

BLUEPRINT FOR TRANSFORMATION

EIGHT PATHWAYS

TO EQUITY & JUSTICE

FOR BLACK MEN

A Policy Agenda for Reclaiming **Wealth, Power, and Dignity**

2025

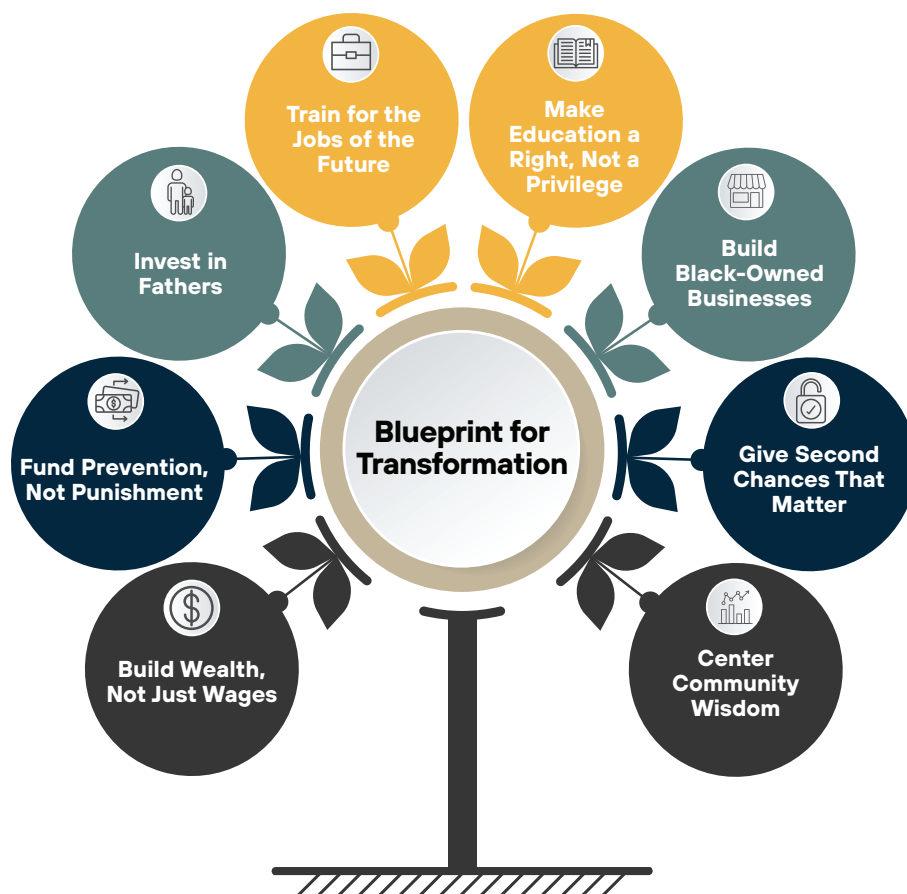


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WHY TRANSFORMATION CANNOT WAIT

The truth is clear to anyone willing to confront it. Black men in America have been deliberately pushed to the margins of society. Our exclusion has not been random. It has been codified in law, reinforced through public policy, and carried out through state-sanctioned violence.

We were stolen from our ancestral homeland, separated from our ancient customs, and thrust into a system that never intended for us to be free. Slavery tried to break our bodies. Segregation tried to break our spirit. Mass incarceration tried to finish what slavery and segregation began. Yet still, we remain.

At Fathers, Families, & Healthy Communities, we know that transformation is not only necessary but also within our reach. We deserve more than temporary relief. We deserve policies and systems that honor our humanity, strengthen our families, and open long-closed doors of opportunity.

This Blueprint for Transformation is a step toward that vision. It is not the full Breaking the Chains report, but a condensed version of its key recommendations. Each recommendation targets a specific system that must be transformed: education, employment, wealth-building, business ownership, housing, public budgeting, data infrastructure, and supports for fathers and families. Together, they form a roadmap for uplifting Black men and fortifying the families and communities we hold sacred.

If you believe in equity, show it through your actions. If you value justice, work to advance it. If you have influence, use it to create access. Let this Blueprint for Transformation guide your decisions, your partnerships, and your investments.

