



LEARN. BUILD. MOVE.

postscript

A Gathering
of Leaders
2013

June 18-20, 2013
Detroit, Michigan
Westin Book Cadillac Hotel

CONFERENCE THEME



LEARN.

This type of session is built around **knowledge sharing**. Facilitators are asked to share knowledge from the field, encourage peer learning, and provide recommendations so participants walk away with new tools, resources, and concrete plans to further their learning.



BUILD.

This type of session is built around **collective strategy**. It is a conversation-based, facilitated dialogue that will ask workshop participants to engage with the issues, assemble in small groups to creatively wrestle with challenges, and arrive at personal and coordinated strategies.



MOVE.

Serving as the last session of the conference, this session is centered on ways conference participants can **mobilize** action plans for work impacting males of color.

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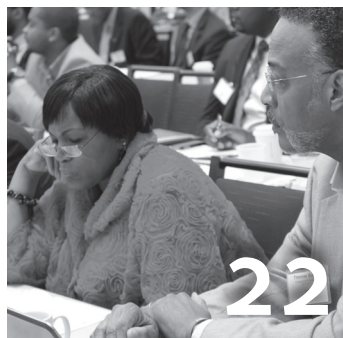
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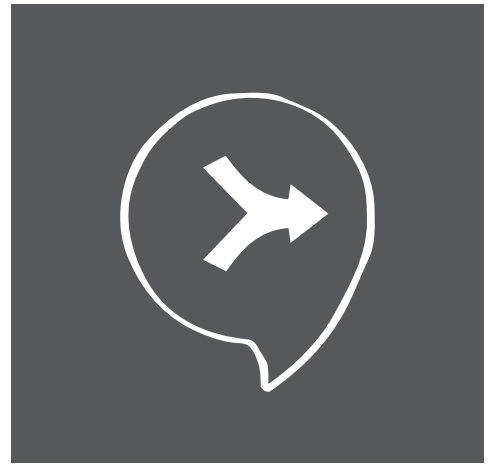
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What's Next



A Gathering of Leaders 2013



INTRODUCTION

Marcus Littles and Micah Gilmer, Frontline Solutions

mentors and organizes Cambodian and Cambodian-American men like him, showing them strategies for protecting their human rights. In Albuquerque, NM, Albino Garcia connects with Chicano and Native-American youth and helps divert them from gang life, satisfying their hunger to belong through traditional culture and sacred rituals.

In Baltimore, MD, Joe Jones founded and directs an organization that trains and equips fathers to be a positive force for their children. In San Diego, CA, Andy Pacificar

Three men who are separated by geography, heritage, and vocation. But they share a similar vision as men of color seeking greater opportunities and better outcomes for their peers.

These three men were among 200 participants who shared their stories at **A Gathering of Leaders 2013**, a three-day conference held in Detroit in June. The invite-only conference, the second in two years, joined together an eclectic group of social change leaders.

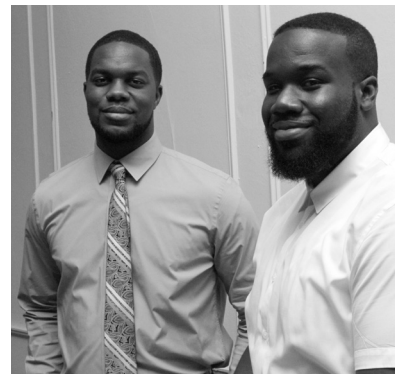
After years of dedicating ourselves to males of color—personally as coaches, mentors, and advocates and professionally as conference organizers and senior partners at Frontline Solutions—it is hard to convey the significance of bringing together leaders like Jones, Pacificar, or Garcia, of giving them a platform for telling their stories and helping foster connections with like-minded peers. For us and for our collaborators and sponsors, A Gathering of Leaders is not networking as usual, but a venue for supporting the work of grassroots leaders on shoestring budgets and CEOs of multimillion-dollar national foundations, and of strengthening the infrastructure that supports their respective organizations.

**THE COLLECTIVE
END GOAL FOR ALL
PARTICIPANTS IS TO
MAKE SUCCESS FOR
MALES OF COLOR THE
NORM RATHER THAN
THE EXCEPTION**

Participants at A Gathering of Leaders represented philanthropy, policy making, research, journalism, advocacy, and community organizing. Each group contributed valuable perspectives and insights, and all were motivated by stories like Jones', Pacificar's, and Garcia's and by a common vision of achievement for African-American, Latino, Native, and Asian/Pacific Islander males. The collective end goal for all participants is to make success for males of color the norm rather than the exception, and, through mass mobilization, to dismantle the structural racism that has long inhibited progress for us all.

In spite of the gross disparities that males of color face today, only a handful of convenings have focused on this population and on strategies to improve their life outcomes. Recent developments, however, indicate the tide is shifting.

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**LEADERS OF 26 OF THE
COUNTRY'S FOREMOST
PHILANTHROPIC
ORGANIZATIONS MADE A
FORMAL COMMITMENT
TO ACT ON BEHALF OF
MALES OF COLOR**

Two months before A Gathering of Leaders, leaders of 26 of the country's foremost philanthropic organizations made a formal commitment to act on behalf of males of color. Specifically, their pledge committed each group member to "examine, recommend, and, where appropriate, individually or collectively support efforts at national, regional, and local levels, by business, government, or individuals, to explicitly engage in improving life chances for boys and men of color." One organization leading this collective mission is the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation through the coordination of its Forward Promise initiative. This multi-year commitment, of which A Gathering of Leaders plays an integral part, seeks to improve the health, education, and employment outcomes for males of color.

