

# A TIME FOR ACTION



Mobilizing Philanthropic Support  
for Boys and Young Men of Color

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | JUNE 2014**



“ Solutions go beyond specific programs; they come from healing whole systems.”

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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PolicyLink for their work to shed light on the rich diversity of place-based initiatives across the country. Although many of these efforts are in an early stage of development, they hold great promise for what can be accomplished. Special thanks to Eric Braxton of the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing, Carmen Iñiguez of the Movement Strategy Center, and Reggie Moore

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# A TIME FOR ACTION

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We all shape the world into which our children are born and nurtured. Their life chances are determined by their families, the communities where they play and grow up, the schools where they learn, the jobs where they earn their first paychecks, and the images they see of themselves in books, magazines, movies, and on television. We are responsible for cultivating their curiosity and talents—and for removing the roadblocks that stand in their way so they may reach their full potential.

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“Our vision of opportunity will benefit all Americans, but it will not be achieved by a one-size-fits-all approach.”

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Young men and boys who are Black, Latino, Native American, and Asian and Pacific Islander are among the fastest-growing segments of our population, representing nearly half of males under age 18 in 2012.<sup>1</sup> Their contributions indelibly shape the vitality, prosperity, resilience, and safety of our nation. They willingly put their lives on the line defending our country.<sup>2</sup> They embody the American entrepreneurial spirit by starting new businesses at high rates.<sup>3</sup> Without their talents and skills in the arts, sciences, engineering, public service, and athletics, the American economic and cultural landscape would be unrecognizable.

Yet for all their achievements and promise, boys and young men of color hold a curious place in American society. A long history of laws and prejudices has kept their families out of prosperous neighborhoods, schools, and careers. They are more likely than their peers to attend schools that have fewer experienced educators and that lack resources such as libraries, science labs, athletic programs, and the arts as well as guidance counselors and health services.<sup>4</sup> They are not only less likely to emerge from high school prepared for college but are also less able to compete for good jobs or to access startup capital to build

businesses.<sup>5</sup> They are more likely to be irrationally perceived as threats instead of as sources of inspiration and hope. They are often targets of violence and punishment. In some places they face discriminatory school discipline, policing, and sentencing practices. And most shamefully, and unjustifiably, they suffer intolerably high levels of incarceration and immigrant detention.<sup>6</sup>

We cannot reach our full moral and economic potential as a country if we do not change this trajectory. To do so, we need not change our young people so much as change the way we engage and support them. We must invest human and financial capital in their growth and development and alter the damaging narratives that constrain them.

Part of what makes dismantling barriers for boys and young men of color so challenging is that the obstacles can be difficult to see. Many of them are rooted deeply in our institutions and in the ways in which we think and interact. Most people may no longer make conscious decisions to marginalize and exclude, but cognitive science reveals that “implicit bias” deep below our level of consciousness drives how we interact with others.<sup>7</sup> Ominous media images give vivid

life to these unconscious beliefs. Boys and young men of color are often portrayed as dangerous, threatening, and less deserving of opportunities, supports, and chances for redemption. These hidden dynamics conspire to overshadow the contributions boys and young men of color make every day.

In recent decades young people of color, their families, and their communities have made massive strides in dismantling the barriers to opportunity in our country. Over the years, the philanthropic sector has supported these efforts, focusing initially on supporting Black males but increasingly on helping

boys and young men of color from diverse racial and ethnic groups as well as the girls and young women of color with whom their lives are inextricably linked.<sup>8</sup>

It is our hope that we now mark another milestone for that work. In early 2014, our eleven foundations had more than \$150 million in active commitments toward improving the life chances of boys and young men of color—both in grantmaking directly focused on boys and young men of color as well as strategies that significantly impact them. Countless numbers of our colleagues in philanthropy have invested many millions more. We drew upon these efforts on

February 27, 2014, when we came together to launch a coordinated strategy to remove the barriers that constrain the life prospects of boys and young men of color. Joining in the spirit of President Barack Obama's *My Brother's Keeper* initiative, we commissioned research to identify ways to align the efforts of the public and private sectors on key policy and programmatic recommendations, comprehensive community-based initiatives, and strategies to replace the false and deficit-based narratives about our young men. We are pleased to provide this overview of what we have learned to date, as well as some preliminary recommendations for collective action.



# AUDACIOUS GOALS, BOLD SOLUTIONS

We are driven by a shared vision for all people—to be healthy, well-educated, economically prosperous, and happy—regardless of our race, ethnicity, or gender. Many young people of color face similar challenges and opportunities, while at the same time boys from Black, Latino, Native American, and Asian and Pacific Islander communities each have distinct experiences rooted in diverse cultural and historical contexts that give rise to different assets and needs. Our vision of opportunity will benefit all Americans, but it will not be achieved by a one-size-fits-all approach. Rather, the unique needs and assets of various groups of young people must inform the solutions we develop.