We cannot rewrite the past. But we can build a future that reflects who we are and what we deserve. The question is not whether transformation is possible. The question is whether you are ready to be part of it, because in the end, victory belongs to the righteous.

In pursuit of justice,

Clinton Boyd, Jr., Ph.D.

Clinton Boyd, Jr., Ph.D.
Executive Director
Fathers, Families, & Healthy Communities

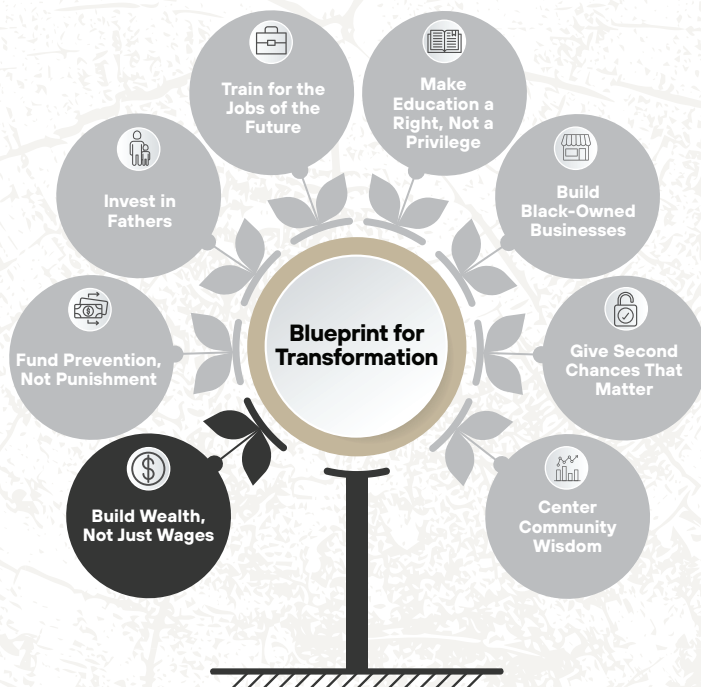


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BUILD WEALTH, NOT JUST WAGES

From: Breaking the Chains: Reclaiming
Wealth, Power, and Dignity for Black Men



Why It Matters

Black men—particularly those who are formerly incarcerated, low-income, or in disinvested communities—have been locked out of wealth-building by design. Today's economic disparities are the direct result of that history.

The data makes it plain:

- Black households, on average, hold \$1.1 million less wealth than white households—a gap shaped by centuries of racial injustice passed down across generations.¹
- In Chicago, half of Black families have no wealth, while the typical white family has \$210,000.²
- Median wealth for Black men is just \$10,100—eight times less than white men.³

What We Recommend

Deliver Reparative Wealth Solutions

Implement bold, targeted solutions that confront the root causes of economic exclusion and build lasting financial security for Black men and their families.

- **Reparations for Black Descendants of U.S. Slavery**
Eliminate the racial wealth gap through material redress for historic and present-day injustices.
- **Baby Bonds**
Seed wealth for Black children to ensure long-term financial security.
- **Guaranteed Income for Low-Income Black Men, Especially Fathers**
Provide direct cash support to reduce economic volatility and support family stability.
- **Expanded Earned Income Tax Credits**
Extend relief to noncustodial parents and childless workers—disproportionately benefiting Black fathers long excluded from support.

Expected Impact



**Builds
Generational
Wealth**



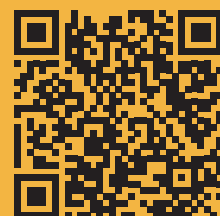
**Advances
Economic
Justice**



**Fuels
System
Transformation**

Call to Action

Help us close the racial wealth gap. Support justice-centered investments that build lasting economic power for Black men and their families.



¹ Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, Survey of Consumer Finances, 2022; William A. Darity Jr. and A. Kirsten Mullen, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2023).

² Suparna Bhaskaran, Fatimah Al-Khaldi, Ofonama Biu, Elaine Chang, Chidera Ihejirika, Ana Patricia Muñoz, and Darrick Hamilton, *The Color of Wealth in Chicago* (New York: The Institute on Race, Power and Political Economy at The New School, June 2024).