We have also seen meaningful steps forward for males of color in the public sector. In early 2013, in a legal settlement involving Meridian School District in Mississippi, a U.S. District Court judge approved a plan to reform school discipline that decreased excessive suspensions and expulsions of mostly young black students. The case represented a victory for advocates across the country fighting to abolish a school-to-prison pipeline that disproportionately affects males of color.



In California, a dozen Assembly members sitting on the Assembly Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color have made legislative gains on issues affecting males of color, including reductions of the number of school expulsions and suspensions of males of color. The Committee, working in partnership with the Alliance for Boys and Men of Color, currently operates from a blueprint it created to move an agenda forward for boys and men of color.

Because convenings about males of color are uncommon, it is essential that we spread the word about this emerging movement with our colleagues through blog posts, social media, op-eds, and publications like this one. This report, intended as a resource for A Gathering of Leaders participants as well as for the broader social change sector, highlights the insights, recommendations, lessons learned, victories, and struggles of those who attended. It stops short of exhaustively chronicling every observation, but it does capture the conference in its different settings and contexts—the full-conference discussions, panel interviews, and intimate breakout sessions in which participants organized around areas of practice and strategized with each other.

**BECAUSE CONVENINGS
ABOUT MALES OF COLOR
ARE UNCOMMON, IT IS
ESSENTIAL THAT WE
SPREAD THE WORD
ABOUT THIS EMERGING
MOVEMENT WITH OUR
COLLEAGUES**

The authors have extended the theme of the conference—**Learn, Build, Move**—with its triple focus on knowledge sharing, strategy coordination, and action planning. It was important to gather reflections from conference participants and leaders, to anchor this extensive field in the personal experiences of real people. Kris Putnam-Walkerly, William Jackson, Melissa DeShields, and Andrew Wolk each share how they have learned, strategized, and acted on behalf of males of color, and the value they place on A Gathering of Leaders and forums like it.

The report's conclusion, *What's Next?*, offers final thoughts on where we are now and where we should go from here. Among the many challenging questions regarding this work, one dominates: how do we change public will about males of color? Of course, there isn't a short answer to that question. A venue like A Gathering of Leaders exists so that leaders can gradually formulate an answer through consensus. The hope is that public will builds and people mobilize to a tipping point, making conferences gatherings like this one entirely obsolete.





QUESTIONS & CONCERNS

KRIS PUTNAM-WALKERLY, PUTNAM COMMUNITY INVESTMENT CONSULTING

In the opening discussion at A Gathering of Leaders, participants identified challenges they are experiencing in their work to support and advance the lives of young men of color. I found it interesting that five of the questions and comments focused on concerns about and mistrust of philanthropy and even of nonprofit organizations in general. All are legitimate questions and concerns—applicable to grantmaking on any issue or community:

1. *Do funders and nonprofits have our best interests at heart?* Communities are often asked to do work at the behest of foundations and nonprofits, and they aren't always sure these organizations fully understand the communities' needs or are truly working for their best interests. Foundations and nonprofits must ensure that the people who will be impacted by their strategies and initiatives are represented in planning, framing, and development. Authentic community voices must be heard "so that we don't inadvertently support white supremacy and racism."

2. *What is the lens through which funders view their work supporting young men and boys of color?* Most foundation staff and trustees bring different race and class perspectives and experiences than people living in low-income communities and communities of color. We need to ensure that there is diversity in philanthropy at all levels—staff, executives, and board. The D5 Coalition is one example of an organized effort to encourage diversity in philanthropy. Foundations can also get creative about additional ways to engage diverse perspectives. For example, the Saint Luke's Foundation in Cleveland has a community advisory board for each of its funding areas, comprised of people who live in the communities being served.

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Session Recap

Title: Day 1 Opening Session

Facilitators: Marcus Littles, Micah Gilmer, Maisha Simmons

Issues Raised:

- Recognizing the challenges as well as the progress made to improve the lives of males of color
- The need to build public will
- Fitting structural issues into programmatic frames
- Building an authentic alliance between black and brown people

Main Conclusions:

- We need to build collective will in a way that connects meaningfully with public policy.
- Males of color need to demand a bigger piece of the funding pie.
- A tension exists between nonprofits and community leaders.
- There needs to be less funding for research and more for grassroots organizations.

Quotes:

"We hope to be a continuous example of philanthropy collaborating to provide a venue for field leaders to connect, engage, and build on our collective resources."

—Maisha Simmons

"We need to make sure we have authentic voices from the community advocating for policies that benefit our communities the best."





Session Recap

Title: Building the Public Will
(Plenary Panel)

Facilitators: Joe Jones, Darrell Dawsey, Frank Antonio Lopez, Judith Browne Dianis, Deirdre Royster, Albino Garcia

Issues Raised:

- Black and brown people's lack of control of their own narratives
- The need among young males of color for a policy platform
- The large sums of money in the prison industrial complex and in dangerous education reform ideas

Main Conclusions:

- Our work must extend beyond organizational capacity by leveraging each other's resources to advance good policy.
- We must challenge the public conversation as it pertains to black and brown males by taking back control of our own stories.

Quotes:

"Practice without policy advocacy is limited and narrow." —Joseph Jones

"We have to be careful of schools that are pushing our kids out so they can try to race to the top."

—Judith Browne Dianis

"No other groups tell their history from a loser's perspective. We are not losers!"

