical to the work we do in community development. Every interaction is a chance for us to learn what you're experiencing in your work with low- and moderate-income (LMI) communities. While we would like to call or email each of you multiple times a year, our team has its limits and so might your patience. With the **Community Conditions Survey**, however, we can gather insights on a large scale. The survey allows us to identify issues we might miss in one-on-one interactions, and it allows us to track conditions consistently over time.

While the general purpose of the survey has not changed from the now-retired LMI Survey, we intend to link the Community Conditions Survey more closely to our work. We designed the survey to be integrated into our overall mission of "Relationships, Resources, and Research." I asked two team members to share their thoughts on what it means for our work with you.

Relationships and resources

Teesha Miller is assistant vice president of community affairs and manages the community development team. Asked how our team might use the Community Conditions Survey, she noted the context from which this survey emerged.

"The COVID-19 pandemic took a toll on our nation's health and economy and exacerbated existing inequities in low- and moderate-income communities and households. Recovery from the pandemic presents an opportunity to reimagine the systems that contributed to where we are, to emerge even more resilient for the future. The same holds true for the reimagined Community Conditions Survey. The pandemic may be a new phenomenon, but social injustice and financial disenfranchisement are not." - Teesha Miller

Our work is rooted in trying to understand and alleviate barriers to prosperity faced by LMI populations. When we understand the conditions in communities, Miller said, we can work to alleviate those barriers:

"The Community Conditions Survey will provide the community development team at the Kansas City Fed the data we need to do what we do best: convene stakeholders, inform policy and generate transformative ideas. The Community Conditions

Survey will encourage courageous innovation toward solving age-old problems to alter forever the financial future of the most vulnerable populations and communities we serve.” – Teesha Miller

I also asked Steve Shepelwich how he might use the survey data in his work as a community development advisor. He envisions the information being useful across a broad range of his work.

“Understanding local needs, resources and opportunities is key to ensure programs are effective in making a lasting difference. The Community Conditions Survey will provide targeted, actionable information that can be put to many uses by community leaders, policymakers and program developers. The survey data will help me in targeting my outreach activities and adjusting programming to meet the needs of the communities I work with. With close to real-time data and analysis from contacts on the front lines of work in low- and moderate-income communities, the survey provides a new perspective and context to complement more traditional data sources.” – Steve Shepelwich

That understanding he would gain from the survey data extends to the work he does with community members like you:

“When I engage with community members, I know I will be able to use the survey data to spark new conversations, help organizations inform their problem statements and program design choices, and support funding proposals.” – Steve Shepelwich

Research

As the research lead for our team, I have the responsibility of keeping our community development team and Bank president informed about the conditions of LMI populations. What you tell us through the Community Conditions Survey will inform our Bank president and community development team of general conditions, along with specific areas they may want to reach out to, emerging issues, and areas where things are going well. Additionally, the information you provide is a critical starting point for analyzing some of the long-standing barriers to prosperity faced by LMI populations.

An exciting development this year is that for the first time, your answers will help inform part of the [Beige Book](#). The Beige Book is a Federal Reserve System publication about current economic conditions across the 12 Federal Reserve Districts. It characterizes regional economic conditions and prospects based on a variety of mostly qualitative information, gathered directly from each District’s sources. The Fed publishes a Beige Book eight times each year.

With the [Federal Reserve System changes referred to in this article](#), the Federal Reserve wanted to include the voices of LMI communities when making monetary policy decisions. The Beige Book provides that opportunity. The data you provide us will go a long way to helping determine the best strategy for setting interest rates, stabilizing prices and ensuring the continued

flow of money in the economy.

We look forward to your [participation in the survey](#). And if you have any questions or comments about the Community Conditions Survey, please reach out to me.

Author



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Steven Howland is senior researcher in the community development department of the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City. Howland performs analyses on various surveys, such as the Community Conditions Survey, and those at the System level to provide insight on the conditions of LMI communities in the Kansas City District. He also conducts independent research that gives more insight into issues affecting LMI communities. Howland joined the Kansas City Fed in August 2020 after a career as a college instructor and researcher. Howland has undergraduate and graduate degrees in urban and environmental planning from Arizona State University and has a doctorate in urban studies from Portland State University. Howland enjoys reading both academic works and sci-fi/fantasy novels as well as playing video and board games. Highlights of his work include: [“I should have moved somewhere else’: The impacts of gentrification on transportation and social support for Black working-poor families in Portland, Oregon”](#) [“Evictions and the pandemic economy in the Tenth District”](#) To learn more about Steven: [Howland researches issues facing disadvantaged populations](#) - Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City **About the Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City** The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City is one of 12 regional Reserve Banks that, along with the Board of Governors in Washington, D.C., make up our nation's central bank. We work in the public's interest by supporting economic and financial stability. The Kansas City Fed's territory includes Colorado, Kansas, western Missouri, Nebraska, northern New Mexico, Oklahoma and Wyoming. Our headquarters is in Kansas City, with branch offices in Denver, Omaha and Oklahoma City. The Kansas City Fed Community Development Department promotes economic development and public understanding that leads to progress for lower-income individuals and communities. Our focus areas include community development investments, digital inclusion, small business / entrepreneurship, and workforce development.

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