

# Charlottesville



## Economic Mobility & Opportunity (EMO)

***National Learning, Competitive Selection, and Grant-Funded Capacity Building***

January 19, 2026, City Council Session | Presented by Ashley Reynolds Marshall, Chief Prosperity Officer

# Why Economic Mobility & Opportunity (EMO)

**Economic Mobility & Opportunity** focuses on whether residents can move from instability to stability and opportunity. EMO looks at:

- ✓ Income and asset stability
- ✓ Access to workforce opportunities
- ✓ Housing and childcare affordability
- ✓ Financial security and resilience

## Local context:

- Median personal earnings in Charlottesville are **\$38,285**, well below surrounding Albemarle County (**\$51,922**) and the Commonwealth (**\$49,405**)<sup>1</sup>
- **27% of Charlottesville families** do not earn enough to meet their basic needs, even when working<sup>2</sup>

These data points help explain why economic mobility has emerged as a strategic priority **aligned with Council's Economic Prosperity goals**.

### Sources:

<sup>1</sup> City of Charlottesville Community Wellbeing Profile (UVA Center for Community Partnerships, 2025)

<sup>2</sup> Orange Dot Report 6.0 (UVA Equity Center & Network2Work@PVCC, 2024)

# EMO Work Began in 2024

**National Learning → Local Evidence → Capacity Gap Identified**

- **Longstanding local focus:** The City has invested for years in community financial well-being, including initiatives such as **Bank On Charlottesville** and the creation of the **Downtown Job Center** to provide more accessible support for job seekers and employers
- **May 2024:** Charlottesville selected through a competitive process into ICMA's Economic Mobility & Opportunity (EMO) Cohort
- **2024–early 2025:** City leadership participated in national convenings, technical assistance, and required reporting

***Key takeaway:*** *The EMO Cohort built on longstanding local efforts and existing data, and confirmed that Charlottesville lacked dedicated, cross-departmental capacity to move from analysis and individual programs to coordinated implementation.*

**Sources:**

*City of Charlottesville Community Wellbeing Profile (2025); Orange Dot Report 6.0 (2024)*

# What the ICMA EMO Cohort Is

## **A Structured National Learning and Analysis Program**

The ICMA EMO Cohort provided:

- Peer learning with selected local governments nationwide
- Technical assistance and coaching
- Grant funding for analysis and planning activities
- Required reporting and deliverables

**Important clarification:** The cohort is intentionally designed for *learning and assessment*—not program implementation.

# What the City Did During the Cohort

## Foundational Work (Not Program Delivery)

During the EMO Cohort, the City:

- Analyzed income and self-sufficiency data showing that **approximately \$60,000/year** is required for a typical family to meet basic needs locally<sup>2</sup>
- Reviewed evidence that **most struggling families are working full-time**, but wages do not meet costs<sup>3</sup>
- Examined disparities in economic security by race and geography
- Identified gaps in coordination across existing programs and partners

**Outcome:** Clear identification of a structural capacity gap—no dedicated role to align, coordinate, and advance EMO work.

### Sources:

<sup>2</sup> *Orange Dot Report 6.0 (2024)*

<sup>3</sup> *Orange Dot Report 6.0, Undervalued Labor section (2024)*

# Why Additional Capacity Was Needed

## Evidence + Strategic Alignment

- Local data show that economic insecurity persists even in a high-growth, high-education city
- **Nearly 1 in 4 Charlottesville families** struggle to meet basic needs despite employment<sup>2</sup>
- These challenges span housing, workforce, childcare, and income stability—crossing departmental lines

**Council alignment:** City Council's Strategic Plan identifies **Economic Prosperity** as a core outcome area, calling for coordinated approaches that improve residents' ability to thrive.

**Conclusion:** A time-limited, grant-funded role provides focused capacity to advance Council's Economic Prosperity goals by translating analysis into coordinated, cross-departmental action.

**Source:**

*Orange Dot Report 6.0 (2024)*

# Applying for the EMO Special Assistant

## Competitive National Opportunity

- ICMA invited cities to apply for an **Economic Mobility & Opportunity Special Assistant (EMO SA) in Fall of 2025**
- Applications were open and competitive, with eligibility extended to cities that met program criteria
- Applications evaluated based on:
  - Demonstrated community need
  - Organizational readiness
  - Executive leadership commitment



### Economic Mobility and Opportunity at ICMA

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ICMA is thrilled to announce the sixteen sites selected for the Economic Mobility and Opportunity (#EMO) Special Assistants Program!