—Darrell Dawsey

"We work to convert public ill that impacts males of color through cultural healing, or *cultura cura*." —Albino Garcia



3. *Recognize that your funding, theories of change, and frameworks are unlikely to reverse the past 400 years of oppression and racism.* One participant wanted to remind foundations that however well-intentioned, strategic, and evidence-based their grant programs are, and no matter how much money they want to give, they won't reverse hundreds of years of institutionalized racism and the problems that have resulted. They also encouraged foundations to "be a little looser with your results-based accountability framework" and come into their communities with "open hearts and understanding" about the myriad ways that community members are already working to help young men of color that don't neatly fit into these frameworks, but which will exponentially leverage philanthropic investments if funders would only see and appreciate those efforts.

RECOGNIZE THAT YOUR FUNDING, THEORIES OF CHANGE, AND FRAMEWORKS ARE UNLIKELY TO REVERSE THE PAST 400 YEARS OF OPPRESSION AND RACISM

4. *Expand the pie and ensure that funding is not disproportionately spent on research, analysis, convenings, and yet more research.* One participant was concerned that it seems more funding is provided for research, evaluation, reports, analysis, and convenings than for grassroots organizations doing the work on the ground. But rather than think about how to re-divide the pie, let's think about how to *expand* the pie and increase funding and political will to support young men of color.

5. *Stop "flavor of the month" grantmaking.* Too often funding is tied to specific projects, making it difficult for nonprofits to plan, grow, and do their work effectively. During the conference discussion, youth organizing served as an example of a strategy that is critical for changing policies to support boys and young men of color yet appears to be fading in interest and appeal for foundations. Participants advocated for more foundations providing general operating support to nonprofits to realize the greatest impact.



LEARN. SESSION RECAPS



Title: Advancing State and Local Policies for Boys and Men of Color

Facilitator: Marc Philpart

Key Outcomes:

- Explored partnering with the public for resources in multiple ways to advance policy and overcome structural challenges that disadvantage men of color.
- Developed a long-term economic argument to government in “return on investment” terms.

Issues Raised:

- Getting allies to see the benefit of state policy on local issues
- The need to fully understand systems and have a clear vision
- Recognizing the enormous nature of issues, which can't be fixed by the passage of a single bill

Takeaways:

Strategies

- Build coalitions.
- Find partners from the outset.
- Have political power that will threaten the power of the legislature.

Action Steps

- Conduct a scan to ensure against competing models.
- Bring a wide variety of people into the conversation about solutions.
- Encourage communities to push for policy by
 - holding community hearings to identify issues and possible solutions.
 - forming policy work groups.
 - developing state-wide coalitions (it's harder to ignore multiple voices).

Resources

- The Black Worker Center

Quotes:

“The legislative process has a way of making great ideas seem mediocre.” —*Opio Dupree*

Title: Changing the Conversation About Young Men of Color

Facilitators: Robert Pérez, Debayani Kar, Amy Simon

Key Outcomes:

- Figured out how to talk about opportunities and challenges facing young men of color to see the change we want to see in the world.
- Participants came to understand how to get people to empathize with their work.
- Facilitators received input on how to proceed with research.
- Had engaging conversation about what works and what doesn't.

Issues Raised:

- How race, age, and gender are really tough topics to talk about
- The empathy gap among those who are not people of color
- The “hope deficit”—how people think the problems are too big to solve
- The ways people naturally categorize people; the need to change how people perceive the category of males of color
- How young men of color are treated more harshly for their mistakes than their white counterparts are

Takeaways:

Strategies

- When presenting solutions, “Show, don't tell.”
- Story themes that work well: redemption, making amends, paying it forward, accountability (sometimes), second chances, and being a man.
- In order to elicit the greatest emotion, use one statistic and one statistic only.
- Identify how the brain processes information to get people to empathize. Strategies that elicit empathy:
 - Start with values.
 - Use moral messengers.
 - Show solutions.
 - Tell stories.

Quotes:

“Race, ethnicity, gender, and age are some of the toughest issues to talk about in America.” —*Robert Pérez*

“Showing and not telling is really important in getting people to overcome their initial skepticism.” —*Amy Simon*

“Empathy is incredibly important to be successful is changing the hearts and minds of the people whose hearts and minds we want to change.” —*Robert Pérez*



LEARN. SESSION RECAPS

Title: Ensuring Excellence for African-American Students: Bridging the Gap between Theory & Practice

Facilitators: Rhonda Bryant, David Johns

Key Outcomes:

- Became familiar with the current educational reform trends that must be maximized to close gaps for low-income, high-need African-American students.
- Found partners for thinking through strategy and advancing solutions in these areas.

Issues Raised:

- Urgent need to reframe the narrative and bust certain myths
- The closing of public schools in primarily poor minority neighborhoods across the country
- Expanding the teacher workforce, particularly so more males of color are represented in the classroom

Takeaways:

Strategies at the Federal Level

- Support expanded investments for early learning and out-of-school youth (those who have dropped out without attaining credentials).
- Advocate for an ESEA Reauthorization that serves the interests of black boys.

Strategies at the State Level

- Pursue all opportunities for families to be more involved in the education conversation (family, community, and faith-based engagement).
- Take advantage of opportunities for business and industry to support early-learning investments.
- Advocate for legislation that supports out-of-school youth.

Strategies at the Local Level

- Develop relationships with your politicians. Remember they are motivated by personal experience, what their local constituents think about, and the most-talked about issues of the current moment.

