



Fathers Families & Healthy Communities

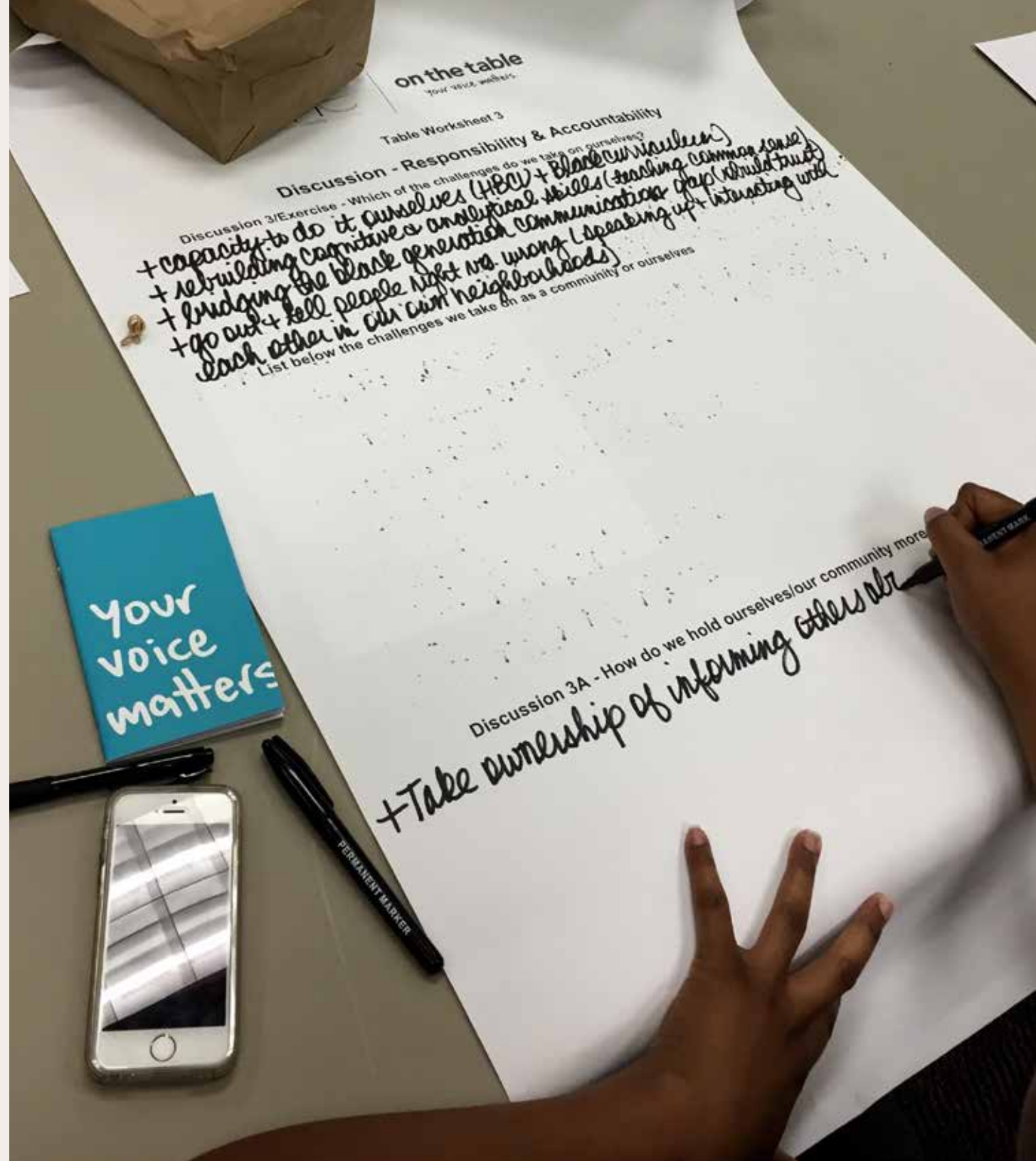
Report on

CHICAGO BLACK MEN & BOYS » COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Advancing Safe and Healthy Families in Our Community

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INTRODUCTION

Black men and boys exist in an ecological context in which they play an essential role in nurturing, serving and securing their families and communities as parents and fathers, grandfathers, sons, brothers, and uncles. Families and communities are the vital social infrastructure upon which the hopes, dreams and possibilities of men and boys rests. However, historically defined inequalities impact families and communities and contour the opportunity structures for Black men and boys, as well as Black women and girls in both distinctly similar and different ways. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory posits that the intersecting influences of familial relationships, interactions with community institutions, economic factors, the political environment, and governmental actions and policies, as well as public perceptions all contribute to shaping outcomes for individuals and groups. Bronfenbrenner argues for researchers, service providers, policy makers and the like to consider these different layers and factors when seeking to understand and address the complex web of influences of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1998). Engaging with community, corporate and civic, governmental, and educational stakeholders is essential to better understand the multiple sets of influences, barriers and opportunity structures that have import for the sustained success of Black men and boys. In so doing, we more accurately observe the array of intersecting ecological factors that influence, and often determine, the success that an individual or group of individuals may experience. The operationalization of racism at the individual, institutional and community levels further complicates and exacerbates the inequalities experience by Black men and boys in profound and persistent ways, thus undermining the life chances of Black men and boys, as well as Black community members as a whole. Therefore, understanding the complexities of structural racism

is essential to constructing strategies for mitigating inequality and clearing pathways for success.

Given these intersections and that structural racism has permeated the social and institutional fabric of America, particularly in highly segregated cities like Chicago, we need to adopt a systems perspective and approach to combating and ameliorating the systemic harm continually exacted by structural racism. Taking a systems approach means that we must “connect the dots” between the various factors within social and structural ecology that serve to offer resistance to the production of racial injustice and inequality and that construct opportunities to reinforce community resilience. Fathers, Families and Healthy Communities (FFHC) is a non-profit community development intermediary that:

- 1) works to leverage and “connect the dots” between community assets, networks of service provision and community member supports;
- 2) seeks to promote the transformation of institutional social service practices, and
- 3) actively advances family strengthening public policy. FFHC's ecologically driven three-prong model embraces efforts to more effectively engage and support men, boys, and fathers as assets. FFHC works to strengthen outcomes for women, children and families by building healthy communities through the active involvement, engagement and support of Black men and boys.

Embedded in FFHC's approach is the fundamental belief that change can be facilitated by leveraging resources and by deploying the assets that exist within and outside the community, with Black men and boys being one of the most important resources to be leveraged and deployed. This requires calling on those connected to or in control of resources to share a common vision with those inequitably impacted

by racialized systems. Within this charge, efforts must be driven by a set of measurable objectives and commitments to ongoing collaboration and coordination to advance agreed-upon goals that deconstruct the systems that continue to reproduce inequality. The application of this effort can be seen in the Black Men and Boys Community of Practice (BMB CoP) led by FFHC. It is a systems-focused initiative under development that seeks to engage a growing body of stakeholders and move those engaged stakeholders into collective action while harnessing their commitment to being agents of social change and racial justice.

Early in its development, the BMB CoP included stakeholders representing human services, philanthropy, education, business and government. In 2015, FFHC and its strategic partners designed protocols to engage the men and boys who bore the weight of the system—those struggling to find employment or housing, being excluded from quality education, or imprisoned unjustly and thus facing unnecessary obstacles to their success and reintegration. For “Connect-the-Dots” and other systems change initiatives to work, they must be rooted in the lives of those impacted by the policies and programs we are working to transform or create. This knowledge led to the next phase of FFHC's work—deep listening and engagement, which we call the Black Men and Boys Success Initiative. In the inaugural convening of BMB CoP that included human service, philanthropic, education, business and governmental stakeholders, these stakeholders identified structural racism as the main barrier to the success of Black men and boys. Given robust scholarly research and the wisdom consensus of the BMB CoP's early participants, structural racism served as a silent yet overarching consideration as we conducted our listening sessions with the men and boys.

Literature Review

“Covert racism may be viewed as racism which is hidden; secret; private; covered; disguised; insidious; or concealed,” (Coates 2011)

Structural racism is by nature covert, and it is the root cause of systemic barriers and challenges that Black men and boys face.

This term refers to complex systems where racism is developed, maintained and protected. Structural racism, operating explicitly and implicitly, is embedded in society, culture, and the economy. It is present within systems and institutions, including education, criminal justice, health care, finance and banking. This “structural racialization” results in harmful practices and policies that maintain racial outcomes (Powell 2012). Although many institutions are not overtly racist, the structures within institutions can result in the loss of opportunity for distinct groups while creating systemic barriers to advancement (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Bonilla-Silva argues that racial stereotypes arise from (1) conditions and reality experienced by the group, (2) genuine ignorance about the group or (3) solidified misguided views on the group’s physical, cultural or moral nature, which perpetuates a group’s position within a racialized system.

Structural racism in the context of the City of Chicago can be understood by examining three levels of racialization: micro, meso and macro. The micro level consists of social interactions that happen through everyday life, including micro-aggressions at school, in the workplace, and other social activities. The meso level, consists of contextual factors like:

- (1) socio-economic disadvantage;
- (2) neighborhood ecology and its effects;
- (3) political and popular discourse through media, and
- (4) institutional structures, policies and practices.

At the macro level, forces of racialization, like political marginalization and disempowerment occur at the state and global level. “Ethnic monitoring, the surveillance and criminalization of racially identified populations, their limited access to economic resources and the extent to which such groups interacted, all served the modern racial state,” (Phillips 2011, p. 178).

It is also important to consider the results of the BMB project through the lens of systems theory, also known as systems thinking. A system is defined as “an interdependent group of agents working together as a whole,” (Menendian and Watt, 2008). Within a system, the structures, relationships and components determine the outcomes and behavior of the system. In other words, no part of a system works in isolation and one part of the system influences and often reinforces



other parts, perpetuating existing dynamics. This theory is diametrically opposed to reductionist theories that simplify complex, multi-level issues into distorted cause and effect rationales. For instance, a reductionist approach resulted in the misguided notion that making available low-income public housing that is located in racially segregated communities would solve low-income community problems, among them lack of access to affordable housing in an urban system. Through systems thinking, the issue of a lack of affordable housing, would also be viewed in terms of how the solution creates the desired result as well as the implications and consequences of the possible solutions in terms of educational, economic, environmental, social, health and well-being outcomes for the group affected by the issue and the proposed solution. With segregated housing, among other issues, the implications for neighborhood schools, employment opportunities, as well as environmental, social and health impacts for the residents moving into the housing development are not considered.