³ National Community Reinvestment Coalition, *Racial Wealth Snapshot: Women, Men, and the Racial Wealth Divide* (Washington, DC: NCRC, March 15, 2022).

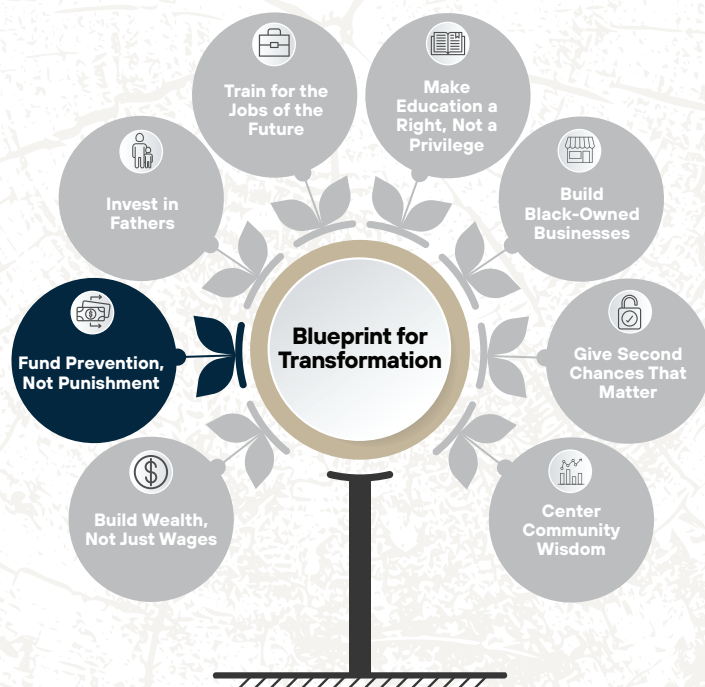


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FUND PREVENTION, NOT PUNISHMENT

From: Breaking the Chains: Reclaiming
Wealth, Power, and Dignity for Black Men



What We Recommend

Rebalance Budgets to Reflect Justice and Equity

Public budgets at the state, city, and county levels should serve as tools for repairing harm, preventing future injustice, and building thriving communities—not as instruments of punishment and exclusion.

- **Put Healing Before Harm**
Invest in culturally relevant violence prevention, behavioral and mental health care, reentry services, and mentorship programs led by and serving Black communities.
- **Direct Funding to Black-Led Organizations**
Shift funds from downstream systems to Black-led organizations, correcting historic underfunding that favored larger White-led institutions.
- **Adopt Racial Equity Budgeting**
Shape budgets through racial equity analysis, community input, and investments that eliminate racial disparities.

Expected Impact



Shifts Power to
Communities



Reverses
Systemic
Disinvestment



Creates Safer,
Healthier
Neighborhoods

Why It Matters

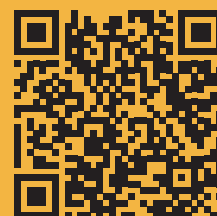
Budgets are moral documents that show who and what we value. For generations, they have stripped resources from Black men and communities, deepening poverty, fueling violence, and expanding incarceration. Across Chicago, Illinois, and the nation, funding favors punishment over investments in safety, health, and opportunity.

The data makes it plain:

- From 2021 to 2024, Illinois spent about \$2 billion each year on incarceration, while committing only a fraction of that to community-based interventions.⁴
- Public safety spending overwhelmingly funds policing and incarceration over community-based alternatives.⁵

Call to Action

Support us in advocating for equitable budget reforms that redirect resources to build safe, thriving communities for Black men.