General Strategies

- Take every opportunity to make the education conversation relevant to the work you do.
- Distill the messaging down and keep it simple for the media and a mass audience.

Resources:

- CLASP (clasp.org)
- White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African-Americans (ed.gov/edb/whieea)



Title: Organizing & Campaigns: Building Community Power through Our Own New Narratives

Facilitators: Don Cipriani, Maisie Chin, Frank Lopez

Key Outcomes:

- Through the sharing of ideas, gained a better understanding of how organizers of males of color think about campaigns.
- Recognized the importance of understanding our values around men of color.

Issues Raised:

- The absence of culture from the general narrative—how culture shapes one's situation and how people of color have made unique contributions to civilization
- The need for a greater focus on community-based participatory research
- The challenge of scaling programs without funding
- Reclaiming the values that have been stolen from boys and men of color

Takeaways:

Strategies

- Have dialogues with elders and learn from their values.
- Education is a human right we have to fight for.
- Look at work from an assets-based approach instead of a negative framework.
- Build more fee-for-service businesses (co-operative, social entrepreneurship).

Action Steps

- Own your own media.
- Go outside your community to push your story.
- Encourage participants to tell their own stories.
- Capitalize on the energy of the youth and the wisdom of the elders.
- Take back the values of males of color.

Quotes:

"It is an act of political resistance to raise a child."

"We have a human right to be educated in a manner that works for us."

"When you don't tell your own story, someone else tells it for you."

—Frank Lopez



LEARN. SESSION RECAPS

Title: Using Evaluation to Improve BMOC Programs and Build Evidence of Impact

Facilitator: Loren Harris

Key Outcomes:

- Created global impact statement outlining the critical importance of issues facing boys and men of color (BMOC) through a positive lens.
- Discussed fostering a culture in which men recognize that their core responsibility is to be involved with and guide boys in their community.
- Acknowledged that relationships across all genders, societies, and cultures need to be appropriate and healthy.
- Connected evaluation indicators back to the greater good, not just for the sake of boys and men of color.

Issues Raised:

- The importance of healthy, enduring relationships
- Maintaining reciprocal respect between researchers/evaluators and practitioners
- The advantage of an asset-based strategy over a deficit-based one

Takeaways:

Strategies

- Remember the role of policy. Data alone cannot solve the issues of a community.
- Frame the conversation of BMOC evaluations around an asset-based approach.
- Acknowledge that solutions regarding males of color are not perfect; they are incremental or imperfect, which is still preferable to having no solutions.

Action Steps

- Move away from a standard set of research questions.
- Remove bias upon entering a community, and leave professional titles or academic arrogance at the door.
- Acknowledge, understand, and then work to overcome the structural barriers, systems, policies, and inherent inequalities facing BMOC.

Quotes:

"It is not enough to be present in one's community. One must know their role and accept their responsibility."



Title: Why Grantmaking for Men and Boys of Color Needs an Equity Lens

Facilitators: Marcus Walton, Greg Hodge, Paul Bachleitner

Key Outcomes:

- Acquired understanding of the complex interaction of systemic inequalities and structural barriers that is the root cause of disparities for men and boys of color.
- Gained exposure to practical examples of practices that address systemic inequality and structural barriers.
- Provided access to tools, resources, and thought leadership that help grantmakers adopt an equity framework.

Issues Raised:

- Recognizing the extent of diversity, even within ethnicities
- The multiple forms of racism (e.g. institutionalized, self-mediated, internalized racism)
- The pervasiveness of the "post-racial America" notion
- The centrality of the race focus in improving outcomes and closing "equity gaps" for males of color

Takeaways:

Strategies

- Use data.
- Keep a focus on policy and its impacts.
- Message issues responsibly and counter dominant frames by
 - leading with widely shared values.
 - leading with structural issues.
 - focusing on *what's* to blame, not *who's* to blame.
 - bundling solutions with problems to avoid compassion fatigue.
 - using numbers and a frame to understand those numbers.
- Go after "the other 70 percent," those who aren't naturally on board.
- Frame equity in terms of what is happening in the broader community and in terms of economic development and markets.

Resources

- *Widening the Lens on Boys and Men of Color: California AAPI & AMEMSA Perspectives* (report)



CAUTIOUS

First, some troubling figures: in Henrico County, VA, schools have a 91.7 percent suspension rate for African-American males identified with cognitive and emotional disabilities. In Chicago, the suspension rate for the same population is 72.5 percent. In Pasadena, TX, 77 percent of Latino students were suspended at least once during one school year.



OPTIMISM

WILLIAM JACKSON, FRONTLINE SOLUTIONS

These egregious numbers help us conceptualize the “school-to-prison pipeline” and its impact on males of color. Through zero-tolerance suspension policies, our education system pushes black and brown boys out of the school, sending them the message their kind is not welcome.

Despite the prevalence of damning statistics, there is a persistent myth that males of color are unsuccessful students because they believe being smart is “acting white.” My thoughts? Instead of theorizing that children of color deliberately opt out of their learning because of a superficial dislike for “being smart,” let’s reflect on what the numbers are really telling us. To paraphrase Malcolm X, the proverbial Plymouth Rock has landed on our males of color.

The biased policies that adults implement in schools also disproportionately label students with special education needs and reduce participation in honors classes. Policies leave less than 3 percent of black males enrolled in AP courses, while 30 percent of white males are selected for these classes. I encourage you to research the special education, suspension, and gifted and talented policies in your region. I think you’ll be shocked by the degree to which school policies vary from one county to the next.