Focusing on the racialization that occurs through a system requires an analysis of racialization that is:

- (1) internalized beliefs within individuals,
- (2) interpersonal: prejudice between individuals,
- (3) institutional: bias within an agency, school or organization, and
- (4) structural: dynamic and cumulative among institutions (Powell, Heller, and Bundalli 2011).

Systems thinking also explains the relationships between and within systems. For instance, the effects of incarceration (criminal justice system) and its ability to strip individuals of their rights of citizenship, limit these individuals in their efforts to secure housing, education, employment and be healthy physically and mentally. As urban systems evolve over time, the complexity of the relationships between its various facets increases to the point where it is difficult to identify specific causes and effects (McPhearson et al. 2016). The results of the BMB project are presented through individual community voices regarding specific challenges and barriers that they face in their communities based on the various systems that touch their lives. All that these voices present is rooted in a daily experience that grows out of a rich and complex community context.



Methodology

Based on various statistical measures (see State of the African-American male graphic), the life-chances of Black men and boys are significantly undermined as they come in contact with numerous systems and institutions that construct the social, political and economic landscape that they must negotiate. While the focus of this project is on Black men and boys, Black women have a vantage point on their success and barriers that provide a more robust and complete picture of the problem and potential solution and, thus, were also included. The objectives in talking with each group of Black men and women was to learn firsthand the struggles Black men face in their daily lives, to gain insight from them on their priority needs based on their challenges, and to garner the lessons they have learned in navigating various systems and institutions.

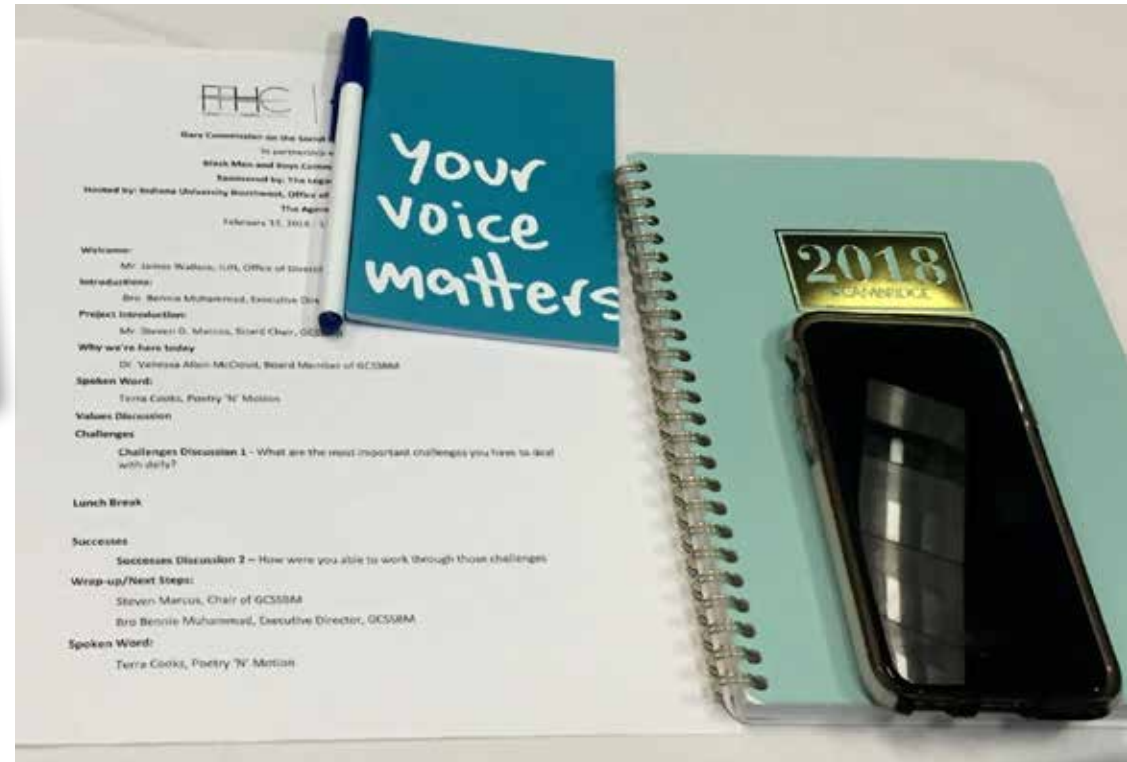
In designing and implementing engagements and analyzing the information that came from the men and women, we partnered with Stanhope Consulting and BECOME. Stanhope Consulting is an urban planning and public engagement consultation firm that utilizes both human and technological processes for robust discussion and idea generation. BECOME is a 501c3 Center for Community Engagement and Social Change with a commitment to racial equity and thriving communities. They use program evaluation, training, coaching, coalition building, facilitation, and strategic planning as tools for effective and sustainable social change.

The methodology for this work was multifaceted, designed to create spaces that allowed for the most vulnerable participants to trust, disclose painful stories, and express their dreams and resilience. These voices came from large and small groups, men and women, young and old, led by a skilled facilitator and supported with an equipped scribe. The community's experiences and wisdom were collected in three phases - tables, focus groups, and mind-mapping forums. Tables are semi-structured, self-facilitated discussion structures. As part of this initiative, Table Discussions consisted of 8-10 participants at each table. This phase yielded lessons learned around our agenda and process, including informing the finalized facilitator protocol and training. Over 70 table discussions were conducted.

For the second and third phases, inclusive and structured interactions and two types of recording methods were used. Each convening was designed

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according to the size (the number of participants) and the depth of discussions we needed from our participants. For focus groups, “circle practice” was implemented, a facilitation technology designed to create intimate spaces, allowing for deep listening and providing ample time for participants to express their thoughts and experiences for the agenda). Thirteen small groups with 5-6 participants were conducted, gathered around a circle, with a trained facilitator and scribe.

For the larger, brainstorming group, a mind mapping forum format was used, including discussion with two groups of ten men each mapping the root causes and possible solutions around the most prevalent systemic barriers that the men and boys faced. These were led by a lead facilitator, trained table facilitators, scribes at each table and technology staff. Technology in the form of keypad polling was integrated into the design of the forum, allowing each participant to prioritize their shared issues by voting. The forums capitalized on the strengths of large groups, having individual table discussions, then reporting out to the entire room. A total of 111 (74 men and 37 women) people participated in the circle and forum phases of the project. Altogether, the initiative convened over 80 Table and Circles over a three-year period.

With this information, action steps were designed to be taken during implementation that were measurable and achievable. Content analysis was conducted and yielded themes within and between stakeholder groups. The results informed a logic model that provides the foundation and guide for what will be included in the implementation phase, particularly the pursuit of evidence-based strategies—e.g., policy advocacy, coalition building, and community engagement—for removing barriers created by racialized systems and practices. With this foundation, the BMB CoP will finalize and implement a strategic plan to create the conditions in Chicago necessary for Black men and boys’ success.

Results

Systemic Barriers • Challenges • Hopes, Success, and Resilience



Even though there was no explicit mention of structural racism by the project leads or facilitators in the discussions with the men, boys and women, their stories presented further evidence that structural racism is the driving force of the insurmountable barrier they face. These stories present the reality of their lives.

Systemic Barriers

Structural racism engenders systemic barriers to opportunity. Thus, faced with structural racism, Black men and boys are denied the tools or skillset to access resources and opportunities. The systems causing barriers identified by participants include: the criminal justice system, education system, housing system, banking system, labor market system, and health care system, which are described below (see Table 1). The list of barriers in Table 1 is rank ordered from highest to lowest by frequency of participants identifying that barrier.

» Criminal and Civil Law Systems

Participants most frequently stated that the criminal justice system in the United States is racially discriminatory and dehumanizes Black men and boys. A female participant said: “*Having cousins and other Black men in my family who are part of the criminal justice system, specifically who are good, smart, talented people who had great potential when they were younger, but it’s the system they were sucked into...*” Her comment emphasizes the widespread and negative impact of the disproportionate number of Black people involved in the criminal justice system. The impact of racially discriminatory sentencing has harmful ramifications for individuals, families, neighborhoods, and larger communities. The disproportionate incarceration of Black men and boys also created barriers to education, employment and family relationships, which, in turn, worsens financial hardships, and is destructive to family connections and deconstructs opportunity pathways.

Table 1:
Systemic Barriers

Barriers are rank ordered by frequency.
1 = **Greatest number** of participants
5 = **Fewest number** of participants

Barrier	Rank
Criminal & Civil System	1
Education System	2
Housing System	3
Banking System	3
Labor Market System	4
Healthcare System	5

A participant attributed misinformation within the child support system to life-changing direction into a world of street survival. This participant was randomly apprehended during a night out, and temporarily incarcerated for non-payment of fees related to child support payments. Unpaid child support processing fees were \$108. After brief incarceration (less than a week), the participant returned to work, only to be dismissed for a no call/no show. Embittered by the system, the participant found himself collecting unemployment and thrust into the illegal informal economy of hustling. This is just one of the many examples of how the criminal justice system has not only influenced a moment in the men's lives but their families' overall wellbeing and livelihood.

» Education

From racist slights from teachers and school policy to district and city level decisions around school closings and resource allocations, education arose as one of the most harmful systems to Black boys (and girls), and an

obstacle to them becoming successful. For example, a female participant talked about the lack of resources and poor quality of instruction in schools: *"When I was growing up, we didn't have books in our school and the ones we did were outdated. I had an Irish Catholic tutor from age 7 to 14 every Saturday because we knew that the school system was failing me. I would have been functionally illiterate..."* The lack of access to high quality primary and secondary education for African American children and youth creates disadvantages and disincentives for further involvement in the educational system and negatively impacts access to well-paid employment and opportunities for economic and social mobility.