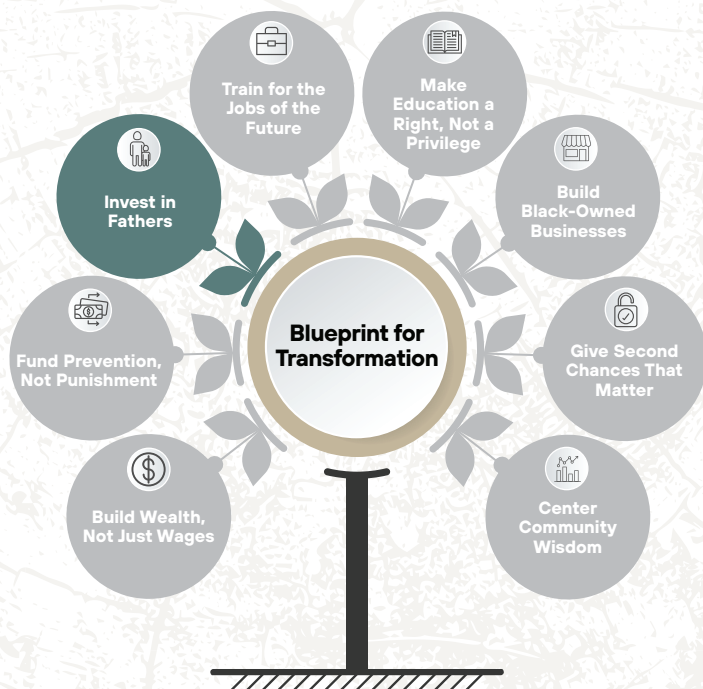
⁴ McGuireWoods Consulting. *Illinois 2024 End of Session Report*. June 14, 2024.

⁵ Lindsey McLendon, Rachael Eisenberg, and Nick Wilson. *Improving Public Safety Through Better Accountability and Prevention*. Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, May 16, 2024.



INVEST IN FATHERS

From: Breaking the Chains: Reclaiming Wealth, Power, and Dignity for Black Men



Why It Matters

Black fathers are central to the economic, social, emotional, and cultural well-being of their families and communities. Yet they are too often excluded from family support systems. Even when fully engaged, many—especially those impacted by the legal system—face persistent barriers to employment, housing, and parenting.

The data makes it plain:

- Black fathers, whether living with their children or not, show higher levels of involvement in daily caregiving than fathers of any other race.⁶
- Many low-income Black fathers are more likely than others to lack supportive networks, rely on family for emotional support, and have limited access to community resources.⁷

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What We Recommend

Support Holistic, Healing-Centered Fatherhood Programs

Invest in programs that strengthen the role of Black fathers as pillars of their families and communities.

- **Culturally Responsive, Trauma-Informed Supports**
Invest in programs that uplift Black fathers, address systemic oppression, and offer healing services like parenting support, counseling, and mentorship.
- **Reentry and Basic Needs**
Start fatherhood planning during incarceration, then provide housing, meals, and personal care items post-release to ensure stability and family connection.
- **Childcare Access in Fatherhood Programs**
Partner with early childhood providers to offer quality childcare, enabling fathers to fully engage in programs and strengthen family bonds.

Expected Impact



Strengthens Family Bonds



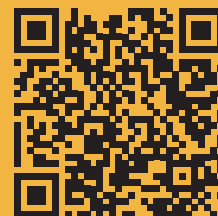
Improves Child Outcomes



Improved Emotional Safety

Call to Action

Support us in backing programs that affirm Black fathers and create pathways for them to thrive alongside their families.



⁶U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Father's Involvement With Their Children: United States, 2006–2010*. National Health Statistics Reports, no.

71. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, December 20, 2013.

⁷Angela Valdovinos D'Angelo, Emily Knas, Pamela Holcomb, and Kathryn Edin, *The Role of Social Networks Among Low-Income Fathers: Findings from the PACT Evaluation*, OPRE Report 2016-60 (Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2016).