Session Recap

Title: Day 1 Closing Session

Facilitator: Marcus Littles

Issues Raised:

- Knowing what works through evidence-based outcomes
- The value of technology in establishing valuable connections
- The danger of pursuing short-term strategies that fail to produce long-term results
- Recognizing the role of community organizing in building public will

Main Conclusions:

1. Evidence-based outcomes have shown that it is possible to transform people's lives.
2. Government and philanthropic organizations do not and cannot solve everything. Change is up to regular people at the local level.
3. In the future, we need to see what has worked in certain places and use those same strategies in other regions.
4. We need to be careful to ensure our short-term strategies are beneficial in the long run.

Quotes:

"We haven't systematically shared narratives about success in engaging the public at the local level." —*Alford Young, Jr.*

"Our history will teach us the lessons we need." —*Khary Lazarre-White*

"The connections we make here today need to be meaningful and valuable and reciprocal." —*Dr. Donna-Marie C. Winn*

"What might seem like a simple, quick fix for change in the long term may actually be our demise." —*Andy Perez*

"We need to evaluate ourselves in terms of how proactive we are in identifying opportunities to get better."

—*Marcus Littles*

Despite it all, I remain cautiously optimistic. I was moved and inspired at A Gathering of Leaders 2013, which for me evoked something psychologist Albert Bandura wrote: "But those who have a firm belief in their efficacy, through ingenuity and perseverance, figure out ways of exercising some control, even in environments containing limited opportunities and many constraints."

This conference reminded me that those who've worked to effect social change for males of color have found countless ways to exercise great control despite undesirable conditions.

And while we must point out the troubling statistics and policies that illuminate the challenges we face, we can't forget to observe and celebrate solutions as they emerge. While at the conference, I witnessed a particularly poignant example of a solution in development. I saw a 20-year-old male of color, Khalil Fuller, share his basketball-inspired mathematics curriculum with David Johns, the Obama-appointed director of the new White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans. Both Fuller and Johns then used the educational tool to talk math with the young son of Sherrie Deans. Her organization, Admiral Center at Living Cities, assists some of the NBA's top players and other celebrities with enhancing their philanthropic efforts.

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Beyond the exciting collaborations this kind of networking can spark, the account above represents a rarely highlighted narrative of males of color in this country, one of mathematical intelligence, mentorship, and collaboration. I felt compelled to share this story in response to a call to action by one conference participant, who said, “We must begin to write our own narratives lest we become the character of someone else’s story.” This is exactly what I mean by “cautious optimism.”

**OUR SOCIAL CHANGE
PREDECESSORS HAVE
PERSEVERED, AND SO
WILL WE. BECAUSE
OUR LEGACY HAS BEEN
ONE OF TRANSFORMING
TRASH INTO TRIUMPH
AND THE MOST MEAGER
OF OPPORTUNITIES INTO
SUCCESS.**

How do we best “write our own narrative”? I believe that the greatest stories are told *after* laying down the proper building blocks for social change. Within the education world, this means guaranteeing every child of color a high-quality early-childhood program. For our school-age boys, we must continue to fight against archaic, ineffective, and biased zero-tolerance policies that disproportionately push them out of school.

We must also continue to push for the use of culturally relevant instruction. We can’t afford to have teachers who are unacquainted with and devalue our children’s culture. Education for males of color must focus on valuing the wealth of their native culture and bridging the divide between their culture and that of mainstream America. Lastly, we must continue to provide better assistance to our children as they enter college. Far too often, our young men are struggling to navigate an endless maze of decisions—many of them financial—associated with attending college.

So here we sit at the edge of opportunity. Although the stakes are high, we must avoid what I call the “lie of defeat.” We have to take perceived failures and recast them as steps bringing us closer to success. Our social change predecessors have persevered, and so will we, because our legacy has been one of transforming trash into triumph and the most meager of opportunities into success.

Questions of course remain: Do we have the vision to realize our ambitious goals? Will we mobilize our collective effort and multiply our successes? Will we collectively **MOVE** toward a place that Tonya Allen of the Skillman Foundation so aptly described, one in which “stories of males of color succeeding are no longer seen as singular mistakes or exceptions”?

To accomplish all these things, we must recognize something that A Gathering of Leaders illustrated best to me: we are not alone in this work. There are researchers, policy makers, funders, and practitioners all across the country invested in improving outcomes for males of color. We are the change we’re waiting for, and success is more than possible—it’s at our fingertips. For all of these reasons, I’m cautiously optimistic.

What will you do to make change happen? 

SESSION RECAPS

Title: Day 2 Opening Session

Facilitators: Loren Harris, Ben O'Dell, Ashleigh Gardere, Derrick Johnson, David Johns

Issues Raised:

- The importance of picking effective partners
- Following "the 80/20 rule"—when working together we will disagree on 20 percent of issues but we must focus on the 80 percent we are aligned on
- Renegotiating government roles and private sector roles
- Acknowledging that there is a difference between the public message and private reality
- Recognizing that different races, classes, and genders have different needs

Main Conclusions:

- Conversation is good, but action is better.
- We shouldn't be divided and competing with each other. Rather, we should come together and concentrate on one thing so we don't lose focus.
- The best way to combat race is to root it in the work.
- We need to target communities through programs that stimulate constructive conversation and action.
- Personal narratives inform the debate.

Quotes:

"Outside the Beltway, it's about pulling heart strings, but inside the Beltway, it's all about numbers."