Research tells us that there are steps we can take to tackle the specific obstacles facing boys and young men of color. We can improve school discipline policies and train educators in implicit bias as well as culturally responsive curriculum and teaching methods. We can revisit housing and social service policies to ensure boys and young men of color have a safe and warm place to call home. We can connect boys and men of color to jobs, career networks and promising entrepreneurial opportunities. And we can address gaps in data and knowledge that limit our ability to understand and address the unique needs of different populations of boys and men of color, not to mention women and girls of color whose voices are too often omitted from public discourse.

To keep boys and young men of color out of the juvenile and criminal justice systems, we can reform policing practices and employ restorative practices in schools and communities that heal rather than punish children for ordinary adolescent mistakes. When young people do find themselves in the justice system, we can do more to provide equitable access to legal counsel and support services, helping them to recognize and tap into their own talents and potential as a means of redemption. We can not only reform drug-sentencing and immigrant detention and deportation policies but also train police and prosecutors to be aware of how racial bias can shape their responses and develop tools to limit the impact of that bias on discretionary decisions.

These strategies reach into the very heart of who we are as a nation, and who we want to be. We will know we have succeeded in achieving our vision when all children and youth—including boys and young men of color—are developmentally on track by age five and reading on grade level in elementary school; when they have finished middle school on track for high school graduation, and completed their high school studies by age 18; when they have achieved a post-secondary degree by age 25 and are on the pathway to rewarding careers and entrepreneurial opportunities; and when they are no longer overrepresented in the justice system.<sup>10</sup>

Our young men cannot do this alone. As leaders of America's philanthropic institutions, we are proudly aligning our efforts to realize this vision. This means acknowledging our collective failure as a nation to adequately address these issues; shedding the deficit-based lens that often is used to view these young men and to blame them when they face limited choices; taking a critical look at how philanthropy operates with its grantees and within their communities; and re-visioning how we influence and interact with the social and government systems that profoundly impact the lives of all children and adults. It means making bold, big bets on what we can achieve together, with a sense of urgency but also with the patience to ensure our efforts are sustained and focused over the long haul.

Today, we call on our colleagues in philanthropy, community leaders, the business community, non-profit organizations, faith leaders, community-based organizations, and federal, state, local, and tribal governments to join us to achieve the following goals:

“I am deeply inspired by my community. They keep me grounded and help me really understand what to do to advocate with them.”

- Anonymous youth member – RYSE Center, Richmond, CA



1

**All boys and young men of color are healthy—socially, emotionally, mentally, behaviorally, and physically.**

Healthy development is the cornerstone of a fair chance in life. To ensure that all boys and young men of color grow up with the developmental supports they need, we must:

- Strengthen family financial well-being, health, stability, and access to safe and opportunity-rich neighborhoods
- Advance women’s economic security and rights, impacting the many boys and young men of color living in households led by women
- Promote comprehensive and targeted health interventions for boys and young men of color, including regular access to mental health and information about sexual health and reproductive rights
- Reduce exposure to violence and trauma, in all forms from physical to emotional, which results in unhealthy levels of “toxic stress” over prolonged periods of time across generations, and expand the availability of supports that promote resilience and healing
- Dismantle gender stereotypes, assumptions, and perceptions that limit boys’ aspirations and poisons their interactions with others



2

**All boys and young men of color are taught in rigorous, effective, culturally relevant, engaging, and supportive school environments.**

Achieving educational excellence requires us to dramatically improve how we foster a natural hunger for learning among boys and young men of color and how we support them should they have difficulty in school. To create stimulating and supportive environments for learning in schools, we must:

- Enhance access to rigorous and culturally responsive curriculum and teaching
- Reduce school exclusion and student disengagement
- Connect students with comprehensive services to ensure their success





3

**All boys and young men of color graduate from high school and postsecondary education prepared for success in their careers.**

Building a foundation for future success will require dramatically improving access to education and training that is aligned with the college and career pathways of both today and the future. It also requires improving the quality of jobs and economic opportunities available to young men of color. We must:

- Promote workforce preparation and education to ensure college and career readiness
- Connect—and reconnect—young men to quality post-secondary education, to entrepreneurial opportunities to build wealth, and to good jobs
- Confront all forms of discrimination in hiring and employment practices



4

**Boys and young men of color’s exposure to harm from the juvenile and criminal justice systems is dramatically reduced.**