Another example illustrates the harm of city-level decisions on education and the safety of the students, such as the decision to close schools in particular neighborhoods: *"For school, schools are shut down and changed the name of the school and you would see people shot in front of you. School is still shut down."* Such school closures increase tensions and worsen the violence because young people are split

up into different schools, forcing them to cross gang boundaries in neighborhoods. Farmer et al. described some of the impacts of the school closures in *Closed by Choice: The Spatial Relationship between Charter School Expansion, School Closures and Fiscal Stress in Chicago Public Schools*. The closure of neighborhood schools disproportionately affected black boys in Chicago who already experienced high drop-out rates compared to other groups. Based on CPS data, the overall five-year graduation rate increased from 73.5 percent for those in the 2016 cohort to 78.2 percent in 2018. Asians had the highest five-year graduation rate in the 2018 cohort at 92.9 percent, with whites at 86.2 percent, Latinos at 81.6 percent and blacks at 71.8 percent (Hinz 2018).

Not only did children in underserved communities lose access to their neighborhood schools, many were forced to attend dysfunctional charter schools, while taxpayers picked up the costs of these bankruptcies. This structural racism perpetuated the decline in school age children and families in the neighborhoods where schools closed.

Education: Data Points About the Community

Of the 108 new charter schools opened between 2000 and 2015, 62% of new charter schools were opened in areas with high population loss of school aged children (25% or more).

Between 2000-2009, 85% of new charter schools were located within 1.5 miles of schools that were closed. 71% of new charter schools opened between 2000 and 2012 were opened within 1.5 miles of the 49 schools that would be closed due to low enrollments in 2013.

Since 2013, CPS has opened 20 new charter schools, nearly half of which were in a 1.5 mile walking radius from a school closed for low enrollment.

In 2015, 27% of all CPS charter schools filed an audit with the Illinois State Board of Education. These schools had a combined outstanding debt of \$227 million that will be paid back almost fully with tax payer dollars. This debt is independent from CPS' overall \$6 billion debt (Farmer, Baber, and Poulos 2017).

» Housing

The housing system, in particular Section 8 housing policy, is discriminatory against Black men, as it is much harder for them to obtain housing than women. The Housing Opportunity Extension Act of 1996 included a “one strike” policy requiring all Public Housing Authorities to implement a case review process containing stringent background checks on applicants and all household members (Geller and Curtis 2011). This causes problems such as family discord, stress, miscommunication between family members, and homelessness. One participant said, “*It (Section 8) was set up to break up a happy home. I was a victim of it. I’m the father of the kids and now I have to be away from home. You get to fight with your lady. Stress makes people give up. It is very stressful.*” These experiences and the related impacts are referred to as the “The New Jim Crow. Black men have been incarcerated for nonviolent, petty “crimes” like the possession of marijuana, which is now in the process of being legalized in the state of Illinois.

If you take into account prisoners, a large majority of African American men in some urban areas have been labeled felons for life. (In the Chicago area, the figure is nearly 80 percent.) These men are part of a growing undercaste—not class, caste—permanently relegated by law to a second-class status. They can be denied the right to vote, automatically excluded from juries, and legally discriminated against in employment, housing, access to education, and public benefits, much as their grandparents and great-grandparents were during the Jim Crow era (Alexander 2010, p. 75).

» Banking

Participants mentioned the banking system as another systemic barrier that Black men and boys face. That is, they get rejected from getting a loan. Such loan discrimination hampers them from making investments for future advances. One participant expressed that he could not get a loan approved, and thus, could

not start a business. “*Loan discrimination, no resources available. I tried to get a loan for a business. I have a lot of things I want to do. I have been rejected every time. I get denied. I don’t have a criminal record. I am rejected because of how I look and where I come from. It isn’t fair.*” There is a growing gap in access to capital for minority-owned business. The number of SBA loans to African-American borrowers declined 47% between 2009 and 2013, despite an overall increase of 25 percent (Abello 2015)

» Labor Market

Participants also raised the issue of the labor market system. They pointed out that regardless of their strong desire and efforts to find jobs, Black men and boys lack access to decent jobs. Also, they stated that the jobs they have access to hardly require any use of their skills. Such barriers in the labor market system not only hinder Black men and boys from providing adequate income to their families but also lower their self-esteem.

Levine and others conducted a study to examine barriers to employment for low-income primarily Black American men seeking employment. They identify several important structural and historical factors that drive the problem of joblessness among Black men: a) location of available jobs, b) local incarceration patterns, and c) discrimination (Levine 2012; Mong and Roscigno 2010). Research suggests that employers enact racial stereotyping, a practice that has consequences for African American men seeking employment (Pager, Quillian 2005; Shih 2002). This discrimination is prevalent in the US overall, but has some of the most deleterious outcomes in Chicago. According to annual unemployment data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Illinois had the nation’s highest black unemployment rate in 2016, with less than 51% of black adults reporting some form of employment. In Chicago, the Black unemployment rate was 12.7 percent in 2016, compared with 6.7 percent for Latinos and 5 percent for whites (Lucci 2017).

» Healthcare

Despite long-standing and deleterious health disparities, the healthcare system manifests as a barrier due to the experience community members have related to a lack of access and subpar treatment. Issues were identified regarding the shortage of mental health services and a lack of tools to access existing health services. Institutional racism is pervasive in the healthcare system. Participants expressed a perception that relatives received sub-par treatment. The effects of a lack of access to quality healthcare can have multi-generational effects.

“Death. At one time, I had even stopped believing in God. My pops passed away, then six months later my mom passed away while she was cooking my birthday dinner, and then three months after that my sister passed away. So it just...man, I just lost all my spirituality, because I couldn’t believe that God could put this much burden on me. With me, I know not to do suicide or anything, so I tried to self-medicate with narcotics and different things like that. Because I thought I say, wow, maybe if I get high enough, the Lord will take me away from here, then I go on to be with my mom and pops. Y’all don’t understand is that your parents suffer when your child is incarcerated, I’m doing time out here on the streets. I’m robbing Paul to pay Peter, and my child is locked up. I’m doing the same time he doing...Barely keeping our bills paid because we trying to get this money to get our child out. But He had a mission, He had a purpose for me.”

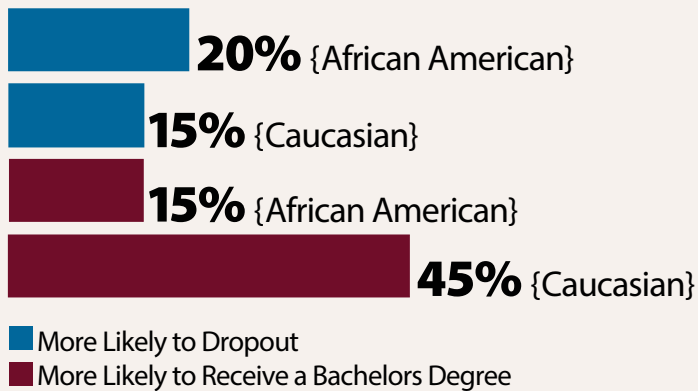
A female participant mentioned, “*What I noticed, which is the practice of mental health workers, was ‘oh, you have a mental illness’—they put that on you and, you’re okay with being in this mental illness space—you don’t have to go to college—this is what you can do and these are your supports.*” The intersection of healthcare and the criminal justice systems was highlighted, as the criminal justice system penalizes people struggling with mental illness and incarcerates

State of the African American Male

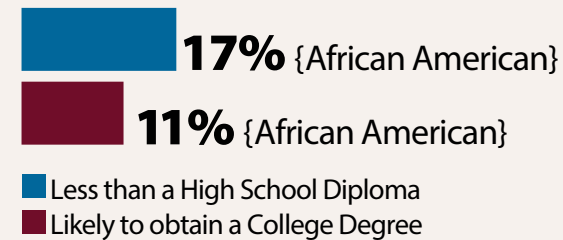
African American Male
Population in the U.S. is
19,056,501

African American Male
Population in Chicago is
384,976

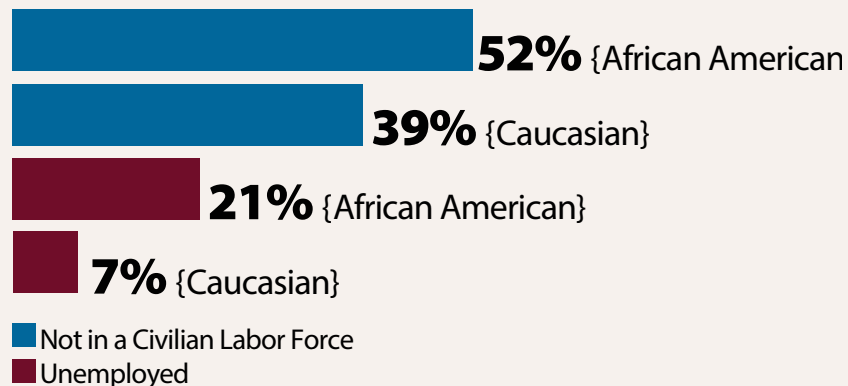
Educational Attainment in Chicago



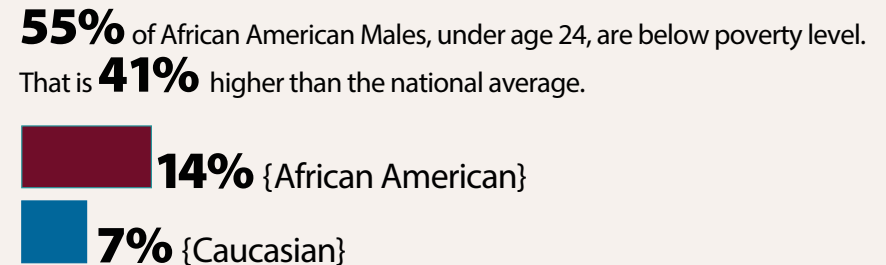
Educational Attainment in the U.S.



Employment in Chicago



Poverty Status in Chicago



Source: U.S. Census American Community Survey 2015, 1 year Estimates. U.S. Census American Community Survey 201-2015, 5-Year Estimates.

RESULTS *continued*

them, rather than providing treatment. The intersection of health, race, and gender was raised as a problem as well, as shown by the following quote: “*But those were all tools that I had to learn—mental health is not really talked about in certain communities, not among women of color, so I felt like I was by myself in certain spaces—Black women talk about self-care and stuff like that but not really onset of certain things like depression.*” Racial health inequities in Chicago are prevalent related to survival rates for women with breast cancer, prevalence of lead poisoning, HIV/AIDS and trauma-informed care for children (Roberts 2018; Stolbach and Anam 2017). There are health inequities for Black men in Chicago that are caused by discrimination, segregation, access to health care, employment and income (Gilbert et al. 2016).