"We have to live our promise and push our partners to [do the same]." —Ashleigh Gardere



Title: Building a Community of Social Entrepreneurs in the Black Male Achievement Field

Facilitators: Greg Hodge, Decker Ngongang, Shawn Mooring, Trabian Shorters

Key Outcomes:

- Identified multiple approaches to gaining investment capital (risk capital).
- Illustrated the true value of creating networks.

Issues Raised:

- Approaching funding in the right way
- The need to change the narrative about males of color
- Increasing entrepreneurs' visibility

Takeaways:

Personal Strategies

- Find innovative ways to work with close friends and peers.
- Take inspiration from the histories of people of color, their struggles, and how ancestors made something out of nothing.

Coordinated Strategies

On changing the narrative...

- Make a message out of a mess.
- Practice your message and maintain consistency and frequency.
- Change the language.
- Do your research.
- Be artistically unique.

On building visibility...

- Understand the importance of social media.
- Create a blog.
- Establish relationships with reporters and search for opportunities with local media.
- Tap into community events.
- Brand your content and articulate your brand value proposition.

On gaining risk capital...

- Share common funding resources.
- Consider crowdfunding (e.g., Kickstarter, Indiegogo).
- Find angel investors.
- Investigate program-related investments for L3Cs (low-profit, limited liability companies).
- Enter business plan competitions.
- Seek out Community Development Financial Institutions and micro lenders.
- Consider peer-to-peer lending.

Quotes:

"The number-one reason people give is that they are asked, and the number-two reason is who asks." —Trabian Shorters



WE ARE WHO WE SERVE

MELISSA DESHIELDS, FRONTLINE SOLUTIONS

My work in the males of color field has always been grounded in the reality and experiences of the black men and boys in my community with whom I interact on a daily basis.

My journey with this work began 16 years ago in Mt. Holly, New Jersey, as a youth worker at a residential treatment facility for young boys and men aged 8-18. Their back stories varied: they had been released from juvenile detention; or were placed by family services as neglected and abused kids; or, due to behavioral issues, had been unable to find homes with foster or adoptive families. I would work there on weeknights following my day job or would take on shifts on weekends and holidays. As a result, for 12 years I worked with young males of color, hearing their stories and witnessing their struggles first-hand.

I remember vividly one day I was assigned a young man who had aged out of the facility and needed to get to his new residential placement. The only information I received was an address and directions. It wasn't until I had dropped him off and begun driving away that it sunk in that I had left him in a temporary men's shelter, where after three days he would be out in the world on his own with no supports.

This young man was only 18 years old and had probably spent more than half of his life in one residential program or another. At that time I didn't understand and had probably never heard of disproportionate minority confinement, the cradle-to-prison pipeline, disconnected youth, the achievement gap or any other terms describing the practices and policies that disproportionately affect the life chances of males of color. But I had a visceral reaction to just how badly our policies and systems were failing this young man and so many other young men I worked with on a daily basis. So there I stood, yelling at the top of my lungs at the social worker who had just discharged an 18-year-old kid to a three-day shelter. I was only 23 years old and had just entered the BMOC field—without even knowing one existed.

It is because of this kid's story and others like him that I am deeply committed to the practice and policy work conducted around black men and boys. The importance of policies that provide disconnected youth with educational and employment opportunities can't be understated. I see and know the faces of the black boys they are meant to serve.

continued >>





The 2025 Network for Black Men and Boys was my first introduction into the more formal space of this field. My charge with the network was to support the implementation of place-based strategies and develop effective partnerships with community-based organizations in New Orleans, Los Angeles, and Chicago. The work solidified my commitment and understanding for the work; even more vital were the relationships I developed with dynamic, dedicated, and talented leaders.

I remember the first time I was asked the question about whether I grew up with any positive black role models. As the daughter of a single mother, my initial response was “no.” But after taking a moment to reflect, I thought about Mr. Dunlap, who lived across the street from us and was our resident handyman. He fixed just about everything that broke in our house and taught me how to change my first flat tire. I also thought about Coach English, who shuttled me and my teammates to away basketball games in his personal vehicle when the school bus didn’t show up.


For me, A Gathering of Leaders and the field organized around it is about so many of the individuals I’ve recalled here—the boys and men at that residential treatment facility so many years ago, Mr. Dunlap, Coach English, and all of the fathers, brothers, mentors, teachers, and coaches who continue to inspire me.

This is, in part, why my most recent work with the Black Male Engagement project, or BMe, was so powerful. BMe is a growing network of inspired and engaged black men from all walks of life who do their part to strengthen communities. As the National Community Engagement Director for BMe, I was inspired by the thousands of stories of black men who were committed to making their families, neighborhoods, and cities stronger, and the millions of stories that still need to be told.

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When people hear that I was born and raised in Camden, NJ, their first response is often, “Wow, look at you. How did you make it out?” The statement has always struck me as odd and it’s been hard to find a response. But it may be easier for me now, after hearing Darrell Dawsey, a journalist born and bred in Detroit, speak passionately at A Gathering of Leaders on the importance of identity. He reminded me that there’s

no “making it out” of a community, that my identity, like everyone else’s, is wrapped up in my roots. There’s no “casting off” my roots, and anyway, I’d never want to. I’m what a successful, black woman from Camden looks like.

Dawsey had me and everyone else in the room fired up, and he also reminded us of the importance of living and breathing our truth, lifting up our communities and representing what success looks like for our young males of color. As one participant observed, “We are who we serve. I am you and you are me.” 