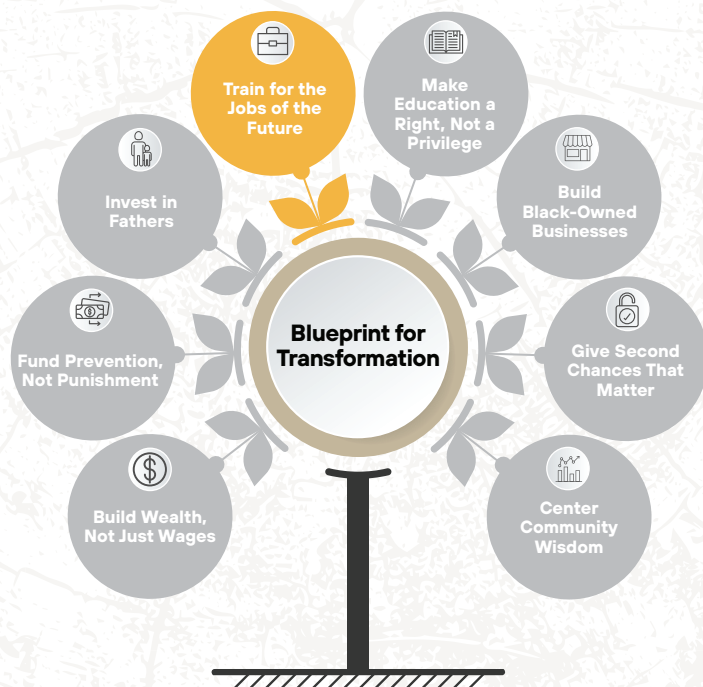


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TRAIN FOR THE JOBS OF THE FUTURE

From: Breaking the Chains: Reclaiming Wealth, Power, and Dignity for Black Men



Why It Matters

Black men—especially those with criminal records—are too often confined to unstable, low-wage work or excluded from employment altogether, while workforce systems fail to offer genuine pathways to economic mobility.

The data makes it plain:

- Black men hold less than 2% of Illinois HEAL teaching roles, 8% of STEM jobs, 10.8% of manufacturing jobs, and 7.7% of clean energy jobs—despite these high-growth sectors offering strong wages and mobility.⁸
- Targeted pipelines, from apprenticeships to mentorship networks, can connect Black men to high-growth careers in HEAL, STEM, advanced manufacturing, and clean energy while addressing critical diversity gaps.⁹

What We Recommend

Reimagine Workforce Systems to Promote Equity and Mobility

Equip Black men with the training, support, and opportunities needed to thrive in high-growth careers.

- **Target High-Growth Industries**
Train and certify Black men for careers in health, education, and literacy (HEAL); science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM); advanced manufacturing; and green energy—careers with strong wages and mobility.
- **Offer Wraparound Supports**
Provide childcare, transportation, personal care items, and mentorship to remove barriers to success.
- **Leverage Lived Experience**
Accredit skills gained informally or during incarceration and connect to unionized, full-time employment with insurance and employee benefits.

Expected Impact



Expands
Access to Stable
Careers



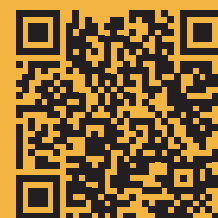
Increases
Employment



Strengthens
Regional
Economy

Call to Action

Stand with us to ensure Black men have access to real careers, not temporary jobs.



⁸ Chalkbeat Chicago, "Male Teacher of Color Shortage," *Chalkbeat*, 2022, <https://www.chalkbeat.org>; National Science Foundation, "Representation of Demographic Groups in STEM," NCSES Data Tables, 2023, <https://nces.nsf.gov>; Jobs for the Future, "Manufacturing Workforce Overview," 2024, <https://www.jff.org>; Illinois WorkNet, "Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program Manual," 2024, <https://illinoisworknet.com>.

⁹ American Institute for Boys and Men, "The HEAL Economy" Research Brief, 2023, <https://aibm.org>; National Society of Black Engineers, "Programs and Initiatives," accessed August 8, 2025, <https://nsbe.org>; Illinois Clean Jobs Workforce Network Program, "Climate and Equitable Jobs Act Overview," Smart Energy Design Assistance Center, 2024, <https://smartenergy.illinois.edu>.



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MAKE EDUCATION A RIGHT, NOT A PRIVILEGE

From: Breaking the Chains: Reclaiming Wealth, Power, and Dignity for Black Men



Why It Matters

Education is the cornerstone of civilization and a gateway to opportunity, yet systemic inequities—from underfunded schools to exclusionary discipline—continue to deny Black men the affirming, high-quality learning environments they need to thrive.

The data makes it plain:

- Only 24.9% of Black men over 25 hold a bachelor's degree or higher, the lowest among major racial-gender groups, with just 40% completing college within six years.¹⁰
- About 40–45% of Black men aged 20–24 in Chicago are neither in school nor working, over twice the national average.¹¹
- Only 35% of state prisons offer college courses, and just 3% of incarcerated Black men leave with a bachelor's degree or higher.¹²

What We Recommend

Make Learning Accessible, Relevant, and Empowering

Support debt-free education and skills training for Black men, paired with mentorship, financial literacy, and targeted pathways into high-growth industries.