Challenges

» Challenges Communities Face with Resilience and Resistance

Systemic barriers give rise to challenges that limit opportunities and threaten the lives and wellbeing of Black men and boys. Chicago has a long history of systematic institutional racism regarding housing that continues to affect Black men and boys disproportionately. In 1947, a Chicago landlord converted his property from white to black tenancy in order to increase the rent, a standard practice. However, after a fire killed ten African American tenants, it was discovered that the fire was started by a white tenant who was charged fifteen dollars

a month, while Black tenants were charged sixty dollars per month, in the same building (Rothstein, 2017). Housing discrimination that favors white residents over the needs of Black residents continues. As recently as 2011, when the Cabrini Green housing development was demolished, and despite the promise of affordable housing for the displaced residents, many Black families were forced to move to the South and West sides of Chicago, in order to make room for the private development of luxury single family dwellings (Reed, Drew 2015). The issue confronted by community members as a result of this displacement is the destruction of community relationships that have lead to challenges associated with neighborhood safety, police harassment, lack of basic needs being met, loss of trust, substance abuse, loss of hope, mental health issues, and difficulty connecting with opportunity networks for skill building and job training. These challenges are not mutually exclusive, as issues and challenges are intertwined in the lives of Black men and boys. These challenges are described below, starting with the most frequently mentioned challenge (see Table 2). It should be noted that even though efforts were made to rank challenges, the challenges are truly intersecting and mutual reinforcing. For example, a group could have talked about violence and another group about trust but both groups could be experiencing both issues as challenges.

» Community Safety

Many of the participants said that they experience violence and/or threats to their safety everyday while doing mundane activities such as going to school or the store. Shootings are relatively frequent depending on the area and some community members live in constant fear for their safety and the safety those

Table 2:
Challenges

Challenges are rank ordered by frequency.
1 = **Greatest number** of participants
9 = **Fewest number** of participants

Challenge	Rank
Violence	1
Lack of Basic Needs	2
Police Harassment	3
Social Capital	3
Negative Decision-making	4
Trust	5
Substance Abuse	5
Hope	6
Violence—Gang Affiliation	6
Skills Development	7
Family—lack of support from guardians	7
Mental Health (mental illness, race, and self-harm)	7
Dependence on boy/girlfriend	8
Family—physical, sexual assault from parents	9

close to them. The following quote explains this well: *“I’m just trying to go to school. I look out for my younger brother to protect him from violence. Gun shots rang and everyone ran. Daily experience...”*

Community members also stated that the widespread presence of gangs and their operations make it difficult to avoid some measure of involvement. Some are coerced into gang membership, and others see no alternative means of livelihood. Lack of adult supervision also makes it more difficult to resist the pervasive pressure to join a gang, in that many parents are working multiple poorly paid jobs to make ends meet and cannot spend as much time with their children as they would like. The development of illicit informal economies is a byproduct of economic marginalization, and the violence and gang activity that emerges is a byproduct of the illicit informal economies that have developed in some vulnerable African-American communities as a result of longstanding economic inequality and injustice.

» Police Harassment

A participant said, *“Me and my cousin came from the store and they accused us of robbing a store because we were young and Black and a group of young Black men just robbed a store. The police hit us with a club, handcuffed us and took us to the station anyway. We were hit for no reason. My aunt had to come down.”* Incidents like this, and worse, were reported by multiple participants as some of the most difficult challenges they face in their lives, speaking to the level of trauma they experience due to police. In this sense, police harassment increases the likelihood of Black men and boys becoming involved in the criminal justice system. As a result, Black men and boys do not trust the police.

» Adaptive Decision-making

While participants mentioned that their past decisions are barriers to their current and future success, it must be recognized that individual decision-making is socially constructed. The choices men and boys make

about pursuing an education or providing for their families are dictated by the social contexts into which they are purposely pushed. The absence of quality schools in impoverished neighborhoods and limited access to meaningful employment often leaves Black men and boys grasping for opportunities to sustain themselves and their loved ones.

Participants conveyed that the consequences of their past actions contribute to their present difficulties. One of the men represented this sentiment and expressed: *“I’m kind of going through a challenge right now of getting back in school and bettering my life. Because I had messed up and caught a case, so now like, I got a felony. I got something on my background, so now I need to better myself, push myself to where I need to go.”* They expressed that actions resulted from choices associated with impulse gratification, gang involvement, dropping out of school, and other illegal activities that led to negative outcomes such as incarceration. As we continue to think about social change through a systems lens, it is critical that we see how discrimination and implicit-bias embedded in all institutions presents African-American men and boys with few options and extremely limited choices from which they select productive pathways.

» Lack of Basic Needs

Participants discussed their hardships with meeting basic needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter. Regarding housing needs, participants identified the challenge arising from loss of residence due to eviction or moving out of the family. One male participant said that his son’s incarceration resulted in his severe financial hardship which illustrates how the criminal justice system contributes to greater difficulties for community members to obtain access to their basic needs. These hardships are often a result longstanding racialized economic inequity.

» Weakening of Familial and Community Connections

Many participants lacked the social capital associated

with familial relations because parents and extended family members were not present in their lives—deceased, incarcerated, ill, or otherwise absent. As these losses create voids within the family system, individuals are strained with both grappling with the painful effects of trauma and having to accommodate for the absence of a family member’s role. Each loss and the cumulative effect of numerous losses contribute to ongoing states of distress and trauma and give rise to chronic challenges, such as mental illness, depression, suicidal ideation, substance abuse, and gang affiliation. Additionally, these losses diminish individuals’ social power as their network begins to disappear as does the social capital that comes from invested relationships.

The absence of parents is also system driven issues as single parents are charged with providing multiple incomes to support their family while coming up against economic inequity. A quote from a male participant shows how the absence of his father was a contributing factor in his gang involvement: *“I don’t have a father. I didn’t get much attention in the crib and I was looking for attention. A child needs attention and love. You need a mother to tell you “I love you.” She was never there, she was always at work, at the club and partying and I was left by myself. When you leave a child in the house by himself, he gets curious. Go outside in my neighborhood—surrounded by gangs. They were negative influences and they had an impact on my life—I am a product of my environment.”*

» Mistrust

One woman said that abuse caused her to distrust others. Suspicion and distrust weaken social bonds, and participants noted that it can result in a lack of connectedness among people within Black communities. *“I don’t want to talk about my feelings... There is a weakness in telling people how you really feel.”* Issues of mistrust are often rooted in psychological and emotional pain and betrayal, which affect men, women, and their children. Some men brought up the skepticism they have toward systems offering

RESULTS *continued*

social services coming from a long history of being manipulated by those institutions. In addition to the abuse that takes place on an individual level, it is important to acknowledge that communities are rightfully suspicious and distrustful of social systems that have actively betrayed them as a way of protecting themselves from the pain and abuse these discriminatory systems have enacted.

» Hope

Many participants attributed their hopelessness to the shootings and violence pervading Chicago neighborhoods. *It's getting to the point that a lot of us don't want to be here. We are ready to go. I don't want my kids here.* Living in a dangerous environment causes both physiological and psychological effects that can lead to chronic anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and feelings of worthlessness making it more difficult for individuals to tackle the barriers that confront them. Many participants expressed fatigue from constant financial struggle and hardship which also stems from the vast racial disparities in the labor market

» Skills Development

In terms of technological skills, they mentioned their struggles in adapting to the digital age where everything changes rapidly and they lack opportunities and resources to learn new skills. This challenge is rooted in the long going, unequal access for African-American students to a high-quality K-12 education, higher education, and professional development or training opportunities.

» Family

Challenges associated with family life and familial relationships include: (1) participants who said that

they were challenged as children or adolescents due to lack of support from parents or guardians (e.g., heading a household when an adolescent), and (2) some women who identified physical and sexual assault by parents as a challenge. These family-related issues are intertwined with other types of challenges. For example, lack of support from parents or guardians reduces social capital and increases vulnerability to trauma and mental health problems. One female participant mentioned that she became the head of her family when she was 15 years old, and this experience was very traumatizing, which resulted in depression and substance abuse. When youth are “parentified”, they are forced to function in multiple family roles while they are still developing psychologically, often putting them under more responsibility than their able to bear, which causes detrimental effects to their quality of life. Youth are often parentified as a result of one or both parents’ absenteeism which is directly linked to systems and issues of incarceration, community violence, health disparities, or single-parents working multiple jobs to sustain their household. Another female participant talked about her experience of being physically and sexually assaulted by parents, which led to suicidal ideation.

» Substance Abuse

Participants regard substance abuse as the byproduct of other challenges, such as mental illness, financial hardship, trauma, and loss of family members. Participants said that support for recovery from family members and agencies is insufficient and/or difficult to access.

» Mental Health

Mental health was seen as closely related to the lack of hope and substance abuse. Some of the women

participants talked about their depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and anxiety. Additionally, participants identified self-harm as a challenge. One participant said, *“Cutting myself is to ease the pain.”*

While these complex challenges rooted within institutions feed off one another causing families daily strains, the strengths, motivation, and hope within Black men and boys is also brightly apparent.

Hopes, Success, and Resilience

“My strength is determination and creativity. I learn from the mistakes of others.” “Remembering what my mama taught me. Being thankful for what I have. I might be living in an apartment, but it may feel like a mansion. I might be eating noodles, but some people eating out the garbage can. You can always be in a worse situation than you are in.”

» The Role of Fathers in Community Strengthening

Black men and boys mentioned a range of factors that fuel their hopes and future success: talent in music and sports; personal qualities such as optimism, perseverance, positive spirit, gratitude, strong mindset, determination, and creativity; personal supports such as the love of a mother, wife, or romantic partner; involvement in organizations; and spiritual life.

Strength of character and personal relationships were identified as the basis for hope, success, and resilience. The BMB CoP project attempts to interact at the system level for community change through a multi-level approach to Fathers, Families and Healthy Communities.

The venn diagram (at right) illustrates the dynamic interactions of Black men and boys with their families

and the communities. The synergy between **Fathers and Healthy Communities** looks through the lens of safety, security, and stability for families. The nexus between **Fathers and Families** engages efforts to promote healthy children, effective co-parenting, and ongoing social support. The connection between **Healthy Communities and Families** advances sustainable and resilient communities. This ecological perspective is at the heart of FFHC vision and theory of change.