BUILD. SESSION RECAPS

Title: Healing Generations: Building a Cadre of Leaders Serving Boys and Men of Color

Facilitators: Jerry Tello and Juan Gomez

Key Outcomes:

- Highlighted the importance of building black and brown alliances.
- Acknowledged the effectiveness of programs focused on males of color.
- Created a space where participants were able to share deep insights into their own experiences working with men of color.

Issues Raised:

- The self-hate among men of color and how it leads to disruptive behavior
- The high incidence of young men of color living in trauma
- The necessity of instilling culture, values, and traditions to bring about change in males of color
- Society's often ill-advised responses to misbehavior (e.g. incarcerate, subjugate, medicate, isolate, educate, negate)
- The effectiveness of rite of passage programs that build on cultural community strengths

Takeaways:

Strategies

- Teach culture, values, and traditions.
- Hold ceremonies.
- Coordinate discussion circles.
- Make everyone feel they
 - are wanted and a blessing.
 - are protected and secure.
 - have a sacred purpose.

Action Steps

- Instill values in young men of color.
- Teach them how to be men.

Resources

- NationalCompadresNetwork.org
- JerryTello.com

Quotes:

"In order to heal generations, young men need elders. They need father figures. They need to learn how to be honorable men. They need to build capacity of assistance that is not trauma formed but healing centered." —*Jerry Tello*

"The more I learn about other cultures, the more I embrace them."

"Within the collective dignity, love, trust and respect of all people exists the wisdom and resources for a beautiful, harmonious tomorrow." —*Jerry Tello*

Title: Intervening in the Early Stages of Crisis: Strategizing about Black Boys in the Middle School Years

Facilitators: Rhonda Bryant, Alford Young, Jr.

Key Outcomes:

- Outlined specific policy and programmatic interventions that constitute a healthy public identity for African-American boys.
- Created a space for envisioning an improved public perception for black youth and for bringing new ideas to policy makers and philanthropists.

Issues Raised:

- Understanding cultural relevance and competence for young boys of color
- Thinking of new approaches to the school-to-community relationship
- Considering the relationship between trauma and black boys in middle school
- Changing the public perception of black youth so they are viewed as worthy consumers of education rather than a danger to the school system

Takeaways:

Personal Strategies

- Complete a whole-child assessment that includes family, community, and social background.
- Understand context-specific definitions and approaches, place-based conceptions of black boys, and the student's own evaluation of cultural relevancy and competence.
- Encourage parents to intervene, be supportive, and acknowledge their child.

Coordinated Strategies

- To improve the school-to-community relationship, explore ways that schools can use community resources.
- Pursue partnership strategies like bridge grants and school models like University Preparatory Academy in Detroit and Youth Scholar Academy in Washington, DC.
- Achieve cultural relevancy and cultural alignment between teachers and students.
- Understand what constitutes trauma for boys in middle school.

Quotes:

"Unless we talk specifically about the racial dynamic of this, we miss the boat." —*Rhonda Bryant*

"Our young men bear stigmatized identities at schools, and that has traumatic effects." —*Alford Young, Jr.*

"The thinking that we have generated will be directly used to fuel how the White House agenda on these issues moves forward." —*Rhonda Bryant*



TACKLING THE HARD QUESTIONS TOGETHER

ANDREW WOLK, ROOT CAUSE

As I arrived in Detroit for the second Gathering of Leaders, I could not help feeling both excited and anxious. Like many of my peers working tirelessly for males of color, I was eager to see our efforts bear fruit.

Last year around the same time, my colleagues and I had just completed a nine-month planning process that culminated in the business plan for the Leadership and Sustainability Institute for Black Male Achievement, a national membership network seeking to ensure the growth, sustainability, and impact of leaders and organizations across the public, private, and nonprofit sectors committed to improving the life outcomes of black men and boys through systemic change.

We were still in conversations with funders at that time, in hopes the LSI would launch in the fall. At the first year at A Gathering of Leaders, I had presented about the promise of the LSI along with my colleagues Shawn Dove and Rashid Shabaaz from the Campaign for Black Male Achievement, and Marc Philpart from PolicyLink, now our co-lead implementation partner for the LSI. The sessions were packed, and the response was positive and energizing.

Fast forward one year later, and I am in Detroit on the heels of the first-ever “LSI Live” event. Up until now we had only connected with members via phone or on-line, but had never brought them together. Launched last October, the LSI is now an established membership network with over 1,500 leaders representing over 1,000 organizations, all committed to improving the life outcomes for black men and boys. A Gathering of Leaders provided the LSI the opportunity to host our first ever in-person event that also served as a pre-conference seminar. Detroit-based LSI members as well as conference attendees were invited. The session attracted over 80 individuals including several key leaders in Detroit and many of the BMe winners (BMe is a network that recognizes leaders for community-building initiatives). We set up the seminar to bring to life part of what the LSI provides.

We facilitated a session on financial sustainability and another that provided structured networking so people could not only meet but also help each other through a particular challenge. It only took five minutes for me to get amazing advice from a Detroit-based participant about a board issue I’m having. Through a talk led by the Association of Black Foundation Executives, we also shared with attendees how they might work with a more explicit black male

achievement lens and why it matters. Lastly, we ended with group discussions about what this group could do together.