Boys and young men of color experience higher rates of police interaction, arrest, juvenile detention, and incarceration than their white counterparts, despite evidence that they do not necessarily engage in criminal acts more frequently than others; for example, Black adolescents have lower rates of substance use compared with white youth, but higher rates of justice involvement on drug charges.<sup>11</sup> To reduce unnecessary involvement in the justice system and to support successful reintegration into communities after arrest or incarceration, we must:

- Change law enforcement and immigration enforcement policies that disproportionately target communities of color
- Reassess laws that criminalize minor offenses and nonviolent crimes such as drug offenses that are disproportionately enforced in communities of color

- Develop and scale preventive strategies that reduce initial engagement with the juvenile justice system and that also offer other beneficial effects for entire families
- Use juvenile detention and adult incarceration as steps of last resort, in recognition of their limited restorative value and the severe disruption they cause to individuals and families
- Reduce reliance on jails and prisons and re-direct funds to community based services and treatment
- Promote rehabilitative and restorative practices, including a public health approach to drug addiction and treatment
- Remove barriers and provide supports to people leaving jail and prison
- Expand violence reduction and prevention efforts and enhance public safety, especially in ways that do not criminalize the very young people we aim to help



**Our vision for change will require a sustained commitment across multiple years in the following core strategies:**



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### **Recognizing and Promoting Leadership of Boys and Young Men of Color in their Communities**

We must promote youth organizing, empowerment, and authentic leadership as critical components of any strategy to improve life outcomes for boys and young men of color. Youth of color are not passive recipients of adversity; instead, they have consistently shown that they understand the sources of the challenges they face, and they bring a wealth of insights and ideas about how to create the future they want to see. Youth organizing also has demonstrated that young people have the capacity to lead significant reforms at the local, state, and national levels. The process of doing so fosters a sense of personal agency that has far-reaching impacts on young people's lives.<sup>12</sup> Our role should be to listen—to learn from them and to facilitate their participation in community and public institutions.



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### **Acknowledging and Fostering Accurate and Holistic Narratives For, and About, Boys and Young Men of Color**

We must advance a new understanding of the value of all human beings in our society. To do so, we will tell the truth about the achievements of boys and young men of color, offering an affirmative vision of individual, family, and community strengths, correcting the public record when necessary, and emphasizing how the success of our sons and brothers is intertwined in our nation's well-being as a whole. Our work will lift up the voices of young men of color, invest in their development and leadership, and ensure honest reflections of their experiences in mainstream media. We also will support tools to minimize implicit bias and seek accountability by the media, local government systems, and across all sectors regarding how we depict and engage boys and young men of color. These efforts will transform our understanding of our young men of color and their understanding of themselves, transcending commonly-held stereotypes about race, gender, and masculinity.



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### **Expanding Place-Based Efforts to Support Boys & Young Men of Color**

We believe that change must happen at multiple levels but most powerfully in the places and communities where boys and young men of color live. We will support efforts rooted in communities that create a space to develop solutions and mobilize local resources, people, policies, and institutions toward shared goals for boys and men of color, their families, and their communities. Emerging projects across the country offer powerful examples of how place-based strategies to improve outcomes for boys and young men of color can drive policy and systems change as well as foster sustained community action towards shared goals.



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### **Building a Pipeline of Innovation, Data and Research to Improve Life Outcomes for Boys and Young Men of Color**

We will harness the tools of research, policy assessment, and data analysis to better understand the unique needs and assets of boys and young men of color and also to explore the similarities and differences in dynamics facing Black, Latino, Native American, and Asian and Pacific Islander communities and sub-populations therein. We will also better understand the role of factors such as national origin, gender, documentation status, and language proficiency. We will use research to support innovation and testing of new strategies and policy solutions to address the diverse needs of boys and young men of color, and we will push governments at all levels to collect and report data disaggregated by gender and racial and ethnic subgroups and ensure their responsiveness to the disparities revealed.

# INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT BOYS & YOUNG MEN OF COLOR

Our eleven foundations worked in parallel to the White House's *My Brother's Keeper* initiative to identify ways that we might work collectively and in concert with the public sector to advance achievement and opportunity for boys and young men of color. At the end of the initial 90-day period following the launch of *My Brother's Keeper*, we announced several partnerships that stemmed from this effort, some of which are directly targeted toward boys and young men of color and others which are geared toward reforming the systems with which boys and young men of color most often come into contact. These are first steps in what will be long-standing commitments from these and other funders.