- **Expand Community-Based, Debt-Free Education**
Invest in neighborhood adult education and GED programs, along with scholarships and grants that enable Black men to pursue higher education, trade certifications, and apprenticeships.
- **Career-Connected Credentialing**
Create pathways into STEM, HEAL, manufacturing, and clean energy by turning informal skills into credentials with tuition support and industry partnerships.
- **Strengthen Mentorship and Financial Empowerment**
Pair Black-led business mentorship with financial literacy training in budgeting, credit, investing, and wealth-building.

Expected Impact



Elevates Talents and Aspirations



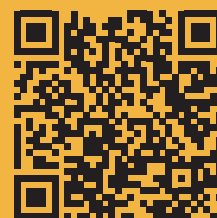
Expands Pathways to Career Advancement



Interrupts Intergenerational Poverty

Call to Action

Support programs that recognize lived experience, remove barriers to education, and open career pathways for Black men.



¹⁰ U.S. Census Bureau, Educational Attainment Data 2021, via Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2021.

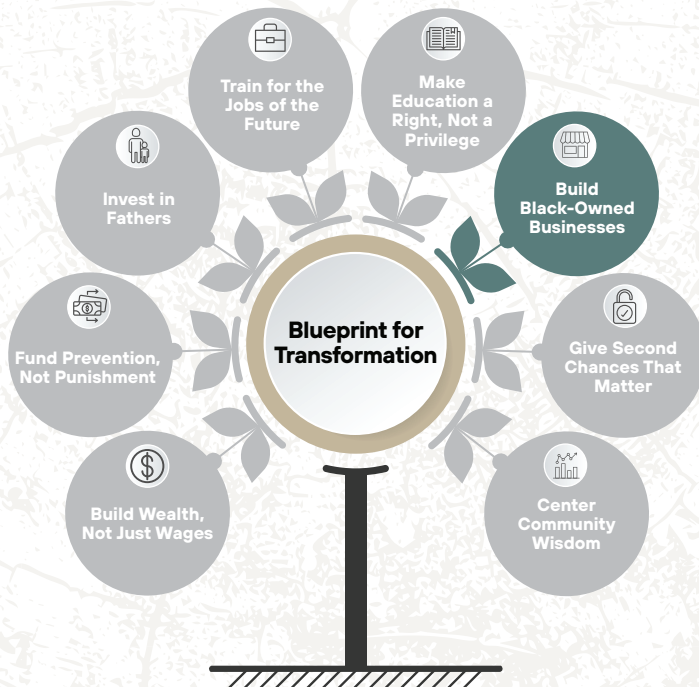
¹¹ University of Illinois at Chicago Great Cities Institute, *Youth Disconnection in Chicago*, 2022.

¹² Prison Policy Initiative, *Getting Back on Course: Educational Exclusion Among Formerly Incarcerated*, 2018.



BUILD BLACK-OWNED BUSINESSES

From: Breaking the Chains: Reclaiming
Wealth, Power, and Dignity for Black Men



Why It Matters

Black men, especially those with low incomes and who are system-impacted, have the talent and drive to build thriving businesses that strengthen communities. Yet systemic barriers keep them from the capital, networks, and opportunities they need to succeed. Targeted investment can remove these barriers, unlock entrepreneurship, and create lasting wealth for families and communities.

The data makes it plain:

- In Chicago, Black residents make up 29% of the population yet own under 5% of employer firms, reflecting Black men's limited presence as entrepreneurs in the city.¹³
- Formerly incarcerated individuals, particularly Black men, are 40% more likely to start businesses than peers without records, yet face higher loan denials and persistent barriers to capital, contracts, and licensing.¹⁴

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What We Recommend

Fund Black-Owned Futures

Equip aspiring Black entrepreneurs with the capital, skills, and connections they need to launch, grow, and sustain thriving businesses.

- **Increase Capital and Market Access**

Expand grants, low-interest loans, venture funding, and contracting opportunities for Black men-owned businesses, paired with capacity-building support.