What a relief that the post-session feedback was positive! “The entire day was a shining light,” said one survey response. “The networking was phenomenal; meeting other leaders doing work with black males was so valuable,” said another. The completed surveys reminded me how passionate, inspired, and impressive these leaders are and how important it is to each of them to stay connected and keep moving forward on improving life outcomes for black men and boys.

The pre-conference session set up an inspiring and rewarding two days at A Gathering of Leaders. I learned a lot, and had great conversations with people I knew and others I just met for the first time.


I also was part of the planning of a conference session on evaluation. The session, led by Loren Harris at Frontline Solutions and Leon Caldwell at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, was filled with members of the academic and practitioner community. It was a great opportunity to have an open and candid conversation about the state of evaluation and how we might better organize ourselves around common outcomes.

I came away from the conversation with two big aha moments: First, in order for us to advance the kinds of outcomes we all hope to achieve, academics and practitioners need to continue to find ways to collaborate more closely, understand each other better, and present a more unified front. Otherwise, the prevailing approach to conducting

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evaluation and the high standards demanded by federal agencies and foundations community may not align, closing the door on substantial funding opportunities. The second aha moment occurred for me at the session’s end, which coincided with our development of an impact statement and a small list of outcomes that could be tracked to realize that impact. I left with the realization that settling on a common set of outcomes is relatively easy, but identifying the drivers or factors for realizing those outcomes—the policies, practices, and local conditions—is going to be hard.

What are the most effective policies, practices and conditions to get us to these outcomes and how do we collectively agree on those paths to our goals? Do we work toward universal early childhood education, push for more commissions on African-American males like those already established in a handful of cities and states, or replicate the Eagle Academy school model for boys across the country?

These are the hard questions I hope we can tackle together, and A Gathering of Leaders was a wonderful setting to get the conversation going. 

For more information about the Leadership and Sustainability Institute for Black Male Achievement, go to www.lsibma.org.



Session Recap

Title: Safe and Healthy Communities

Facilitator: Marcus Walton

Key Outcomes:

- Heard presentations from organizations working within the field of violence prevention and public health.
- Had great discussion about the best approaches to violence reduction and safer communities.
- Received great feedback from the audience for each organization on how to best incorporate their own ideas into already strong models.

Issues Raised:

- The impact of chronic exposure to violence
- The role of mayors in black male achievement and violence reduction
- Advancing the cause of responsible fatherhood
- The justice system and violence

Takeaways:

Personal Strategies

1. Pursue advocacy, communication, and connections.
2. Identify services for youth ages 14–26.
3. Promote policy informed by practice.
4. Work with street soldiers and grassroots interventions.

Coordinated Strategies

1. Work toward a collective infrastructure (networks of interconnected services) to avoid silos.
2. Use data and community to frame issues.
3. Work with the National League of Cities to best inform the Cities United, a black male achievement campaign led by U.S. mayors.

Quotes:

“Don’t try to solve systematic problems with programmatic money.” —*Scott Moyer*

Yes, we are our fathers’ sons and daughters,
But we are not their choices.
For despite their absences,
We are still here,
Still alive,
Still breathing,
With the power to change this world
One little boy and girl at a time.

—*Daniel Beaty (“Knock Knock,” a poem shared during the presentation)*

WHAT'S NEXT?



In certain respects, the litmus test for a report like this and for a convening like A Gathering of Leaders is the same: if meaningful action isn't the end result, it's not worth people's time and effort. It's merely just another conference.





In the case of this report and the conference it covers, we can confidently shake off those doubts. We believe in the practical wisdom and action plans detailed in the previous pages. We have even more faith in the visionaries and leaders dedicating themselves to the work. We draw hope from the emergence and growth of a movement for the success of males of color. This is a vibrant field that is learning, building, and moving.

A Gathering of Leaders 2013, along with the convening the year before, were special events because they assembled a diverse mix of nonprofit and community leaders, policy makers, researchers, journalists, and advocates around a common cause. As one of the report's authors pointed

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out, the potential for tension among these actors is real; however, mutual distrust does not have to be a foregone conclusion. Voicing challenges and concerns, and figuring out the most thoughtful way to collaborate, can set us on the right course.

Again, we must continue to consider the powerful examples of "what works"—the efforts serving males of color like that those led by Joe Jones, Andy Pacificar, and Albino Garcia. In their communities—Baltimore, San Diego, Albuquerque, and everywhere else—success for males color needs to become the norm and not the exception.

There are certainly ways to improve our efforts, but we must measure our success not so much by the output of individual organizations, but by the broader infrastructure and policies that support them. This is how, collectively, we'll expand opportunities for males of color in the schoolroom, the courtroom, the legislative hall, and the workplace.



MOVE.

Session Recap

Title: MOVE Plenary

Facilitator: Marcus Littles and Micah Gilmer

Key Outcomes:

- Articulated final thoughts on where have we been, where we are now, and where we go from here regarding males of color.
- Made a collective commitment to a future in which gatherings and work on behalf of males of color become unnecessary.

Issues Raised:

- Changing the public will
- Framing males of color issues nationally and engaging in public narratives
- The need to engage with other ethnic groups in conversation and partnership
- Having a personal relationship with those at the grassroots and policy levels to facilitate trust
- Building upon what already exists and creating new ways to facilitate information exchange, research, and data collection

Quotes:

"We need to support healthy relationships and come to the table together, healthy, and whole."

"We cannot face an issue or come to a solution from a position of desperation."

"Thank you for being experts and students, for contributing and defining the space. Let's find a way to challenge everyone, stay engaged, and be a resource to one another."





A Gathering of Leaders 2013