## **Making All Communities Places of Opportunity**

Building on experience and lessons learned from existing programs, the Open Society Foundations, Bloomberg Philanthropies, Ford Foundation, The California Endowment, Annie E. Casey Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation are launching a range of new focused efforts to assist local actors, from government officials to community stakeholders, in implementing effective local, systemic, and comprehensive strategies to support and expand opportunities for boys and young men of color. The initial investment of over \$21 million is intended to catalyze matching funds from other national and community foundations, corporations, and public-private

partnerships to build on existing local efforts and infrastructure that offer promise of success. These aligned efforts intend to provide technical assistance, capacity building, and financial support to help communities develop and/or expand strategies explicitly aimed at reducing disparities and improving life outcomes for boys and young men of color. We will also promote shared learning among the sponsoring foundations and local partners, as well as analysis to strengthen existing efforts across the country, and to ensure that future policies and programs focused on community improvement are designed to be more effective at addressing the needs and barriers facing boys and young men of color.

## **Creating Safe, Supportive and Engaging Learning Environments in All Schools**

Students cannot learn when they do not feel safe, or when they are pushed out of school for minor misbehaviors, such as coming to school late or violating their school's dress code. Children of color, and boys in particular, are often disciplined more harshly than their white peers, even when engaging in the same behavior. In response to a rising tide of reform to address these issues, The Atlantic Philanthropies, The California Endowment, Ford Foundation, Open Society Foundations, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation are committing to an unprecedented partnership to accelerate efforts to reduce suspensions, expulsions, school-

based arrests, and juvenile court-referrals in our nation's elementary and secondary public schools and pre-school settings. This effort is intended to spur further efforts by the public and private sectors to reduce racial disparities in discipline and to promote holistic and data-driven strategies to improve the climate for learning in schools. With a collective investment of over \$55 million over the next three years alone, our foundations will coordinate our individual foundation-giving, including a final infusion of resources from The Atlantic Philanthropies, to resource grassroots organizing and advocacy for policy change, and to promote systems reform to create safe, engaging, and academically rigorous environments for learning.

## **Rethinking Justice for Young Adults**

Reliance on the juvenile and criminal justice systems locks too many young men and boys of color out of opportunity before they fully have a chance to start on the path to adulthood. Yet a growing understanding of brain science is deepening our understanding of developmentally-appropriate strategies that can reduce the harm young people experience from justice system exposure. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, The Atlantic Philanthropies, The California Endowment, Ford Foundation, Open Society Foundations, and W.K. Kellogg Foundation will invest

over \$81 million in the coming years in efforts to spur reforms to the criminal and juvenile justice systems. Going forward, we will work collaboratively to support the kinds of comprehensive reforms needed to dramatically reduce racial and ethnic disparities in, and the overall use of, confinement for boys and young men.

### **Elevating New Narratives for Boys and Men of Color**

The historic belief in a hierarchy of human value is embodied in today's projected images, stories, and perceptions about people of color, and that belief has had a disproportionately destructive impact on communities and children of color. Building on current efforts, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, The California Endowment, Ford Foundation, John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, Open Society Foundations, Annie E. Casey Foundation, and The Atlantic Philanthropies will invest more than \$26 million collaboratively to lift up positive narratives that affirm the value of all human beings, including boys and men of color, and to

minimize the effect of implicit bias. We will work with entities such as print, broadcast, and social media, as well as professional associations of journalists, writers, publishers, editors and producers. We will also align our support for research and opportunities to engage boys and men of color in affirming and creating positive narratives about their own lives.

### **Investing in Field-Building, Leadership Development, and Movement-Building**

The many strong advocates, activists, researchers, and program administrators working within communities to advance the interests of boys and young men of color are some of our nation's most important innovators. Experience suggests that they are most impactful when they are themselves supported in developing and implementing promising approaches. In response to the growing need for sustained infrastructure for the network of Black male achievement-focused organizations, the Open Society Foundations, The California

Endowment, Ford Foundation, The Skillman Foundation, Casey Family Programs, and other funders are providing a seed investment of over \$11 million to spin off the Campaign for Black Male Achievement (CBMA) as an independent entity. Since its inception in 2008, CBMA has been a leading force supporting and strengthening the capacity of local leaders and organizations focused on improving the life outcomes of Black men and boys. With this spinoff, CBMA will have a new platform to serve as a critical intermediary strengthening the capacity of leaders, promoting field activities, and expanding the network of those committed to this cause and, in turn, strengthening organizations' impact and effectiveness. The success of CBMA is intended to serve as a model for future efforts to provide capacity building and network infrastructure to organizations supporting boys and men from Latino, Native American, and Asian Pacific Islander communities, each of which has unique needs and valuable organizations devoted to their cause.