- **Build Supportive Business Hubs**

Create community-based centers offering technical assistance, legal help, marketing, certification, and cooperative ownership development.

- **Eliminate Structural Barriers**

Protect informal entrepreneurs, ease licensing restrictions, and enforce supplier diversity to open pathways for Black men to succeed in business.

Expected Impact



More Black
Men-Owned
Firms



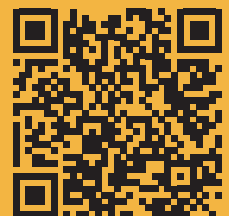
Higher Business
Revenues and
Assets



Transition
from Informal
to Formal
Ventures

Call to Action

Join us in unlocking the potential of Black-owned businesses to drive community growth and create lasting careers.



¹³ Chicago Urban League, *State of Black Chicago – Entrepreneurship Section* (2025)

¹⁴ Hwang, Kylie J., and Damon J. Phillips. 2024. "Locked Out of the Labor Market and Into Entrepreneurship: The Surprising Path to Self-Employment after Incarceration." *American Journal of Sociology* 130(1):1–48. <https://doi.org/10.1086/729476>

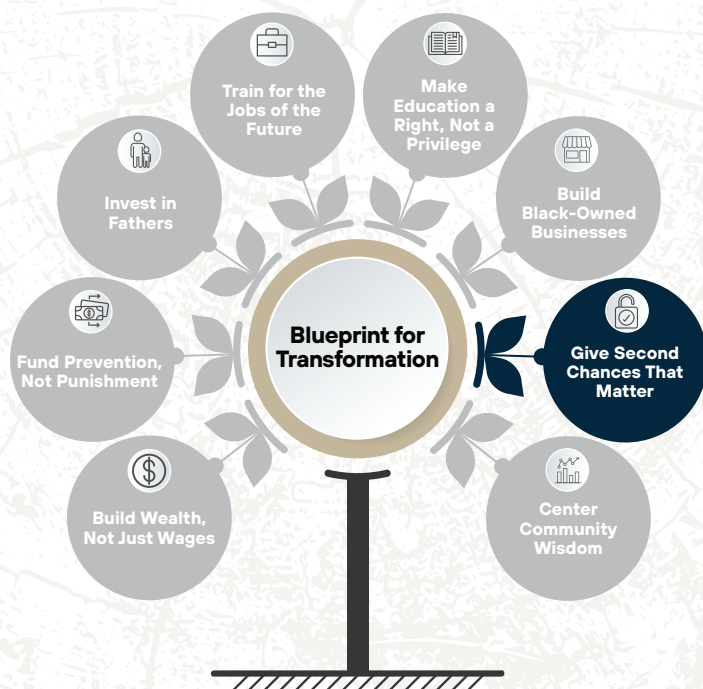


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GIVE SECOND CHANCES THAT MATTER

From: Breaking the Chains: Reclaiming Wealth, Power, and Dignity for Black Men



Why It Matters

Black men with records possess valuable skills and experience, yet face steep discrimination in hiring. Too often, stigma, bias, and misplaced fears cause employers to overlook their talent and potential.

The data makes it plain:

- Black men with records are routinely shut out of jobs, even when they have the skills to excel.¹⁵
- Fair hiring raises incomes, stabilizes families, and slashes recidivism.¹⁶
- Employing Black men builds communities, grows the economy, and cuts public assistance dependence.¹⁷

What We Recommend

Remove Barriers, Expand Opportunity

Implement bold, targeted solutions that confront the root causes of economic exclusion and build lasting financial security for Black men and their families.

- **Incentivize Fair-Chance Hiring**
Provide tax credits and contracting preferences for employers hiring formerly incarcerated Black men, tied to retention and wage growth.
- **Adopt Job-Relevant Screening**
Ban blanket exclusions and limit background checks to job-related criteria after conditional offers.
- **Strengthen Support and Engagement**
Offer mentorship, training, and employer education to boost retention and advancement.