- 📍 [City of Beaumont, TX](#)
- 📍 [City of Charlottesville, VA](#)
- 📍 [City of Clarkston, GA](#)
- 📍 [City of Dubuque, Iowa](#)
- 📍 [City of Fayetteville, North Carolina](#)
- 📍 [City of Gainesville, FL](#)
- 📍 [City of Greenfield, California](#)
- 📍 [Kalamazoo County Government, MI](#)
- 📍 [City of Morgan Hill, CA](#)
- 📍 [City of Newport, Oregon](#)
- 📍 [City of Rochester, MN](#)
- 📍 [San Juan County Utah Government](#)
- 📍 [City of Staunton, Virginia Local Government](#)
- 📍 [Taos County Government, NM](#)
- 📍 [City of Thomasville, NC](#)
- 📍 [VT EMO Coalition \(City of Essex Junction, Town of Shelburne, Vermont , City of South Burlington, City of Winooski, Vermont\)](#)



These mid-sized **#LocalGovernments** have committed to advancing **#EconomicMobility** for all residents by addressing critical local challenges—including housing affordability, workforce development, and financial empowerment.

At each site, a senior-level champion will work with executive leadership to coordinate EMO initiatives and implement a community-informed workplan. ICMA, along with our partners, will support these efforts through tailored training, coaching, and strategic guidance.

As ICMA's CEO/ED [Julia Novak](#) notes: "This is a tremendous opportunity to move the needle on local priorities over the next two-plus years. We look forward to seeing how local governments across the country use these funds to develop innovative solutions that address significant issues in their communities."

# Funding the EMO Special Assistant

## Grant-Funded Capacity Building

- Approximately **\$350,000+ in external grant funding** over 30 months
- Funding provided through ICMA with support from the Gates Foundation
- Supports salary, training, and implementation activities

***Key point:*** *This role is funded primarily through external grant dollars, not new general fund spending.*

# Hiring the EMO Special Assistant

## Transparent, Competitive Process

- Position publicly advertised by the City and ICMA
- Job description reviewed and approved by ICMA to ensure alignment with program requirements
- Open, competitive recruitment
- Multiple qualified candidates interviewed
- Final candidate selected through standard City hiring practices

ICMA reviewed the process and finalists to ensure compliance with grant and program requirements.



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#### Tuesday Local Government Job Roundup ☀

The Economic Mobility and Opportunity (EMO) Special Assistants Program is live, and each Tuesday we'll bring you up to speed on the most recent Special Assistant job openings in communities across the country. If you're eager to make a difference through **#PublicService**, experienced in local issue problem solving, and skilled in collaboration and leadership, these opportunities are for you.

📍 Today's roundup features jobs from

- Gainesville, FL is hiring for an Economic Mobility Program Manager:  
<https://lnkd.in/eXnxHUFH>

- Dubuque, IA is hiring for an Economic Mobility and Opportunity Special Assistant:<https://lnkd.in/exBJ6c-v>

- Fayetteville, NC is hiring for an Economic Mobility Special Projects Officer:  
<https://lnkd.in/eaY-tyzH>

- Charlottesville, VA is hiring for an Economic Mobility Officer:  
<https://lnkd.in/e8Y-mad4>



### Economic Mobility Officer (Grant Funded)



Salary	Depends on Qualifications	Location ⓘ	Charlottesville (22902), VA
Job Type	Limited Term Appointment	Job Number	251000011
Department	City Manager's Office	Division	City Manager's Office
Opening Date	10/14/2025	Closing Date	11/5/2025 5:00 PM Eastern
Bargaining Unit	N/A		



# What the EMO Special Assistant Will Do

## ICMA-Defined Role and Scope

Per ICMA program requirements, the EMO Special Assistant will:

- Report directly to executive leadership
- Lead a **community-engaged co-design process** with residents, partners, and stakeholders
- Identify **strategic economic mobility priorities** informed by local data and lived experience
- Develop a **tailored, actionable implementation plan** during their 2+ year tenure
- This work focuses on planning and design, not independent policy or program implementation.

ICMA will provide ongoing coaching, training, and customized technical assistance to support this work.

**Source:**

*ICMA EMO Special Assistants Program – Host Community RFA (2025)*

# What Comes Next

## Time-Limited, Grant-Funded Phases

- **Phase 1: Co-Design & Priority Setting**  
Community engagement and strategy development
- **Phase 2: Implementation Planning**  
Alignment of departments, partners, and resources around agreed priorities
- **Phase 3: Sustainability Planning**  
Identify pathways to continue effective strategies beyond the grant period

This structure ensures clarity, accountability, and appropriate use of grant funding.

# A Deliberate Journey

**A Deliberate Journey:** Charlottesville's Economic Mobility & Opportunity (EMO) work began in **2024** through a national learning cohort and has progressed intentionally.

**Structure and Grant Funding:** The City followed a structured national process, resulting in **\$75,000** in grant support for the ICMA EMO Cohort and **\$350,000+** in grant funding for the EMO Special Assistant.

**Focused, Time-Limited Capacity:** The EMO Special Assistant is a **grant-funded, time-limited role** created to support a defined body of work.

**Transparent Hiring:** The position was publicly advertised and filled through a **competitive and transparent hiring process**.

**Looking Ahead:** This role supports the City's work to advance Council's **Economic Prosperity Strategic Outcome Area** and, through community-engaged co-design, better understand what residents need not only to survive, but to thrive in Charlottesville.