## **END NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Census Bureau Population Estimates, 2012 Vintage.

<sup>2</sup> The U.S. Army is the largest unit in the U.S. Armed Forces. In 2012 the ethnic breakdown of the Army enlisted force was as follows: 22% Black 13% Hispanic, 3% Asian Pacific Islander, 55% Caucasian. <http://www.usarec.army.mil/support/faqs.htm#demo>

<sup>3</sup> Fairlie, R. W. "Kauffman Index of Entrepreneurial Activity." Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation: April 2014. [http://www.kauffman.org/~media/kauffman\\_org/research%20reports%20and%20covers/2014/04/kiea\\_2014\\_report.pdf](http://www.kauffman.org/~media/kauffman_org/research%20reports%20and%20covers/2014/04/kiea_2014_report.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights. "Data Snapshot: School Discipline. Issue Brief No. 1." March 2014. <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/crdc-discipline-snapshot.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Building a GradNation: The Progress and Challenge of Ending the High School Dropout Epidemic. April 2014. <http://gradnation.org/resource/building-gradnation-progress-and-challenge-ending-high-school-dropout-epidemic-2014>

<sup>6</sup> Alexander, M. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. New York: The New Press. 2012.

<sup>7</sup> American Values Institute. "What is Implicit Bias?" August 2009. [http://www.americanvaluesinstitute.org/?page\\_id=14](http://www.americanvaluesinstitute.org/?page_id=14)

<sup>8</sup> Martinez, T. E., S. J. Colby and L. Quay. "Minding the Gap: Strategic Philanthropy and the Crisis Among Black Men and Boys" in Christopher Edley Jr. and Jorge Ruiz de Velasco, eds., *Changing Places*. Berkeley: University of California Press. 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Powell, John A. "Post-Racialism or Targeted Universalism?" *Denver University Law Review* Vol. 86. 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Association of Black Foundation Executives and M. McDaniels. "Exceeding Expectations: A Shared Vision for Impact and Definition of Success for Black Men and Boys, Presentation to ABFE's Learning and Action Network". April 2014.

<sup>11</sup> Johnston, L.D., P.M. O'Malley, J.G. Bachman and J.E. Schulenberg. "Demographic Subgroup Trends among Adolescents for Fifty-One Classes of Licit and Illicit Drugs, 1975–2012." *Monitoring the Future Occasional Paper 79*. Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan. 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Shah, S. (2010). *Building Transformative Youth Leadership: Data on the Impacts of Youth Organizing*. New York: Funders Collaborative on Youth Organizing. 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Shah, S. and G. Sato. "Building a Beloved Community: Strengthening the Field of Black Male Achievement." *The Foundation Center*. May 2014.

<sup>14</sup> Martinez et al.

# LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In the coming months we will continue to share scholarly research, emerging and innovative practices, and our recommendations for how government, corporate leaders, nonprofit groups, and the philanthropic community can work together to improve outcomes for boys and young men of color. We will also pursue opportunities for additional private sector partnerships as well as public-private partnerships in which government entities at the local, state, tribal, and federal levels play key roles in improving the policies and systems that disproportionately impact boys and young men of color and their families.

In taking on these challenges, we understand full well that our foundations cannot succeed alone. Many of our foundations are members of the Executives' Alliance to Expand Opportunities for Boys and Men of Color—a

network of national, regional, and community foundations focused on supporting boys and young men of color. We are working closely with our colleagues in philanthropy and in communities who will join us in these and future efforts.<sup>13</sup>

Solutions go beyond specific programs; they come from healing whole systems.<sup>14</sup> While the complex web of challenges facing boys and young men of color will take time to overcome, we welcome the persistence and hard work needed to make meaningful change. Our targeted approaches require reforming and strengthening entire institutions and systems; so young people of all races, genders, and ethnicities will benefit, thereby strengthening our nation as a whole. We stand alongside young people and their families in our commitment to these continuing efforts until this vision becomes a reality.



“It’s good because the elders have wisdom, and they share their past and the mistakes they’ve made to help us not to go down those paths. It’s also good when we just do [healing circles] with our youth, because we can confide in each other, relate to each other. You let all the negative out. It’s like a good energy. You let all the positive in.”

— Jesse Esparza, 18, youth mentor and policy activist, Stockton, California





THE ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION



The California Endowment



KAPOR CENTER FOR SOCIAL IMPACT



Robert Wood Johnson Foundation

The ATLANTIC Philanthropies



FORD FOUNDATION

THE NATHAN CUMMINGS FOUNDATION



W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

Bloomberg Philanthropies



Knight Foundation



OPEN SOCIETY FOUNDATIONS