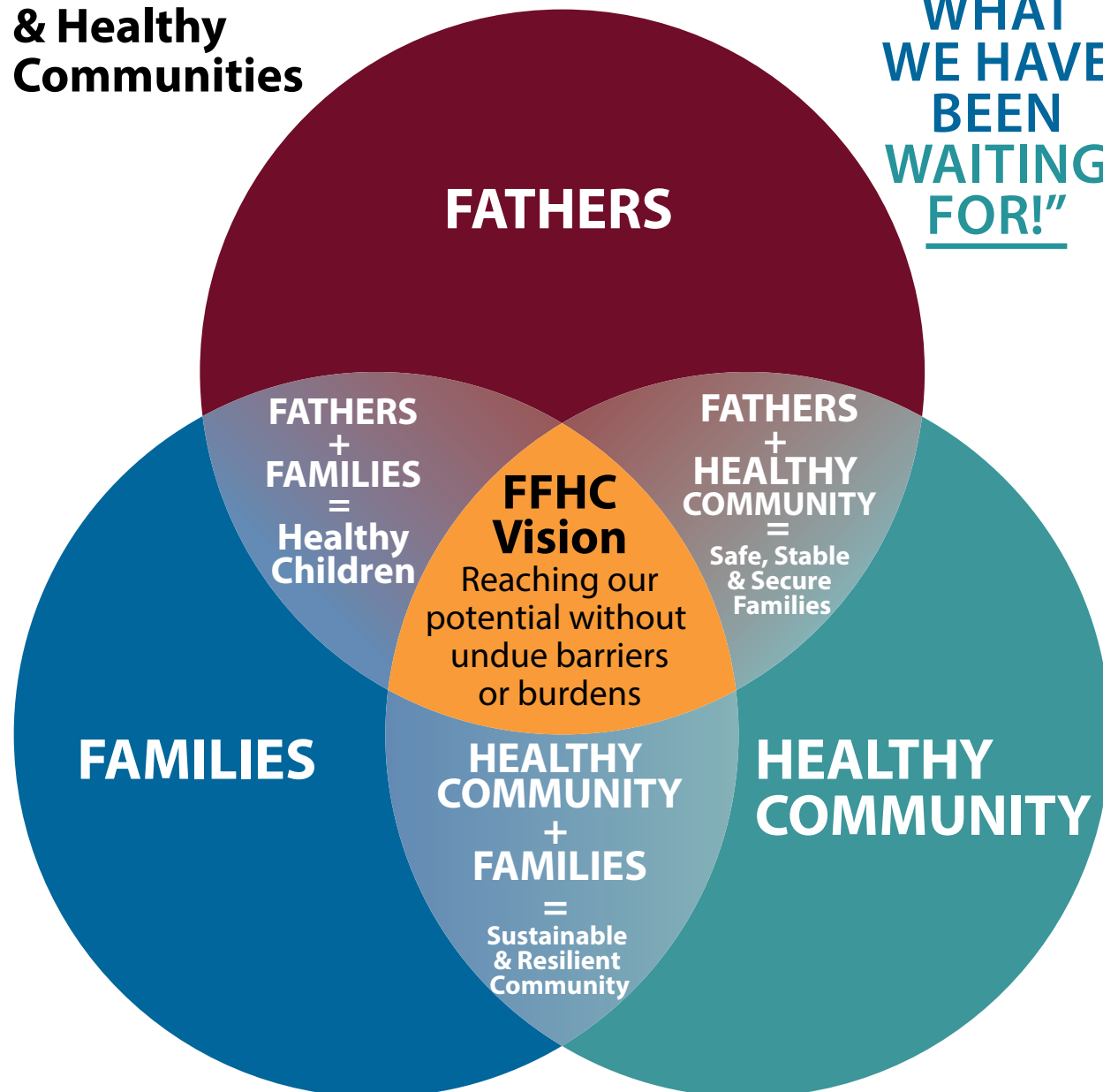
Black men and young Black men continue to recognize the strengths within themselves and therefore begin to see themselves as invaluable assets in their communities. Since racial inequity exists in every area of our social systems, we must acknowledge that everyone is responsible for creating sustainable and systemic solutions from the education sector to the labor market to the criminal justice systems and health systems—the need for shared responsibility is critical. Participants continue to feel their charge, to step into their role and identify ways that they could transform their communities. And as leaders in their neighborhoods, these motivated men want to make sure they hold themselves and all entities accountable to the communities.

During one of the sessions, as the keypad polling votes came in one by one on the screen, the question was—“What is the best way to transform the lives of men and boys in Chicago?” Twenty Black men from the south side of Chicago wait to see their collective solution appear. The answer would reveal the best way to transform the lives of their fathers, brothers, sons, friends, and their own. Finally, after productive debate over which solution could be most critical to transforming their reality, the choice reveals itself: **BLACK MALE LEADERSHIP**.

To a silent, contemplative room, a short man with glasses turns around as if he were experiencing an epiphany and shouts to the group: “We are what we have been waiting for!”

Participants answered questions in each of these areas and spoke to the roles and the responsibilities the community could take on while identifying where they need other government, corporate, and local entities to step in.

Fathers, Families & Healthy Communities



**“WE ARE
WHAT
WE HAVE
BEEN
WAITING
FOR!”**

BLACK MEN'S PERSPECTIVE ABOUT THEIR ROLES

The question posed to Black Men and Young Black Men was:

What are the challenges the community/individuals face that require outside cooperation—Federal, State, City/Private or Public?

Black Men answered the question as follows:

- The trust that it takes to deal with the issues, we have the solutions, there are artificial barriers, we need the connections with other people
- With so many veterans, better help for veterans from the VA

Black Young Men answered the question as follows:

- “Help in dealing with Human Rights violations” it’s demoralizing when you grow up feeling that your rights are constantly violated and you have no control of the outcome
- Safety issues in the immediate surroundings
- Dealing with Police brutality
- Violence

What are the challenges we take on ourselves as Black Men, Fathers and Community Members?

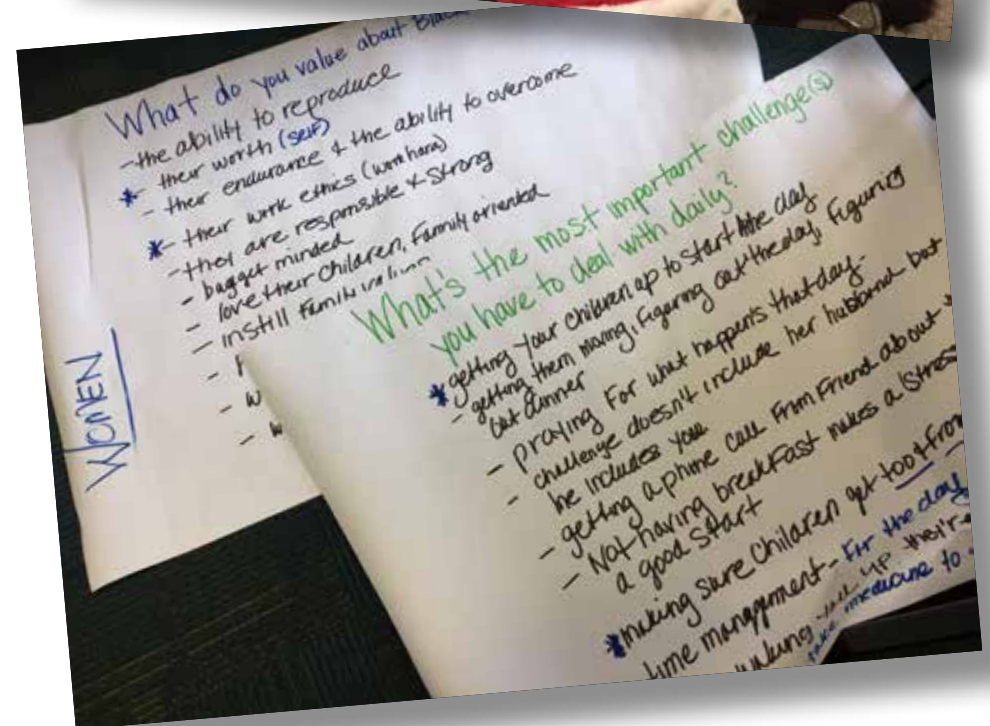
Black Men answered the question as follows:

- Educating each other (resources and systems)
- “Be the change you want” be ready to stand up for the change we need
- “Rebuilding cognitive and analytical skills” we’ve been surviving on street smarts, let’s go a step further

Black Young Men answered the question as follows:

- “Interacting with my father” relationships get developed with your peers, father and son relationships should be stronger
- “Fathers stay with families” mothers are forced to do double duty, families would be more stable if fathers were present

- Being more assertive
- “Less of a procrastinator” stop putting off important life decisions
- “Avoiding gangs/dealing with gangs” for some of us, it’s the only family we have
- “Following probation” we allow little things to trip us up with the law
- “Violence” our community live in fear
- Safety in the community
- “Put the guns down” it has to start with someone
- Building better relations with parents and siblings
- Changing attitudes
- “It’s not the right time to become a father (becoming financially stable)” taking more responsibility toward becoming a father/parent too early in life
- Strengthen the family’s ability to accept and love the individual (no matter the circumstances)



The synergy between **Fathers and Families** looks through the lens of Healthy Children, Effective Co-Parenting and Ongoing Support:

What are the challenges the community/individuals face that require outside cooperation—Federal, State, City/Private or Public?

Black Men answered the question as follows:

- “Lack of help in Stakeholders” organizations are in place to help, but a good enough job isn’t being done
- “Strengthening of government accountability and professionalism” who keeps track of how effective the work these agencies are supposed to be doing?
- “Food systems” invest in the community
- Truth and reconciliation Council
- NAACP
- “Systemic separation of the family” family separations have historically federal housing policies and more recently the school-to-prison pipeline
- State support for fathers
- Systemic racism

Black Young Men answered the question as follows:

- “Portrayal in the media” the media continues to project the negative image covering all black youth

What are the challenges we take on ourselves Black Men, Fathers and Community Members?