Expected Impact



Reduces
Recidivism



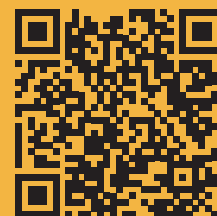
Expands Labor
Pool



Creates Second
Chances

Call to Action

Join us in advancing hiring policies that open fair, lasting opportunities for returning citizens, especially Black men.



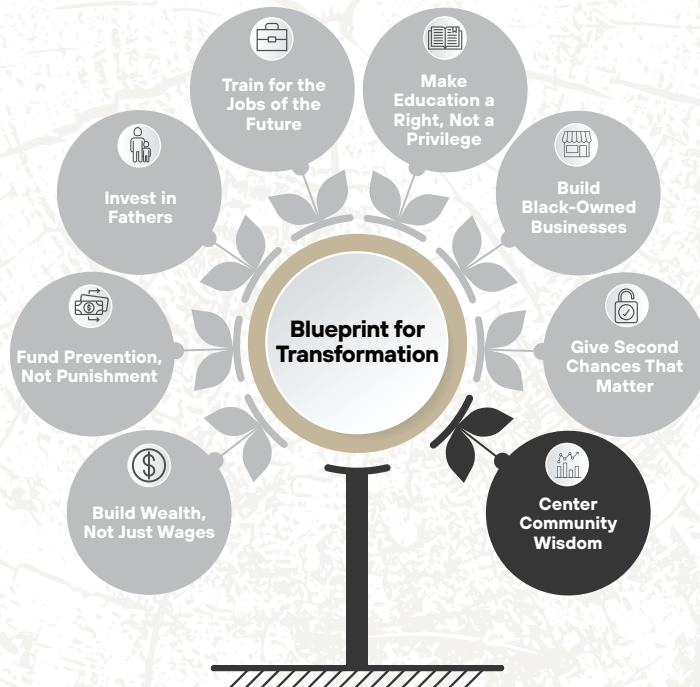
¹⁵ Pager, Devah. *Marked: Race, Crime, and Finding Work in an Era of Mass Incarceration*. University of Chicago Press, 2007.

¹⁶ Schaefer, Stephanie, et al. *A Better Path Forward for Criminal Justice: Training and Employment for Correctional Populations*. Brookings Institution, 2021.

¹⁷ Rodgers III, William M. "Race in the Labor Market: The Role of Equal Employment Opportunity and Other Policies." *RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 5(5), 198–220, 2019.

CENTER COMMUNITY WISDOM

From: Breaking the Chains: Reclaiming
Wealth, Power, and Dignity for Black Men



Why It Matters

Black men are often invisible in data collection, leading to policy failures. Accurate, disaggregated, and community-owned data is essential to advance policies and programs that benefit Black men, their children, families, and communities.

The data makes it plain:

- Black men's invisibility in traditional data systems obscures the systemic barriers they face.¹⁸
- Disaggregated, community-owned data aligns policies and programs with Black men's lived realities.¹⁹
- Such data drives targeted investments, closes equity gaps, and counters harmful myths.²⁰

What We Recommend

Build Community-Centered Data Infrastructure

Community-driven data systems can ensure Black men's experiences are represented in decision-making, improving the relevance and effectiveness of policies and programs.

- **Build a Statewide Data Set**
Collect comprehensive data on Black men's health, well-being, and experiences statewide.
- **Ensure Community Stewardship**
Partner with trusted institutions to protect privacy and ensure data is used for community benefit.
- **Drive Solutions**
Amplify the strengths of Black men and inform prevention-driven policies and practices.

Expected Impact



**Informs Better
Policy and
Practices**



**Elevates
Community
Voices**



**Tracks
Progress and
Accountability**

Call to Action

Support us in building a community-owned data initiative that puts Black men at the center of policies and programs benefiting them, their families, and their communities.



¹⁸ Pettit, Becky. *Invisible Men: Mass Incarceration and the Myth of Black Progress*. Russell Sage Foundation, 2012.

¹⁹ Fathers, Families, & Healthy Communities, and Equity and Transformation (Chicago). *Breaking the Chains: Reclaiming Wealth, Power, and Dignity for Black Men*. Chicago: Fathers, Families, & Healthy Communities and Equity and Transformation, 2025.

²⁰ U.S. Commission on Social Status of Black Men and Boys. *Annual Report*. 2023.



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