Black Men answered the question as follows:

- Mentoring and youth development and giving back.
- Discussions with youth about “being and doing” better.
- “Being a voice for youth and giving them more exposure at a younger age” to positive life outcomes
- Challenge ourselves to succeed, help youth with life-skills training.
- “Wake-up”—get involved in helping your community towards positive change
- Stop “blowing off” our youth—respect and affirm their potential

- “Civic involvement at the State level. Leadership, being the example, not just acting as a leader” our political and civic leaders need to show results not just be a part of the broken promises
- “Accountability to ourselves” we have to be both responsible and accountable to our communities
- Being more self-reliant and self-sufficient. More community information sharing. Being better advocates for ourselves.

Black Young Men answered the question as follows:

- Neighborhood Dad’s “Step-Up”
- Community volunteers, lack of Father figures and mentors



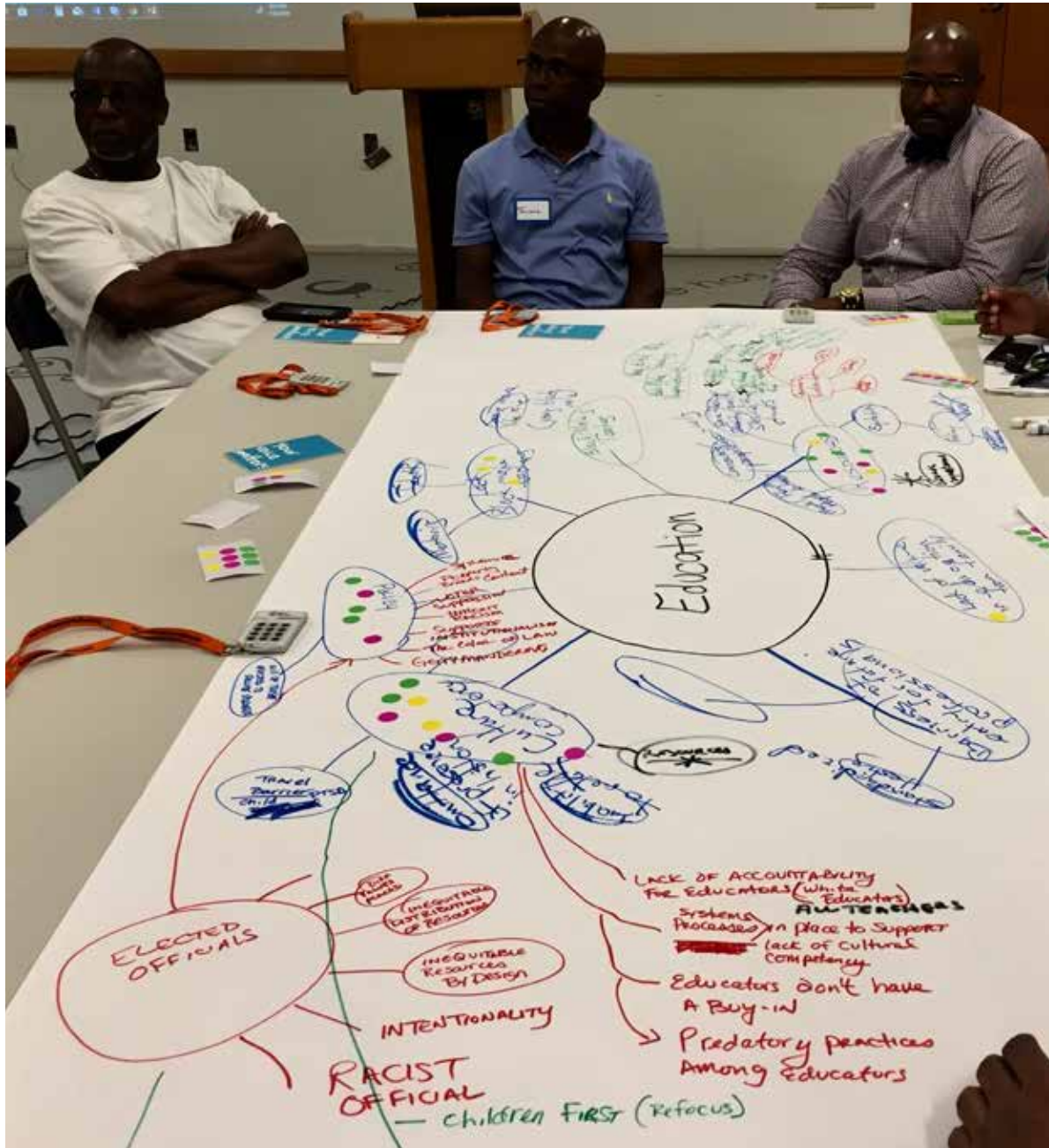
Bennie Muhammad



Dr. Kirk Harris



BLACK MEN'S PERSPECTIVE ABOUT THEIR ROLES *continued*



The synergy between **Families and Healthy Communities** looks through the lens of Resilience and Economic and Social Sustainability:

The question posed to Black Men and Young Black Men was:

What are the challenges the community/individuals face that require outside cooperation—Federal, State, City/Private or Public?

Black Men answered the question as follows:

- Need State support for infrastructure.
- Outside assistance in developing home owner association
- Support in advancing the use of technology in education
- Building support for education in the trades.
- Training governmental workers... example: the police
- Educational Institutions, Research, Think Tanks, Higher Ed, K-12
- The Judicial System
- “Employment opportunities” that allow long term opportunities to succeed
- Unions—more access to apprenticeships
- Philanthropic/Funding organizations and Civic Organizations
- Social Impact organizations focused on community building and education

Black Young Men answered the question as follows:

- “Cost of education skyrocketing” the cost leaves us out of the advancement “game”
- “Programs to help Youth” outside of the traditional going to “college route”
- “Transportation” access to work opportunities is more that getting on public transportation—getting to the suburbs is difficult

*What are the challenges we take on ourselves
Black Men, Fathers and Community Members?*

Black Men answered the question as follows:

- Take ownership of the community
- Creating community events
- Educating ourselves, academically and mentally.
- Developing our own apprenticeship programs.
- “Be community activists” to fight for change
- Helping individuals to be more employable
- Equipping individuals with tools and skills for employment
- “Support local businesses” that they can succeed

Black Young Men answered the question as follows:

- “Build motivation for learning” need more positive role models in the community
- “Jobs” we need mentors to help young men to prepare us for the work-world
- “Transportation” just getting around can become a struggle for a young person
- Business owners “Step-up” as the community steps up to support local businesses, they should hire more local young people
- Communities clearly articulated a commitment to self-help and to an ongoing struggle for change from within. This internalized commitment to self-help and struggle is necessary but not sufficient. Close examination and engagement of the external influences of civic, corporate and governmental stakeholders, the role they play in buttressing self-help efforts of the community and the role they play in bringing down the barriers that thwart the community success is vital to the formula for building healthy communities.



Summary of Research Findings

(emerging from Community Voice)

Black men and boys face systemic barriers—criminal justice, education, housing, banking, labor market, and health care system—resulting in interlocking systems of oppression that result in their suffering. The interconnected and formidable systemic barriers and challenges make Black men's and boys' future bleak if the current conditions, systems and institutions of the city stay the same.

The findings suggest that many Black men and boys' strive to overcome the challenges associated with the systemic barriers of structural racism by purposefully developing strategies to shift their mindset from pessimism to optimism as well as using close personal relationships as their support. The work of Black men and boys' that is focused on their own success, as well as the success of their families and communities is necessary, but not sufficient. City systems need to be revamped to address government's central role in the development of racialized policies and practices, corporate and civic decision-making and preferences related to resource allocation need to be more equitable, and philanthropic efforts need to focus on social cohesion and social capital building that challenges historic and systemic patterns of overt racism and implicit-biases, not only to transform social relations and institutions and to remove systemic racial barriers, but also to increase and create opportunities for ongoing support within vulnerable Black communities so that the community can flourish as they engage in self-help. Immediate, sustained focus on these issues is required to affect systemic change:

- Criminal Justice
- Education
- Housing
- Labor Market
- Banking
- Healthcare

The findings also indicate that Black men and boys are resilient, want to live successful and happy lives, and are ready to participate in developing and deploying resources and strategies for transforming their lives and communities.





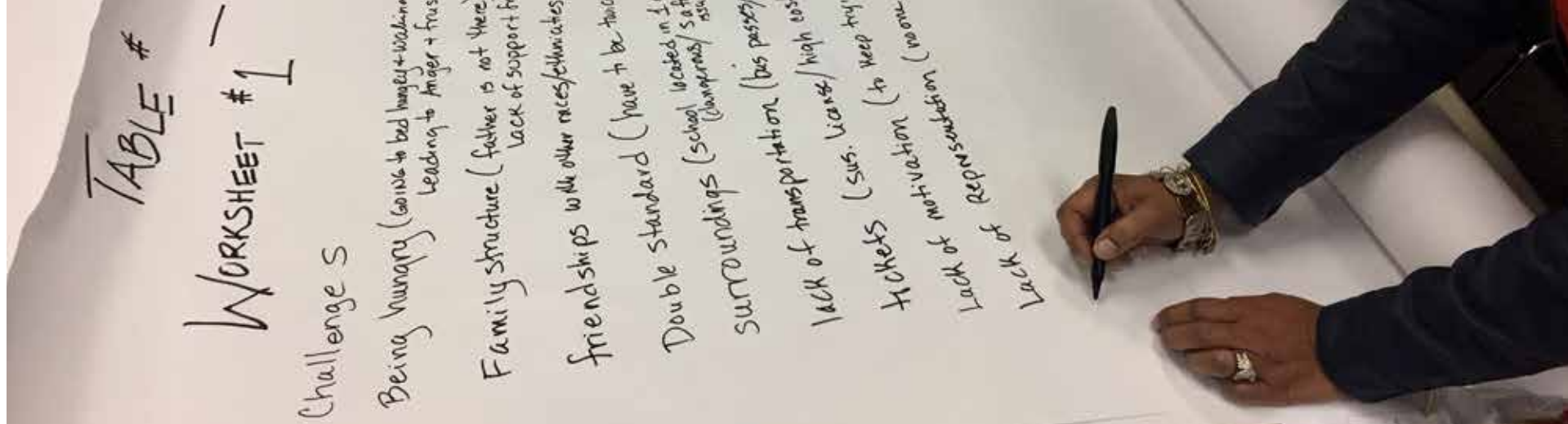
Next Steps: Call to Collective Action

Building & Engaging a Community of Practice

While Black Men and Boys have asserted their role and responsibility for advocating for themselves, their families and communities, in the face of systems that work against them, change is only possible when stakeholders from the various systems and institutional settings play a role in helping to mitigate the historical and structural racism maintained and advanced by systems and institutions. The Building & Engaging a Community of Practice chart highlights the critical stakeholders needed in the process of supporting better outcomes for Black Men, Boys, and their community. The chart provides a rationale for the particular stakeholder engagement and highlights their role in the process of making change.

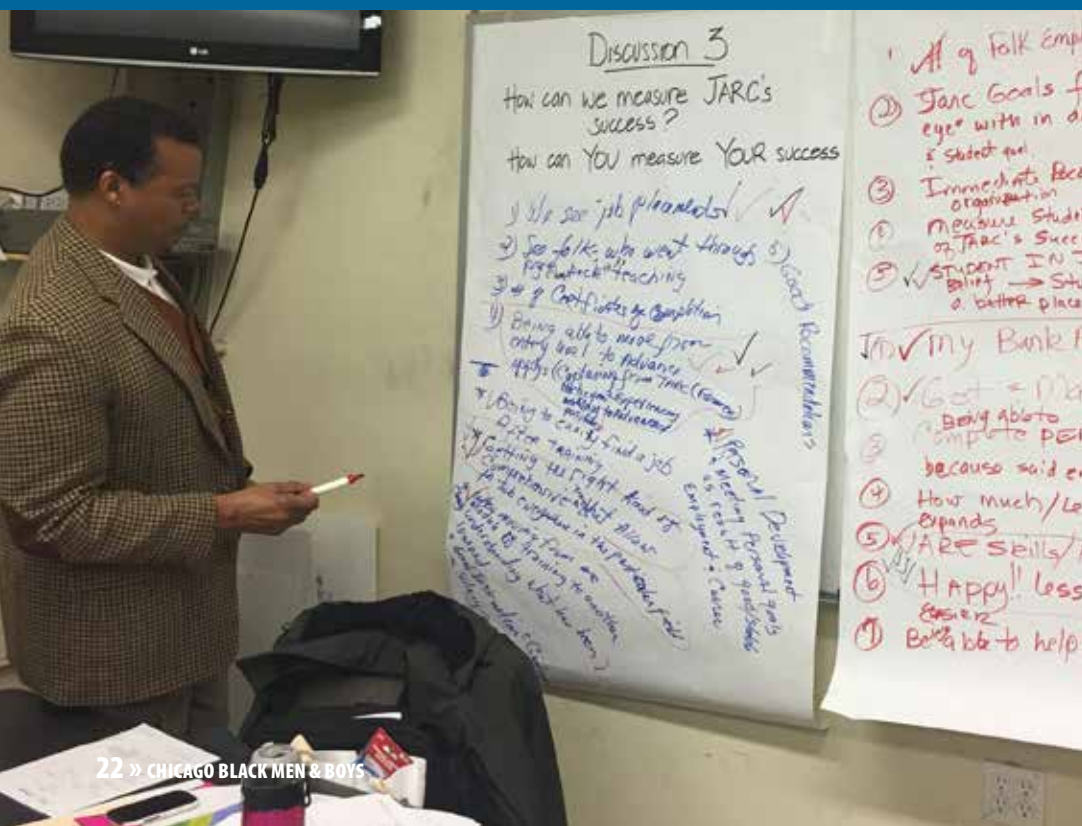


Internal Entities (within community of practice)	Roles	Rationale
Community Organizations/ Agencies	Committing to building Healthy Community through the inclusion and support of Black Men and Boys	Community Organizations and Agencies need to be involved so they can engage in internal self-assessment of organization/agency practice and policies and their impact on Black Men and Boys and examine how those practices and policies could be advanced to “scale-up” comprehensive community outcomes.
Families	Working to strengthen outcomes for children through effective parental and extended family involvement and leadership that leverages the involvement of Black Men and Boys.	It is essential to involve families because they need to be actively engaged with societal and community institutions and exact demands for more equitable educational, social and economic outcomes for children and families.
Community Leaders	Embracing opportunities for intergenerational leadership to be cultivated with a nuanced understanding of the plight and promise of the community.	Community Leadership is essential in transmitting the struggles, successes, and strategies deployed by the community to advance community survival, foster intergenerational leadership development and the sharing of stories of community resiliency and self-help.
Places of Worship	Cultivating and extending the theology of liberation beyond just the congregation to the community-at-large.	Faith-based institutions have capacity and structure to lend to community problem solving and interfacing with governmental, economic and civic institutions to both advocate and advance a community consensus agenda.
Local Businesses	Building stronger social and economic connections with the community that are sustainable and that are built on trust, loyalty and community caring.	Local business is vital to the provision of quality goods, services and supports that are readily available to the community in non-exploitive transactions, with an objective of improving the economic and social status of the community.



External Entities	Roles	Rationale
Corporate	Acknowledge that private sector markets often fail to fairly distribute opportunities, resources, and rewards, and that a longstanding US history of racial and economic subordination reinforce these racial and economic injustices.	It is critical that discussions occur in board rooms about racially and economically justice practices that advance a “double bottom-line of profitability/shareholder interest and socially/economically just public outcomes.
Local Government (City Hall)	Acknowledge that local governmental (City Hall) practices and policies have reinforced racial and economic divisions established through federal and state policies and practices.	Local governmental policy has created racial injustice and economic injustice. It is critical that local government be engaged and use racial and economic equity as a prism through which governmental decisions are made. For example, deploy the Racial Equity Assessment tool to governmental decision-making.
State Government	Acknowledge that state governmental practices and policies have reinforced racially and economically divisive federal practices and policies, as well as State practices and policies themselves have promoted racially and economically divided cities.	State governmental policy has created racial injustice and economic injustice. It is critical that State government be engaged and use racial and economic equity as a prism through which governmental decisions are made. For example, deploy the Racial Equity Assessment tool to governmental decision-making.
Federal Government	Acknowledge that federal governmental practices and policies have worked to construct a racially and economically divided nation that is racially and economically segregated.	Federal governmental policy has created racial injustice and economic injustice. It is critical that Federal government be engaged and use racial and economic equity as a prism through which governmental decisions are made. For example, deploy the Racial Equity Assessment tool to governmental decision-making.

Action Plan: Theory of Change



The BMB CoP Theory of Change models how the proposed initiative strategies inform the short-term, mid-term, and long-term outcomes that will manifest the ideal vision of this work. From a collective analysis of qualitative themes from table and forum discussions, the Theory of Change model represents a framework of activities and short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals needed to impact systemic barriers and move toward an ideal system which supports the success of Black men and boys, families, and communities. The Theory of Change model outlines considerations for systems change training, model and prototype development for effective programs and accountability, methods for enhancing community leadership, increasing interest in racial equity within the system, creating systems attitudinal shifts, and long-term systems change.

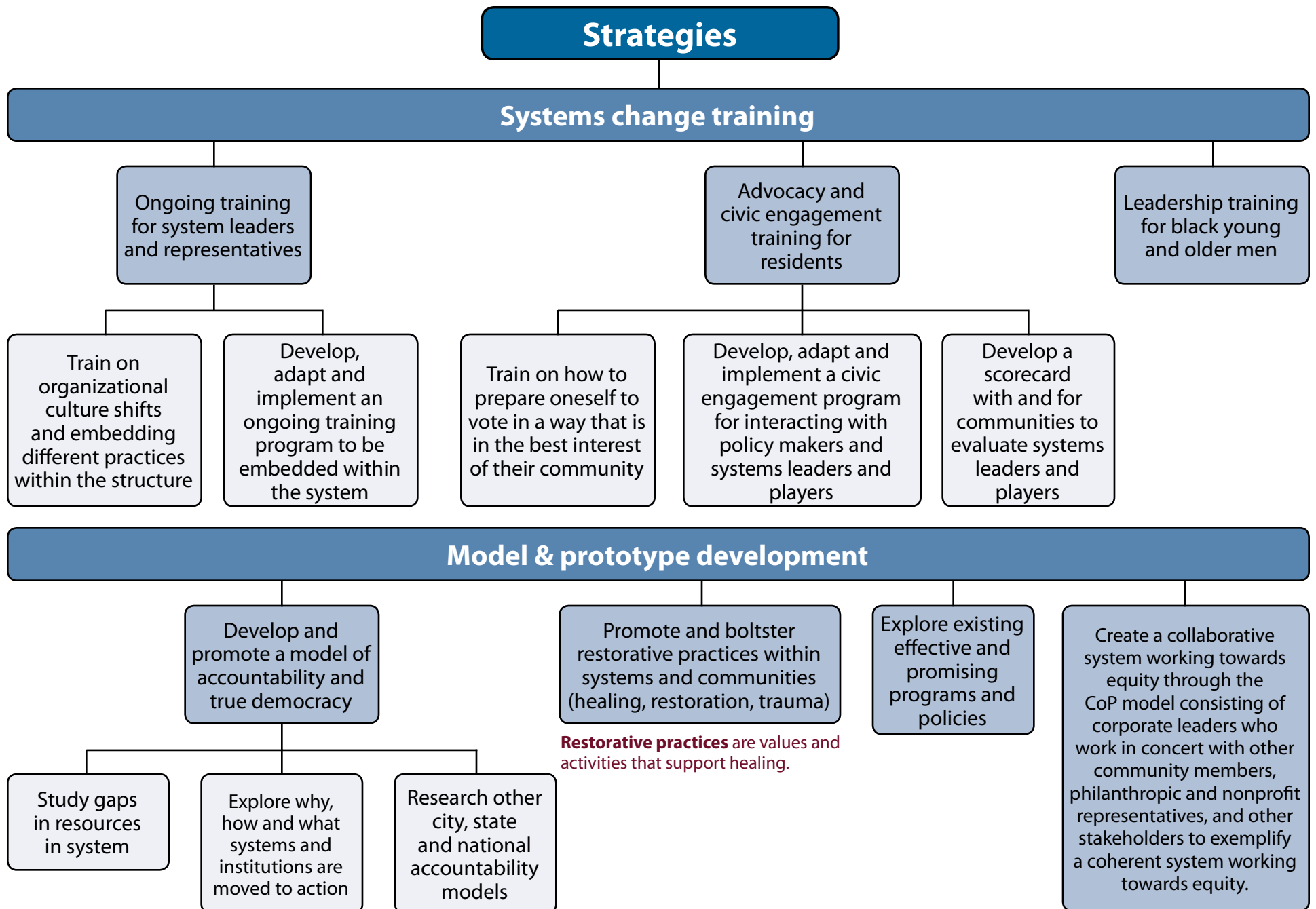
This representation is appropriate to the FFHC and the BMB CoP initiative because it provides structure and process for achieving various outcomes. The Theory of Change model was created from the voices of Black men, boys, and women; in openness and vulnerability; in authentic alignment with their experiences and from their narratives. It includes where Black men stated a desire to take ownership and contribute to the path toward transformative change as well as articulates the components that are the responsibility of stakeholders outside the community to address. Corporate and civic, governmental and philanthropic leaders are all major stakeholder groups in this effort and have a role to execute within the BMB CoP initiative.

Below is the skeleton of a roadmap for social systems to begin working toward the desired vision of this work, **a vision where systems value all people, especially Black men and boys, and see and serve to contribute to the potential and success of those they influence.** They listen, are responsive, accountable to and integrated in the communities they influence and recognize their role in supporting individuals and families over the lifespan. They recognize and admit the historic oppression they have bestowed on communities of color and act to restore the communities while supporting the strengths and responding to the wisdom of communities.





BMB CoP: The Logic Model



Short-term outcomes (1 year)

Enhanced community leadership

Residents are registered and know how to vote in a way that supports equity and justice

Increased knowledge of political system and what's perpetuating injustice

Increase in skills for independent lay accountability assessors

Motivation to be leaders, enhanced leadership skills

Increased interest in the wellbeing of black men and boys within the system

Increased awareness and motivation to address implicit bias

Knowledge of accountability model

Increased collective efficacy within CoP

Mid-term outcomes

Systems attitudinal shift

Motivation for being more critically self-reflective

Increased openness of the idea of black male leadership (policies and practices)

Enhanced relationships with black male residents from low income communities

Increase interest in accountability model

Decreased barriers for residents to participate in political process

Long-term outcomes (10 years)

Systems change

Integrity and follow-through on commitments to and for historically marginalized communities

Dedicated resources and practice around accountability model

Increased accountability to the community, esp black men and boys

Increased transparency

Strong and servant-oriented culturally responsive black leadership

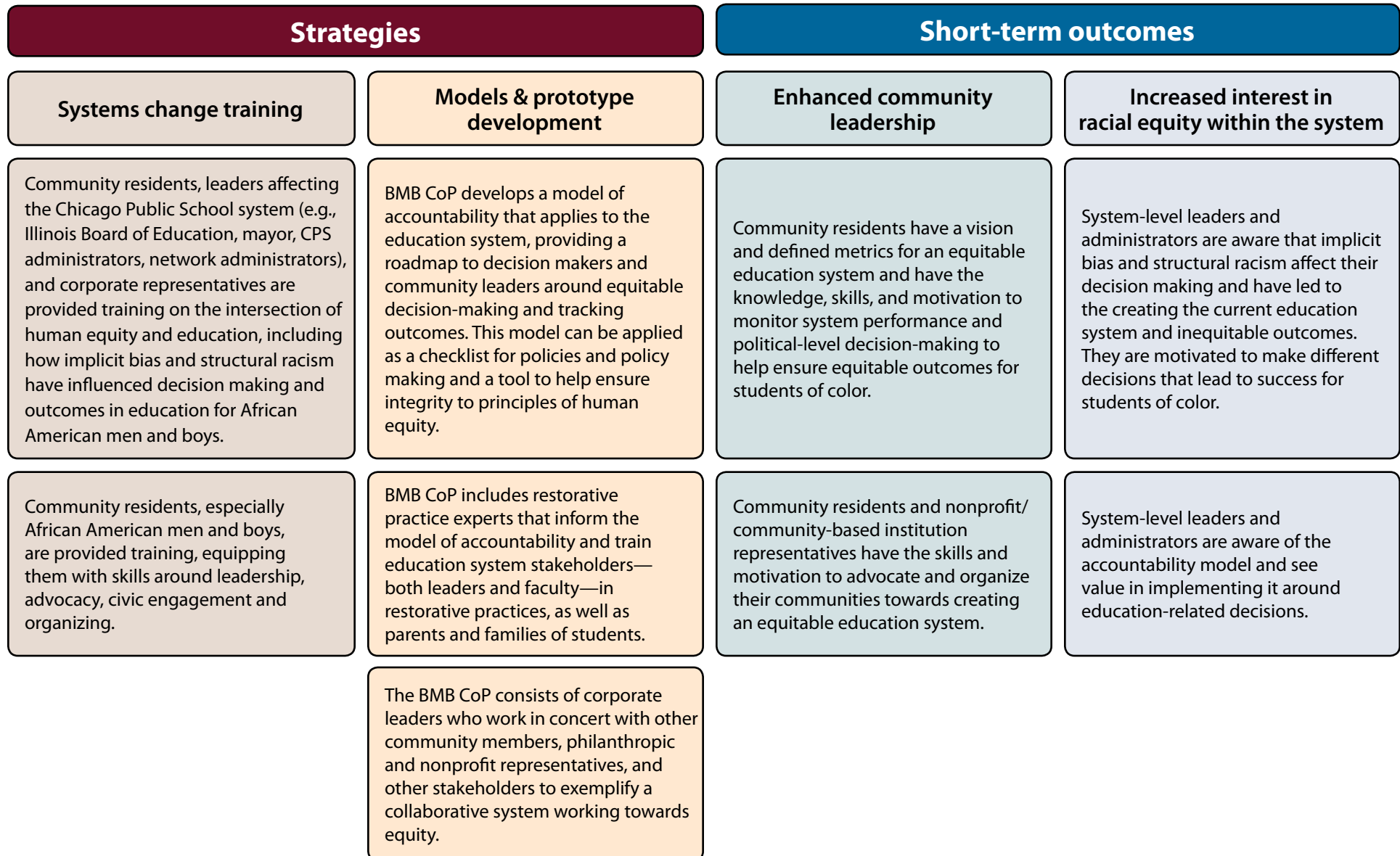
Culturally humble leadership

Decreased influence of personal monetary gain and large donors on political decisions / decreased political corruption

Logic Model Example

(applied to education strategy)

This model presents an example of a *possible* application of the theory of change (TOC) in the system of education in Chicago. This is an “around-the-corner” look at strategies and potential short-term outcomes, which provides a practical depiction of the prior conceptual framework (TOC). While this is only one scenario of how this could be applied to the education system, the theory of change will also be applied to systems, such as criminal justice, health, and housing, the labor market, and banking.



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THE PROJECT TEAM



Three groups are collaborating for this initiative: *FFHC*, *Stanhope Consulting*, and *BECOME: Center for Community Engagement and Social Change*. The following are brief bios for each entity along with their role in the project.

» FFHC

Vision Statement: Black men are recognized and valued as assets to their children, families, and communities. As an asset Black men are supported in their efforts to contribute greatly to the well-being of their children, families, and community and the public and private sector policies and practices reflect these beliefs.

Role: Provided overall oversight and management of the project. FFHC was charged with helping to facilitate the small and large group engagements and activities associated with the building of the BMB Community of Practice. Additionally, FFHC helped provide support for the conceptual framing of the outcomes or outputs associated with the group work in collaborative partnership with Stanhope and BECOME, Inc. FFHC engaged in outreach and strategic connections with Community of Practice members and other important stakeholders in efforts to continue to expand the circle of individuals participating in the Community of Practice. Also, FFHC has provided capacity support for the mining of best and promising practice and policies that are emergent in changing the life-chances of BMB. Finally, FFHC provided organizational infrastructure for supporting and resourcing the project so that it could advance successfully.



» Stanhope Consulting Corp.

Stanhope's business is Public Participation. We are committed to designing the best public involvement and engagement strategies. The primary goal is inclusion by design. With a combination of extensive stakeholder outreach and polling technology, we craft engaging, deliberative, public forums. These strategies involve stakeholders throughout the decision-making process, amplifying the public's voice in the design of vibrant and sustainable places.

Role: Provided Forum Design, Meeting Management, and the outputs and analysis from the Forums. Designed outreach strategies to establish the optimum level of public input. This was done through identifying, contacting and engaging stakeholders to attend and participate at their highest level at the Forums. The planning and designing of these strategies, that incorporate vulnerable communities (usually marginalized as hard to reach populations) into the Forum, resulted in a richer and deeper discussion, more robust deliberations and prioritization of the critical issues that impacts them most.



» BECOME: Center for Community Engagement and Social Change

is a multifaceted, 501(c)3 community-based, nonprofit organization. Our values that drive the direction of BECOME can best be summarized by these words: transformation, community-centered, building from within, culturally responsive, mobilization, and systemic change. Our mission is to nourish communities affected by injustice in order to make their vision of a thriving community a reality. Our model and competencies include Culturally Responsive Evaluation, action research, community organizing, facilitating collaborative learning and action and working with individuals, groups and organizations to build on the communities' strength and resiliency, while implementing, coordinating, and evaluating strategies for long-term quality of life.

Role: Assisted with the design facilitation, action research, data collection, and evaluative thinking framework throughout the project. Planned and designed focus groups, designed and conducted the facilitator training and facilitation, facilitated and solidified the Theory of Change Model design, established benchmarks within the planning phase and beyond, lead data analysis, convened small group sessions for collective analysis and learning from forums, and assisted in report writing.

Acknowledgment:

FFHC would like to extend its enormous thanks to its community and neighborhood partners, community-members and specifically all the Black men and women who shared their stories of triumph and pain with us, such that we could tell their story. The openness, commitment and the desire to serve and strengthen community resounds loud and clear. It is our hope that the report captures the voice and spirit of the many community individuals that we had the privilege and honor to engage and represent in the pages of this report.

The Hosts of our Convenings and the Volunteers at those Facilities, the countless Facilitators and support Staff that executed our agendas, and those that took what was shared and made created this Report.



Rest In Peace

Otis Green

Participant in BMB discussions
at The Peace House (located in the
Englewood Community, Chicago)

Host: Founder & President, Robbin Carroll
Co-Executive Directors, Erin Vogel
& Quentin Mables